

Isaiah 27, Concluding Cantata: The Lord's Song

Overview

The whole section (24-27) began with two major sections of judgment (24:1-12; 16b-22) alternating with a distant echo of songs of praise (13-16a, cf. 23).

This chapter is the third of the three songs that we hear as the singers draw near.

- Isaiah's Song (25:1-5) and a description of what will happen “in this mountain” (6-12)
- The people's song (26:1-19) and advice and description for the coming judgment (26:20-27:1)
- The Lord's song (27:2-5) and description of the coming restoration of his people and judgment on the unbelievers (1, 6-13).

27:2-5, The Lord's Song

2 In that day sing ye unto her, A vineyard of red wine--“Vineyard” is masculine; “her” must refer to the nation, of which the vineyard is a figure.

This song builds on the imagery of the vineyard in 5:1-7, but with a very different twist. Step by step, God undoes the judgment pronounced in 5:5-6. The relation between the two is summarized in 12:1-2 (note the reference to a song!)

Note the similarities between the two passages.

Judgment, 5:1-7	Restoration, 27:2-5
2he looked that it should bring forth grapes, and it brought forth wild grapes .	2 In that day sing ye unto her, A vineyard of red wine .
5 And now go to; I will tell you what I will do to my vineyard: I will take away the hedge thereof, ... and break down the wall thereof, ...	3a, d I the LORD do keep it; ... I will keep it night and day.
5 ... and it shall be eaten up ; ... and it shall be trodden down :	3c lest any hurt it,
6 And I will lay it waste :	4 Fury is not in me:
it shall not be pruned , nor digged ;	4c I would go [step] through them [her], I would burn them [her] together.
but there shall come up briers and thorns :	4b who would set the briers and thorns against me in battle?
6b I will also command the clouds that they rain no rain upon it.	3b I will water it every moment:

The vineyard imagery continues in the verses that follow the song (vv. 6-13) as well:

- v. 6, Jacob and Israel as a plant that takes root, blossoms, buds, and bears fruit,
- v. 8, the nation “shoots forth” its tendrils and roots as a growing vine (AV only, but probably correctly),

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- v. 9 describes Jacob's "fruit",
- vv. 10-11 describe the destruction of the strong city in terms of the desolation of its gardens,
- v. 12 describes the gathering of Israel using verbs for gleaning.

Note the progression through the three songs.

- In ch. 25, Isaiah is the only one singing. As summarized in the first of the three songs of 24:14-16 ("they shall sing for the majesty of the Lord"), he glorifies the Lord for his power in destructive judgment, and for protecting the poor and needy.
- In ch. 26, Judah rejoices in their strong city, and describes how God creates "the righteous nation" by discipline.
- In ch. 27, the Lord appears without fury, to cultivate and protect his people.

They have gone from being downtrodden, to the special care of the Lord. The focus of the songs moves from God's power in judgment to his loving care for his own.

3 I the LORD do keep it; I will water it every moment: lest any hurt it, I will keep it night and day.--The order in Hebrew is slightly different, to establish a chiasm: "I the LORD do keep it; every moment I will water it: lest any hurt it, night and day I will keep it."

- The outer layer answers "who": It is the Lord himself who is guarding the vineyard.
- The next layer answers "when", emphasizing the constancy of his care (every moment, day and night)
- The central two items tell us "how," focusing on two threats to the vineyard: natural causes (drought), and predators ("lest any hurt it").

4 Fury is not in me:--Literally, "I have no fury." This is the very antithesis of his attitude toward the vineyard in 5:5-6, and particularly in 6a, "I will lay it waste." His people have nothing more to fear. But there is still judgment:

who would set¹ the briars and thorns against me in battle?--The "briars and thorns" are literally, singular and without conjunction, "the brier, the thorn." They recall 5:6. The position of the phrase "in battle" (MT, AV, ESV, but not NET or NIV) suggests that the weeds have not appeared naturally, but that someone has actually planted them with hostile intent.² Such a strategy is reflected in one of our Lord's parables,

Mat 13:24-28 Another parable put he forth unto them, saying, The kingdom of heaven is likened unto a man which sowed good seed in his field: 25 But while men slept, his enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat, and went his way. ... 27 So the servants of the householder came and said unto him, Sir, didst not thou sow good seed in thy field? from whence then hath it tares? 28 He said unto them, An enemy hath done this.

1 יתן appears 23x in the OT; only here and in Job 14:4 does AV not translate it as a cohortative. The cohortative appears to be impossible in Job 14:4. Here it is likely, but makes no substantial difference to the line of exposition that I propose.

2 This insight relies on the Massoretic accentuation, which most modern commentators choose to ignore.

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As in Matthew, the briars and thorns are plants that take the place of the true crop. They are people who occupy a place in the people of God but who do not partake of the true life of the plantation and show their alien nature by failing to bear fruit. They have been planted by the adversary; as our Lord said of such false pretenders among the people of God in his day, "You are of your father the devil" (John 8:44).

A fair understanding of the nature of the church requires us to realize that even today, the enemy seeks to sow briars and thorns in God's vineyard. This is why believers are exhorted not only to examine themselves (1 Cor 11:28), but to discern the body (1 Cor 11:29), when we gather at the Lord's table.

The Lord's response to such an attack is not to rise up against the enemy, but calmly to care for the field, reversing his policy of not pruning and digging.

I would go through them,--Literally, "Let me step in her," the feminine pronoun referring to the vineyard, as in v. 2. Like an avid gardener, the Lord is eager now to undertake the daily care of the vineyard, clearing out the weeds. There is no violence, no anger here, just patient tending of the beloved garden plot.

I would burn them together.--Again, the pronoun is feminine singular. The vineyard is in view, but the fuel is undoubtedly the weeds, with which such burning is associated in 9:17 and 33:12. Perhaps the reference is to a burning off of the land after the harvest, such as our Lord describes in his parable:

Mat 13:28-30 The servants said unto him, Wilt thou then that we go and gather them up? 29 But he said, Nay; lest while ye gather up the tares, ye root up also the wheat with them. 30 Let both grow together until the harvest: and in the time of harvest I will say to the reapers, Gather ye together first the tares, and bind them in bundles to burn them: but gather the wheat into my barn.

5 Or let him take hold of my strength,--The masculine singular verb reflects the masculine gender and singular number of "the briar, the thorn." The natural destiny of a weed is to be pulled out and burned. But here is a gracious invitation. The weed can become a true plant, the brier can turn into a fruitful vine, by fleeing to the very one who threatens to remove him, the Divine Gardener.

So, by God's grace, those whom the enemy places in the church in an effort to disrupt it, may in fact be brought to a true faith if the rest of the body behaves in a biblical way.

The noun "strength" refers to an isolated stronghold, a place of refuge. Isaiah uses it of the fortress cities of Damascus and Samaria, and twice of Island Tyre (23: 4, 14), seemingly secure in its offshore location. But the only true refuge is God (25:4, where the word is twice translated "strength," but in parallel with "refuge" and "shadow"). There alone can one find refuge from divine judgment, and in the grace of God, refuge is offered there.

that he may make peace with me; and he shall make peace with me.--We saw in 26:18 and Deut 20 that Israel was to confront the nations with the dual offer of peace and destruction. Now the Lord himself is making this offer to those who oppose his people. He will burn them up, unless they make peace.

Deu 20:10-12 When thou comest nigh unto a city to fight against it, then proclaim peace unto it. 11 And it shall be, **if it make thee answer of peace**, and open unto thee, then it shall be, that all

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the people that is found therein shall be tributaries unto thee, and they shall serve thee. 12 And **if it will make no peace**³ with thee, but will make war against thee, then thou shalt besiege it [and destroy it]:

27:6-13, Expectation

The pronouns that refer to the Lord turn from first to third person, marking the end of the song. But the image of the vineyard continues.

This section is chiastic, ABBA. The outer members describe Israel's return and prosperity. The next level describes two kinds of judgment: the **disciplinary** judgment of Israel, and the **destructive** judgment of the nations. Each judgment section concludes with a description of the response of those under the judgment. The whole section amplifies 26:7-9, the instructional value of judgment.

6, Return and Prosperity of Israel

6 He shall cause them that come of Jacob to take root: Israel shall blossom and bud, and fill the face of the world with fruit.--This verse is linked in two ways to vv. 12-13 at the end of the chapter.

First, “them that come of Jacob” is not a temporal phrase (as in all modern translations). Rather, it refers to Israel's return, mentioned also at the end of this chapter (vv. 12-13; cf. וּבָאוּ in v. 13).

Second, we will see that 12-13 anticipate the salvation not only of Israel but also of the Gentiles. So here, Israel's fruit “fill[s] the face of the world with fruit.” Her mission is to bless all the world.

Isa 49:3-6 And said unto me, Thou art my servant, **O Israel**, in whom I will be glorified. ...
6 ... It is a light thing that thou shouldest be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob, and to restore the preserved of Israel: I will also give thee for **a light to the Gentiles**, that thou mayest be my salvation unto the end of the earth.

In Judah's song (26:18) she confessed her inability to work “deliverance in the earth.” Now God will “cause” what she could not achieve. The following verses explain his methods. As in 26:7-8, God brings us to righteousness by causing us to walk “in the way of [his] judgments.”

7-9, Disciplinary Judgment of Israel

7 Hath he smitten him, as he smote those that smote him? or is he slain according to the slaughter of them that are slain by him?--The plurals (representing the two participles “that smote” and “that are slain”) are the Gentiles, while the 3ms pronouns describe the Lord and Israel. Two judgments are compared: the Lord's judgment of the oppressors, and his judgment of Israel. The terseness of the pronouns and the repetition of the two verbal roots, three times each, is highly poetic:

הַכַּמְכַת מִכְּהוּ הַכְּהוּ אִם־כִּפְהֶרֶג הֶרְגִּיו הֶרֶג:

The verse becomes clearer, if less poetic, if we replace the pronouns by their antecedents:

3 A slightly different idiom than Isaiah uses, with the verb **שָׁלַח** instead of the phrase **עָשָׂה שְׁלוֹם**. Isaiah's idiom does appear in Josh 9:15; Job 25:2; Isa 45:7, but with the Lord or his people as subjects.

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Hath God smitten Israel, as God smote the nations that smote Israel? or is Israel slain according to the slaughter of the nations that are slain by God?

That is, "Has Israel suffered the kind of utter destruction that the Lord has brought upon the oppressors?" The answer is, "No," as the contrast between 8-9 and 10-22 shows.

8 In measure,--God's treatment of his people is always in measure, modulated to their ability to profit from it. Compare Jeremiah's frequent statement (though using a different expression, במשפט)

Jer 10:24 O LORD, correct me, but **with judgment**; not in thine anger, lest thou bring me to nothing.

Jer 30:11 For I am with thee, saith the LORD, to save thee: though I make a full end of all nations whither I have scattered thee, yet will I not make a full end of thee: but I will correct thee in **measure**, and will not leave thee altogether unpunished.

Jer 46:28 Fear thou not, O Jacob my servant, saith the LORD: for I am with thee; for I will make a full end of all the nations whither I have driven thee: but I will not make a full end of thee, but correct thee in **measure**; yet will I not leave thee wholly unpunished.

The principle extends to the NT as well:

1Co 10:13 There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted **above that ye are able**; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it.

when it shooteth forth,--The verb is used to describe plants that put out their tendrils. The suffix here is feminine, the same used for the vineyard in v. 3. When he restores the nation, he will continue to deal with it in measure.

thou wilt debate with it:--The verb ריב describes the covenant lawsuit, the form with which chapter 1 began, God will continue to deal with his people. But his purpose is discipline and correction, not vengeance and destruction. Here is the foundation for John 15,

Joh 15:1-2 I am the true vine, and my Father is the husbandman. 2 Every branch in me that beareth not fruit he taketh away: and every *branch* that beareth fruit, he **purgeth** it, that it may bring forth more fruit.

he stayeth his rough wind in the day of the east wind.--Israel has the sea to its west and the desert to its east. The east wind is the sirocco, a hot, dry, dusty wind that parches the land and wilts the plants. Here, it is a figure for the judgment of God about to come on all the earth. When that time comes, he will stand watch over his vineyard, and protect it from the devastating blast.

v. 9 looks at the results of this measured discipline.

9 By this therefore shall the iniquity of Jacob be purged;--"By this" בזאת (fem) looks back to the previous verse. God's measured discipline will have its effect, dealing effectively with Jacob's sin.

26:9 when thy judgments *are* in the earth, the inhabitants of the world will learn righteousness.

and this is all the fruit[:] to take away his sin;--The shift in gender of "and this" וזה (masc) suggests a different antecedent. This phrase looks ahead: the fruit (the vineyard again!) is the removal of Jacob's

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sin, so we should read a break between “fruit” and “to,” conformable to the disjunctive accent on פרי.

It is Jacob, not the Lord, who removes this sin. The verb “take away” is used to describe putting off clothes. The fruit of the discipline is that Jacob himself “takes off” his own sinful activity.

when he maketh all the stones of the altar as chalkstones that are beaten in sunder, the groves and images shall not stand up.--He (Jacob) will cast down and crush his own idol altars. Compare the abandoning of idol altars prophesied in the Burden on Damascus,

Isa 17:7-8 At that day shall a man look to his Maker, and his eyes shall have respect to the Holy One of Israel. 8 And he shall not look to the altars, the work of his hands, neither shall respect that which his fingers have made, either the groves, or the images.

Jacob behaves as Gideon did when the Lord appeared to him, tearing down the idol altar and cutting down its accompanying grove (Judg 6:25-32; note the repeated references to his desecration of Baal's altar and grove).

Israel's fortunes have progressed from abandoned vineyard to fruitful plantation. But just the reverse happens with the cities that men fortify in a vain effort to protect themselves, as vv. 10-11 show.

10-11, Punitive Judgment of Man's City

10 Yet the defenced city shall be desolate, and the habitation forsaken, and left like a wilderness:--Throughout the Cantata the “city” (24:10, 12; 25:2, 3; 26:5) represents human efforts at self-sufficiency.⁴ It becomes a wilderness. In spite of its fortifications, it is now vulnerable to the weakest adversaries. Isaiah gives two examples:

there shall the calf feed, and there shall he lie down, and consume the branches thereof.--The first adversary is the grazing calf. The image is repeated from the Burden of Damascus:⁵

Isa 17:2 The cities of Aroer *are* forsaken: they shall be for flocks, which shall lie down, and none shall make *them* afraid.

The rare word “branches” appears only here and in 17:6, where it refers to the twigs of an olive tree. It suggests that the flocks are munching, not on weeds, but on fruit trees in the gardens of the city⁶ that they have overrun. Note the contrast with vv. 1-5. The Lord restores and protects his garden, Israel, but abandons the gardens of the godless to abuse and destruction (as he once did to Israel).

11 When the boughs thereof are withered, they shall be broken off: the women come, and set them on fire:--Those trees are now good only for firewood. In many primitive cultures, gathering firewood is the task of women and children. These defenseless ones invade the gardens and break up

4 Some commentators see “city” in this section as a specific reference to Babylon, from whom Israel will be delivered. Others (K&D), because of parallels in v. 11, see the reference to Jerusalem. But the section is a summary to the burdens, which concerned many cities, not just Babylon, and a reference to Jerusalem would contradict vv. 7=8.. It seems best, with Motyer, to understand the epithet here, as throughout ch. 24-27, as a generic reference to every example of human organization in an effort to be independent of God.

5 The idea of cattle grazing as a curse is also in 7:25, but that deals with vineyards, not cities.

6 1 Kings 21 documents the presence of gardens in cities. Naboth's refusal to sell the vineyard (v. 3) was due to Lev 25:30, which makes sale of land within a walled city permanent (unlike fields, which return to their original family every 50 years in the Jubilee).

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the trees with no opposition.

The last half of v. 11, like v. 9, describes the people involved and their response (or lack of response).

for it is a people of no understanding:--The Hebrew emphasis is slightly different: "It is not an understanding people." There are two kinds of people in the world: those who understand the ways of God, and those who do not. v. 11 presented Jacob as attaining to such understanding. Those under the judgment of vv. 10-11 are not an understanding people.

The link between the verses may be even closer. Jacob's understanding led him to put away his idolatry. In 44:9-20, Isaiah mocks the idolater who carves an idol from the very tree that he himself has cut down and whose branches he burns for fuel. The idolater's error is at root a lack of understanding:

Isa 44:18-20 They have not known nor understood: for he hath shut their eyes, that they cannot see; *and* their hearts, that they cannot **understand**. 19 And none considereth in his heart, neither *is there* knowledge nor **understanding** to say, I have burned part of it in the fire; yea, also I have baked bread upon the coals thereof; I have roasted flesh, and eaten *it*: and shall I make the residue thereof an abomination? shall I fall down to the stock of a tree? 20 He feedeth on ashes: a deceived heart hath turned him aside, that he cannot deliver his soul, nor say, *Is there* not a lie in my right hand?

God's patient discipline delivers Jacob from idolatry and restores the Lord to his rightful worship. But the city of man, with its many surrogates for God, shows that its inhabitants are not "an understanding people." They persist in their idolatry.

therefore he that made them will not have mercy on them, and he that formed them will shew them no favour.⁷--In contrast with the patient discipline of vv. 7-8, producing Jacob's reform, merciless judgment comes to those who ignore the ways of God.

12-13, Return of Believers

12 And it shall come to pass in that day, that the LORD shall beat off from the channel of the river unto the stream of Egypt, and ye shall be gathered one by one, O ye children of Israel.--The agricultural image continues. "Beat off" is what one does to an olive tree to remove the very last olives. "Gather" is one of the two main verbs used to describe gleaning. The Lord will thoroughly seek out and assemble his scattered people.

When Cyrus sent the Jews home from Babylon, most did not return (see Note). As of 2007, only 40% of the world's Jews live in Israel.⁸ This prophecy (and others, like 11:12, 16) anticipates a much more complete return, one that has not yet happened.

13 And it shall come to pass in that day, that the great trumpet shall be blown,--This trumpet is a *shophar*, a ram's horn, not the silver trumpets that Moses made (Num 10:2). We considered the significance of the *shophar* on our study of Rosh Hashannah in 2007.⁹ It is first mentioned in Exod

⁷ K&D take the parallelism of יצר and עשה to indicate Israel, on the basis of the parallel with 22:11. The pair is a favorite of Isaiah (10 out of 15 instances), and is often used thus: 43:7; 44:2; , but note that the same parallel refers to Assyria in 37:26, Cyrus in 46:11, and more generally in 45:9, 18.

⁸ <http://www.haaretz.com/hasen/pages/903585.html>

⁹ http://www.cyber-chapel.org/sermons/special/jewish_holidays/notes/Trumpets07.pdf; <http://www.cyber->

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19:16, 19; 20:18 to describe the sound that the people heard from Mt. Sinai, and represents the Lord's kingship over his people. The prophets often mention it in connection with the day of the Lord, because that is the point at which the Lord's kingdom comes on earth, as it is in heaven.

and they shall come which were ready to perish in the land of Assyria, and the outcasts in the land of Egypt,--Most commentators understand this verse to refer, like the previous one, to the gathering of the Jews from the lands of their dispersion. But Isaiah has also identified the Assyrians and Egyptians themselves as turning to the Lord (19:23-25), and Motyer suggests that this verse, coming as it does at the end of the judgments on the nations, refers to this broader gathering. Describing these Gentiles as “ready to perish” and “outcasts” would be entirely appropriate after the judgments that these nations will have experienced. Then these two verses describe the gathering of both Jews (v. 12) and Gentiles (v. 13) under the Lord's rule in the great Day of the Lord.

and shall worship the LORD in the holy mount at Jerusalem.--We have now reached the objective anticipated in 24:23,

the LORD of hosts shall reign in mount Zion, and in Jerusalem, and before his ancients gloriously.

We can summarize the entire Cantata thus: judgment is coming on all the earth. But the effect of this judgment will be to turn both Jew and Gentile to him, and to purge the earth of all opposition. The king will be enthroned, and all the earth will joyfully submit to his rule.

Notes

Verbs for guarding: שמר and נצר

The two verbs are very close semantically, but there are some hints that נצר focuses more on careful observation, while שמר has to do more with protecting from harm. Consider these two proverbs, in which נצר describes an aspect of our conduct to which we are to pay special attention, while שמר describes our well-being that is preserved by that attention.

Pro 13:3 He that keepeth נצר his mouth keepeth שמר his life: *but* he that openeth wide his lips shall have destruction.

Pro 16:17 The highway of the upright *is* to depart from evil: he that keepeth נצר his way preserveth שמר his soul.

Both verbs are used with מן to indicate the threat from which one is protecting. Contexts:

שמר: Has 469 occurrences, 22 with מן

- Gen 31:29; Exod 23:21; Deut 23:10 (ET 9); Josh 6:18; Jud 13:13; 1 Sam 21:4; 2 Sam 22:24; 2 Kings 6:9; 9:14; Ps 18:23; 121:7; 141:9; Pro 3:26; 6:24; 7:5; 21:23; Isa 56:2 (*bis*), 6; Jer 9:4; Mic 7:5;
- (Ps 12:7;) Ps 140:5 (ET 4) (parallel with נצר)

chapel.org/sermons/special/jewish_holidays/mp3/Trumpets07.mp3

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נצַר: Has 62 occurrences, 6 with מן, but of these four could be excused:

- Ps 12:7; 140:5 (ET 4) (parallel with שָׁמַר); Ps 140:2 (ET 1) (parallel with חָלַץ)
- Ps 32:7 (but could be alternatively parsed, ignoring accents, “Thou *art* my hiding place from trouble; thou shalt preserve me; thou shalt compass me about with songs of deliverance.”)
- Psa 34:13 Keep thy tongue from evil, and thy lips from speaking guile. (Not the threat, but the thing to watch out for)
- Ps 64:1 Hear my voice, O God, in my prayer: preserve my life from fear of the enemy.

The raw percentages are about the same (5%), but שָׁמַר appears with מן in a much wider array of contexts; נצַר is used in this way only in Ps. Note that the two words are used in the same verse 12 times; other than Deut 33:9, all the rest are in Ps or Pr. The two are a stereotypical poetic pair, and it makes sense if in poetry an idiom that properly belongs to one (שָׁמַר) leaks over to the other.

Verse 7

The challenge in this verse is figuring out the antecedents of the pronouns, and whether the genitives are subjective or objective. Observations:

1. The two halves of the verse should correspond to make up the poetic parallel. So we should be able to place them in parallel.
2. But numerous details in the corresponding members are different, as shown in the table below.

Hath he smitten him	or is he slain	Note replacement of active by passive
as he smote	according to the slaughter of	Again, the subject is missing in the second half
those [the one] that smote him ¹⁰	them that are slain by him	“Him” in the first half is Israel, echoing 10:20. In the second half, as the AV renders it, it appears to be the missing subject of the previous two clauses. Or it might be “his [the oppressor’s] slain,” neither objective nor subjective but possessive. The singular suffix then would correspond to the singular “the one smiting him” in the first half.

Verse 8

The commentaries all agree in taking the 3fs suffixes on בְּשִׁלְחָהּ and תְּרִיבִנָּה as referring to Jacob and Israel, though these were masculine in the previous verse. Then D שְׁלַח is given the sense of “divorce” (HALOT 3ב), and הִגָּה (lacking its expected object) is taken to describe the implementation of this “removing.” In spite of the introductory “in measure,” subjecting Israel to God’s “rough wind” is a strange way of making the distinction in v. 7.

The AV appears to have followed a different clue that relieves some of this tension. Start with the observation that the feminine was used in v. 3 of the vineyard. In this case, another well-attested meaning of D שְׁלַח (HALOT 2d) is appropriate, “to sprout, spring forth.” In the day of Israel’s blossoming, God will reprove her in measure. In this case, the object of הִגָּה may well be the rough wind, from which God shields his vineyard in the time of the harsh sirocco.

¹⁰ as in 10:20, where it refers to Assyria

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I have followed the AV's more organic rendering.

Population in Exile

In the discussion on v. 12, I assert that most of the Jews did not return from the captivity. We don't have detailed numbers, but here is the data that we do have.

Consider first of all how many went into captivity. There were at least five waves.

1. Assyria under TPIII (2 Kings 15:29): no number given, but it encompassed “Ijon, and Abelbethmaachah, and Janoah, and Kedesh, and Hazor, and Gilead, and Galilee, all the land of Naphtali.”
2. Assyria under Sargon: see Wood, p. 333 note 95, “Sargon lists 27,290, which, if correct, must have been taken following the fall of Samaria proper. Many more had been taken by Tiglath-pileser and probably Shalmaneser.”
3. Babylon, 607. At least Daniel and his friends were taken at this time.
4. Babylon, 597: 2 Kings 24:14-16 mentions 10,000.
5. Babylon, 586: this was the final, major deportation, but we have no numbers.

The explicit numbers in waves 2 and 4 give us nearly 40,000 people, but many remain unaccounted for, particularly in wave 5. There could easily have been twice this many.

During the exile, the people would have multiplied. Compare Israel's experience in Egypt, where over the course of 400 years, 70 people turned into 600,000, even under conditions of slavery. This suggests a rate of 2.29% per year ($70 * 1.0229^{400} = 600302$). Applied to the two numbers that we have,

$$27290 * 1.0229^{(722 - 537)} + 10000 * 1.0229^{(597 - 537)} = 1,838,360$$

This is surely an underestimate, since it leaves out three of the five rounds of captivity. There might very well have been, at the time of the return, more than two million male¹¹ Jews in the dispersion.

Ezra 2:64-67 tells us that about 43,000 returned, only about 2% of the total.

The book of Esther, which describes events in the diaspora after the return, confirms an extensive Jewish presence. Haman was concerned (Est 3:8) about “a certain people scattered abroad and dispersed among the people in all the provinces of thy kingdom.” There were 127 provinces (Est 1:1). Even a village of only 500 men in each province would amount to over 60,000, more than the number who returned. Consider also Est 9:16, which reports that the Jews who remained in dispersion were able to slay 75,000 of their adversaries, suggesting that their numbers were at least comparable.

11 All of the numbers in these counts are of males.