

## **The Deuteronomist(s)' Interpretation of Exilic Suffering in an African Perspective<sup>1</sup>**

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### **ABSTRACT**

*The question of the identity of the Deuteronomist(s) has been debated and is still in debate. While some believe he was an individual author, editor, or compiler who sought to interpret as honestly as possible the history of Israel in the light of his personal understanding of the crisis that befell Judah, others believe that the Deuteronomists are groups, schools, prophets or scribes. Be that as it may, both Deuteronomistic and African slave theologies of suffering hold similar interpretations of exilic suffering despite the events not being the same. Both interpret their suffering as retributive, divine disciplinary, redemptive, revelational, probational and eschatological.*

### **A INTRODUCTION**

This article is a critical examination of the Deuteronomistic theology of suffering as it affects the disaster that befell Judah in 597 and 586 B.C.E. in African perspective. It further examines the Deuteronomistic theology in the light of an African theology of suffering especially as it relates to the suffering associated with slavery in Africa. Should Africans understand the suffering of slavery, that is, the forceful exile of Africans, in accordance with the Deuteronomistic theology? Does African slavery put Africans and African Diasporas in a better position to understand a biblical theology of suffering in the light of Deuteronomistic interpretation?

To answer these questions this article will briefly discuss who is/are the Deuteronomist(s). It will also provide a background narrative of the history of exile in Israel as well as Africa and the accompanied suffering. Finally, the interpretation of the two sufferings are then compared.

### **B THE DEUTERONOMIST(S)**

The history of Deuteronomistic discussion is a long one despite the fact that the Deuteronomistic History is not recognized by Jewish or Christian tradition as a separate collection such as the Torah.<sup>2</sup> This might be due to the fact that the

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<sup>1</sup> This paper was presented at the meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature, Boston, USA, November 2008.

<sup>2</sup> Thomas Römer, *The So-called Deuteronomistic History* (New York: T & T Clark, 2007), 13.

term is an invention of biblical scholars. Martin Noth was considered the father of the Deuteronomistic History hypothesis even though he was not the first person to speak of the Deuteronomistic redactions.<sup>3</sup>

Römer mentions that before Noth, the idea of the Deuteronomistic hypothesis was already mooted by scholars such as John Calvin, Andraes Masius, Baruch Spinoza, Wilhelm De Wette, John William Colenso, Heinrich Ewald, Abraham Kuenen, Julius Wellhausen, Bernhard Duhm and others actually had talked about the possibility of a redactor behind the books of the Prophets following the Pentateuch with Deuteronomistic ideas.<sup>4</sup> However, de Wette was the first scholar who spoke of a Deuteronomistic redaction to explain the formation of the historical books.<sup>5</sup> Then Heinrich Ewald, Kuenen and Wellhausen continued the elaboration of the Deuteronomistic redaction in the historical books.

Martin Noth tried to build on the work of his predecessor, de Wette, Ewald, Wellhausen, Driver, and others who have discussed a “Deuteronomic style” and advocated Deuteronomistic redactions in the historical book. Noth, agreeing with Albrecht Alt, believed that the Pentateuchal sources cannot be found in the book of Joshua and that there was nothing like the Hexateuch.<sup>6</sup>

Although Noth was not the first person to mention Deuteronomistic redaction, he was however the first person to emphasise the continuity of the work of Deuteronomist. During his time, there was a shift from source and literary criticism to the question of the transmission of biblical tradition. There was also a shift from the so-called Hexateuch to the existence of a coherent and unified Deuteronomistic redaction in the Former Prophets due to the work of one redactor, the Deuteronomist (Dtr).<sup>7</sup> Evidence of this redaction is found in texts that Noth called “chapters of reflection” (such passages are Joshua 1:-9; 12:1-6; 23:1-16; Judges 2:11-3:6; I Samuel 12:1-16; I Kings 8:14-53; 2 Kings 17:7-23).<sup>8</sup>

According to Noth the Deuteronomistic presentation of the history of Israel was divided into three different periods: The conquest under Joshua (Joshua 1; 12; 23), the time of the Judges (Judges 2:11 to 1 Samuel 12), the instauration of the monarchy (1 Samuel 12 to 1 Kings 8), and the history of the

<sup>3</sup> Römer, *The so-called Deuteronomistic History*, 13.

<sup>4</sup> Römer, *The So-called Deuteronomistic History*, 14-21.

<sup>5</sup> Römer, *The So-Called Deuteronomistic History*, 17.

<sup>6</sup> Martin Noth, *Das Buch Joshua*. HAT 1/7, (Tubingen: Mohr, 2nd Edition). Cited by Thomas Römer, *The So-called Deuteronomistic History*, 22.

<sup>7</sup> Martin Noth, *The Deuteronomistic History*. JSOTSup 15, (Sheffield: Academic Press, 2nd Edition, 1991), 15-19.

<sup>8</sup> Noth, *Deuteronomistic History*, 15-19.

kingdoms of Judah and Israel until the fall of Samaria (1 Kings 8 to 2 Kings 17), the last days of Judah.

To Noth, the Deuteronomist included Deuteronomy 5-30 in his first edition of the eight and seventh centuries BCE. with a new framework. This new framework then became the hermeneutical key and the ideological basis for reading and understanding the subsequent history of Israel.<sup>9</sup> He also regarded his Deuteronomist as a *historian* comparable to Hellenistic and Roman historians who also used older traditions and rearranged them. He sees him as an “*honest broker*”, a *redactor*, an *author*, and *editor*.<sup>10</sup> According to Noth, Dtr was an individual who without any institutional links, wrote history, apparently for his own concerns, in order to explain the ruin of Judah and Jerusalem in 587 B.C.E. The Deuteronomistic History was probably the independent project of a man to whom the historical catastrophes he witnessed provided an inspiration as well as a curiosity about the meaning of what had happened. This author then tried to answer this question in a comprehensive and self-contained historical account.<sup>11</sup>

He therefore (Deuteronomistic historian) combined complex old and diverse materials available to him and arranged them according to his own judgment.<sup>12</sup> Deuteronomistic history relates the history of Israel from the wilderness to the fall of Jerusalem, and the Babylonian exile with the purpose of demonstrating that the fall of Judah was as a result of their failure to keep Deuteronomic law. However, the event of 597/587 B.C.E. did not mean that the Babylonian gods defeated Yahweh, the God of Israel. Rather, the event of the destruction should be understood as Yahweh’s punishment.

The first affirmative reaction to Noth’s thesis came from Jepsen and Engnell. While Jepsen advocated a prophetic redaction of the books of Kings which probably took place in 550 B.C.E., Engnell separated the books of Genesis to Kings into a “P-work” (Priestly Circle - Genesis to Numbers) and a “D-work” (Deuteronomistic Circle - Deuteronomy to Kings) which corresponded to Noth’s division.<sup>13</sup>

However, there were some modifications in the scholars’ reactions. Although Frank Moore shares the idea of Noth’s sharp distinction between the Tetrateuch and the Deuteronomistic History, he believed that the first edition of

<sup>9</sup> Noth, *Deuteronomistic History*, 26-145.

<sup>10</sup> Noth, *Deuteronomistic History*, 26, 128, 145.

<sup>11</sup> Noth, *Deuteronomistic History*, 145.

<sup>12</sup> Römer, *The So-Called Deuteronomistic History*, 25.

<sup>13</sup> Ivan Engnell, *A Rigid Scrunity: Critical Essays on the Old Testament* (trans. John T. Willis. Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 1962). Jepsen, Alfred. *Die Quellen des Königsbuches*. (Halle: Niemeyer, 1953), cited by Römer, *The So-called Deuteronomistic History*, 25.

the Deuteronomistic History can be found in the reign of Josiah instead of the conquest under Joshua.<sup>14</sup> Rudolph Smend discovered a common redactional layer designated as “nomistic” (DtrN) because of the emphasis on the obedience to the Law.<sup>15</sup> He considered a double redactor and saw DtrN as a kind of *signum* which should be subdivided into DtrN<sub>1</sub> and DtrN<sub>2</sub> and others.<sup>16</sup> Walter Dietrich, a student of Smend, discovered another Deuteronomistic layer which he labelled as DtrP because of its emphasis on prophecy.<sup>17</sup>

Steve Mckenzie and John van Seters are considered to be ‘Neo-Nothians’ in that they advocated a return to Noth’s ideas of a single Deuteronomistic Historian and a coherent Deuteronomistic work with very little difference from Noth ideology.<sup>18</sup>

There is also a great debate concerning the Deuteronomistic redactions and Deuteronomism in the Pentateuch.<sup>19</sup> Today it is still being debated whether Deuteronomistic redactions can be found in the Tetrateuch and in some of the prophetic books.<sup>20</sup> There is a problem concerning Deuteronomistic redactions in the prophetic books. That of Jeremiah is quite widely accepted but that of the book of Isaiah is in great dispute because of the little evidence of Deuteronomistic terminology in Isaiah. The book of Ezekiel is a difficult case because it reveals only a few mixtures of Deuteronomistic and Priestly influences.<sup>21</sup>

<sup>14</sup> Frank Moore, “The Themes of the Book of Kings and the Structure of the Deuteronomistic History,” in *Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic: Essays in the History of the Religion of Israel* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1973), 289.

<sup>15</sup> Rudolf Smend, 2000. “The Law and the Nations. A Contribution to Deuteronomistic Tradition History,” in *Reconsidering Israel and Judah: Recent Studies on the Deuteronomistic History*. (eds. Gary N. Knoppers and J. Gordon McConville, Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2000), 95-110.

<sup>16</sup> Smend, “The Law and the Nations,” 95-110.

<sup>17</sup> Walter Dietrich, “Martin Noth and the Future of the Deuteronomistic History,” in *The History of Israel’s Traditions: The Heritage of Martin Noth*. (eds. Steven L. McKenzie and Patrick M. Graham, Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1994), 153-175.

<sup>18</sup> For example, both eliminate an important number of texts from the first of edition of the Deuteronomistic History such as most of the prophetic stories in Kings. Steven L. McKenzie, *The Trouble with Kings: Composition of the Books of Kings in the Deuteronomistic History*, (Leiden: Brill 1991); “The Trouble with Kingship,” in *Israel Constructs its History: Deuteronomistic Historiography in Recent Research*. (eds. Albert de Pury, Thomas Römer and Jean-Daniel Macchi, Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000) 286-314; John van Seters, *In Search of History: History in the Ancient World and the Origin of Biblical History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983).

<sup>19</sup> Römer, *The So-Called Deuteronomistic History*, 33.

<sup>20</sup> Römer, *The So-Called Deuteronomistic History*, 33.

<sup>21</sup> Römer, *The So-Called Deuteronomistic History*, 35.

Among the book of the Twelve, Hosea, Amos, and Micah are the likely candidates.

The multiplication of the Deuteronomistic layers, especially in the Göttingen school poses a challenge to the idea of a unified and coherent work of a Deuteronomistic redactor.<sup>22</sup> Claus Westermann do not believe in a unified Deuteronomistic Work.

## C ISRAELITE EXILE AND THE ACCOMPANIED SUFFERING

The word “exile” means forced migration from one’s homeland. In the Hebrew Bible the words for exile are גלות (2 Kings 24:15) and גלות (2 Kings 25:27). The period of the Israelite exile refers to the period when the Babylonians forced Judah to migrate from Judah and Jerusalem to Babylon (597 B.C.E. and 587 B.C.E.).<sup>23</sup>

Apart from the Assyrian deportation of the Northern Kingdom in 721 B.C.E., there were three major deportations in Judah (598, 587, 582). The first deportation (598/7) was vividly described in 2 Kings 24:12-16. It was reported

<sup>22</sup> Noth, *The Deuteronomistic History*, 23.

<sup>23</sup> The so-called United Monarchy did not seem to be actually united because there were so many divisions and strifes. The result was that the actual division came about in 922 when Jeroboam went to the North (Israel) and Rehoboam remained in the south (Judah). After this division, the kingdoms of Israel and Judah reached their zenith of power and prestige in the eighth century B.C.E. under the reigns of Jeroboam II (786-746 B.C.E.) and Uzziah (783-742 B.C.E.) Peter Ackroyd (*Exile and Restoration* [Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1968].) cited Martin Noth as the first to propound the idea of a single author.

It was during this period of prosperity that Tiglathpileser III (745-727 B.C.E.) began to build the Assyrian Empire with the hope of dealing ruthlessly with Israel and Judah and their neighbours. He eventually captured Naphtali, Reuben, Gad and half of Manasseh, carrying the inhabitants to Assyria (2 Kings 15:29; 1 Chronicles 5:26). After taking Samaria he appointed Hoshea as the puppet king who later rebelled in 724 B.C.E. because he depended on Africa (Egypt) for defence. He was finally taken captive while Samaria, the capital of Israel, fell in due course in 721 B.C.E. under Sargon II (722-705 B.C.E.). The inhabitants were captured and deported to Assyria (2 Kings 17:18; Obadiah 20). The captor brought other people from Babylon, Cuthah, Avva, Hamath and Sephar-vaim to the cities of Samaria to replace the Samaritans (2 Kings 17:24, Ezra 4:10).

Judah, the Southern Kingdom survived. Jehoahaz, the son of Josiah, after reigning for three months was deported to Egypt where he died (2 Kings 23:31; 2 Chronicles 36:1-3). Jehoakim died during the siege of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar and his son, Jehoiachin, who reigned for only three months before he was exiled to Babylon (2 Kings 24:6-8; 2 Chronicles 36: 9-10). Zedekiah, after reigning for eleven years (597-587), was blinded and exiled to Babylon where he died (2 Kings 24:17-25). Thus three kings of Judah, Jehoahaz, Jehoiachin and Zedekiah suffered exile.

that about 10,000 captives were taken to Babylon along with Jehoiachin, his mother, and the treasures in the palace and the temple.

The second deportation was described in 2 Kings 25:8-21 (see also Jeremiah 39:8-10; 40:7; 52:12-34). The temple, the palace and private homes were burnt. The walls of the city, the temple treasures, and the people were deported to Babylon in 587 B.C.E.<sup>24</sup> The Babylonian Chronicle also mentioned the destruction of Judah.<sup>25</sup> The third deportation was in 582 B.C.E. when men of rank and skill were exiled to Babylon as a reprisal for the assassination of Gedaliah. 2 Kings 25:27-30 and Jeremiah 52:31-31-34 report of the favourable treatment Jehoiachin who was deported in 587 B.C.E., experienced.<sup>26</sup>

The most important centre of exile was Babylon and the nucleus were people from Judah and Jerusalem. The exiles were forcefully removed to Babylonia in 597 and 586 B.C.E..<sup>27</sup> They are estimated at about 40,000 and among them were king Jehoiachin and his household, princes, the aristocracy, the military leadership, the craftsmen, and smiths who were the cream of the nation. From the book of Jeremiah 52:28-30 it appears that other exiles from Judah and Jerusalem were also sent to Babylonia. Moreover, it appears that later others migrated on their own to Babylonia for economic reason.

There were different categories of exile. While there were those who were captured and sent to Babylonia in chains and imprisoned because they participated in active revolt and war, others were merely transported or “plucked off” from the homeland in order to weaken the strength of the rebellious nation so that they will no longer be able to rebel.<sup>28</sup> The terrors of war made some people to flee to Babylon and other places.<sup>29</sup>

## **D THE SUFFERING OF THE BABYLONIAN EXILES**

The exile itself is a compulsion and a subjugation of the individual and the community. Forcefully uprooting the mass of people and transporting them

<sup>24</sup> John Collins, *Introduction to the Hebrew Bible* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2004), 276-278.

<sup>25</sup> James Pritchard, ed. *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament*. 3rd edition with supplement (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969), 564.

<sup>26</sup> The discovery of ostraca and excavations of contemporary fortress towns such as Debir, Lachish, and Bethshemesh also gave a graphic evidence of the defeat Judah suffered in 598-597 and testify to the pitiable state to which she succumbed in the years between 597 and 587.

<sup>27</sup> Yehezkel Kaufmann, *The Babylonian Captivity and Deutero-Isaiah, History of the Religion of Israel* vol. 4 (New York: Union of the American Hebrew Congregations, 1970), 5.

<sup>28</sup> Kaufman, *The Babylonian Captivity*, 5.

<sup>29</sup> Kaufman, *The Babylonian Captivity*, 5-6.



abroad is indeed a political and national ruin.<sup>30</sup> It involved mental and physical suffering. The exiles suffered the inhuman treatment of chains, especially those who were active in the revolt and war.<sup>31</sup>

The possibility was that they trekked to Babylon taking the shortest route. Psalm 137 probably refers to the multitude of the exile people who were tormented and forced to sing the song of Zion in the land of Babylon. They were forced to serve the king and paid heavy taxes, even though the forced labour and extreme taxation may not be peculiar to the exiles of that time.

No doubt, many of the exiles were imprisoned in Babylon even though they were released later. Isaiah 42:7; 43:14; 45:20 seems to describe the general condition of enslavement and captivity in Babylon. We also learnt that there was poverty among the exile in Babylon (Isaiah 58:10). They were also forced to serve the king.

Although the exiles suffered, their condition in Babylon were soon generally favourable. There was no discrimination. The letter of Jeremiah to the exile in Jeremiah 29:1-7 shows that their condition was encouraging. In fact, Jeremiah encouraged them in the name of the Lord to build houses, plant gardens, take wives, beget sons and seek the peace of Babylon — a sign that they were about to settle there. They missed the temple and their homes however.

Later on, when the exiles gave support for the returnees to Zion by means of gold and silver, and cattle and goods (Ezra 1-2), their general wealth had to be considerable. The returnees also brought with them, amongst others, 7,337 menservants and maidservants, temple slaves, and camels. This is evidence of economic well-being. The fact that Jehoiachin, the king of Judah was released from prison and allowed to dine with officials of Babylon is more evidence that it went well economically with the children of Israel in exile (2 Kings 25:27). He was elevated and given special garments and taken care of throughout the days of his life.

## **E THE EXILE OF AFRICANS (SLAVERY) AND THEIR SUFFERING**

The forceful removal of Africans from their continent to various foreign countries in the West and their accompanied suffering can be compared with that of the exile of 597/98 and 586/7. A brief description of African exile during the slave trade is important. The forceful removal of Africans to another continent can be traced to the classical antiquity. Few Africans were sold into slavery in the Mediterranean region while others went to western Asia, South-

<sup>30</sup> Kaufman, *The Babylonian Captivity*, 6

<sup>31</sup> It is difficult to be sure whether all the captives were in chains during the passage to Babylon.

ern Iraq and China.<sup>32</sup> By the fifteenth, sixteenth and nineteenth centuries, the Portuguese, the Spaniards, the Dutch, the English and the French were the main slave traders.

In 1452 C.E. Pope Nicholas V in his papal bull *Dum Diversas* granted Alfonso V of Portugal the right to put any pagan or unbeliever to hereditary slavery.<sup>33</sup> This was reaffirmed in 1455 in his *Romanus Pontifex*. The whole papal pronouncement became the justification for slavery and European colonialism.<sup>34</sup>

The first Europeans to arrive in the Coast of Guinea were the Portuguese and the first European to actually get involved in African slave trade was Antao Gonçalves, a Portuguese explorer. The Portuguese originally settled in the Island of São Tomé for the purpose of trade in gold and spices. When the Portuguese discovered that this island was good for growing sugarcane, they started using African slaves for the cultivation of the land. Elmina Castle in the Gold Coast that was originally built for the purpose of controlling gold became the slave depot for large African slaves to be transported to the New World.<sup>35</sup> Because of the constant death of the native inhabitants of Cuba and Hispaniola a decision to import Africans was made. The first African slaves arrived in Cuba and Hispaniola in 1501.

By the 1600s and 1700s the number of slaves shipped to Americas skyrocketed as a response to the demand in the Caribbean for sugar growers. By the 1700s more than 100 million Africans were exiled as slaves.<sup>36</sup> The eighteenth centuries more than 6 million Africans were enslaved.<sup>37</sup> During the sixteenth century the Portuguese dominated the human trafficking business, and the seventeenth, the Dutch, the eighteenth the English with substantial involvement of New England and France.<sup>38</sup> It has been estimated that over twelve million Africans were enslaved and exiled to the New World during these centuries. It was believed that most of these Africans came from the western part of Africa,

<sup>32</sup> Vigil Wood, "The Biblical Jubilee: The African American Experience," in *The Holy Bible: African American Jubilee Edition*, (New York: Felder, Kan. ed. American Bible Society, 1999), 19.

<sup>33</sup> Elikia M'bokolo, "The Impact of the Slave Trade on Africa," <http://mofrlfiplo.com/1998/04/02africa>, 1998, 2.

<sup>34</sup> Elikia M'bokolo, "The Impact of the Slave Trade on Africa," <http://mofrlfiplo.com/1998/04/02africa>, 1998, 2.

<sup>35</sup> John Henrik Clarke, *Critical Lessons in Slavery & the Slave trade*. (A & B Book Pub. 1998).

<sup>36</sup> Maluana Karenga, *Introduction to Black Studies* (Los Angeles: Kawaida Publications, 1983), 81.

<sup>37</sup> Alfred J. Andrea, and James H. Overfield. *The Human Record: Sources of Global History*, vol II (Boston:Houghton Mifflin and Company, 1990), 248.

<sup>38</sup> Andrea and Overfield, *The Human Record*, 248.



such as Senegal, Zaire Nigeria, Angola, Ghana, Ivory Coast, Liberia and Sudan.<sup>39</sup> However, few other Africans were from East Africa such as Mozambique and Madagascar. Karenga described the impact of slavery to Africa as follows: .

The impact of the European slave trade expressed itself in the most tragic ways. First and most easily perceived is the depopulation thru murder, societal disruption and destruction and forced transfer of population especially in Angola and other part of West Africa. Estimates run as high as 50 to 100 million persons lost to Africa. Second, the slave trade cost the loss of youth and skilled personel thus affecting the scientific and technological and cultural progress of Africa. The youth were key, for it is among them that the thrust toward scientific inquiry and inventiveness is greatest. And loss of skilled people could only blunt and in some cases eliminate development and induce technological arrest.<sup>40</sup>

## 1 The Suffering of African Exile During the Rite of Passage

The method of capturing Africans included the burning of their houses, robbery or stealing, the spreading of terror and detribalization. When the slave traders first arrived in 1498 they pretended to bring good news and Africans, as usual, were friendly to them, but few knew the truth that they were dishonest people and came to destroy Africans.<sup>41</sup> Hans Mayr<sup>42</sup> who was on board the slave ship to Mozambique and an eyewitness gave the following description of the method of obtaining slaves:

As soon as the town had been taken without opposition, the Vicar-General and some of the Franciscan Fathers came ashore carrying two crosses in their possession and singing the *Te Deum*. They went to the palace and there the cross was put down and the Grand Captain prayed. Then everyone started to plunder the town of all its merchandise and provisions.

The Grand Captain ordered that the town should be sacked and that each man should carry off to his ship whatever he found: So that at the end there would be a division of the spoil, each man to receive a twentieth of what he found [...]. Then everyone started to plunder the town and search houses, forcing open the doors with axes and iron bars [...].

<sup>39</sup> Wood, "The Biblical Jubilee," 19.

<sup>40</sup> Karenga, Maulana, *Introduction to Black Studies*, 80-81.

<sup>41</sup> David Tuesday Adamo, *Black American Heritage* (African American Heritage in later edition) (Waco: Texian Press, 1985), 29.

<sup>42</sup> Basil Davidson, *The African Past* (New York: Universal Books, 1967), 136.

The slave traders manufactured quarrels, created confusion, anarchy and ruin and set the indigenous inhabitants against each other's throats. De Graft-Johnson describes it as follows: "From the black men digging in the fields about the village, a cry of suffering and fear went up. Women shrieked and children hurried for hiding as if pursued by lions."<sup>43</sup>

The horrible condition of the Africans during the passage between Africa and America was unimaginable. The physician on board of the slave ship had a better description of what his eyes saw during the middle passage:

The deck, that is, the floor of their rooms, was so covered with blood and mucus which had proceeded from them in consequence of the flux, that it resembled a slaughter house. It is not in the power of the human imagination to picture a situation more dreadful and disgusting. Numbers of the slaves had fainted; they were carried on deck where several of them died.<sup>44</sup>

In 1781, a case was brought before English Court concerning a slave ship that was so crowded that sixty of them died and another ninety Africans were thrown overboard. Thirty-six more were drowned because of lack of water. During another trip from West Africa no fewer than 2,053 died out of 7,904 in the slave ship. God is the only one who knows how many African slaves perished during the middle passage.<sup>45</sup> It was estimated that not less than 100,000 Africans died. Eltis also described the condition of the African slaves on board the slave ships:

No European, whether convict, indentured servant, or destitute free migrant, was ever subjected to the environment which greeted the typical African slave upon embarkation. The sexes were separated, kept naked, packed close together, and the men were chained for long periods. No less than 26 percent of those on board were classed as children, a ratio that no other pre-twentieth century migration could come close to matching. Except for the illegal period of the trade when conditions at times became even worse, slave traders typically packed two slaves per ton.<sup>46</sup>

## **2 Condition of African Suffering in the Americas**

The first African slaves arriving in British North America set their feet ashore in 1619 in Virginia. African slaves worked without pay from the very beginning. It was estimated that about a total of 9,566,100 African slaves were

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<sup>43</sup> John Coleman De Graft-Johnson, *African Glory: The Story of Vanished Negro Civilization* (New York: Walker & Co, 1966), 152.

<sup>44</sup> Adamo, *African American Heritage*, 29-30.

<sup>45</sup> Adamo, *African American Heritage*, 29.

<sup>46</sup> David Eltis, "A Brief Overview of the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade," n.p. [cited 14 April 2010]. Online: <http://www.slavevoyages.org/tast/assessment/essays-intro-07.f>.

sent to the British North America, the Spanish America, the British Caribbean, the French Caribbean, the Dutch Caribbean, Brazil and the Old World. When the African captives arrived on shore their purchasers examined them for defects. They examined their teeth, pinched their skin, tasted their perspirations and sometimes spat on their faces. Moreover, the separation of families and comrades was the order of the day. No two people of the same language or tribe were allowed to stay together.

The constitution which established the United States in 1789 recognised black slaves as three fifths of a person.<sup>47</sup> During the early colonial American history, when there was a controversy whether black slaves should be converted or not, it was resolved by some southerners that they were less than human. Johnstone describes their mindset as follows: “We don’t convert dogs Kudus or zebra; therefore, we don’t need to convert blacks as a lower animal form, they lack soul to be saved.”<sup>48</sup> In captivity, the treatment of the African exile was terrible. They were not even allowed to play official popular games professionally, such as football and boxing. Education was an abomination.

And Africans who were left at home wondered what they had done to deserve such punishment. They consulted the gods through their priests and were told that it was because of offences against the gods of the land. The Yorubas of Nigeria, made sacrifices to *Oya*, *Sango*, *Iyemoja*, *Arunni* and others, the Igbo to *Amadiora* and other gods. They made sacrifice upon sacrifice but the gods never seem to answer their prayers because the white men (with the help of greedy tribesmen) kept on coming to capture their relatives. When they consulted the *Ifa* oracle they were repeatedly told that it was an offence against the gods of the land.

## **F DEUTERONOMISTIC INTERPRETATION OF THE EXILE SUFFERING**

### **1 The Exile Suffering is Retributive**

It is made clear by the Deuteronomist that the exile and the suffering that accompanied it is a divine action. Babylon then became an instrument of divine judgment on Judah. However, the Babylonian empire will eventually be judged too (Jeremiah 51:59-64).

Unlike the Chronicler’s interpretation of exile as sabbath rest, the Deuteronomist(s) sees the exile as a form of retribution. The children of Israel went to exile because of their sin. The destruction of Judah and the exile is a creative reform of Yahweh. It is also a divine judgment (Ezekiel 39:21-23):

<sup>47</sup> Wood, “The Biblical Jubilee,” 21

<sup>48</sup> Ronald L. Johnstone, *Religion and Society in Interaction. Sociology of Religion* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J: Prentice- Hall, Inc, 1975), 218.

And I will set my glory among the heathen, and all the heathen shall see my judgment that I have executed, and my hand that I have laid upon them. So the house of Israel shall know that I am the LORD their God from that day and forward. And the heathen shall know that the house of Israel went into captivity for their iniquity; because they transgressed against me, therefore hid my face from them, and gave them into the hand of their enemies: so fell they all by the sword.

The divinely appointed destruction of the Temple and the city and the exile to Babylon is clear in the book of Ezekiel. It is Yahweh himself who decreed it. Sin and failure on the part of the people is the primary motif. According to the author/editor the failure is so deep-rooted that it must happen and there is no cure available (Ezekiel 2-3).

## **2 The Suffering of the Exile is Revelatory**

The exile is the handiwork of Yahweh and the purpose, according to the Deuteronomist(s), is revelation of the knowledge of Yahweh. The purpose is for Yahweh's name to be revealed. It is only through the exile suffering and the acceptance of the loss that accompanied it "can the vindication of God's name and nature be achieved." The Deuteronomist, in the book of Ezekiel made it clear that the destruction of Israel is for the people to know that I am Yahweh (אֲנִי יְהוָה). Such is the center of thought as far as the exile and restoration is concerned, that is, to make visible of the honour of Yahweh in Israel and beyond Israel and in all the world (Ezekiel 39:7):

So will I make my holy name known in the midst of my people Israel; and will not let them pollute my holy name any more: and the heathen shall know that I am the LORD.

The characteristic declarative phrase of Deuteronomic passages in Ezekiel is אֲנִי יְהוָה. The author/editor of the book of Ezekiel has a central point, that is, the actual destruction of the city and the temple and the experience of the exile as a means for his revelation. This is also true of Jeremiah- Ezekiel tradition.

## **3 The Exile Suffering is a Divine Discipline**

The view that suffering is disciplinary is very close to the retributive view of suffering discussed above. It sees the affliction of the people as God's visitation for some reason other than punishment.<sup>49</sup> Usually the purpose of visitation is not punishment alone, but to discipline and to educate the people of Judah and Jerusalem. The whole purpose of the disaster is to bring the people back to him,

<sup>49</sup> David T. Adamo, "Suffering in the Old Testament," *Bulletin of Biblical Studies*, vol. 8, New Series. (1989, January-June), 30-42.

that is back to obedience, in other words, the maintenance of law and faithfulness which made them fit to be the people of God.

The prophet Jeremiah is the most popular preacher of suffering as discipline. The prophet used the root of יָסַר (יָסַר and מוֹסֵר) about nine times in eighth verses of the so-called authentic Jeremianic materials. Five of these verses have the idea of Yahweh teaching a lesson by afflicting, or learning a lesson when the word מוֹסֵר is used (Jeremiah 2:30; 5:3; 30:14; 31:18). The prophet Jeremiah reached the conclusion that the defeat of Josiah at Meggido in 608 B.C.E., the defeat of Pharaoh Necho in 605 and the defeat and the downfall of Judah, the destruction of Jerusalem and the exile is inevitable (2:19):

Thine own wickedness shall correct thee, and thy backslidings shall reprove thee: know therefore and see that it is an evil thing and bitter, that thou hast forsaken the LORD thy God, and that my fear is not in thee, saith the Lord, God of hosts.

For playing harlotry, the Lord's anger and wrath against the people was supposed to have the effect of ceasing their harlotry and by implication returning to God (Ezekiel 16:27-28; 23:18-20). The third chapter of Lamentation expressed the idea that suffering is good and purposeful.

#### **4 The Exile Suffering as Redemptive**

The redemptive answer to suffering in the Old Testament is close to two theories: (i) that physical suffering may be redemptive when suffered for others (ii) that God will also achieve victory no matter what kind of suffering one is going through.<sup>50</sup> The suffering servant of Yahweh in Isaiah 40-55 is the chief illustration of the idea that suffering can be sacrificial. These passages bear the Deuteronomist's editorial hand. The author/editor who lived during the exilic period seem to be saying that the exile and the suffering that accompanied it was sacrificial. In this case, the suffering servant is the people of Israel.<sup>51</sup> Israel's suffering in the exile is therefore interpreted as a guilt offering for the nation of the world so that they may know Yahweh and have access to him through repentance. This is considered to be one of the reasons why Yahweh sent Judah and Jerusalem to exile in Babylonia. The prophet Ezekiel interpreted the exile as such, that not only for them to know him, but also that the nations of the world may know him (Ezekiel 39:7):

So will I make my holy name known in the midst of my people Israel; and will not let them pollute my holy name any more: and the heathen shall know that I am the LORD.

<sup>50</sup> Adamo, "Suffering in the Old Testament," 39.

<sup>51</sup> There are various other interpretations of the Suffering Servant in Deutero-Isaiah, for example an individual person in Israel, Zerubbabel, Jehochin, or Moses.

## **5 The exile suffering is probational and eschatological**

The prophet Habakkuk is a classic illustration of suffering as probational. The prophet looked out from his watch-tower. What he saw was violence, oppression and tyranny. He (Habakuk 1:13) cried out, “Wherefore lookest thou upon them that deal treacherously, and holdest thee when the wicked swallowed up the man that is more righteous than he?” He had to protest and Yahweh told him to be patient.

That Yahweh is in control is no doubt the preaching of the Deuteronomist(s) even though it seems that Yahweh had forgotten Israel. Yahweh has always acted in the desperate situation of the year of depression. The release of Jehoachin from prison and him being looked upon as king, the changing of his status was the beginning of divine favour for the exile despite the anger of the God.

The story of restoration provides indeed some evidence that the exilic suffering is probational. Having been in captivity for so many years, at the appointed time God raised a saviour in the person of Cyrus the Great who came to Babylon and released the children of Israel to go back to Jerusalem. The restoration from captivity is the fulfilment of the symbolic act of the prophet Jeremiah who bought a portion of land while the siege was on. The Deuteronomistic passages in Jeremiah, Deutero-Isaiah, Ezekiel and others preached exile and suffering as probational. The truth, according to the interpretation of exile and suffering by the Deuteronomists is that suffering brings future hope.

## **G COMPARISON OF ISRAELITE EXILE AND AFRICAN EXILE**

### **1 Similarities**

A close examination of the two different exiles shows that there were many similarities, and of course, differences.

The Deuteronomistic interpretation of exilic suffering, namely that suffering is as a result of sin is definitely similar to African interpretation. African forebearers interpreted slavery as an African exile due to an offence against the gods of the land. As usual in those days, all disasters or evil that befell them were considered as a result of sin against the gods of *Ogun*, *Arunni*, *Oya*, *Iyemoja* and others among the Yorubas of Nigeria. That was the reason they made so many sacrifices to the gods of the land, but to no avail.

Like the Deuteronomistic interpretation, the African forefathers also saw slavery and the exilic suffering as a divine discipline. To them, the exile itself is a punishment that came from the gods and not from human enemies as such. But even though it was as a result of sin against the gods of the land, the gods brought the punishment in order to bring the people of the land back to the gods of the land. In other words, it was a lesson for the people. In these terms one



can argue that the gods used the White men to bring the Africans back to themselves. It was for the purpose of repentance and that they may know the gods. That was the reason why any family or individual who blatantly offended the gods and the priests, the elders would deal ruthlessly against that person.

The African exile is also interpreted as probational. In other words, the exile and the suffering that accompanied it, was temporary. That was why sacrifice upon sacrifice was made to the gods. They strongly believed that if a sacrifice was made the suffering could be averted. It was not only the Africans at home that believed that African exilic suffering was temporary, the African exiles themselves interpreted their suffering to be temporary. Martin Luther King's famous speech, "I have a dream" is an interpretation of the suffering by African Diaspora that the suffering they were going through was temporary. Many of the African American folk songs were a perfect interpretation of the suffering they were going through that it was temporary. In these songs their faith constitutes a bridge:<sup>52</sup>

Their depth of faith required the special preparation for living on tirelessly, living on unfulfilled hopes and desires, which have not been paralleled. This faith brought them through sheer pain and brutality of the lash, the chains, the whip and the burden; this faith sustained them in the anguish of the separation from their parents, children and spouses. More particularly, this faith enabled them to envision that a day of freedom would come and they could come, and they would begin that long trek toward an education, and respectability, independence, security, leisure and personal privacy, which was the most cruel denial of all.

Just as Deuteronomistic interpretation came to fulfilment in 539 B.C.E. during the conquest of Cyrus and the Israelites marched back to Jerusalem after 37 years of suffering in Babylon,<sup>53</sup> the fulfilment of the African exile started during the abolition of the slave trade, the march to Liberia and lately, the election of Barack Obama, a black man, as the 44<sup>th</sup> president of the United States of America and consequently, a world leader on November 4, 2008.

That exilic suffering is both redemptive and eschatological is true of both African and Israelite exiles. The Lord, God of Host, has a plan for the exile. Although the perpetrators of the exile meant it for evil and selfish reasons, the Lord can still bring something good from the exile for Africans. In other words, God who is working in mysterious ways, is yet to use the African exile or the black man for the redemption of the entire world. It may not be during our time, it shall but come to pass.

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<sup>52</sup> Wood, "The Biblical Jubilee," 24.

<sup>53</sup> Collins, *Introduction to the Hebrew Bible*, 278.

## 2 Differences

In the early seventies, some African Americans who considered themselves as the original Hebrew Israelites left the shore of America and went to Israel for settlement. They thought that the Old Testament story of exile and suffering was the story of the African exile. They considered the people who were in Israel then as European and not the true original Israel..

I think their associative identification with the Israelite exile was erroneous. Firstly, the two exiles are two different exiles of two different groups. Israelite exile took place in 597 B.C.E. and from Judah to Babylon while African exile took place in about 1400 C.E. and from the continent of Africa to Europe and Americas.

Secondly, the method of enslavement is different. In the Israelite exile, the enslavement came as a result of war by the Babylonian Empire against Judah and the majority of the population were deported only to Babylon. However, African exile is not so much a result of war between Europeans and Africans as it was because of the expansion of the European commercial circuit. Although some Africans warred against themselves in order to capture slaves, most of the wars were induced by the Europeans who brought guns, glasses, irons and other things to entice the Africans. Whatever the Africans captured, they were sold to the Europeans and others to be exiled.

The exilic suffering of the Africans are probably more gruesome than that of the Israelite exile. The reason for this belief is that, while some Israelite personalities were respected in Israel and Babylon, African slaves were believed to be less than a human being, as is testified to in the American constitution later on. During the early colonial days, there was a controversy as to whether to convert the African slaves or not. The controversy was resolved by some southerners who said that black Americans were less than human.<sup>54</sup>

It is clear from various historical evidence that European slave trade and its “accompanying violence, destruction and enslavement was one of the most catastrophic events in the history of humankind.”<sup>55</sup> Karenga also concludes that if one is to calculate the loss of lives through murder, war, forceful transportation of population, cultural destruction, and the attendant dehumanization during the middle passage, one will not be wrong to conclude that “of all the holocaust of history, none surpasses or equals this one.”<sup>56</sup> It is also can be said that

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<sup>54</sup> Ronald L. Johnstone, *Religion and Society in Interaction* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J: Prentice- Hall, Inc, 1975), 218.

<sup>55</sup> Karenga, *Introduction to Black Studies*, 77.

<sup>56</sup> Karenga, *Introduction to Black Studies*, 78.

the transatlantic slavetrade was “the largest long-distance coerced movement of people in history...”<sup>57</sup>

## H Conclusion

It was most unfortunate that those who perpetrated the evil acts of exile were people who called themselves Christians. It was the Pope who gave the adventurers the authority over the land from Africa to India because they were heathens. John Hawkins, the first notable English slave trader of note named his ship *Jesus*. He admonished his sailors to serve God daily. Yet he went on to kidnap men of Cape Verde in Africa. A story was told that a Vicar-General and some Franciscan Fathers who accompany the ship prayed after reaching the shore and started to kidnap and rob people of their merchandise.

Many African kings such as King Kosoko of Lagos resisted slavery which led to the burning of the palace and city of Lagos. Queen Nzinga of the Angolan state of Matamba fought fiercely against the Portuguese for more than thirty years, Tomba of Baga people in the present day Guinea, Uzenga Meremba (Alfonso) of Congo, King Agaja Trudo of Dahomey also resisted slavery.<sup>58</sup> However, this is not to lay the whole blame of this evil on the Europeans alone (even though they are to bear the heavy part of it), because other indigenous African kings supported slavery. They got involved in capturing fellow Africans for commercial gain. Others who got involved were instigated to do so. Their commercial interest and instigation do not make them guiltless for the evil of African enslavement. That might be the reason why some African Americans demanded some unreserved apology for the role some of the traditional rulers played in perpetuating slavery. The agitation for this apology is also as a result of the perverted history of African and African American past. The Euro-American historians who taught the history of Africa and African Americans in high school, colleges and universities argued that it was the native chiefs who sold the African slaves to them. This to me is an excuse to pass the blame, even though they were both guilty.

I hold the fact that evil is evil and most of the time evil can be turned to good at the long run. Patience is the watch word for whoever is undergoing suffering. That is what I think is the message of Deuteronomist(s) and African suffering. Suffering has an expiration in all circumstances no matter how gruesome.

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<sup>57</sup> Eltis, “A Brief Overview of the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade,” <http://www.slavevoyages.org/tast/assessment/essays-intro-01.f>.

<sup>58</sup> Karenga, *Introduction to Black Studies*, 80.

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