Prophetic Ministry in Jeremiah and Ezekiel

Rochester, Kathleen M.

PROPHETIC MINISTRY IN JEREMIAH AND EZEKIEL

by

Kathleen M. Rochester

Submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements

for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Department of Theology and Religion

Durham University

2009

Abstract

This study seeks to make a contribution to the understanding of Old Testament prophetic ministry by offering a close comparison of selected texts from two different, yet related, prophetic books: Jeremiah and Ezekiel. The approach is canonical, based on the received text. Texts on key areas of prophetic ministry are examined exegetically then compared. These relate to the prophet's call (Jer 1:1-19, Ezek 1-3), worker images for prophetic ministry (assayer Jer 6:27-30, potter modelled on Yahweh's work in Jer 18:1-12, and watchman Ezek 33:1-20), the prophet's relationship with the temple (Jer 7:1-15, Ezek 8-11) and assessment of deviant prophets (Jer 23:9-32, Ezek 13).

Although each of these prophets remembers an experienced call and is sent out as Yahweh's messenger, their styles of communication are strikingly different. It is the contention of this thesis that a serious acceptance of the settings given in each book provides interpretive clues regarding the reasons for these differences. In Jeremiah, where his people are still in the land with the temple present, Yahweh is perceived as close and the communication between Yahweh and prophet is characterised by intimate dialogue. Jeremiah's communication to the people is focused on Yahweh's spoken word, the medium of proximity. Where Ezekiel and his people are conscious of distance from their temple and land, Yahweh is also presumed to be distant. Communication between Yahweh and Ezekiel is more distant, Ezekiel is often spectator rather than participant. His communication to the people is more visual and more distant. Jeremiah's call for the people to 'turn' back to listen to and obey suggests that a break has not fully developed; Ezekiel's call to respect the 'holiness' of Yahweh suggests that the relationship must begin again from a more distant point before drawing close to a place of intimacy. Comparing two such significantly different prophets gives a range of fruitful insights into the relationship between prophetic ministry and local context.

Declaration

This thesis is the product of my own work and does not include work that has been presented in any form for a degree at this or any other university. All quotations from, and reference to, the work of persons other than myself have been properly acknowledged throughout.

Statement of Copyright

Table of Contents

Abbreviations

ABD	David Noel Freedman (ed.), *The Anchor Bible Dictionary* (New York: Doubleday, 1992)
ANE	Ancient Near East or Eastern
ANET	James B. Pritchard (ed.) *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1950)
ATD	Das Alte Testament Deutsch
BZAW	Beihefte zur ZAW
BZ	*Biblische Zeitschrift*
CBQ	*Catholic Biblical Quarterly*
CUP	Cambridge University Press
ExpT	*Expository Times*
FAT	Forschungen zum Alten Testament
FRALNT	Forschungen zur Religion und Literatur des Alten und Neuen Testaments
HAR	*Hebrew Annual Review*
HAT	Handbuch zum Alten Testament
HTR	*Harvard Theological Review*
ICC	International Critical Commentary
ITC	International Theological Commentary
IVP	Intervarsity Press
JBL	*Journal of Biblical Literature*
JBQ	*Jewish Biblical Quarterly*
JETS	*Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*
JSOT	*Journal for the Study of the Old Testament*
JSOT Sup	*Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series*
JQR	*Jewish Quarterly Review*
JTS	*Journal of Theological Studies*
NT	New Testament

NICOT	New International Commentary on the Old Testament
OT	Old Testament
OUP	Oxford University Press
SHBC	Smyth & Helwys Bible Commentary
SBL	Society of Biblical Literature
SBT	*Studies in Biblical Theology*
TB	*Tyndale Bulletin*
TWOT	*Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*
VT	Vetus Testamentum
WBC	Word Biblical Commentary
ZAW	*Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft*

Ancient texts are abbreviated in accordance with the *SBL Handbook of Style.*

Acknowledgements

I wish to thank my supervisor Prof. Walter Moberly for his consistently astute yet kindly guidance, correction and encouragement, in wise measure, over a much more lengthy period than either of us anticipated ten years ago. Through him I have learnt a lot. Rev. Alan Scott in Australia first prodded me to seriously consider doing a PhD; many others have given significant encouragement. Employment opportunities in the UK enabled me to work part-time; friends in Middlesbrough were supportive through a difficult time. The people of Hardwick Evangelical Church have been brilliant in understanding the needs of a minister trying to complete a PhD. The facilities of Tyndale House, Cambridge, and participation in the community of scholars there, has been invaluable. I am also grateful for a grant from the Panacea Society towards the costs of my study for one year - it helped considerably. My children and grandchildren in Australia have contributed significantly by allowing me to study on the other side of the world. Without the constant encouragement and practical support of my husband Stuart, I could not have done it.

CHAPTER ONE
INTRODUCTION

This study seeks to make a contribution to the understanding of Old Testament prophecy by offering a close comparison of selected texts from two different, yet related, prophetic books: Jeremiah and Ezekiel. These books portray overlapping historical contexts, yet different geographical settings. For both prophets the fall of Jerusalem is the crucial focus. Despite many similar motifs in their messages, the ministries of these two men bear closer scrutiny to uncover commonality and contrasts and to explore possible factors, suggested by the texts themselves, in shaping Israelite prophetic ministry. I choose the term 'ministry' rather than perhaps 'career' or 'model' to indicate service of a subordinate to a divine superior where divine purposes and commands carry authority for the shaping of each man's life and work.

Stylistic differences

It is immediately apparent that there are striking differences of style between the books of Jeremiah and Ezekiel. This is even reflected in the introductions: Jeremiah's book is characterised, in a formal heading, as 'the words of Jeremiah' (דברי ירמיהו), whereas Ezekiel's book begins more abruptly with 'and it was' (ויהי) ... 'and I saw visions of God' (ואראה מראות אלהים). Even a cursory reading of these books reveals some obvious differences: Jeremiah has little obvious structure, is strongly word-orientated, and portrays a sensitive, emotional prophet who shows little interest in priestly matters but engages in lively dialogue with Yahweh. On the other hand, Ezekiel is carefully structured, has a large amount of visionary material, and portrays a detached, self-disciplined prophet who is very influenced by priestly concerns and seems unable to argue with Yahweh. While the

two men who are portrayed in these books are both canonically accepted as Israelite prophets, their personas, ministries and at times their messages, can show considerable divergence; yet there are many significant aspects of their ministries in common, as well as extensive verbal affinities. It is not only the similarities but also the differences that need to be accepted and probed to further our understanding of their prophetic ministry.

Relevant literature

There is a wealth of scholarly material on each of these prophets separately. However, there are surprisingly few studies which treat Jeremiah and Ezekiel comparatively, especially in relation to prophetic ministry. Many general books on prophets contain pertinent insights, and include some general comparisons between these prophets.[1] Comparative studies on Jeremiah and Ezekiel have mostly been motivated by historical questions. Interest in the role of deuteronomists in a proposed post-exilic compilation of the book of Jeremiah has been the focus of many (e.g. Janssen, Nicholson, Hyatt); some look at the possible influence of Deuteronomists on the literary work of Ezekiel (e.g. Vieweger).[2] More recently others, whose comparative work still focuses on textual histories, have deduced that

---

[1] See Martin Buber, *The Prophetic Faith* (New York: Collier, 1949), Abraham Heschel, *The Prophets* (New York: Harper & Row, 1962), J. Lindblom, *Prophecy in Ancient Israel* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1962), Gerhard Von Rad, *The Message of the Prophets*, trans. D.M.G. Stalker (London: SCM, 1968), R.B.Y. Scott, *The Relevance of the Prophets: An Introduction to the Old Testament Prophets and Their Message* (New York: Macmillan, 1968), Klaus Koch, *The Prophets*, trans. Margaret Kohl (London: SCM, 1983), Walter Brueggemann, *Hopeful Imagination: Prophetic Voices in Exile* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1986), David J. Zucker, *Israel's Prophets: An Introduction for Christians and Jews* (New York: Paulist Press, 1994), David L. Petersen, *The Prophetic Literature: An Introduction* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2002), Christopher R. Seitz, *Prophecy and Hermeneutics*, Studies in Theological Interpretation (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007).

[2] Enno Janssen, *Juda in der Exilzeit*, FRLANT (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1956), uses a form-critical approach to suggest that the book of Jeremiah assumed its present shape largely at the hands of Deuteronomists who were working within an active preaching tradition; Ernest W. Nicholson, *Preaching to the Exiles: A Study of the Prose Tradition in the Book of Jeremiah* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1970); James Philip Hyatt, "The Deuteronomic Edition of Jeremiah," in *A Prophet to the Nations*, ed. Leo G. Perdue and Brian W. Kovacs (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1984), 252–53; Dieter Vieweger, "Die Arbeit des Jeremianischen Schülerkreis am Jeremiabuch und deren Rezeption in der literarischen Überlieferung der Prophetenschrift Ezechiels," *BZ* 32, no. 1 (1988): 15–34.

Jeremiah is dependent on Ezekiel, rather than the reverse (e.g. Leene and Kuyvenhoven).[3] Some attention is given by scholars to a proverb that is referred to in both books (Jer 31:29; Ezek 18:2).[4] Broader concerns, like inner-biblical exegesis (e.g. Rom-Shiloni) or pain (e.g. Mills) have motivated other studies.[5] A few scholars have written short, comparative articles regarding aspects of prophetic ministry in these two books (e.g. Reiss, who caricatures Jeremiah as preaching ethics and Ezekiel as preaching ritual; and Tiemeyer, who proposes a divine motivation in rejecting prophetic intercession).[6] However, there is a distinct lack of scholarly works that give careful, exegetical attention to a comparative treatment of the prophetic ministries of Jeremiah and Ezekiel and to their messages in relation to the fall of Jerusalem.

Composition

Many of the studies on both books focus on questions of composition. In Jeremiah three principal literary strands have been postulated. These are known as Source A (prophetic oracles in poetic form, being considered by many to be the *ipsissima verba* of Jeremiah), Source B (prose narrative about the prophet, assumed by many to be composed by Baruch) and Source C (consisting mostly of the prose sermons, commonly attributed to a later deuteronomistic circle which utilises Jeremianic

---

[3] Hendrik Leene, "Ezekiel and Jeremiah: Promises of Inner Renewal in Diachronic Perspective," in *Past, Present, Future: The Deuteronomistic History and the Prophets*, ed. Johannes C. de Moor, van Rooy (Leiden: Brill, 2000), 150–75; Hendrik Leene, "Blowing the Same Shofar: An Intertextual Comparison of Representations of the Prophetic Role in Jeremiah and Ezekiel," in *The Elusive Prophet: The Prophet as a Historical Person, Literary Character and Anonymous Artist*, ed. Johannes C. de Moor (Leiden: Brill, 2001), 175–98; Rosalie Kuyvenhoven, "Jeremiah 23:1–8: Shepherds in Diachronic Perspective," in *Paratext and Megatext as Channels of Jewish and Christian Traditions: The Textual Markers of Contextualisation*, ed. August den Hollander, Ulrich Schmid, and Willem Smelik (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 1–36.

[4] e.g. Rodney R. Hutton, "Are the Parents Still Eating Sour Grapes? Jeremiah's Use of the *Māšāl* in Contrast to Ezekiel," *CBQ* 71, no. 2 (April 2009): 275–85.

[5] Dalit Rom-Shiloni, "Facing Destruction and Exile: Inner-Biblical Exegesis in Jeremiah and Ezekiel," *ZAW* 117, no. 2 (2005): 189–205; Mary E. Mills, *Alterity, Pain and Suffering in Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel* (New York: T & T Clark, 2007).

[6] Moshe Reiss, "Jeremiah, the Suffering Prophet, and Ezekiel, the Visionary," *JBQ* 32, no. 4 (2004): 233–38; Lena-Sofia Tiemeyer, "God's Hidden Compassion," *TB* 57, no. 2 (2006): 191–213.

material but develops it and adds to it).[7] However, further examination of material from each of these categories has shown that the lines are more blurred than the categories suggest.[8] In the light of findings to date, both Craigie and Brueggemann urge caution in making too sharp a distinction between the major blocks of material in Jeremiah, with respect both to chronology and authorship.[9] Discussion of sources in Ezekiel emerged later than it did in Jeremiah, due to the impressive structural unity of the book of Ezekiel. The book's Babylonian setting has been attributed by some to a Babylonian editor.[10] Ezekiel is known for its many examples of motifs or even larger blocks that seem to be reused, developed or altered later in the book. This repetition has led many scholars to speculate regarding source dependence, for example, the visionary descriptions in ch.1 and ch.10.[11] Others see the repetition as

---

[7] See Sigmund Mowinckel, *Zur Komposition des Buches Jeremia* (Kristiania: J. Dybwad, 1914); William L. Holladay, "A Fresh Look at 'Source B' and 'Source C' in Jeremiah," *VT* 25 (1975): 394–412; Louis Stulman, "The Prose Sermons as Hermeneutical Guide to Jeremiah 1 - 25: The Deconstruction of Judah's Symbolic World," in *Troubling Jeremiah*, ed. A.R. Pete Diamond, Kathleen M. O'Connor, and Louis Stulman, JSOT Sup 260 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999), 35–52.

[8] e.g. John Bright, "The Date of the Prose Sermons of Jeremiah," in *A Prophet to the Nations*, ed. Leo G. Perdue and Brian W. Kovacs (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1984), 205–11, finds that verbal links between the prose sermons and passages commonly held to be from Jeremiah himself (Source A) are stronger than those between the prose sermons and the deuteronomistic works; Helga Weippert, "Die Prosareden des Jeremiabuches," *BZAW* 132 (1973): 132, classifies many of the prose sermons (Source B) as *Kunstprosa* (artistic or formal prose) which she considers to be the result of demetrification of prophetic discourse which conforms more widely to 'Source A' than is widely held; John F.A. Sawyer, *Prophecy and the Biblical Prophets*, Oxford Bible Series (Oxford: OUP, 1987), 96, concludes that the traditional division into three sources still has problems. He thinks that the actual words of Baruch and Jeremiah are 'certainly beyond our reach,' and that 'poetic beauty cannot seriously be accepted as a very objective criterion for authenticity'.

[9] Peter C. Craigie, Page Kelley, and Joel Drinkard, *Jeremiah 1–25*, WBC (Dallas: Word, 1991), 119. Walter Brueggemann, *To Pluck Up, To Tear Down: A Commentary on the Book of Jeremiah 1–25*, ITC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 7, concludes that, although 'scholars are no longer agreed that the character of the book can be understood according to...a mechanical literary process...(and) the new stress on the canonical shape of the literature may diminish the pertinence of these older historical-critical questions' a residue of old consensus remains which includes two important points: 1) there is a core of material which originates with the prophet Jeremiah, and 2) an extended process of editorial work has transformed and perhaps made beyond recovery the original work of the prophet.

[10] e.g. I.G. Matthews, *Ezekiel*, American Commentary on the Old Testament (Chicago: American Baptist Publication Society, 1939), xxi.

[11] e.g. David J. Halperin, "The Exegetical Character of Ezekiel X 9–17," *VT* 26 (1976): 129–30, who thinks that there is, in ch.10 especially verses 9-17, a 'general impression of chaos' and finds its *Vorlage* (Ezek 1:15-21) 'confusing.' Although still assuming a dependence on ch.1, a different position is taken by Cornelius B. Houk, "The Final Redaction of Ezekiel 10," *JBL* 90 (1971): 54,

evidence of 'resumptive exposition', or a kind of intentional inner-compositional exegesis, and find that focusing on sources misses its significance.[12]

This study acknowledges that there is an important place for studies addressing questions about the development and formation of the text of each prophetic book. It also acknowledges that our present biblical texts of Jeremiah and Ezekiel (whether MT or LXX) are likely composites with complex histories. However, it is difficult to attend to certain questions adequately while preoccupied with compositional concerns. Zimmerli and Holladay are examples of scholars whose commentaries are very helpful for textual details, but are, at times, unhelpful in looking at broader questions, like prophetic ministry.[13] Their approaches rest on presuppositions which they impose onto the text in order to make decisions about which parts of the text are secondary, or relocated from elsewhere within the text. Their reading of the text too easily leads to the inferior weighting or even dismissal of some sections. This approach may be useful if the required outcome is a historical reconstruction of one kind or another. However, for concerns that run through the whole of each book, like prophetic ministry, such an approach can easily distract from, obscure or truncate meaning that can be derived from looking at the whole of the canonically received text. The process of grappling with the points of tension and repetitions that are present within the text as it stands, rather than using them as a basis for the downgrading of certain segments, can often provide a source of fruitful reflection.

---

who does not consider the editor to be merely a copyist or interpolator; but considers his redaction to be 'a literary accomplishment with definite theological purpose.'

[12] e.g. Daniel I. Block, *The Book of Ezekiel Chapters 1–24* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 24.

[13] Walther Zimmerli, *A Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Ezekiel, Chapters 1– 24*, trans. Ronald E. Clements, Hermeneia (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979) and his second volume. William L. Holladay, *Jeremiah 1: A Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Jeremiah Chapters 1–25*, Hermeneia (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986) and his second volume.

There have been many voices pleading for a reading that is now generally called 'canonical' or 'synchronic' while still acknowledging the likelihood of earlier sources. Childs asserts that

> neither the process of the formation nor the history of its canonization is assigned an independent integrity. These dimensions have been either lost or purposely blurred. Rather, canon asserts that the witness to Israel's experience with God is testified to in the effect on the biblical text itself.[14]

Greenberg has also been an influential voice advocating a 'holistic' reading of the text as it stands, especially in the book of Ezekiel.[15] In this study I have followed the lead of these two scholars in taking a canonical approach.

Authorial intention

If historical questions regarding textual composition are to be left aside for the purpose of this study, what place is being assigned to the author and his intentions? Although the text began with an 'author' (or sequence of 'authors' and 'redactors') whose intentions were of great importance, authorial identity is ultimately uncertain and open to speculation. The only 'author' that can be 'known' is the final shaper of the canonical book, rather than any authors/redactors of previous sources. His intentions can only be known through the text, as the text's 'implied author'.[16] Furthermore, as Schökel notes, 'author-hermeneutics is insufficient. The work will not remain enclosed in a historical moment; the work goes further than the author.'[17] In the words of Polk, 'it violates the integrity of the text ... to replace the given literary context with the conjectured historical occasion of the writing process and so

---

[14] Brevard Childs, "The Canonical Shape of the Prophetic Literature," in *Interpreting the Prophets*, James Luther Mays, Achtemeier (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987), 42. See also Brevard Childs, "Introduction to the Old Testament," in *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture* (London: SCM Press, 1979), 342–54.

[15] e.g. in Moshe Greenberg, "The Vision of Jerusalem in Ezekiel 8–11: A Holistic Interpretation," in *Divine Helmsman; Studies on God's Control of Human Events*, Lou Silberman Festschrift (New York: Ktav Publishing House, 1980), 143–64.

[16] Tremper Longman III, *Literary Approaches to Biblical Interpretation* (Grand Rapids: Academie Books, 1987), 65–66.

[17] Luis Alonso Schökel, *A Manual of Hermeneutics*, trans. Liliana M. Rosa (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998), 36.

to construe the text as referring to authorial circumstances rather than to the subject as it is literarily defined.'[18] Like Schökel, I am placing the text as my 'highest concern', acknowledging also that 'we cannot understand the meaning of each part if we do not refer to the totality'.[19]

The texts

This study works with the Hebrew text in its received form. Although the MT is the basis, significant differences in the LXX are mentioned if they are relevant to the thesis. Much of the material studied here contains a considerable number of textual issues, not to mention the complexity of the differences between the MT and LXX, especially in the book of Jeremiah. However, I only comment on textual issues where they are significant to my thesis. In the interest of space, I have not included my translation from the Hebrew but adopt the NRSV translation except where I indicate otherwise. In particular, I acknowledge the tetragrammaton by translating יהוה as 'Yahweh' (departing from the NRSV's 'the LORD') and אדני יהוה as 'the Lord Yahweh' (departing from the NRSV's 'the LORD God'). When I refer to 'later' and 'earlier' sections of the book I am not referring to a historical chronology, but to placement within the final form of the text.

The prophetic persons

As it is necessary to deal with the 'implied author' rather than any 'historical author', it is also impossible to access the historical figures of Jeremiah and Ezekiel. Instead we can only access the texts' portrayal or characterisation of each prophet (as Polk has done in his work on Jeremiah).[20] However, with Brueggemann, I am prepared to accept 'a coherence in the text in some way reflective of and witness to

---

[18] Timothy Polk, *The Prophetic Persona: Jeremiah and the Language of the Self*, JSOT Sup 32 (Sheffield: University of Sheffield, 1984), 165.

[19] Schökel, *Manual*, 124,127.

[20] Polk, *Prophetic Persona*. Longman III, *Literary Approaches*, 90–93.

concrete historical experience and faith' and to attribute intentions that are faithful, though I recognise that such a stance is controverted.[21] Some scholars take a psychological approach and postulate significant personality differences between the two prophets. This may be so, but our texts do not present us with personality profiles, so my study will leave questions of personality aside. Others go further with psychoanalytical approaches, particularly with the unusual figure of Ezekiel.[22] However, the lack of agreement among such scholars only demonstrates the limitations of attempting psychoanalysis on someone who is not present, of another age and distant culture, and whose textual material does not use a psychological framework. Furthermore, a diagnosis of pathology risks skewing the profundity of Ezekiel's message.[23] Instead of psychological information, what we do have in these texts is a portrayal of events, circumstances and society that the text considers important in relation to the ways in which these prophetic vocations unfold.

Modes of communication

Some scholars are interested in the differences in the primary mode of communication in these two prophets. Jeremiah's oracles are acknowledged to be primarily oral, and only later written down. Ezekiel's are often thought to be primarily written, even if sometimes presented orally. The visionary scroll-eating episode (Ezek 2:9 - 3:3) is often seen to support this view. Davis writes that Ezekiel marks a turning point in prophecy that is linked to social development, and becomes, for the first time, literate in its primary expression.[24] Although I disagree with some

---

[21] Brueggemann, *Jeremiah 1–25*, 11–12.

[22] e.g. Edwin C. Broome, "Ezekiel's Abnormal Personality," *JBL* 65 (1946): 277–92, David J. Halperin, *Seeking Ezekiel: Text and Psychology* (University Park, PA: Penn State Press, 1993).

[23] Block, *Ezekiel 1*, 11.

[24] Ellen F. Davis, *Swallowing the Scroll: Textuality and the Dynamics of Discourse in Ezekiel's Prophecy*, Bible and Literature Series (Sheffield: Almond Press, 1989), 39, makes much of this transition point, regarding the exilic period as marking a major transition towards literacy. She writes 'Ezekiel greatly exceeded his predecessors in the degree to which he exploited the potential inherent in writing.'

of Davis's conclusions, a consideration of relative orality or literacy has some value.[25] However, my decision to base my study on the text means that I take the opening superscriptions to be markers of significance. Instead of marking an orality/literacy difference, they point to a difference in relative emphasis on words or visions. It is this difference to which I will pay attention.

Settings

Because this study will take a text-focused, literary approach, I will take seriously the settings presented in these books, both historical and geographical. Jeremiah's ministry is set primarily within Judah, during the reigns of Josiah, Jehoahaz, Jehoiakim, Jehoiachin and Zedekiah, over a forty year period up to the exile. However, the material in the book is not arranged chronologically and is notoriously difficult to categorise with any degree of certainty, although several schemas have been proposed.[26] The book gives no explicit mention of Josiah's reform.

Ezekiel's ministry is set in Babylon, among the exiles. Although some scholars disagree with this setting (e.g. Brownlee, who holds it to be really in Israel), Wilson and von Rad are examples of the many, of whom I am one, who think it important to retain an exilic setting.[27] The book is carefully structured, with a frequent use of

---

[25] Walter Ong, *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word* (London: Routledge, 2002), identifies some important differences between orality and literacy, and between people groups that are predominantly oral or predominantly literate. His work is relevant in exploring this aspect in Jeremiah and Ezekiel, but will not directly impinge on this thesis.

[26] One example of a historical schema comes from Koch, *Prophets*, 16, who proposes four historical periods, two (of twelve years each) having no known records within the book. The dated records are in the reigns of Jehoiakim and Zedekiah, during periods of heightened conflict; he suggests that the mysterious silence during Josiah's reign occurs when the prophet is young and making early attempts to gain a hearing; the second is the time of imprisonment by Jehoiakim.

[27] See William H. Brownlee, *Ezekiel 1 - 19*, WBC (Waco, TX: Word, 1986). But Robert R. Wilson, "Prophecy in Crisis: The Call of Ezekiel," in *Interpreting the Prophets*, ed. James Luther Mays and Paul Achtemeier (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987), 160, writes that there is 'no evidence in the book to suggest that he ever prophesied outside of Babylon.' Similarly, Gerhard von Rad, *Old Testament Theology Vol.2*, trans. D.M.G. Stalker (Edinburgh: Oliver & Boyd, 1965), 220, writes, 'To divest his message of its exilic dress and assume that he worked exclusively in Jerusalem before 587 entails a radical criticism which makes deep inroads into the very nature of the prophecy itself.'

specific dates, including month and day.[28] It is significant that all of these (apart from the opening call date of 'thirtieth year') are dated from the exile of Jehoiachin, rather than from the beginning of a monarch's rule. The presentation of dates demonstrates the book's attribution of significance to the portrayed historical events, particularly the exile and the fall of the Jerusalem temple. This study will take attributed dates and events to be of significance in assessing prophetic ministry.

This study suggests that if the different settings presented in the received texts (from within Jerusalem prior to its fall, in Jeremiah's case, and away from Jerusalem already in exile, in Ezekiel's case) are taken seriously, they may provide significant clues to differences in perspective—for prophet, people, and Yahweh—and so for these two prophetic ministries.

Theological approach

The emergence of comparatively recent canonical approaches has led to heightened interest in the enduring significance of canonical texts for communities of faith; this significance inevitably revolves around the dynamics of Scripture, God and humanity and raises questions that are theological. Such approaches recognise that the canonically received texts have been compiled with theological purpose. In this study, theological dynamics are in the foreground, simply because prophetic ministry necessarily includes significant divine-human interactions. My approach is, therefore, theological, working broadly within the contemporary movement of

---

[28] An early division based on the simple use of date-markers was made by E.W. Hengstenberg, *The Prophecies of the Prophet Ezekiel*, trans. A.C. Murphy and J.G. Murphy (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1869). Thomas Renz, *The Rhetorical Function of the Book of Ezekiel* (Leiden: Brill, 1999), 62, uses rhetorical considerations to divide chs 1-24 into four cycles, while recognising the formation of earlier subcollections. Block, *Ezekiel 1*, vii-ix, proposes a scheme that gives some recognition to the change from the dominance of visual material in chs 4-11 to the more word-based material in chs 12-24. However, the book is also structured around three extended visionary narratives, at the beginning, the end and chs. 8-11.

theological interpretation of Scripture.[29] Although implications for contemporary communities of faith are not delineated in this study, such an approach does allow the possibility of contemporary appropriation.

It is important to examine the texts' portrayals of Yahweh, the specific types of interactions he has with each prophet, the roles he gives each prophet and tasks he sets each prophet to do, the relationships and responses he has with the people group represented by each prophet and the perceptions of Yahweh that are commonly held within those people groups.[30] These elements are not static, so the movements and changes also need to be noted, attending to textual evidence for divine absence as well as presence.[31] Comparison of these various divine-human dynamics in the two books will be highly pertinent to the comparison of prophetic ministries in each context.

Method

This thesis will examine texts relating to prophetic ministry in Jeremiah and Ezekiel which can be profitably compared. The call narratives, placed at the beginning of both books, form the unique basis of each prophetic ministry and point to specific aspects which later unfold in each book. So I compare Jer 1:1- 19 with Ezek 1-3. Each book has a distinctive metaphor for each prophet's ministry: assayer (Jeremiah) and watchman (Ezekiel). In addition, Jeremiah's ministry is affiliated with the work of Yahweh, through the metaphor of potter, on account of specific verbal links (Jer 1:10; Jer 18:7,9). All three of these metaphors are worker images that emphasise

---

[29] See Daniel J. Treier, *Introducing Theological Interpretation of Scripture: Recovering a Christian Practice* (Nottingham: Apollos, 2008), for a helpful introduction to this contemporary movement and its points of reference to some past models.

[30] See Paul M. Joyce, *Divine Initiative and Human Response in Ezekiel*, JSOT Sup 51 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1989), for more on the divine-human responses in Ezekiel.

[31] John F. Kutsko, *Between Heaven and Earth: Divine Presence and Absence in the Book of Ezekiel*, Biblical and Judaic Studies from the University of California, San Diego (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2000).

different aspects of these specific prophetic ministries. So I compare Jer 6:27-30 and Jer 18:1-12 with Ezek 33:1-20 (the first watchman passage in Ezek 3:16-21 is covered with Ezekiel's call). Since the fall of Jerusalem is the crucial point of focus for each prophet, and this fall is symbolised most dramatically by the Jerusalem temple, the relationship of each prophet to the temple and his message concerning the temple is an important aspect of his ministry. So I compare Jer 7:1-15 with Ezek 8-11 (leaving aside the temple vision in chs. 40-48, since it relates to a future era, rather than to the same Jerusalem temple of the present era). What each prophet says about deviant prophets provides valuable negative images which highlight, by way of contrast, their own ministries. The subject of deviant prophets in this era has often been largely derived from material in Jeremiah.[32] On closer inspection, the material on deviant prophets in Ezekiel provides significant differences from, as well as similarities to, that in Jeremiah. So I compare Jer 23:9-32 with Ezek 13. Due to the limitations of space, I will not compare other aspects, such as the use of signs.

In each of my next four chapters careful exegetical attention will be given first to a selection of text from Jeremiah, then from Ezekiel, simply to follow the canonical order. This will be followed by comments of a comparative nature related to prophetic ministry, based on my reading of these texts. Issues that have no relevance to prophetic ministry will be left aside. The final chapter will draw my comparisons of prophetic ministry together.

---

[32] e.g. Thomas W. Overholt, *The Threat of Falsehood*, SBT, Second Series (London: SCM, 1970).

CHAPTER TWO
THE CALL NARRATIVES

2.1 JEREMIAH'S CALL: Jeremiah 1: 1-19

The superscription: Jer 1:1-3

Although the book of Jeremiah has some visionary components, it is the word, particularly in its oral form, that belongs to the very heart of this book. The 'words' of Jeremiah (דִּבְרֵי יִרְמְיָהוּ) head the superscription (1:1) and also mark the ending of the book, (51:64), apart from the third person historical epilogue (ch. 52). Although דבר (usually translated 'word') can be used more broadly to include deeds, and even a whole history of words, deeds and their consequences, in this book 'words' and 'the word' occupy a central place.[33]

The beginning point of Jeremiah's ministry is nominated: the thirteenth year of the reign of Josiah (v.2), so 626 B.C. However, the virtual silence within the book concerning Josiah's reform has led many to question this date as referring to Jeremiah's call and commissioning. Some argue for alternative readings, such as 1) taking this as the year of his birth (was he not, in 1:5, set apart before his birth by Yahweh?), or 2) emending the text by taking the old feminine ending ה of the 'thirteenth' year (of Josiah) to be miscopied from מ, making it read 23rd year of Josiah, or 3) separating the call from the commissioning.[34] However, this study

---

[33] Holladay, *Jeremiah 1*, 17, says that דבר can mean 'revelatory activity' more generally.

[34] Holladay, *Jeremiah 1*, 1, makes a case for regarding the thirteenth year of Josiah (627B.C.) as being the year of Jeremiah's birth, making him only five at the time of the reform. He suggests that Jeremiah responded to the call around age 12, in the autumn of 615, and that he supported Josiah. T.C. Gordon, "A New Date for Jeremiah," *ExpT* 44 (1932–33): 562–65, assumes that the prophets

works from the text's portrayal of a personally remembered and recounted call event, which features robust dialogue between Yahweh and Jeremiah and is dated in 626 B.C. (cf. 25:3).[35]

Jeremiah's father Hilkiah (v.1) is likely from the priestly family of Abiathar, descended from Eli, which suggests that the traditions of Shiloh are familiar.[36] His home village of Anathoth belongs to Benjamin;[37] however, it is only an hour's walk north of Jerusalem, and is by now under the jurisdiction of Judah. His father's priestly service would be in the local sanctuary in Anathoth up until the time of Josiah's reform, but the reform and the proximity to Jerusalem would ensure familiarity with the temple. There is no evidence within the book that Jeremiah ever functions as a priest or identifies with priestly groups, even though he does have some links with sympathetic scribal families. However, Jeremiah's sophisticated use of the Hebrew language, his knowledgeable use of the theological tradition and his personal relationship with God may confirm a priestly family context.[38]

---

arose at the call of a national crisis and were essentially men of the times. This gives the exact year of the beginning of the siege of the Assyrian capital Nineveh in 616 B.C., which he thinks formed the ideal political event for Jeremiah's prophetic call. Jack R. Lundbom, "Jeremiah 15,15–21 and the Call of Jeremiah," *Scandinavian Journal of the Old Testament* 9 (1995): 154, keeps the date in 1:2 for the call, assuming that Jeremiah was around the age of 12 or 13 (similar to Samuel at the time of his call, and fitting the description of נַעַר [1:6]). However, he suggests that Jeremiah accepted the call later, after the scroll of Moses was found in the temple, reflected in his joyful 'eating' of the words (15:16) around the age of 18.

[35] Thomas W. Overholt, "Some Reflections on the Date of Jeremiah's Call," *CBQ* 33 (1971): 165–84, gives a careful overview of the various proposals and concludes that he finds nothing in the message or the historical situation that necessarily conflicts with the traditional understanding of 626 as the date of Jeremiah's call and the beginning of his prophetic activity.

[36] Holladay, *Jeremiah 1*, 16, notes that Jeremiah is the only prophet who mentions Shiloh (Jer 7:12,14; 26:6,9) and Samuel (Jer 15:1). He also concludes that the Hilkiah who was high priest at this time is not the same Hilkiah as Jeremiah's father because it would be unlikely to omit 'high priest' in the description and because the location of Anathoth may be specified to distinguish this Hilkiah from the high priest who was operating in Jerusalem.

[37] The tribe of Benjamin is alluded to in Jer 6:1and 31:15 and is listed among the Levitical cities of Benjamin in Josh 21:18.

[38] Terence E. Fretheim, *Jeremiah*, SHBC 15 (Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys, 2002), 46.

The word of Yahweh is said to have come (literally 'was') to Jeremiah (1:2,3). In Jer 1:4,11,13 and 2:1 the first person pronoun is used: 'the word of Yahweh came to me.' This expression is often associated with a specific experienced event and normally introduces an oracle which is then publicly declared. In Jer 1:4 it points to the memory of his inaugurating experience; his retelling of this private encounter with Yahweh is a weighty authentication of his public prophetic ministry. Although the circumstances of this initial call are not given, he later claims to have stood in the council of Yahweh (23:18,22) and accuses the false prophets of having no experience of being there.

The opening of this book (1:1-3), marking the beginning point of Jeremiah's ministry, forms an inclusio with the end of the book (52:27b-34), when a large number of people are taken into exile. Together they assert that the entire period covered by the prophetic ministry of Jeremiah concerns the exile.[39] His ministry spans a period of forty years (627/6 to 587/6 B.C.), but this number is given no significance in the text. The 'words of Jeremiah' are not simply for individuals or those small groups who are present when he speaks; this 'word of Yahweh' is of national significance and will affect all the people of Jerusalem and Judah.[40]

The Call: Jer 1: 4–10

Yahweh's prior initiative: Jer 1:5

The 'word of Yahweh' is the initiator of this remembered encounter, but refers to a prior initiative of Yahweh, even before Jeremiah had a chance to make his own choices, even before his family had laid their claims on him. Jeremiah's later struggles with his call refer to this earlier initiative (e.g. 20:7-10 regarding the lack

---

[39] Brueggemann, *Jeremiah 1–25*, 21.

[40] Ronald E. Clements, *Jeremiah*, Interpretation (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1988), 13, adds that the superscription implies that the word of prophecy may provide an interpretation of a whole age.

of his own personal choice, and 11:21-23 regarding the conflict with his own family, despite his father's initial joy, 20:15). Poetic hyperbole (before Jeremiah was formed, in 1:5) places this divine initiative further back in time than for anyone else in the canon.[41] The possibility of a royal allusion has also been suggested in this divine initiative, in light of an Egyptian parallel and a comparison of verbs with David's consecration.[42]

The womb is here the place of divine consecration/being declared holy (hiphil of קדשׁ v.5), although there is no suggestion of cleansing from sin.[43] Throughout Jeremiah's life the womb remains a powerful image that reminds him of his peculiar calling; leaving the womb marks the transition into a life of conflict and trouble (15:10 and 20:14-18). The first twenty chapters end on this theme and enclose several passages of personal struggle relating to it, so the womb can be seen as marking a major *inclusio* relating to Jeremiah's call.[44]

The image of a potter moulding his clay is evoked in v.5 by the use of יצר (form).[45] It resonates with Genesis 2, and implies an intimate and purposeful connection between the divine maker and the one being formed, an image to which this book

---

[41] Cf. Moses and Samuel marked for special ministry from birth, Ex 2; 1 Sam 1; the 'servant' 'formed in the womb', Isa 44:2,24; 49:5; and 'called from the womb', Isa 49:1; in the NT, John the Baptist filled with the Holy Spirit 'from the womb', Luke 1:15; Jesus conceived 'from the Holy Spirit', Matt 1:20; Luke 1:35; and Paul who says, 'God set me apart before I was born', Gal 1:15. Jack R. Lundbom, *Jeremiah 1–20*, Anchor Bible (New York: Doubleday, 1999), 231.

[42] M. Gilula, "An Egyptian Parallel to Jeremia 1:4–5," *Vetus Testamentum* 17, no. 1 (January 1967): 114, notes the following: In the speech of Amun, on a stele of King Pianchi (around 751-730 B.C., so predating the text's portrayal of Jeremiah) there are these words, written as if from God: 'It was in the belly of your mother that I said concerning you that you were to be ruler of Egypt; it was as seed and while you were in the egg, that I knew you, that you were to be Lord.' Lundbom, *Jeremiah 1–20*, 232, finds some similar, but not identical, verbs used in David's consecration (Jer 1:4,5 cf.1 Sam 16:5, 8-13).

[43] Lundbom, *Jeremiah 1–20*, 230, also notes that טֶרֶם and בֶּטֶן in v.4 form a stereotyped pair.

[44] Jack R. Lundbom, *Jeremiah: A Study in Ancient Hebrew Rhetoric* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1997), 42.

[45] Guy P. Couturier, "Jeremiah," in *The Jerome Biblical Commentary*, ed. Joseph Fitzmyer Raymond E. Brown, and Roland E. Murphy (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1968), 304.

returns in chapter 18 at the potter's house and which will be addressed in Chapter 3 of this thesis. For Jeremiah, his call, then, is inextricably bound up his own formation. It is significant that the very first divine action is to know him. Here it heads a sequence of three actions: knowing (ידע), setting apart (הקדש) and appointing (נתן), that together make up the call from the womb.Yahweh is Jeremiah's rightful owner, who has the freedom to do such things. However, the call does not come from an owner who is remotely detached or whose choice is uninformed, but from one who knows him deeply.[46] His own deep awareness of Yahweh's 'knowing' him, and the implied response that this evokes, to 'know' Yahweh in return, forms the background for his critique of other religious leaders, that they do *not* 'know' Yahweh (e.g. Jer 2:8).

A prophet to the nations: Jer 1:5

Before Jeremiah was aware of it, Yahweh had already 'given' or 'appointed' (נתן) him for a particular purpose. The responsibility given him is now articulated: to be a prophet (נביא) to the nations (גוים). In fact, an element of suspense occurs in the bald announcement of this surprising call, before there is some further elaboration in v.10; this suspense serves to bring an even greater focus on it.[47] No other person is called to this precise task ('to the nations'), except perhaps the servant in Isa 42:1,6, but several others appear to function with some international elements (e.g. Moses, to and against Pharaoh; Jonah and Nahum, against Nineveh; Obadiah, against Edom; Amos, Isaiah and Ezekiel, against foreign nations), even if they are specifically called to speak to Judah/Israel.

---

[46] John Goldingay, *God's Prophet, God's Servant: A Study in Jeremiah and Isaiah 40 - 55* (Exeter: Paternoster, 1984), 60, writes that 'know' here means 'recognise', 'commit oneself to', and involves the will as well as the understanding. He notes that in Amos 3:2 we find something similar regarding the nation: 'You only have I known of all the families of the earth.' Wilhelm Vischer, "The Vocation of the Prophet to the Nations," *Interpretation* 9 (1955): 310, adds that, for the Israelites, to 'know' unites the one who knows with the object or the being that he knows.

[47] Leslie C. Allen, *Jeremiah: A Commentary* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2008), 26.

As Jeremiah's ministry unfolds we see oracles to foreign nations (chs 46-51), the pouring out of God's wrath on the nations (ch. 25), some advice given to neighbouring powers to submit to Babylon (27:3-7), and a generalisation about the way Yahweh deals with all nations (18:7-10). But, as with other canonical prophets, the main thrust is to the people of Judah. The difficulty in finding an obviously distinctive international aspect to Jeremiah's ministry has caused some to emend 'nations' to 'nation;' however, there are insufficient textual grounds for doing so, especially as it occurs in two places (vv.5,10).[48] It cannot refer to Judah and Israel, even though the latter has ceased to exist, since גּוֹיִם (nations) in Jeremiah and Ezekiel normally refers to nations of the world (Ezek 37:22 being the exception where it does refer to Israel and Judah).[49]

Many think that the 'nations' aspect of Jeremiah's ministry occurs simply because Israel's history is necessarily closely related to that of its neighbours; while this is true, it doesn't entirely justify his distinctive call.[50] Carroll suggests that in this international crossroads setting, where other nations hold dominance over Judah, his call 'subtly reverses that domination by representing Yahweh's prophet as the one with real power over these apparent dominant forces.'[51] This is more satisfying, but doesn't quite explain why other prophets like Ezekiel do not have the same call. However, Jeremiah does go beyond other prophets in the way he views other nations: they are not only objects of divine judgment, but he declares that Babylon is an instrument of divine judgment for Judah.[52] Perhaps another distinctive is his

---

[48] Bernhard Stade, "Emendationen," *ZAW* 22 (1902): 328, suggests this emendation, but Holladay, *Jeremiah 1*, 34, and others reject his suggestion.

[49] Lundbom, *Jeremiah 1–20*, 232.

[50] Couturier, "Jeremiah," 304. Fretheim, *Jeremiah*, 50, understands this to mean that Jeremiah would 'proclaim a word to Israel that would catch up the future of other nations (especially Babylon) ... [and that this word] carries a theological claim.' He refers to 12:14-17; 16:19-21; 18:7-10; 25:9-32; 46-51.

[51] Robert P. Carroll, *The Book of Jeremiah: A Commentary* (London: SCM Press, 1986), 95. Holladay, *Jeremiah 1*, 27, finds a suggestion of kingship, comparing v.5 with Pss 2:8; 72:11.

[52] Fretheim, *Jeremiah*, 48.

ability to stand apart from national inclinations and loyalties, to a greater extent than other prophets, in order to give some surprising and politically dangerous messages.[53]

Jeremiah's response: Jer 1:6

The announcement of Yahweh's call and purposes issues in open dialogue. This, in itself, is important in providing the foundation for Jeremiah's characteristically robust and sometimes brutally frank conversations with Yahweh. Brueggemann writes, 'This God is a vital, free conversation partner to whom Jeremiah can speak candidly and who surely is free to say anything back to Jeremiah.'[54] Jeremiah protests (1:6), as Moses (Ex 3:11) and Gideon (Judg 6:15), on grounds of inadequacy; in this case his protest is due to his lack of expertise in speaking and his young age. Although his actual age at this point is unknown, נַעַר seems to be used to cover a reasonably wide age range, but usually indicates a young man under marriageable age.[55] His two objections are overruled; he is simply told that he *is* to speak (to whomever and whatever Yahweh commands), and that he is *not* to be intimidated (Yahweh is with him, to deliver him). Up to this point there are no hints of visual components.[56]

---

53 Vischer, "Vocation," 312. Carolyn J. Sharp, "The Call of Jeremiah and Diaspora Politics," *JBL* 119 (2000): 433, also mentions his inclusion of both prophecies of doom (for both Judah and the world) and prophecies which present the option of obedience versus disobedience to both Judah and the other nations.

54 Brueggemann, *Hopeful Imagination*, 14.

55 Jack R. Lundbom, "Rhetorical Structures in Jeremiah 1," *ZAW* 103 (1991): 196, points out that King Solomon is called a נַעַר at age 16 but not at age 20 (1 Kings 3:7 and 2 Chron 34:3).

56 Although this type of auditory event is often included under a general category of 'vision,' I am here simply distinguishing between revelatory experiences which do have a visual component and those which do not. John Barton, "Prophecy (Pre-Exilic Hebrew)," in *ABD, Vol. 5*, ed. David Noel Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 493, points out that it is unclear whether prophetic experience, such as Jeremiah's to this point, refers 'to "audition", a supernatural but literal hearing of voices, or to some more subtle inner conviction that Yahweh has spoken to the heart.' Jenny Manasco Lowery, "Vision," in *Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible*, ed. David Noel Freedman (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 1360, defines vision as 'a visual or auditory event which reveals something otherwise unknown'. According to this definition Jeremiah's experience falls within the category of vision, even without any visual components.

Touch on the mouth: Jer 1:9

Then the Lord's hand appears, in visionary form, and touches Jeremiah's mouth.[57] Unlike the touch in Isaiah 6:7 which is mediated by a seraph with a tong, not by the divine hand, and has the purpose of removing guilt, the direct purpose of the touch here is to place the words of Yahweh into Jeremiah's mouth with the connotation of divine empowerment. In another passage (Jer 15:10-18) which has many allusions to Jer 1:4-10, Jeremiah declares, 'Your words were found, and I ate them, and your words became to me a joy and the delight of my heart' (Jer 15:16). These words may contain some reference to this scene.[58]

The action of touch, in response to the present objections, is a memorable divine action that makes the prior appointing (v.5) effective in the present. The appointment is now expanded, and Jeremiah's concern about speaking is answered more specifically: Yahweh has put his words into Jeremiah's mouth. The concern about his age, which must refer to perceived authority, is answered by an appointment to authority that is over nations and kingdoms, making it an appointment higher than royal rule.

Key tasks: Jer 1:10

Six verbs, describing the nature of his prophetic ministry in relation to nations and kingdoms, follow, and these become programmatic throughout the book: נתש (pluck up), נתץ (pull down), אבד (destroy), הרס (overthrow), בנה (build), and נטע (plant).

---

[57] William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience: A Study in Human Nature. Gifford Lectures on Natural Religion Delivered at Edinburgh 1901–1902* (New York: The Modern Library, 1902), 58–63, calls Jeremiah's call experience an 'imperfectly developed hallucination' such as a person of sound intellect and in full possession of their waking senses may have. Walther Zimmerli, *The Fiery Throne: The Prophets and Old Testament Theology*, ed. K.C. Hanson (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2003), 58, will not describe Jeremiah's call as an 'auditory experience' because of this visual component.

[58] Lundbom, "Jeremiah 15 and the Call," 154, sees this as referring to the finding of the words in the temple scroll. However, there is no reference to this within the text of Jeremiah.

Some or all appear again in Jer 12:14-17; 18:7-9; 24:6; 31:28, 38-40; 42:10 and 45:4 in different arrangements.[59] In Jer 24:6; 42:10 and 45:4 four of these are used as antithetic pairs (build/tear down, plant/pluck up); this observation has led some to emend the text in Jer 1:10 to delete the other two verbs. However, in other places (Jer 1:10;18:7-9; 31:28) there is an accumulation of destructive terms before two constructive ones. This sequence may suggest that destruction precedes construction.[60] Two metaphors are agricultural (pluck up, plant), two are from construction (pull down, build) and two are militaristic-royal (destroy, overthrow).[61] They all can be used in relation to the land, and may suggest a subtle reference to Yahweh's ownership of the land, a theme that recurs in chs. 3 and 4 of this thesis.

The Two Visions: Jer 1:11–16

Despite the presence of two new introductions ('the word of Yahweh came to me') at vv.11,13 many keep the two visions with the call narrative.[62] Repeated introductions are found in other parts of the book (Jer 3:6-11; 11:6,9; 13:1-9; ch 24; chs 32-33) where their function is not to signify a break but to restore focus or prepare the audience for emphatic words to come.[63] In fact, the presence of 'the second time' (v.13) indicates that the text brings these two visions into deliberate association, so they need to be treated together. The contents of both 'visions' are associated with the earlier verses of the call, and elaborate further on the themes present in incipient form in v.5, enunciated more clearly in vv. 7 and 8 and expanded

---

59 Saul M. Olyan, "To Uproot and to Pull Down, to Build and to Plant: Jer 1:10 and Its Earliest Interpreters," in *Hesed Ve-Emet: Studies in Honor of Ernest S. Frerichs*, ed. Jodi Magress and Seymour Gitin (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1998), 63–72, shows how these verbs are recast to serve different purposes throughout the book.

60 William McKane, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Jeremiah Vol 1*, ICC (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1986), 10.

61 Fretheim, *Jeremiah*, 51.

62 e.g. Craigie, Kelley, and Drinkard, *Jeremiah 1–25*, 14–15.

63 Lundbom, "Jeremiah 15 and the Call," 201.

in vv. 9 and 10. This association of content is sufficient to allow me to read the two visions in textual association with the call narrative.

Visionary subjects: Jer 1:11,13

It is impossible to tell if the subjects of the visions, the almond branch and the boiling pot, are noticed in real life or seen in visionary form; on this question I make no judgment, but refer to them as visions for the sake of simplicity. Either way, they are simple, static images (as in 24:1-10) of things that are known from Jeremiah's everyday life. They may be classified with Long's oracle-vision type, or Niditch's symbolic vision form.[64] As is common with other OT visions, each one is immediately followed by an auditory address from Yahweh to the prophet. The first is followed by an interpretation that involves word-play.[65] Both objects (the branch and the pot) are homely.[66] The Anathoth area was and is a centre for almond growing; the almond tree is the first to bud in spring.[67] The sight of a large pot set on a fire, slightly tipped and about to boil over, would be commonplace in any home.[68]

Interpretation: Jer 1:12-16

---

[64] Burke O. Long, "Reports of Visions Among the Prophets," *JBL* 95 (1976): 357, describes an oracle-vision as 'a short report, dominated by questions-and-answer dialogue, wherein the visionary image is simple and unidimensional, providing an occasion for oracle.' Susan Niditch, *The Symbolic Vision in Biblical Tradition* (Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1980), vii, 1,41–52, takes a diachronic approach, classing the visions in Jer 1 and 24 (and in Amos) as Stage 1 (the Symbolic Vision Form), whereas those in Zechariah as Stage 2 (A literary-Narrative Direction) and those in Daniel as Stage 3 (the Baroque Stage).

[65] These visions are of a similar type to some in Amos (e.g. Amos 8:1-3, which, like Jer 7:11-12, also involves word-play). von Rad, *OT Theology 2*, 59, notes that 'the purpose of vision was not to impart knowledge of higher worlds ... [but] to open the prophet's eyes to coming events which were not only of the spiritual sort, but were also to be concrete realities in the objective world.'

[66] Holladay, *Jeremiah 1*, 45–46, contrasts these homely images with what one might expect of one whose calling is in the heavenly court (Jer 23:18).

[67] J.A. Thompson, *The Book of Jeremiah*, NICOT (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1980), 153.

[68] Thompson, *Jeremiah*, 154. However, there are some slightly different interpretations of this somewhat unclear image, e.g. Carroll, *Jeremiah*, 106, thinks it suggests an interrupted meal in preparation, bespeaking pillage. Magical interpretations are mentioned below.

In each vision Yahweh initiates a short dialogue with Jeremiah (addressing him by name for the first time) asking him,'What do you see?' to ensure that he is paying full attention to the appropriate object. Then Yahweh speaks to give a symbolic meaning to each object; the meaning of each builds on what has already been declared. The second image and its interpretation (vv.13-14), which in its basic form is about the same length and of the same structure as the first, is expanded (vv.15-16) to give considerably more detail.

There are suggestions that both the almond branch and the boiling pot have magical connotations, linking them with the idolatry which is expressly named as a cause for judgment in v.16. One view takes the first branch as a piece broken off, so a rod. The almond rod is connected with sorcery, and the pot in the second vision with the cauldron of heathen sacrificial meals; Yahweh is then watching to put an end to such foreign practices.[69] However these images do not usually carry such connotations throughout the rest of the OT, so to make such a link here is rather too tenuous.[70] If the rod is associated with the rod of Aaron that blossoms and bears ripe almonds (Num 17:16-26 [17:1-11]), the symbolism is the judgment of Yahweh made manifest against a rebellious people, a possibly more plausible suggestion.[71] A more unusual suggestion is that סִיר doesn't indicate a pot at all (noting the disagreement in gender between 'its face,' פָּנָיו, having a masculine suffix but referring to a supposedly feminine noun), but a particular species of thorn bush which grows around Anathoth, especially on the northern side. Because it is commonly used as tinder, Harris translates v. 13b as, 'I see kindled thorn facing from the north.'[72] However, this interpretation has not won support because gender discrepancies are not infrequent.

---

[69] Georg Sauer, "Mandelzweig und Kessel in Jer 1, 11ff," *ZAW* 78 (1966): 56–61.

[70] Carroll, *Jeremiah*, 103.

[71] Pearle Stone Wood, "Jeremiah's Figure of the Almond Rod," *JBL* 61 (1942): 99–103.

[72] Scott Harris, "The Second Vision of Jeremiah: Jer 1:13–15," *JBL* 102 (1983): 281–82.

The brevity and simplicity of the images, the lack of strong evidence for other associations, and the fact that a straightforward interpretation of each is given within the text, suggest that each image is intentionally unelaborate and is used to make one point only, hence my preference for straightforward meanings. The simple association of the almond tree with the very beginning of spring, and the eager anticipation that it signifies, could, however, imply that a future that is looked forward to eagerly may become something different.[73]

In the first vision, Jeremiah's reply using the word for almond tree (שָׁקֵד) is picked up and reworked to become שֹׁקֵד (watching). The word-play quickly moves Jeremiah away from dwelling on the details of the image or any other possible connotations to a focus on the key concept in the interpretation: 'watching.' Yahweh names himself as the subject; he is watching over his word, to perform it. Many have asked, 'Which word is this?' The sequence of parallel pairs (verses 7-8, 9-10, and now vision one with vision two) suggests that it is the same word from Yahweh that Jeremiah is to speak and that has now been put into his mouth.[74] The motif of 'watching' occurs more frequently in this book than in any other prophet: in Jer 5:6 a leopard watches as he lies in wait; in 31:28 the Lord watches to perform the four destructive verbs from 1:10 and also watches to perform the two constructive verbs from 1:10; and in 44:27 the Lord watches over the Jews for harm and not for good.[75] The motif implies alert intent, and possible ominous threat.

---

[73] Clements, *Jeremiah*, 20. Also, Amos 8:1,2 is similar in that one would naturally look forward to eating ripe fruit and see the image initially in a positive light before being told that it represents something negative, being ripe for judgment.

[74] The variation between 'word' and 'words' is noted, but does not seem to override the parallelism presented here.

[75] Robert P. Carroll, *From Chaos to Covenant: Uses of Prophecy in the Book of Jeremiah* (London: SCM, 1981), 57.

The image of a pot in the second vision is given in a little more detail. There is movement, the pot is boiling (נָפוּחַ); there is also direction, away from the north. The interpretation leaves no doubt that there *is* an ominous threat. The pot is about to pour out its contents of disaster; the victims are nominated as all the inhabitants of the land.[76] In the following expansion (vv. 15 and 16), each of these components is elaborated. The evil (רָעָה) that will come upon the inhabitants (v. 14) is on account of their evil (רָעָה). This word group occurs more frequently in Jeremiah than in any other prophet and can refer to both human transgression and catastrophe.[77] Now the evil is named specifically as idolatry (v.16).[78] The disaster that will be opened (niphil of פתח) from the north (v. 14) will mean that kings will set up their thrones at the opening (פֶּתַח), or gates, of Jerusalem (v. 15), as a symbol of conquest and subsequent rule over the land.[79] If *this* is a message that Jeremiah will have to bring to his people, it is obvious that he will run the risk of incurring a range of negative reactions, many of which would very likely be directed in anger towards him personally.[80]

The final statement: Jer 1:17–19

---

[76] Brueggemann, *Jeremiah 1–25*, 27, comments that the analysis given is not political but poetic, where the words are deliberately vague and imprecise. The vagueness makes the threat more ominous. Koch, *Prophets*, 18, notes that in Isaiah the image of overflowing water is also used for a threatening gathering of nations, ready for a final attack (Isa 8:7f and 17:12-14).

[77] Koch, *Prophets*, 20.

[78] Douglas Rawlinson Jones, *Jeremiah*, New Century Bible Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1992), 78, gives other references to where the people are also accused of burning incense/sacrifices to other gods (Jer 19:4; 44:3,5,8,15). Fretheim, *Jeremiah*, 57, comments, 'Judgment is not something new that God introduces into the situation ... rather God mediates the consequences that are already intrinsic to the evil deed itself.' This understanding is reinforced in Jer 6:19; 14:16; 21:14.

[79] Thompson, *Jeremiah*, 154, also notes that LXX omits 'clans' or 'tribes', but this makes no significant difference to the meaning.

[80] Clements, *Jeremiah*, 21, comments that in Jeremiah's time his compatriots were celebrating the waning of the Assyrian influence in Judah's affairs and many believed that this was the last time they would see Mesopotamian military might in their land. Jeremiah would need to warn them against such premature and ill-judged complacency.

The last section (vv.17-19) once again addresses Jeremiah's own fears and needs, reinforcing the words spoken in vv.7-8 and 9-10. He is given a threefold charge that places him in the role of messenger: 1) he is to get ready, 2) speak whatever Yahweh commands him, and 3) he is not to be afraid.[81] Once again his authority is declared, this time using imagery from military defence (fortified city, iron pillar, bronze wall).[82] He will be against every known level of his own society.[83] However, he is assured of ultimate victory. The promise of v.8 is repeated ('I am with you to deliver you').[84] However, he is also given a warning: if he draws back in fear and flees from his mission he will not only have people to deal with, he will have Yahweh himself (v. 17).[85]

Yahweh's responses to Jeremiah's concerns

Yahweh's word to Jeremiah is developed as a series of five parallel pairs of statements: 1) v. 5; 2) vv. 7-8; 3) vv. 9-10; 4) vv. 11-16; 5) 17-19. Each pair answers Jeremiah's two objections regarding his inability to speak and his lack of authority:

---

[81] Lundbom, *Jeremiah 1–20*, 243, explains that getting ready implied that the long tunic had to be tied up at the waist with a belt or girdle, in order to allow a greater freedom of movement when one was beginning physical work, setting out on a journey, beginning to run, or engaging in war. Jones, *Jeremiah*, 78, notes that Elisha was similarly told to tuck his cloak into his belt when he was sent as a messenger (2 Kings 4:29; 9:1).

[82] Lundbom, *Jeremiah 1–20*, 243-245, notes that 'walls' here can be taken as an intensive plural, i.e., a thick wall. He also notes the use of the same figure to describe the protection that gods and the Pharaoh are said to give to people in some Egyptian texts, e.g. Amarna Letter EA 147 52-54. The LXX in this passage omits the reference to the 'iron pillar'.

[83] Klaus Baltzer, "Considerations Regarding the Office and Calling of the Prophet," *HTR* 61 (1968): 567–81, discusses this authority, together with the calling and responsibility of being a prophet, in relation to the role of a vizier.

[84] This is like Yahweh's promise to Moses in Ex 3:12 and repeated in the subsequent narrative.

[85] Thompson, *Jeremiah*, 157. Lundbom, *Jeremiah 1–20*, 243, notes that the LXX eliminates the threat.

Jeremiah's Objections

(v. 6) I do not know how to speak.	I am only a boy.

Yahweh's Answers

1.(v. 5) Before I formed you in the womb I knew you.	I appointed you a prophet to the nations.
2.(vv. 7-8) You shall go ... and speak whatever I command you.	I am with you to deliver you; do not be afraid.
3.(vv. 9-10) The Lord ... touched my mouth and said, 'I have put my words in your mouth.'	Today I appoint you over nations and over kingdoms, to pluck up and to pull down, to destroy and to overthrow, to build and to plant.
4.(vv. 11-16) I am watching over my word to perform it.	I am calling all the tribes of the kingdoms of the north ... I will utter my judgments against them.
5.(vv. 17-19) Tell them everything that I command you.	I have made you today a fortified city ... against the kings ... priests and people. They will fight against you; but they shall not prevail against you, for I am with you ... to deliver you. (Do not break down before them)

The word of Yahweh, which is put into Jeremiah's mouth (vv. 7, 9, 12, 17), has its foundation in Yahweh's 'knowing' (v. 5), which comes prior to 'forming'(v. 5), just as Yahweh's words in Jeremiah's mouth come prior to their being able to effect both destruction and building (vv. 9-10).[86] The guarantor of the effectiveness of the word(s) is Yahweh himself (v. 12). The ability given to Jeremiah to withstand conflict among all levels of his own society (vv. 18-19) is his appointment as a 'prophet to the nations' (vv. 5, 10). It stems from Yahweh's authority to 'call

---

[86] Word or words—both are used in this passage.

kingdoms of the north' (v.15) and declare judgments on Judah (vv. 15-16). It carries the potential for both destruction and new hope (v. 10).

The Function of Jeremiah's Call

The written form of Jeremiah's call is no longer simply the record of a man's personal experience. It stands at the head of his book to give legitimation to his prophetic ministry, especially in the face of conflict. It claims that Yahweh is responsible for the message, and that the prophet is not speaking from his own desire or for personal gain; in fact, his objection to the call strengthens the legitimation.[87]

Jeremiah's call is one that is designed by Yahweh for conflict.[88] The words he is to speak will precipitate dramatic change (v. 10).Yahweh threatens to bring political upheaval, devastation and judgment (vv. 15,16) and the language of warfare is used in relation to his own people (vv. 18,19). If Jeremiah withdraws from these conflicts, then he will have conflict with Yahweh (v. 17). This theme of conflict is worked out through the book; even the prophet's prayer life is essentially combative.

His call is one that takes priority over any claims of family or nation. Later in the book we see that he has no freedom to make his own marriage arrangements (16:2) or to assume his normal social role (16:5-8). In conjunction with his assurance of Yahweh's presence, authority and deliverance, he is called to stand apart, with no guarantee of human sympathy or help. Jeremiah's mission will be wrought by words,

---

[87] J.L. Berquist, "Prophetic Legitimation in Jeremiah," *VT* 39 (1989): 129–39 and Ellen Davis Lewin, "Arguing For Authority: A Rhetorical Study of Jeremiah 1:4–19 and 20:7–18," *JSOT* 32 (1985): 105–19, both make this point. Lewin concludes (p.117) that the call and Jeremiah's outcries in the confessions are both part of the proclamation of the prophet. 'Jeremiah offers the prophetic process itself as the validation of his message.'

[88] Brueggemann, *Hopeful Imagination*, 12.

words that are given by Yahweh himself, words that have the guarantee of effecting change, words against which no people will be able to stand.[89]

2.2 EZEKIEL'S CALL: Ezekiel 1-3

A wealth of literature has sprung up from a wide variety of perspectives on this unusually vivid biblical material. Because the focus of this thesis is on prophetic ministry, some of these interpretations, including those of Jewish mystics, will not be addressed. In addition to the call narrative itself (Ezek 1:4–3:15), which is widely regarded as a cohesive unit, I will also consider the introduction to the book (1:1-3) and other material (Ezek 3:16-27) which is textually related very closely to Ezekiel's call.

Introduction: Ezek 1:1-3

Dates: Ezek 1:1-2

The text portrays the setting of Ezekiel's call as among the exiles by the Chebar River (v.1), so in Babylon (cf. Ezek 3:15).[90] The text begins with a date which appears to be precise but gives no point of reference. It is unlikely to be dated from the captivity of Jehoiachin, in line with the other dates in the book, as it produces a

---

[89] The creative power in the word (especially v. 10) has some similarity to the function of the word in Gen 1.

[90] Renz, *Rhetorical Function*, 28–38, summarises the six main options and argues persuasively for the traditional view of a ministry entirely in Babylon. This is the clear majority position of leading scholars today; all agree that the location portrayed by the text is in Babylon. Other views arise from questions of compositional concerns which are not addressed here. Moshe Greenberg, *Ezekiel 1 - 20*, Anchor Bible (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1983), 40, says that the Chebar canal (Akkadian *nār kabari/u*) is an obscure body of water mentioned twice in the archives of the Murashu family, bankers in fifth century Nippur, and is said to be located near Nippur. This means it cannot refer to the Euphrates, which used to run through the centre of Nippur. He notes that Daniel also had a vision by a stream (Dan 10:4), and comments that because foreign lands were considered unclean (Amos 7:17; Ezek 4:13) it would have been understandable for the Israelite exiles to seek communion with God near running water, because of its symbolism of purification (Lev 14:5,50; 15:13; Num 19:17).

date five years after the final vision (Ezek 40:1). The proposal to emend the text to read 'third' instead of 'thirtieth' year has not won wide support.[91] The three main suggestions for the reference point for 'thirtieth year' are: 1) the finding of the Book of the Law in Josiah's time, 2) the Year of Jubilee which some think coincides with Josiah's reform, and 3) the prophet's age.[92] Although the first and second suggestions are plausible, it seems unlikely that two quite different external events would be used for dating in the same book. That leaves the third suggestion, which is not entirely without parallel, as the Genesis flood account uses Noah's age to date different stages.[93] More significantly for the son of a priest (v.3), the age of thirty would be the usual age of assuming priestly office (Num 4:30)—if he were not in exile. If it does refer to his age, his personal disappointment may be addressed by the appearance of the glory, which could be associated with the climax of the ordination service (Lev 9:6) -- but, surprisingly, it comes when he is away from the temple. I also take the thirtieth year as the prophet's age.[94]

What appears to be a parallel date is given by an editor (v.2); this date uses the system which prevails throughout the rest of the book, a system which does not follow the convention of dating from the beginning of the reign of the current

---

[91] Anthony D. York, "Ezekiel 1: Inaugural and Restoration Visions?" *VT* 27 (1977): 82–98, summarises the various interpretations including C.F.Whitley's proposed textual emendation.

[92] The first is an ancient view supported by the Targum and Jerome. No other usage of this dating is found. York, "Ezekiel 1," 85. Renz, *Rhetorical Function*, 134, suggests a variation on this: the primary reference is to Huldah's prophecy predicting disaster, rather than to the finding of the law book. John Calvin, *Ezekiel 1: Chapters 1 - 12*, D Foxgrover and D. Martin, Calvin's Old Testament Commentaries (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 14–15, thinks that the Year of Jubilee coincides with finding the law book in Josiah's time. York, "Ezekiel 1," 84–85, dates this last view from Origen's time or earlier.

[93] Claus Westermann, *Genesis 1–11: A Commentary*, trans. John J. Scullion (London: SPCK, 1974 [German], 1984 [English]), 432, writes that the precise dating of the flood by Noah's age at each stage (Gen 7:11; 8:4,5,13,14) is only paralleled in Ezekiel.

[94] With Joseph Blenkinsopp, *Ezekiel* (Louisville: John Knox Press, 1990), 16, and Walther Eichrodt, *Ezekiel: A Commentary*, Coslett Quin (London: SCM Press, 1970), 52, and many others.

monarch (Zedekiah) but from the beginning of Jehoiachin's exile.[95] Although this may imply that Ezekiel supports the exiled king as the bearer of the critical link in Israel's royal lineage in preference to Zedekiah, it more importantly demonstrates a belief that the most significant marker of the commencement of the present era is the point of exile. The deportation of Jehoiachin takes priority over the commencement of the reign of any king.[96] This lends additional weight to the importance of an exilic setting for Ezekiel's prophetic ministry.

Visions of God: Ezek 1:1

As is usual in prophetic call narratives, revelatory initiative does not lie with the prophet but with God. The expression נִפְתְּחוּ הַשָּׁמַיִם (the heavens were opened) suggests a divine passive. In 2 Sam 22:10; Isa 63:19[64:1] God is said to rend the heavens in order to descend and reveal himself.[97] Elsewhere, the windows of heaven are opened for gifts or judgments to be sent out (Ps 78:23; Mal 3:10; Deut 28:12; Gen 7:11; Isa 24:18).[98] However, here there is nothing which comes down; instead, an opening occurs so that someone may see into the heavenly realm.[99]

What Ezekiel sees, the מַרְאוֹת אֱלֹהִים 'visions of God,' are not so much pictures describing God as supernatural visions which could not be seen without divine help. Greenberg points out that אֱלֹהִים in this book does not usually refer to 'God' as a

---

[95] Risa Levitt Kohn, *A New Heart and a New Soul: Ezekiel, the Exile and the Torah*, JSOT Sup 359 (London: Sheffield Academic Press, 2002), 48, notes that the method of referring to months by ordinal numbers alone is exclusive to the priestly writers, Ezekiel and the post-exilic prophets.

[96] Block, *Ezekiel 1*, 85, says that the deportation of Jehoiachin, marking the end of the primary line of succession in the Davidic house, represents a turning point in Israel's history.

[97] Greenberg, *Ezekiel 1*, 41.

[98] Eichrodt, *Ezekiel*, 54.

[99] Calvin, *Ezekiel 1*, 18, points out that a similar understanding is, however, found in the NT in Acts 7:56, John 1:51 and Rev 4:1. Calvin also points to Jesus' baptism (Matt 3:16, Luke 3:21,22) but although a similar idea of the heavens opening is present, something comes down rather like the other examples. G.A. Cooke, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Ezekiel* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1936, reprinted 1970), 5, notes that a similar use is made of this phrase in later apocalyptic writings (3 Mac 6:18; Ap.Bar. 22:1; T. Levi 2:6; 5:1; 18:6; and T.Jud 24:2 for the outpouring of the Spirit).

proper noun, but generally means 'divinity.' He also regards the plural form here (visions) as a 'plural of generalisation' functioning as a collective noun introducing the whole call narrative.[100] There are two other visions in this book which are introduced by the same term: 8:1–11:25 and 40:1–48:35. These three passages also have other features in common: it is only in these that the Spirit lifts up the prophet (3:12,14; 8:3; 11:1,24; 43:5) and that a date formula coincides with a note that the hand of the Lord is upon the prophet (1:2,3; 8:1; 40:1).[101] Perhaps more significantly, the presence of the glory of Yahweh, which is announced in this initial vision, is seen to depart from the temple in the second vision, and is reestablished in the temple in the third vision. This call narrative, then, is not merely an independent account of a personal call, or even just the preface to the body of the book; rather, it is a key part of the structure and development within the book. The prophet's call cannot be removed and viewed separately from what will develop, but is foundational to all that will come.

The hand of Yahweh: Ezek 1:3

As Ezekiel sees the visions unfold, the 'hand of Yahweh' is on him. This phrase is also used in the books of Kings, regarding Elijah (in 1 Kings 18:46, supernatural aid in running is given) and Elisha (in 2 Kings 3:15, oracles are given), and is also used in Jeremiah (in Jer 15:17, Jeremiah is alone for a distinctive role). 'Hand' is suggestive of 'power' and in each of the seven times in which the phrase occurs through this book (Ezek 1:3; 3:14,22; 8:1; 33:22; 37:1; 40:1), it is connected with visionary events in Ezekiel's life, often where he is removed from one place to another.[102]

---

100 Greenberg, *Ezekiel 1*, 41. Zimmerli, *Ezekiel 1*, 116, notes that it is only in Ezekiel that the plural form is used.

101 H. Van Dyke Parunak, "The Literary Architecture of Ezekiel's Mar'ôt 'Elōhîm," *JBL* 99, no. 1 (March 1980): 61.

102 Keith W. Carley, *Ezekiel Among the Prophets: A Study of Ezekiel's Place in Prophetic Tradition*, SBT (London: SCM, 1975), 13–23.

The approaching glory: Ezek 1:4-28

Visionary imagery

In any kind of dream or visionary material, images from past experience provide raw material for transmutations, but these may operate outside normal constraints like gravity, time and expected characteristics of materials. While there are points of familiarity which provide a lens through which the unfamiliar can be assessed, there is also the capacity for surprising images and outcomes.[103] Ezekiel's own priestly upbringing would make Israelite imagery the most likely primary source of both images and meaning, but a secondary source could well be imagery from Babylon.[104] However, the visionary mode does not require a complete, mechanical correspondence with previous meanings.

The stormcloud: Ezek 1: 4

The word used here (סְעָרָה) can mean storm, whirlwind or even tornado.[105] Cloud and storm imagery have a long Israelite association with the coming of the divine presence. On Mount Sinai, a dense cloud signifies Yahweh's presence (Ex 19:9), and is accompanied by thunder, lightning, fire, smoke and loud rumblings (Ex 19:16-18). A pillar of cloud by day and of fire by night indicates Yahweh's presence in leading his people through the wilderness wanderings (Ex 13:21). Other texts that utilise similar imagery of Yahweh's presence or coming are 2 Sam 22:10-12=Ps 18:9-11[10-12]; Ps 77:18-19[17-18]; Job 38:1; 40:6; Nah 1:3b-6; Zech 9:14; Isa 4:5; Hab 3:4,11 and Ps 97:3-5. The whirlwind is also the vehicle for taking Elijah up to

---

103 Blenkinsopp, *Ezekiel*, 19–20, writes, 'Prophecy and poetry have in common the extraordinary and ultimately mysterious amalgamation of traditional themes and imagery with intense personal experience ... (there) emerges something genuinely new which nevertheless retains its links with the past.'

104 Wilson, "Prophecy in Crisis," 163, observes that most elements in this vision can, indeed, be found in earlier Israelite tradition.

105 Blenkinsopp, *Ezekiel*, 20. Brownlee, *Ezekiel 1*, 10.

heaven (2 Kings 2:1). Although the storm theophany in Israel primarily symbolises the mighty help that Yahweh will give against enemies, it also signifies the voice of ultimate authority and has an element of threatening power (e.g. Ps 50:3-4 and Mic 1:3-6).[106]

The gathering great cloud, a windstorm, is coming from the north (v.4). In view of the 'opening of the heavens' usage elsewhere in the OT, one might expect something which symbolises the divine to 'come down;' however, the direction is 'from the north'. Although it is possible that a natural stormcloud phenomenon could act as a catalyst for the unfolding vision, the cloud which is described is no ordinary cloud.[107] It may signify the place of the gathering of the gods, through its wider ANE associations, but that is not yet clear. The brilliant aura surrounding it, the flashes of lightning from within and the fiery centre glowing like molten metal all suggest the possibility of theophany.[108] Although the exact meaning of חַשְׁמַל is uncertain, it seems to reflect the brilliance of either a precious stone, often identified as amber, or a gold-silver alloy.[109] The overall effect is stunning!

---

[106] Leslie Allen, *Ezekiel 1–19*, WBC (Dallas: Word, 1994), 24, also sees a common ANE derivation of the storm theophany, lying behind the Israelite usage, derived from upper Mesopotamia and east of the Tigris where rain-based agriculture was practised, rather than the irrigation agriculture of the lower courses of the Tigris and Euphrates.

[107] Greenberg, *Ezekiel 1*, 42, thinks that this vision could arise from an everyday occurrence, because from May onwards, peaking in July, a zone of extremely low pressure produces persistent north-west wind, which brings dust or sandstorms to the Nippur area. Alfred Guillaume, *Prophecy and Divination Among the Hebrews and Other Semites*, Bampton Lectures (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1938), 155–56, describes a Euphrates storm: 'Dense masses of black clouds, streaked with orange, red and yellow, appeared coming up from the west south west and approaching us with fearful velocity.'

[108] John B. Taylor, *Ezekiel* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1969), 56, sees the fire, symbolising judgment, as being at the heart of God's presence. Periodically it flashes forth in bursts of lightning (cf. Ps 18:8; Ps 50:3; Gen 15:17; Ex 20:18).

[109] Block, *Ezekiel 1*, 93, writes that the word may be related to Akkadian *elmešu*, which means a brilliant precious stone used in the fabrication of divine statues to enhance their shine, and that LXX translates it as ἤλεκτρον (electrum) which refers to both amber and a gold-silver alloy. Greenberg, *Ezekiel 1*, 43, says that the same word, of unknown etymology, occurs in Ezek 8:2 and the context indicates a bright substance, with a colour like fire. It has later associations with holy and dangerous properties.

The four living creatures: Ezek 1:5-14

As the cloud comes closer, Ezekiel notices that from within the fire appear what look like four living creatures. The language begins to become a little less definite; these creatures are not immediately identifiable with certainty. Nothing in his background quite prepares him for this, and nowhere else in the OT are such creatures described. There is something about them that resembles a human form. There are four faces and four wings; human hands emerge from under the wings; the legs (or feet; 'legs' is usually preferred) are 'straight,' usually taken to indicate that the creatures are standing upright and not crouching down; the feet are like those of calves.[110] The description of the living creatures is chiastic, centering on their faces (1:10). Verses 8-9 correspond to vv. 11-12 and some phrases are repeated, like 'each moved straight ahead' and 'without turning as they went.'[111] The whole scene is exotic, yet with familiar elements.

Although it seems that Ezekiel cannot yet identify these 'living creatures', they are identified in ch.10 as cherubim. In Ezekiel's vision one of the pairs of wings is extended upwards, perhaps reminiscent of the cherubim over the ark in the Holy of Holies, although that connection is not made explicit. The wings are lowered (v.24) when movement ceases, thus implying that they may be used for propulsion, but Ezekiel attributes the power for movement to the 'spirit' (vv.12, 20, 21) rather than

---

[110] The LXX omits עגל. Not all agree that the feet are like those of calves, e.g. Eichrodt, *Ezekiel*, 57, who takes עגל to mean 'round' rather than 'calf' and thinks that the roundness of the feet bear similarity to a rounded pillar, enhancing the bearer-function of the living creatures. W. Boyd Barrick, "The Straight-Legged Cherubim of Ezekiel's Inaugural Vision," *CBQ* 44 (1982): 549, summarises interpretations regarding the legs and looks at the two stylistic conventions in the portrayal of quadrupeds in ANE art. He believes that the temple cherubim of Israelite imagery were of the same general type as the 'winged sphinx' of Syro-Palestinian art, i.e., winged quadrupeds. He says that if an animal is depicted in motion its four legs are either extended in a quasi flying gallop or else in a more naturalistic prancing or walking position. But when stationary they are depicted with front legs together, perpendicular to the ground, i.e., straight. However, in Assyria and Persia sculptors combined both conventions to create the five-legged winged colossi to guard the royal residences; viewed from the side these creatures are striding forward, but viewed from the front they are standing still. Here, in Ezek 1, the creatures are viewed frontally and do not use their legs for locomotion. Like the temple cherubim it is their wings that are used for flight.

[111] Parunak, "Literary Architecture," 63.

to the wings, legs or hands.[112] The movement of the wings makes a tumultuous sound (v.24), perhaps even like the sound of the Almighty's voice itself. Perhaps the fact that the wings are joined implies that the creatures move in perfect unison.[113] Although it is not easy to construct a satisfactory diagram of the spatial relationship between these creatures, it seems that they form a hollow square.[114]

All over the ANE there were half-human, half-bestial images of creatures who were throne-bearers or guardians of temples and palaces, particularly in Babylon and Assyria, and these were called by the Akkadian *karibu*, cognate with the Hebrew for cherub.[115] As the vision unfolds it becomes clearer that the living creatures described here are, indeed, under the divine throne, and are perhaps bearing it.

Whereas the number of winged creatures in Isaiah 6 is indefinite, the number here is quite definite: four living creatures, together with four faces and four wings, moving with four wheels. This number four also appears in other parts of the book of Ezekiel (ch. 8 four acts of sin; 14:12ff four plagues; 47:1ff a fourfold measurement; 37:9 the breath of Yahweh comes from the four points of the compass). The number four is used elsewhere in the OT to denote totality (Zech 2:1-4 [1:18-21], the four horns are

---

[112] Block, *Ezekiel 1*, 97, thinks that because the creatures could fold their wings (v.25) it appears that the wings do not hold up the firmament, as they do in some other ANE imagery.

[113] Greenberg, *Ezekiel 1*, 45.

[114] Taylor, *Ezekiel*, 55.

[115] Blenkinsopp, *Ezekiel*, 21. Leslie Allen, *Ezekiel 1*, 26–30, includes the following pictures of throne-bearers and sky-bearers: 1) an eight-foot high basalt sculpture from Carchemish in North Syria where a throne occupied by a bearded god stands on a platform that is supported by two lions held by a bird-headed genius or lesser deity; 2) a Persian seal showing two creatures with human heads, bovine bodies (bullmen) and two pairs of wings each bearing up the sky where there is a winged divine creature who also has a human face but undefined lower parts; 3) an eighteenth-century B.C. Assyrian representation of a god with four human faces on the same head; and 4) a fourteenth-century B.C. ivory piece from Megiddo which shows four layers of skybearers, the top layer having two lions' heads each. Block, *Ezekiel 1*, 98, gives the example of colossal composite figures that guarded the doorways to Ashurbanipal II's palace at Nimrod: one was a winged bull with a human head, the other had a lion's body. There are other examples of humanoid figures with heads of a lion, a bull and an eagle, but no analogues to Ezekiel's figures, with four different heads on one body, have been discovered.

symbols of the power of all earthly empires; Zech 6:5 the four chariots are from 'the Lord of the whole earth'; Dan 2 and 7 the four world eras represent the whole of human history).[116] A representational value is therefore likely, and many see a reference in the four living creatures to all of creation throughout the four corners of the earth.

The faces are widely recognised as bearing symbolic significance.[117] Within the OT the lion is the most powerful and regal of the wild creatures and is renowned for strength, ferocity and courage (Judg 14:18; 2 Sam 1:23; 17:10; Gen 49:9); the ox is the most valuable domestic animal (Prov 14:4); the eagle the swiftest and most stately of birds (Deut 28:49; Isa 40:31; Jer 48:40); and the human the one created in the image of God and invested with divine majesty (Gen 1:28; Ps 8).[118] The Rabbis also regarded the symbolism of the faces in this way:

> Four kinds of exalted beings have been created in the world. The most exalted of all living creatures is man; of birds, the eagle; of cattle, the ox; and of wild beasts, the lion ... they are set under the chariot of God ... so that they should know that the Kingdom of Heaven is over them.[119]

Together, they can be taken as typical representatives of created beings. However, this combination of faces only finds an approximate parallel in Ezek 10:14 (one of the faces there is a cherub instead of an ox); in Rev 4:7 the same four faces appear as here. It is also possible to see specific reference to Babylon's four chief deities (the ox for Marduk; the lion for Nergal, the god of the underworld and of plague; the eagle for Ninib, god of the chase and of war; and the human face for Nabu, the announcer or revealer).[120] In this interpretation, the vision may represent Yahweh's

---

116 Zimmerli, *Ezekiel 1*, 120.

117 Calvin, *Ezekiel 1*, 24, imagines that there could be four heads, with a face on each head, rather than four faces on one head. The text is not explicit, although modern commentators generally regard the latter as the intention here.

118 Block, *Ezekiel 1*, 96.

119 R. Abin in H. Freedman and Maurice Simon, eds., *Midrash Rabbah*, trans. S.M. Lehrman (London: Soncino, 1939), no. 23 on Ex 15:1, 291.

120 Matthews, *Ezekiel*, 5.

assertion of his position, exalted above all the deities of the Babylonian empire. Because the nature of vision has the capacity for multivalence of meaning, both allusions may be present, suggesting that Yahweh is the God over all created beings and other gods.

An oscillation between masculine and feminine suffix forms (e.g. v.10), as well as other grammatical irregularities and difficult constructions throughout this passage, cannot easily be accounted for. However, the general coherence of the description remains. Eichrodt ascribes these irregularities to scribal transmission.[121] Block takes a different approach and treats the orderliness of the text as a nonverbal aspect of the text's communication; he argues persuasively that Ezekiel's emotional state, being overwhelmed and stunned by such an awesome visionary experience, has a decided influence on the state of the text.[122]

The wheels: Ezek 1:15-21

Diagrams attempting to describe the wheels mechanically, together with other wheels inside, cannot do justice to the visionary nature of the material.[123] After all, Ezekiel's language continues to be imprecise. What is clear is that each living creature has a wheel associated with it and that they move, rise and stop together, and that both the creatures and the wheels move ahead, in any direction, without

---

[121] Eichrodt, *Ezekiel*, 55–56.

[122] Daniel I. Block, "Text and Emotion: A Study in the 'Corruptions' in Ezekiel's Inaugural Vision (Ezekiel 1:4–28)," *CBQ* 50 (1988): 418–42, notes that where this material is repeated in ch.10, the grammar is smoothed out. He attributes this to Ezekiel having more than a year to reflect on the inaugural vision; this new experience is not so startling so his writing is more coherent. Block compares other accounts of prophetic visions and finds that where the prophet has been physically overwhelmed there are also similar text disturbances, e.g. Isa 21:1-10; Dan 10:7-9 (see Dan 8:27); Hab 3 and the book of Revelation.

[123] Greenberg, *Ezekiel 1*, 47, cites an older view that saw the two wheels intersecting at right angles, and another view that suggested concentric circles. In seeking to find ANE models, he mentions the following possibilities: a) an archaic type of disc wheel with a protuberance around each axle that could look like an inner wheel, and b) the concentric rims of the spoked wheel on Sargon's throne chariot. Taylor, *Ezekiel*, 57, thinks that probably each wheel consisted of two wheels, probably solid discs, which bisected each other at right angles, thus allowing movement in any of the four directions without being turned.

turning. Perhaps some kind of four-wheeled chariot is suggested.[124] The description of the wheels suggests a supernatural brilliance and awesomeness, something 'out of this world'. They sparkle, as if made of precious stone.[125] Their height is enormous, and their rims are alive with all-seeing eyes all around, which probably suggests divine omniscience.[126] The energy for movement originates not from within the mechanical construction of the wheels but from the 'spirit of the living creatures'. There is complete unity between the movement of the living creatures and the wheels, without any apparent physical connection; the driving force for both is one and the same.[127]

A new sensory awareness—hearing—appears. The sound becomes loud, like the voice of the Almighty, but not yet like a voice speaking to someone; it is associated with flapping wings. Another sound from a higher realm emerges, but it will not be until a third sound is heard (Ezek 2:1) that Ezekiel will be able to discern it as a voice speaking specifically to him.

The divine throne: Ezek 1:22-28

A dome, above the realm of the creatures and their wheels, now comes to Ezekiel's attention.[128] It, too, sparkles and shines, this time like crystal or ice. When Ezekiel is drawn to the second sound, a sound that comes from above the dome, he looks up

---

[124] Block, *Ezekiel 1*, 100.

[125] Cooke, *Ezekiel*, 16–17, notes that the name of the stone here, תַּרְשִׁישׁ ,'tarshish', only gives us the place of origin of the stone and not the colour, but concludes that it is probably yellow topaz. Greenberg, *Ezekiel 1*, 47, comments that the LXX usually identifies it with chrysolite, so is yellow, though in Ezek 10:9 and 28:13 it is translated as anthrax, a dark red precious stone, e.g. ruby or carbuncle, and that T. Onkelos describes the stone as 'sea-colour'.

[126] Iain M. Duguid, *Ezekiel*, The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1999), 60, thinks that the eyes suggest that there is no place to run and hide. Cooke, *Ezekiel*, 18, notes that in Ezek 10:12 and Rev 4:8 the living creatures or cherubim have eyes all over them, and that in Ezek 10:12 the accompanying wheels also have eyes.

[127] Greenberg, *Ezekiel 1*, 48.

[128] Eichrodt, *Ezekiel*, 57, thinks that the living creatures are carrying this dome or firmament, which is a copy of the firmament of heaven, as in Gen 1:6.

and seeks to describe what he now sees in this realm above. His language takes on a very hesitant, almost stuttering character. Ezekiel gropes to describe the indescribable, dotting his writing with דְּמוּת (likeness, similitude) and the preposition כ (like), e.g., כְּמַרְאֵה and כְּעֵין (like the appearance of). He does not actually claim to see the heavens, the throne or the divine being, but rather something like them. An impression of something like a throne of blue precious stone, reminiscent of the pavement under God's feet in Ex 24:10, comes into sight.[129]

Something like the figure of a man appears high on the throne. As the vision zooms in on the centre of divine power, the details are obscured in a blur of fire and brilliant light.[130] Only the gleaming upper half is able to be distinguished at all, with the core of his being having the appearance of fire.[131] Fire and light are also round about him, brilliant light like a rainbow, like the glory of Yahweh. The formation of a rainbow, requiring both cloud and sunshine, is evocative of hope and delight in the midst of threat. In fact, the passage calls for a comparison with its natural function (v.28). Although most commentators see no direct connection to the covenantal association with rainbows here (Gen 9:16), it is plausible to suggest that the symbolism of the rainbow giving a ray of hope in the midst of the threatening

---

[129] Othmar Keel, *The Symbolism of the Bilical World: Ancient Near Eastern Iconography and the Book of Psalms*, trans. Timothy J. Hallett (London: SPCK, 1978), 171. Keel's conclusion is that the throne imagery here is analogous to that in Mesopotamian and not Canaanite-Phoenician prototypes. Leslie Allen, *Ezekiel 1*, 35, says that the stone is like lapis lazuli, a brilliant violet blue stone, highly valued in the ancient world. Cooke, *Ezekiel*, 21, adds that it was probably a lustrous blue marble rather than sapphire, because sapphires were almost unknown before the Roman Empire.

[130] Blenkinsopp, *Ezekiel*, 22, speaks of the language of indirection and approximation here. He says that the basic image is of blinding light to which the eyes only gradually become accustomed.

[131] The same word חַשְׁמַל, suggesting the gleaming of the upper half, is used as in v. 4 (see comments above). Zimmerli, *Ezekiel 1*, 122, notes the similarities here with the coloured ceramics of the god Asshur from Qal 'at Šerqât (the period of Tukulti-Ninurta II, 890-884 B.C.) which portray a god emerging from the flaming disc of the sun, and appearing with well-defined contours from the waist upwards. As here, the lower half merges with the background. The rays and flames of the sun's disc are shown in a mixture of yellow and blue tones, and the whole is framed by the edge of the sun's disc and its rays.

stormclouds could allude to Yahweh's commitment to his promises even in the midst of his overwhelming judgment.[132] It is, clearly, the rainbow, not the cloud, that is compared with the glory of the Lord here. This is also the only book in the OT where the glory of Yahweh is associated with an anthropomorphic image of Yahweh (cf. Ex 15:2; Isa 6:1ff; Dan 7:9).[133] In fact, this term 'glory' (כבוד) becomes a key term in this book (it appears 19 times) becoming a technical expression for the appearance of Yahweh in light.[134]

The representation of the divine being as somewhat anthropomorphic is, perhaps, congruent with the priestly understanding that humanity is in God's image (Gen 1:26). Here, however, God is presented in humanity's image. The common biblical image of God as king and judge (Deut 33:26) coalesces here with the image of God/Yahweh riding in the heavens (Pss. 68:5,34; 104:3; Isa 19:1) Typical indications of theophany (storm, cloud, lightning, fire and radiance, cf. Ex 19; Deut 33:2f; Judg 5:4f; Nah 1:3ff; Hab 3:8-15) now become associated with an appearance of Yahweh that takes some visible shape. Whereas Yahweh's appearance to Moses and Isaiah in their call narratives does not feature any divine movement, the unique and dominant feature in the divine appearance here is movement.[135] And so the

---

[132] Duguid, *Ezekiel*, 59. Eichrodt, *Ezekiel*, 58, does associate it with the covenant of God, but not now to Israel. Leslie Allen, *Ezekiel 1*, 36, sees an allusion to the bow of the warrior God (Hab 3:9; Job 20:24) from which the lightning arrows are shot (2 Sam 22:15).

[133] Arnold J. Tkacik, "Ezekiel," in *The Jerome Biblical Commentary*, ed. Raymond E. Brown, Joseph Fitzmyer, and Roland E. Murphy (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1968), 349. Leslie Allen, *Ezekiel 1*, 36, draws attention to the fact that 'the glory of the Lord', a phrase often regarded as priestly, is also conceived as a blazing fire enveloped in cloud in Ex 24:16-17. Some wilderness narratives mention Yahweh's appearance in glory in order to pronounce judgment (Ex 16:10-12; Num 14:10-12; 16:19-21). Here the divine figure seems to be identified with the glory (cf. Ezek 3:12,23; 43:2). Blenkinsopp, *Ezekiel*, 18–19, says that 'glory' is associated with the ark from the earliest times and spelled sanctification and blessing (e.g. Ex 29:43; Lev 9:23) although it could also be the harbinger of judgment (e.g. Korah's rebellion, Num 16:19,42). Eichrodt, *Ezekiel*, 58–59, comments that whereas the כבוד is usually associated, according to priestly views, with the tabernacle or the Holy of Holies in the Jerusalem temple (Ex 40:34; Lev 9:6,23; Num 14:10; 16:19; 1 Kings 8:11; 2 Chron 7:1) now it appears in another place.

[134] Zimmerli, *Ezekiel 1*, 123.

[135] Greenberg, *Ezekiel 1*, 53.

climax of this part of the vision occurs as it began (1: 4), shrouded in cloud, fire and bright light. What started at a distance, and came sufficiently close to reveal likenesses to creatures, wheels and a heavenly majestic figure, retains its mystery and shows that those same initial signs of theophany penetrate through to the very core of the vision, to the very core of divine being.

Ezekiel's response: Ezek 1:28

Ezekiel's falling facedown signifies his shocked submission; this action is like that of other priestly responses to the manifestation of divine glory (Lev 9:24; Num 16:22; 17:10[16:45]). The sound that he now hears is no longer one that is indistinct, but distinct. It is the sound of someone speaking, and its meaning is discernible.[136]

Ezekiel's Call: Ezek 2:1–3:15

Son of man: Ezek 2:1

The divine voice addresses its words specifically to Ezekiel, but does not use his given name; in fact, Ezekiel is never addressed by his given name throughout the book.[137] 'Son of man,' it calls, and will do so again many more times in the following pages; this form of address is highly characteristic of this book (it occurs elsewhere only in Dan 8:17 as a direct address).[138] There is general agreement that this address asserts Ezekiel's creatureliness and reinforces the sense of distance

---

[136] Greenberg, *Ezekiel 1*, 61, observes that there is no direct ascription of the speech to the human figure on the throne, as though the source of the speech is reserved for the unseen God. Zimmerli, *Ezekiel 1*, 131, notes the cautious description of the origin of the voice, merely 'the voice of someone speaking', helping to preserve the mystery of the deity.

[137] The name Ezekiel is only mentioned twice in the book (1:3 and 24:24).

[138] Here I depart from the NRSV's 'O mortal' to retain a more literal translation. Blenkinsopp, *Ezekiel*, 24, suggests that the title 'Son of Man' indicates that it is the office or function, rather than the person, which is more important here than with any of the other prophets. Duguid, *Ezekiel*, 69, sees significance in this 'son of Adam' address; just as the first Adam received the breath of life from God (Gen 2:7), so Ezekiel also receives an infusion of the divine Spirit. Duguid extends the analogy by referring to the fact that for both Adam and Ezekiel there is a test of obedience that involves eating.

between him and the divine being. It may also function as an identification of Ezekiel with the exiles who may feel like a no-name people (cf. the hopeful end of the book where the future city will have a name because 'Yahweh is there'(48:35).

Power to stand: Ezek 2:2

Before Ezekiel can be told the divine message he is commanded to stand. Although he is humbled and in awe, he is not crushed or oppressed. There is a divine demand that Ezekiel be in a position that enables him to be alert, free to listen, free to respond, and free to take action.[139] Yet it is obvious that Ezekiel feels so overwhelmed that he is powerless to get himself into that position, powerless to rise to his feet. The Spirit, which I am taking to be of divine origin because of its activity, comes into him and does it for him; Ezekiel is lifted up and enabled to stand (cf. Ezek 3:12,24).[140] Like the living creatures in the vision, this human creature also needs the Spirit in order to move.

There are five distinct units in the subsequent words of Ezekiel's commissioning, each beginning with an address to the prophet (Ezek 2:3-5; 2:6-7; 2:8-3:3; 3:4-9; 3:10-11). Each has its own theme, but the central one (Ezek 2:8-3:3) becomes dominant.[141] Schwartz highlights the concentric structure of these units.[142]

---

[139] Zimmerli, *Ezekiel 1*, 131, writes that the call to stand up 'is an invitation to conscious participation in God's concerns, to be poised for action on his behalf.' Eichrodt, *Ezekiel*, 61, adds, 'The liberating new assurance of God's nearness, imparted to Ezekiel through the vision which he had experienced, was not a gift upon which he could repose and which he could enjoy in the manner of the mystics, but a means by which he might actively serve this glorious God.'

[140] Although it is not uniformly agreed that 'spirit' (רוח) here is divine I am in agreement with Block, *Ezekiel 1*, 153–4. Cooke, *Ezekiel*, 31, comments that the Spirit instigates Ezekiel's bodily movements, but does not, except in Ezek 11:5, convey the divine word; that is imparted through visions.

[141] Zimmerli, *Ezekiel 1*, 131.

[142] Baruch Schwartz, "The Concentric Structure of Ezekiel 2:1 - 3:15," in *Proceedings of the Tenth World Congress of Jewish Studies Division A: The Bible and Its World* (Jerusalem: World Union of Jewish Studies, 1990), 109, couples the beginning (Ezek 2:1-2) with the end (Ezek 3:12-15) in speaking of assistance from the spirit; Ezek 2:3-5 and Ezek 3:10-11 relate the charge; Ezek 2:6-7 and Ezek 3:4-9 give encouragement; Ezek 2:8-3:3, the scroll-eating act, lies at the centre.

Sent to rebellious people: Ezek 2:3-5

First, Ezekiel hears (v.3) that he is being sent (שׁלח, a key term in prophetic commissioning): the 'son of man' to the 'sons of Israel.' The fathers of the 'sons of Israel' have set the paths for their children to follow; both fathers and sons are guilty of the same sin—rebellion (v.3).[143] That sin involves a power struggle where they have pitted their strength against the one who is now calling Ezekiel, the one who is identified as the Lord Yahweh (v.4). Perhaps the use of the dual name emphasises the divine authority and distance of Yahweh. Although Ezekiel may be 'among' these people (Ezek 1:1; 3:15), he is clearly regarded by God as not being 'of' them. He, as 'son of man' represents a more universal class, where no father is explicitly mentioned; the divine authority functions, by implication, in the place of his father.

Ezekiel's primary audience is to be the 'rebellious house' of Israel.[144] The rebellion that Ezekiel will encounter will show itself in stubbornness and hard-heartedness, in being internally strong-willed in opposition to Yahweh and externally brazen.[145]

---

[143] Brownlee, *Ezekiel 1*, 26. The text here speaks of a rebellious nation (v.3), or more correctly, rebellious nations, גוֹיִם הַמּוֹרְדִים. Brownlee suggests a possible perjorative implication as גוֹיִם is usually used for the heathen peoples. Leslie Allen, *Ezekiel 1*, 39, says that מרד (rebel) is a theological metaphor derived from a political act, the refusal of subjects to give loyalty to their king (cf. 2 Kings 18:7; Ezek 17:5).

[144] Block, *Ezekiel 1*, 31, notes that 'house of Israel' is Ezekiel's favourite designation for his primary audience (83 times, that is 57% of its usage in the OT), whereas 'sons of Israel' occurs 11 times. Ezekiel uses 'Israel' variously for 1) the exiles of Judah in Babylon, as seems to be the case here, 2) the remnant in Jerusalem, and 3) the northern kingdom.

[145] Leslie Allen, *Ezekiel 1*, 39. Abraham J. Heschel, *The Prophets*, vol. 1 (New York: Harper & Row, 1962), 191, writes that 'hardening of the heart' is the suspension of freedom, where sin becomes compulsory and self-destructive. He considers that the normal soul is pliable, open to truth and sensitive to God. Hardness of heart is a condition of which the person afflicted is unaware, and so he is unable to repent and recover. He goes on to say that it seems that the only cure for willful hardness is to make it absolute. Then it becomes despair, the end of conceit. Out of despair, out of a total inability to believe, prayer then bursts forth. When hardness is intensified from above, responsibility is assumed by God. God smites and restores, bringing about a revival of sensitivity. Greenberg, *Ezekiel 1*, 63–64, adds that 'hard-faced' indicates an impassive face that shows no emotion or disconcertion when it should (cf. Isa 50:7; Ex 20:20; Jer 5:3), and is an adaptation of the more common 'stiff-necked' (Jer 2:27; 18:17; 32:33) where impudence is implied. The second characteristic, of being 'tough-hearted' is like having a 'heart of stone' (Ezek 36:26) which is incapable of receiving impressions, and recalls the verbal terminology of Pharaoh's obstinacy (Ex 7:3,13 etc).

Ezekiel is not to let the reactions of the people determine whether he speaks or not—his focus is to be on the fact that the Lord Yahweh is sending him to them, his resolution is to be to speak whatever the Lord Yahweh tells him to say, and his assurance is simply that they will know that a prophet has been in their midst.

Don't be afraid: Ezek 2:6-8a

Attention is now given (vv.6-8a) to Ezekiel's own anticipated personal reactions. In contrast to other call narratives, no specific objection is raised by the one being called.[146] Yet specific fears are named, and anticipated feelings acknowledged (v.6). Ezekiel is not to be intimidated by the people, their words or their faces; nor is he to be deterred by anything that feels like briars and thorns, or the bite of scorpions![147] Ezekiel is commanded not to fear and to speak Yahweh's words to them. In fact, there is a rhetorical buildup with the command not to be afraid given three times as אַל־תִּירָא then the variant אַל־תֵּחַת (do not be dismayed or terrified) in v.6. Ezekiel is to be prepared to stand alone, without being deflected by the people, in submissive service to Yahweh.

Eat this scroll: Ezek 2:8b–3:3

Although Ezekiel is being sent out to speak, as in all other prophetic call narratives, he is first asked to act (cf. Moses, Ex 4:3), even though this is still within the visionary context. Before speaking, his willingness to listen (and therefore, in Hebraic understanding, to obey) is tested through the command to open his mouth and to eat whatever the divine figure gives him.

---

[146] In Ezek 4:14 Ezekiel objects to the command to defile himself, but does not object to his call to being a prophet.

[147] Greenberg, *Ezekiel 1*, 66, comments that סָרָבִים the word that is translated as 'thorns, briars or nettles' is a hapax whose meaning is deduced from Ezek 28:24. Zimmerli, *Ezekiel 1*, 134, thinks that the image here is of a field fenced with a thorn hedge, showing complete hositility around the prophet on all sides, while Ronald E. Clements, *Ezekiel*, Westminster Bible Companion (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1996), 16, sees an echo here of Isaiah's parable of the vineyard (Isa 5:6). Regarding the scorpions, Brownlee, *Ezekiel 1*, 29, says that there are two types in Israel, yellow and black. The venom of the latter is like that of a viper and so is particularly feared.

Ezekiel notices a hand containing a scroll stretched out towards him. As with the voice, the hand's owner is not specified; the mysterious origins and the context, however, suggest that the hand is divine. The scroll is unrolled in Ezekiel's presence by 'him', presumably the one who is speaking, and it is seen to have two unusual characteristics: first, the words are all words of lamentation and mourning and woe; second, the scroll has writing on both sides.[148] Perhaps the latter suggests that the whole of the divine message is full of grief—there is no space left for pleasantries or reprieve, no room for negotiating differences to the message.[149]

The command to eat comes again, this time making it clear that it is the scroll itself that is to be eaten. For Ezekiel, eating must precede speaking; the two are obviously related (3:1). Ezekiel is fed by the divine hand; he simply opens his mouth and takes it in. Then he is told to feed himself with it—he also needs to participate in the process of tasting, chewing, swallowing and digesting.[150] His innermost being needs to be filled with it. The taste, to Ezekiel, is surprisingly sweet in view of the bitter words on the scroll. He obeys and finds pleasure in that obedience.[151]

---

[148] Leslie Allen, *Ezekiel 1*, 40, represents the commonly held view that these words symbolise the prophetic oracles of judgment that Ezekiel would be asked to deliver. He also notes that the scroll presupposes the custom of preserving a prophet's message in written form (cf. Jer 36:4,32; 45:1). Blenkinsopp, *Ezekiel*, 24, feels that the description of the contents of the scroll describes not what Ezekiel has to say but the effects of his message on the people. Greenberg, *Ezekiel 1*, 67, says that the quality of skins, before the turn of the era, was not good enough to take writing on both sides. However, papyrus scrolls could be written on both sides, even if it were not normal practice.

[149] In Ezek 9:4, those who receive the saving mark are those who 'sigh and groan over the abominations committed.' These people, with whom Ezekiel will empathise, reflect the divine heart, expressed here as divine words of grief written on this scroll.

[150] Greenberg, *Ezekiel 1*, 67–8, notes that the command for Ezekiel to 'feed his belly' is unique and suggests that this mass of papyrus could be felt to be indigestible; the idea is that he is not to vomit it out.

[151] Clements, *Ezekiel*, 17, writes 'it is better to know the truth and face up to it than to go on living with an illusion! ... God's work is no occasion for self-display ... Only those who have taken it in themselves can pass it on to others.'

This scroll-eating episode has a sacramental function in nourishing the prophet's inner being and enabling him to go to speak in difficult circumstances.[152] Just as Ezekiel could not obey the command to rise to his feet without the enabling power of the spirit, he cannot obey the second command to speak in the face of rebellion without the inner strengthening provided through the divine scroll.

The words which Ezekiel is to take in are already extant on the scroll. Eichrodt regards them as a body of 'objective material' in fixed form, independent of Ezekiel's subjective judgments or creativity.[153] However, the imagery of digestion—the process of making the contents part of Ezekiel himself before they are spoken—still allows that, even if the content may not change, the form of the message may, and that this change will come through Ezekiel's own personality and creativity.

Several scholars think the vital role of the scroll is suggestive of a more extensive use of the written word in Ezekiel's prophetic ministry than has been the case for earlier prophets.[154] Ellen Davis, in particular, argues strongly that the image of the scroll signifies a major historical transition from 'orality' to 'textuality' in the prophetic movement.[155] However, since my present concerns are not historical, it is more pertinent to notice the functions of the imagery. Conrad proposes a reading that sees the character Ezekiel as becoming the scroll he swallows, so 'becoming the text', not as a figure moving around the literary world, but as an object who is

---

[152] Brownlee, *Ezekiel 1*, 32, cites two other examples of eating in visions or dreams: Isa 29:8 and Rev 10:8-11.

[153] Eichrodt, *Ezekiel*, 62.

[154] Tkacik, "Ezekiel," 349.

[155] Davis, *Swallowing the Scroll*, 38, thinks it very likely shows that Ezekiel was to compose his oracles in writing, rather than writing down what was first spoken. However, Paul M. Joyce, "Review of Ellen F. Davis, *Swallowing the Scroll*," *JTS* 42 (1991): 171, urges caution in overstating the transition to writing, citing evidence that Ezekiel still engages in a public preaching ministry (Ezek 24:18; 8:1; 14:1; 20:1; 33:30-33).

moved around.[156] Although Ezekiel is here and elsewhere portrayed as a rather passive prophet, and he is said to be 'a sign' to the people, Conrad's reading does not seem justified. Rather, the medium of a written scroll suggests that 1) divine communication can no longer be modified through negotiation and dialogue, and 2) there is a greater distance (here requiring a medium) between Yahweh and Ezekiel than would be conveyed by conversational speech where the two parties are close enough to hear each other.

As hard as Israel: Ezek 3:4-9

Ezekiel is once again commanded to go and speak, and the prospective audience is again described. This time it is referred to as the 'house of Israel' (as Ezek 3:1), rather than 'sons of Israel.' He is not being sent to a people of foreign speech; the problem is not a language barrier, but something else. As an aside, Ezekiel is told the shocking news that 'foreigners' would, at this point, be more likely to listen to him than Israelites. So God is not sending him to those most open to hearing, but simply to those of his choosing. The 'something else' that stands in the way of Israel's hearing is similar to what he has heard before: they are hard-headed and obstinate, outwardly and inwardly impenetrable. Yet once again he is called not to be afraid! The ability to stand firm in the divine message will be extremely difficult in the presence of faces that show rebellion in every expression. So divine help will be given, help that makes his own head unable to be penetrated by opposing forces. This is especially fitting since his name means 'God is strong' or 'God strengthens'.[157] As he needed and was given the energising of the spirit and the nourishment of the divine word through the scroll, he is now given armour for his own defence.

---

156 Edgar Conrad, *Reading the Latter Prophets: Toward a New Canonical Criticism* (London: T&T Clark, 2003), 175–6.

157 Paul M. Joyce, *Ezekiel: A Commentary* (New York: T&T Clark, 2007), 79.

Back to Chebar: Ezek 3:10-15

The instruction to listen to the divine words, to take them to heart, and to speak them accurately, is reinforced. The response of the people is immaterial; it will not be regarded as an adequate excuse for Ezekiel's non-compliance.

The spirit once again energises Ezekiel. As the living creatures were lifted up, Ezekiel is also lifted up. The words fade, and once again he hears a less distinct sound, a tumultuous sound like he heard before when the wings of the living creatures were raised and the wheels were in motion. In the midst of the tumult there seems to be praise of the glory of Yahweh, resonant, perhaps with the doxology from the seraphim in Isaiah's temple (Isa 6:3). All things are still pointing to the dwelling place of the Lord, in whose presence he has just been. But now he can no longer stay there. The spirit takes him away, to the realm of the ordinary, to the place where the scattered 'house of Israel' is living, oblivious and largely impervious to divine intentions, to the place where the 'glory of Yahweh' is least likely to be found. But Ezekiel has seen more, and now he is overwhelmed, stunned and emotionally stirred. His inward passions are in turmoil, but he cannot yet speak.[158] The 'hand' of the Lord is upon him as it was at the beginning of the experience (Ezek 1:3).

Ezekiel's call to be a watchman: Ezek 3:16-21

After seven days: Ezek 3:16

Although this unit is generally regarded as independent and shows no specific linguistic links to the preceding vision or the following material, there are clear

---

[158] Eichrodt, *Ezekiel*, 66, contrasts Ezekiel's emotions here with those of liberation recorded by mystics, when lifted up by the Spirit. Blenkinsopp, *Ezekiel*, 28, thinks Ezekiel was in a catatonic state, as is psychologically feasible after such an extraordinary experience. However, others, e.g. Greenberg, *Ezekiel 1*, 71, take the distress to be severe but within the bounds of normality; Greenberg thinks it is not clear whether the bitter feelings reflect God's feelings towards Israel or the prophet's own distress over the thankless and probably dangerous task lying ahead.

connections in meaning.[159] This seven day period (v.16) provides a link to the previous call narrative and may allude to the standard seven day period for a priest's consecration (Lev 8:33).[160] Or it may simply allow Ezekiel time to absorb his new call. At the conclusion of this period, the formula 'the word of Yahweh came (literally 'was') to me' (וַיְהִי דְבַר־יהוה אֵלַי) introduces the new section. This is its first appearance in this book; it occurs more frequently in Ezekiel than in any other book.[161] This formula calls for alertness for some words that Ezekiel is to be ready to receive (Ezek 3:10).

A watchman for the house of Israel: Ezek 3:17

Ezekiel is now called to be a watchman (צֹפֶה, v.17).[162] Although the image of prophet as watchman is not unique to Ezekiel (e.g. Hos 9:8; Isa 56:10 and Jer 6:17), it assumes a greater significance in Ezekiel than anywhere else, and is further developed in ch.33. The use of watchmen, posted on high places to look out for and warn of approaching danger, is widely known throughout the OT (e.g. 1 Sam 14:16; 2 Sam 13:34; 18:24-27; 2 Kings 9:17-20 and Isa 21:6-8). People are also urged to watch out for themselves and their ways (Deut 4:9; Ps 39:1) and God is portrayed as watching over his people in loving care as well as keeping a watch on the ungodly (e.g. Gen 16:13; 28:15; Ex 3:16; Deut 2:7; Ezra 5:5; Job 7:20; 13:27; Ps 1:6; 121:3-4,7-8; Prov 15:3; Jer 31:10; 44:27).[163] However, here there is no foreign

---

[159] A textual break (with large ס) after 3:16a (at the end of seven days) has led some to read this as the introduction to the next narrative segment beginning in 3:22; however, there is insufficient evidence to preclude a reading of the text as it stands. Greenberg, *Ezekiel 1*, 83, observes a similar break between two verbs in 2 Sam 7:4 and 1 Kings 13:20 so concludes that it cannot mean a disturbance of the original narrative but may invite reflection on supplementary material.

[160] Taylor, *Ezekiel*, 58.

[161] It occurs over 50 times. Greenberg, *Ezekiel 1*, 83, relates this formula to the pattern 'the word of the king', i.e., a royal command, edict, message or commission. He thinks that this may belong to the self-image of the prophet as a messenger of the divine king.

[162] I depart from the NRSV's 'sentinel,' because 'watchman' keeps a stronger association with the fundamental idea of 'look out' in צפה.

[163] Leland Ryken, James Wilhoit, and Tremper Longman III, eds., "Watch, Watchman," in *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery* (Downers Grove: IVP, 1998), 928–9.

enemy mentioned, and the focus is on the state and response of each person within Israel, together with the consequences for Ezekiel determined by whether he does or does not fulfill his responsibility to warn. Yahweh is the one who gives the watchman the warning; Ezekiel is not to assess danger by his own powers of observation, but only to convey this divine warning.[164]

The watchman's accountability: Ezek 3:18-21

Four situations are presented to the prophet: 1) a wicked man is not warned—he will die for his sin, and God will hold Ezekiel accountable for his blood; 2) a wicked man is warned, but chooses not to turn from his wickedness—he will die for his sin, but Ezekiel will have saved his life; 3) a righteous man turns from his righteousness and is not warned—he will die for his sin, and God will hold Ezekiel accountable for his blood; 4) a righteous man is warned not to sin and he does not sin—he will live because he takes warning, and Ezekiel will have saved his life.[165] In each of these, the burden of unmitigated responsibility is laid on the prophet. His own life is clearly at stake, according to whether he does or does not sound the warning that Yahweh is giving him to sound. While no hope is expressed here for the possibility of the wicked taking heed of warning and turning away from their sin, there is hope that some righteous people might be saved from sinning, and therefore from death.

The watchman image implies that Ezekiel's task is urgent—he is not simply to be a teacher who must work systematically and patiently to build up the knowledge of his

---

164 John W. Wevers, *Ezekiel*, Century Bible, New Series (London: Nelson, 1969), 251.

165 The last two situations, regarding the righteous, are only present here and not in ch. 33. However, ch. 33 presents the possibility of the wicked repenting. Taylor, *Ezekiel*, 70, notes that this does not mean 'save his soul' in the Christian sense, rather 'saved his life'.

students.[166] The outcomes are black and white: life or death.[167] Most scholars consider that Ezekiel's understanding of death is purely temporal: a shortened life, a premature death. This could be at the hand of human enemies, in which case life would refer to survival of the Chaldean invasion.[168] Life, for Ezekiel, involves association with Yahweh and is always conditional upon obedience to his life-giving laws (e.g. Ezek 20:11,13, 21).[169] However, it is Yahweh who is ultimately responsible for the taking of life, not a stranger.

The stumbling block: Ezek 3:20

The assertion that Yahweh places a stumbling block (מִכְשׁוֹל) before people (v.20) is difficult. In a concrete sense the term refers to an obstacle that could make a blind person trip and fall (Lev 19:14) or which could prevent the free passage of people (Isa 57:14). However, it can also be used metaphorically, as a conscientious objection (1 Sam 25:31). Of the word's 14 occurrences in the OT, eight are in Ezekiel, six of which refer to a 'stumbling block of iniquity' (Ezek 7:19; 14:3,4,7; 18:30; 44:12). The association with iniquity could suggest that Ezekiel may be referring to anything that can constitute an occasion for sin, like money (7:19), idolatry (14:3-4,7), the company of those who practise idolatry (44:12), or immorality (18:30).[170] If so, the following question arises: how might Yahweh be

---

166 Christopher J.H. Wright, *The Message of Ezekiel: A New Heart and a New Spirit*, The Bible Speaks Today (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 2001), 65, contrasts the urgency of the watchman with other biblical models of ministry: shepherds of a flock, elders in a community, parents in a family, teachers in a school, servants in a household.

167 The death sentence derives ultimately from the curses of the covenant, e.g. Lev 26:39; Deut 27-30.

168 Brownlee, *Ezekiel 1*, 50. M. Tsevat, "Studies in the Book of Samuel," *Hebrew Union College Annual* 32 (1961): 199–201, points out that talmudic *kareth* means premature death, defined as before the age of 50 or 60. Although the Bible has no such definition, he considers that the biblical understanding of death as divine punishment would be the same.

169 Blenkinsopp, *Ezekiel*, 147.

170 Blenkinsopp, *Ezekiel*, 30. Gregory Yuri Glazov, *The Bridling of the Tongue and the Opening of the Mouth in Biblical Prophecy*, JSOT Sup 311 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001), 260, suggests that the stumbling block is Yahweh's making Ezekiel silent (e.g. 4:4-8) which prevents the people from being admonished. He says 'Yhwh thereby makes Ezekiel responsible "for their blood".' However, this attributes an amoral motive to Yahweh.

involved in putting some kind of occasion for sin in someone's path? By extension, what responsibility does Yahweh bear for the death of those who turn from righteousness? Bearing in mind that 'stumbling block' may refer to another kind of hindrance, and noting that the passage then returns to addressing Ezekiel's responsibility to give warning, I suggest that the warning is precisely that a stumbling block is coming. Those who pay no attention will be caught by it, but those who do can avoid it. Since Yahweh is giving the warning about the coming stumbling block, he, like Ezekiel, will not carry responsibility for the death of those who fail to pay heed.

Watchman and judge: Ezek 3:18

Throughout this call to be a watchman there is one unusual feature: instead of the description of the watchman's role being in military terms (the realm from which the image is drawn) the language takes on a quasi-legal style. Rather than warning of military threat, the prophet is to deliver a decision that Yahweh has made. Yahweh, pictured as judge, pronounces the death sentence, 'You will surely die'; this is the message Ezekiel must convey. The image of watchman here is not a single image, but is merged with that of messenger of the Divine Judge.[171]

Ezekiel's call to be speechless: Ezekiel 3:22-27

The divine glory in the valley: Ezek 3:22-24a

Numerous allusions to material in the call vision account tie this next experience with that vision (hand of the Lord 1:3; 3:14; the glory of the Lord 1:28; by the river Chebar 1:1,3; Ezekiel falling on his face 1:28; being raised to his feet by the spirit 2:2). The present arrangement suggests that a relationship exists between the call to

---

171 Robert R. Wilson, "An Interpretation of Ezekiel's Dumbness," *VT* 22 (1972): 96.

be watchman and the new word that will be spoken to Ezekiel in vv. 22-27, and that both relate to the initial glory vision and Ezekiel's call to be sent to the rebellious Israelites (2:3).[172] However, there is an obvious incongruity: the one called to be watchman is now told to watch the glory of the Lord instead of the enemy (Ezek 3:23) and he is then told that he will not be able to speak to his people (Ezek 3:26).

Ezekiel is no longer by the Chebar River, but the lack of any specified location change suggests he is still 'among the exiles' (3:15). Because 'the hand of the Lord' is said to be upon Ezekiel, the reader by now expects an unusual manifestation of divine presence, power and perhaps movement, with a message of some significance. This time Ezekiel is not transported to a new location by the Spirit (in contrast to 3:14) but told to go there by his own means. He goes out, away from the people, to the wide alluvial Babylonian plain.[173] There he is confronted by a vision that is simply summarised by the expression 'the glory of Yahweh' and represents an identification with that which has been described in detail in chapter 1.[174] This time there is no gradual unfolding of the details, as there was when he saw the unusual, flashing windstorm approaching. Here there is no sense of movement, of coming or of rising or falling. The 'glory of Yahweh' is simply there, standing in the plain, and there is instant recognition.[175] Ezekiel has the same response as before: he falls onto

---

[172] Duguid, *Ezekiel*, 78

[173] Block, *Ezekiel 1*, 153, comments that although the word בקעה usually denotes a cleft in the landscape, like mountain ravines and river gorges, it can also include any flat land (e.g. Isa 40:4). Here it is applied to the broad Mesopotamian plain in Babylon, land that, apart from the rivers and canals, was wasteland and perhaps appropriate for a private meeting with God. Greenberg, *Ezekiel 1*, 101, adds that it is used of the Euphrates plain in Gen 11:2 and of the broad valley of the Jordan at Jericho in Deut 34:3. Rabbi Moshe Eisemann, *Yechezkel: The Book of Ezekiel, A New Translation with a Commentary Anthologized from Talmudic, Midrashic and Rabbinic Sources*, Artscroll Tanach Series: A Traditional Commentary on the Books of the Bible (Brooklyn, NY: Mesorah Publications, 1980), 105, suggests that a particular place is in mind because of the presence of the definite article.

[174] Wright, *Ezekiel*, 69 comments that Yahweh's mobility is reinforced by the new location of the vision of his glory.

[175] Eichrodt, *Ezekiel*, 77, thinks that the 'glory of the Lord' here seems lifeless compared with the dynamic motion of ch.1. Similarly, Zimmerli, *Ezekiel 1*, 157, describes this vision report as 'wooden and static' with the description of Ezekiel's reaction as one of 'literal dependence on 1:28 and 2:2.' In contrast, Taylor, *Ezekiel*, 72, finds focus in brevity and says, 'The abiding recollection was not of the

his face (cf. 1:28). Once again Ezekiel needs to be raised to his feet by the spirit (as in 2:2). Only then is he addressed with his next instructions.

The call to withdrawal: Ezek 3:24b-27

Many have commented that these verses are the most difficult in this book.[176] Controversy has raged concerning the nature of Ezekiel's 'speechlessness' (v. 26) and its apparent contradiction with the call to be watchman (3:16-21), the call to speak to the house of Israel (3:4), and the several examples of Ezekiel giving oral messages to the people in the subsequent chapters before the lifting of the 'speechlessness' at the time of the fall of Jerusalem (referred to in Ezek 24:27, 29:21 and 33:22). The present arrangement produces a recurring theme of speechlessness which lends structural unity to the first section of the book.[177]

In many ways this passage has a Janus function, pointing both backwards and forwards.[178] There are references back to the call vision: instructions after being set on his feet by the Spirit (v.24 cf.2:2); the 'rebellious house' (vv.26,27 cf. 2:5,6,8; 3:7); those who will hear, and those who refuse to hear (v.27b cf. 2:5,7; 3:11). These suggest that the present command is related to the call vision to go out and speak. However, it can also be linked with the subsequent sign-acts, where communication

---

accoutrements of the heavenly chariot-throne, but of the One who sat upon it.' I take it as a focused, short-hand reference to all that was described earlier. Zimmerli's agenda, of attempting to find an original text, means that, in my view, some of the impact of the text is too easily dismissed, reduced or overlooked, because he regards it as secondary. Wright, *Ezekiel*, 69, notes that this time there is no circumlocution, such as 'the appearance of' in the description of the vision because he now knows what he is looking at.

[176] Zimmerli, *Ezekiel 1*, 158.

[177] Wilson, "Ezekiel's Dumbness," 92, also adds that although Ezek 3:2-27 is clearly an independent unit which could plausibly be claimed as an editorial insertion, no problems are solved by positing another chapter as the original location.

[178] Charles R. Biggs, *The Book of Ezekiel*, Epworth Commentaries (London: Epworth Press, 1996), 10, considers that this passage forms a bridge between the call narrative and the condemnation of the people which follows in chs 4-24.

is primarily non-verbal, especially as there is no new introductory statement (4:1).[179]

This command comes at the precise moment when we expect the prophet both to go out to his people and to speak.[180] Instead, he is told to come inside, away from the people, and to be silent. No other OT prophetic call narrative is followed immediately by a similar restriction, although there are some NT examples of withdrawal to deserts after calls.[181] Moses' withdrawal to the desert is voluntary and prior to his call, whereas Ezekiel's withdrawal is neither. Although there is no use of the word 'desert' (מדבר) in this section, its connotations of being apart and unfruitful make it a suitable image for this situation. The symbolic resonances of desert withdrawal in the canon are both positive and negative; the Feast of Tabernacles and the continuing presence of the Rechabites serve as reminders of uncluttered faith in the desert.[182] However, within this book, the desert often represents devastating judgment (e.g. Ezek 6:14; 20:13, 21b, 36) and the people's rebellion (e.g. Ezek 20:13, 21). It is also the place of divine commands (Ezek 20:10) and, importantly, also represents Ezekiel's exilic context (Ezek 19:13). Ezekiel's call to withdraw puts him, in some sense, into a more extreme desert experience than that of his fellow exiles. Perhaps he is here to experience more fully their powerlessness, their alienation from fruitful life, and their awareness of judgment. Yet it is into his withdrawn situation that Yahweh promises to speak (v.27).

---

[179] Leslie Allen, *Ezekiel 1*, 55, places this divine speech at the beginning of a new section which runs from 3:24b through to 5:17 and consists of a series of divine commands for Ezekiel to carry out five sign-acts, of which this act of seclusion is the first. There are also verbal links with the third sign act (4:8 cf. 3:25). Cooke, *Ezekiel*, 46, goes further and treats v.25 as a variant of 4:8, but this approach seems, to me, to be overly reductionist.

[180] Block, *Ezekiel 1*, 151, says, 'All that remains now is the ritual initiation into the prophetic office, which ironically stifles his freedom of expression rather than liberating it.'

[181] Jesus' withdrawal to the desert of temptations immediately after his baptism (Matt 4:1; Mk 1:12; Luke 4:1) and Paul's withdrawal to Arabia immediately after his call to preach the Gospel (Gal 1:17).

[182] John the Baptist's desert location also has a positive resonance with the call to follow God in the Exodus.

Shut in, bound up and tongue-tied: Ezek 3:24b-26

The first statement is a command for the prophet to take an action of withdrawal: to shut himself inside his house. The second statement (v. 25) concerns the actions of others, presumably the exiles, actions that will be done to him. Then he is addressed again as 'son of man' (cf. his mission to the rebellious Israelites in 2:3). It is here that the first major difficulty with regard to text and interpretation is raised: 'they' will tie him with ropes, binding him so that he will not be able to go out among the people. There is no evidence in the book for the exiles literally acting like this towards Ezekiel, so some have suggested changing the verbs from active to passive or reading them as divine passives.[183] Most see insufficient grounds for doing so, so must account for the interpretive difficulty in another way. Then the third statement (v. 26) concerns the action of Yahweh himself. He will make the prophet's tongue stick to his palate, a statement that also raises interpretive issues.

The next two major difficulties come in the consequences: 1) the prophet will be 'speechless', and 2) he will be unable to be an אִישׁ מוֹכִיחַ, commonly translated 'reprover'(v.26). Although the first difficulty has raised longstanding debate, the second has also provoked important discussion in more recent years. In v. 27 there appears to be a modification of Yahweh's action in v. 26. Whenever he speaks to Ezekiel, Yahweh will open the prophet's mouth, and Ezekiel will speak words that are divinely given, saying 'thus says the Lord God' (cf. 3:11). One thing is clear: whatever the exact nature of the restrictions, they will be reinforced by all parties involved. Yahweh's action to reinforce a command that goes against natural instincts resonates with Ezek 4:4-8, where Yahweh prevents Ezekiel from turning over, and Ezek 2:1-2, where the spirit enables Ezekiel to obey the command to stand.

---

[183] Some older interpreters attempted to turn the verbs into the passive in order to avoid having the exiles as the implied subject, e.g. Alfred Bertholet, *Hesekiel* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1936), 14, but this has not gained lasting support. Wilson, "Ezekiel's Dumbness," 98, suggests understanding the verbs as being in the divine passive without changing the text, but this, too, has not gained favour. Greenberg, *Ezekiel 1*, 102, says that the verbs must be taken as third person plural actives, not as expressions of the passive.

Binding by others: Ezek 3:25

To take the question of the binding of the prophet by the exiles first, there is evidence in Jeremiah of prophets experiencing physical restrictions (e.g. Jeremiah banned from the temple complex, Jer 36:5,19; put in stocks and beaten, Jer 20:1-2; arrested and imprisoned, Jer 37-38; and certain prophets treated like madmen, Jer 29:26-28). Although Ezekiel is warned that his audience is rebellious, there is no evidence within this book of Ezekiel being literally tied with ropes or having any other physical restrictions imposed by those around him. This does not exclude the possibility of formal prohibitions on his public speech by an authority group, like the elders, or of more subtle psychological restrictions. In the absence of evidence of literal ropes or formal prohibitions, Calvin, Greenberg and Klein think that the opposition of the exiles effects psychological restrictions which are spoken metaphorically as ropes, an interpretation which is plausible but needs further examination.[184]

We do find some evidence of his compatriots demonstrating a patronising refusal to take his message seriously, regarding him merely as an entertaining teller of parables, or perhaps as one dealing in unreality (20:49; cf. 33:32). We do find statements that the attitude of the people affects Ezekiel's ability to bring answers to their inquiries of Yahweh (Ezek 14:3-6 and 20:30, where, instead of Ezekiel giving the expected prophetic answer, Yahweh himself confronts the elders with their need to repent; and 7:26 where the guilt of bloodshed, violence and arrogance leads to an inability of the people to find a vision from the prophet, instruction from the priest and counsel from the elders). Whether his portrayal of several messages primarily

---

[184] Calvin, *Ezekiel 1*, 105–6, thinks that the Israelites are not ready to be taught and that, if Ezekiel immediately carried out God's commands, rather than being quiet, they would become furious and bind him with ropes. In his view Ezekiel is to remain at home for a time, as if he were mute; the stubbornness of the people prevents him from carrying out his duties as effectively as if they had bound him with ropes. Greenberg, *Ezekiel 1*, 102, thinks, 'the public repulsion toward you is so great, it has as good as driven you off the streets and confined you to your quarters.'

through visual symbols is on account of any formal or informal restrictions on his speech in public spaces is not made explicit. The portrayal of Ezekiel being visited by the elders in his home, rather than in a public place (8:1 and probably in 14:1; 20:1) may simply be consistent with Ezekiel's own withdrawal in response to the command, or it may indicate some additional external pressures to keep him at bay. Whatever these 'ropes' are, it is clear that Ezekiel is not totally withdrawn and is not totally unknown as a prophet. If the people are applying them, they must know him well enough to want to restrict him. Then, there are leading people who come to him to listen to him (8:1; 14:1; 20:1; 33:30-33), so his reputation as one who speaks for Yahweh must be established. Any 'binding' by the people, therefore, is not complete.

The imagery of binding is used again in Ezek 7:23, where the enemy is urged to make a chain (הַרְתּוֹק, a hapax, usually taken as derivative of רָתַק, to bind), with the implication that there are preparations to take more people captive into exile.[185] This is consistent with the imagery of cords used in the Psalms as metaphors of submission and oppression (e.g. Pss. 2:3; 18:5,6; 116:3; 129:4; 119:61).[186] If the exiles are the ones doing the binding in Ezek 3:25, the very people who have so recently experienced being bound by the enemy in order to be taken into a foreign land will now, in turn, act like the enemy and put Ezekiel into some form of bondage. Ezekiel would therefore be placed in some kind of double captivity.

Speechlessness: Ezek 3:26

---

185 Block, *Ezekiel 1*, 263, dismisses the LXX's καὶ ποιήσουσι φυρμόν, meaning that they shall make or work 'uncleanness/confusion/disorder', as a misunderstanding of the MT, as well as attempts to emend the word to הַבָּתוֹק 'desolation.'

186 Zimmerli, *Ezekiel 1*, 160.

The most controversial issue concerns the second problem: the 'speechlessness' of Ezekiel. Is it literal or metaphoric? Does it last for seven years, or for a much shorter period close to the fall of Jerusalem? Is it continuous or intermittent? Is it a particular type of speech rather than all speech? In looking for answers to these questions, the evidence within the first 33 chapters shows the following:

1) Ezekiel presents many visually-rich sign acts: building model siege works (ch. 4); dividing his cut hair (ch.5); digging through a wall with packed belongings (ch.12); clapping hands and stamping feet (6:11 and 21:14); trembling as he eats food (12:17-18); setting his face toward the mountains of Israel (6:1-2), Jerusalem (21:2), Sidon (28:20-26), Pharaoh (29:1-20). Sometimes he is also told to give oral response to questions arising from these sign acts (e.g. 12:8-11; 21:7; 24:19-24), but at other times he interprets some signs without a recorded divine instruction (e.g. 12:19-20).

2) He uses his voice to groan before the people (21:6) and to lament (19:1-14; 27:1-36; 28:11-19; 32:2-16).

3) He often speaks allegorically rather than directly: the wood of the vine (15:1-8); unfaithful Jerusalem (16:1-63); two eagles and a vine (17:1-24); the cooking pot (24:3-14); Tyre as a boat (27:4-9); his talk is characterised by the exiles as speaking in allegories or parables (20:49).

4) He is not permitted to give answers to the inquiries of the elders (14:7,10; 20:3).

5) He is given specific divine instruction to speak (אמר or דבר) other messages of warning to the people: against a saying (12:28); to the deviant prophets (13:2f, 13:18f); to the elders and people (14:4,6 and 20:2f, 27f, 30f); to Jerusalem (16:3f; 21:9f); to the house of Israel (24:20; 33:2f,10f); and to foreign powers (25:3f; 27:3f;

28:22f; 29:3f; 30:2f; 31:2f; 32:19f). He is also to speak warnings to the mountains of Israel (6:3f), to the south (20:45f) and to the land (21:3f, 22:23). In addition, he is also told to speak some messages of hope in the midst of disaster (e.g. 11:16-21; 6:8-9).

In summary, the evidence points to a high level of visual communication, some use of the voice and some spoken messages whose style is frequently allegorical and whose content is heavily balanced towards judgment rather than hope; in addition, there is little evidence of Ezekiel's direct engagement with fellow exiles.

An examination of material in chs. 34-48 suggests the following changes:

1) There is no more mention of sign-acts;

2) There are no more commands to groan and lament;

3) There is further visionary material (chs.40-48), but no more allegories;

4) Inquiry of the Lord will be permitted once again (36:37);

5) His spoken messages are now dominated by hope (e.g. 36:8-15, 22-38; 37:1-28). This is shown also in warnings to those who mistreat his people: Mt Seir (35:2f) and Gog (chs.38-39), and the explanation for the disasters experienced by his people (e.g. 36:16-21). The criticism of bad leaders (ch.34) comes with assurance that the Lord will search for his people and be the ideal shepherd.

Most solutions regarding the 'speechlessness' fall within the following four positions: 1) that the speechlessness is literal but it is of a much shorter duration, assuming that 3:22-27 is displaced; 2) that it is literal but intermittent; 3) that it is metaphoric and intermittent; 4) that it is metaphoric, and refers to a particular type of speech rather than all speech, and lasts from the period of the call till the fall of Jerusalem.[187]

---

[187] Davis, *Swallowing the Scroll*, 50, argues for something quite different: 'Ezekiel's dumbness is a metaphor for the move towards textualization of Israel's sacred traditions.' She points to the way in

1) Those who take the speechlessness to be literal, as an attack of aphasia, are inclined to dwell on the supposed abnormalities of Ezekiel's personality, suggesting that Ezekiel suffers from a psychiatric or psychological disorder such as catalepsy, katatonic schizophrenia, paranoid schizophrenia, epilepsy, hallucinosis, neurosis or hysteria.[188] Halperin imaginatively describes the cause of the dumbness as 'his desperate yet indispensable device for coping with a painful and deep-rooted conflict' with his mother![189] Finding indications of a vulnerable temperament, several authors suggest that the onset of speechlessness is caused by the trauma of his wife's death.[190] The loss of speech would then be regarded as a sign to the exiles of the speechless shock they would feel at the news of Jerusalem's destruction (24:15-27).[191] Glazov, however, has raised a sensible objection that the command in 24:17 for Ezekiel not to cry out loudly would not be necessary if he was actually struck dumb.[192] Lindblom thinks it results from inner tension prior to the arrival of the message regarding the fall of Jerusalem.[193] All of these theories of literal, physical speechlessness require a much shorter speechless period, and assume the

---

which the ingested word in Jeremiah eventually passes out into a scroll, a form hitherto unknown in prophecy, and cites this as important evidence that prophetic speech was coming to be associated with a tradition of fixed words. However, as Joyce, "Review of Davis," 170, points out, her case is somewhat overstated and does not give sufficient acknowledgement to the evidence with the book for oral delivery.

[188] Block, *Ezekiel 1*, 154, writes that A. Klostermann, "Ezechiel: Ein Beitrag zu besser Würdigung seiner Person und seiner Schrift," *Theologische Studien und Kritiken* 50 (1877): 391–439, was a pioneer in opening up such diagnoses by taking a psychoanalytical approach. Broome, "Ezekiel's Abnormal Personality", suggests paranoid schizophrenia. Bernhard Lang, *Ezechiel: Der Prophet und das Buch* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1981), continues to regard Ezekiel as ill.

[189] Halperin, *Seeking Ezekiel*, 215.

[190] E.g. Blenkinsopp, *Ezekiel*, 32.

[191] Carley, *Ezekiel Among the Prophets*, 28,72, also thinks that the periods of dumbness and immobility, as well as the prostrations before the divine glory and his sitting 'overwhelmed' among the exiles are significant indications of Ezekiel's character and temperament.

[192] Glazov, *Bridling*, 50.

[193] Lindblom, *Prophecy*, 198–9. He links this with long periods of neurotic paralysis portrayed in 4:4ff and thinks Ezekiel is subject to a range of abnormalities.

displacement of 3:22-27.[194] Still considering temperamental weaknesses, others think that the stress of Ezekiel's ministry, more generally, is responsible for his loss of speech.[195]

More general psychological studies of those, including mediums and shamans, who have a call experience in solitude and exhibit special sensitivity and creative insight, show that such people usually are unusual individualists. Buss claims that many of these people suffer from various abnormalities, but he stops short of claiming that all do.[196] Another psychologist, Westcott, argues that those who are especially successful in intuition—that is, in making correct judgments on the basis of a limited amount of explicit data—are relatively 'unconventional and comfortable in their unconventionality.'[197] While Ezekiel's 'speechlessness' may represent something unusual and unconventional, it does not necessarily require an interpretation of psychological illness.

Mental illness is not established alone by the presence of some unusual behaviours; otherwise, the presence of some strange or even bizarre behaviours in many of the OT prophets would require a blanket labelling of them all as sick as well as a radical elimination of all motivations and explanations portrayed in the texts.[198] In fact,

---

[194] Greenberg, *Ezekiel 1*, 120, mentions that Fohrer, Zimmerli and Wevers also view the period of dumbness as being immediately prior to the fall, connecting it with the constraint of mourning imposed on the prophet in 24:17.

[195] Clements, *Ezekiel*, 19, thinks that because Ezekiel's task is very stressful and debilitating, and there are signs that his personality is vulnerable and easily overstrained, he suffers at times from severe nervous and physical disabilities, including temporary paralysis and dumbness.

[196] Martin J. Buss, "An Anthropological Perspective Upon Prophetic Call Narratives," *Semeia* 21 (1982): 14-15.

[197] Malcolm R. Westcott, *Toward a Contemporary Psychology of Intuition* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1968), 141.

[198] Duguid, *Ezekiel*, 81, goes further and thinks that those who argue for Ezekiel being a sufferer from dangerous psychoses 'tie him up with ropes, (or) at least place a straitjacket on him' and makes the point that the idea of giving oneself over completely to become God's slave will inevitably seem nonsensical or abhorrent, a sign of certain mental disorder, to those without a relationship with the living God.

there are many who doubt the validity of attributing personality disturbances to Ezekiel, either because of the difficulties in posthumous diagnosis or because this kind of sickness would be inconsistent with the spiritual and intellectual elevation of the man portrayed by the rest of the book.[199] The burden of proof would surely be on those who claim mental illness, to demonstrate concomitant distortions in thought patterns and reality perception throughout the book, rather than just relying on a few unusual experiences. Considering that the man portrayed in this book has long been thought to express faith in difficult times with coherence and long-term reality perception, leading to the book's canonisation, such a claim would be difficult to sustain. More importantly, the text does not attribute the speech loss to any kind of inherent weakness but to divine appointment.[200]

2) Of those who maintain the second position, that the speechlessness is literal and intermittent, Sherlock argues it is only broken whenever Yahweh grants permission to speak. He notes the change in style as well as in content after the fall.[201]

3) Recent authors are more inclined to support a metaphoric reading. For example, Block demonstrates that the expression 'to have one's tongue stick to one's palate' does not necessarily describe a physiological condition, but can also denote voluntary speechlessness (e.g. Job 29:10). He cites various passages showing a diversity of implications, like where a physical condition is implied (Ps 22:16[15]; Lam 4:4; Ex 4:11), where either literal dumbness or a vow of speechlessness may be meant (Ps 137:6), where the niphal describes speechlessness in the face of an immediate circumstance (Isa 53:7; Ps 31:19[18]; 38:14-17[13-16]; 39:3-4,10[2-3,9]; Dan 10:15), or where there is an inability to speak up in court due to being poor or

---

199 E.g. Cooke, *Ezekiel*, 47, who objects on both grounds.

200 Wright, *Ezekiel*, 70.

201 Charles Sherlock, "Ezekiel's Dumbness," *ExpT* 94, no. 10 (1983): 298.

afflicted (Prov 31:8).[202] In his view, the 'opening of Ezekiel's mouth' (3:27 and later in 24:27; 33:22) need not necessarily refer to the reversal of a physical malady but to the commencement of speaking.[203] Others who are also persuaded that the speechlessness is metaphoric include Cooke, Wright, Craigie *et al.*, Friebel, and Taylor.[204] Since allegory or parable is a frequent mode of expression in this book, an allegorical or metaphorical meaning would not be incompatible with the style of the book. However, since the speechlessness is to be a 'sign' to the people, presumably of something else (24:27), its presence and change must somehow be openly recognisable.

Regarding the time period of the restriction, Klein and Allen both take the 'when' in 3:27 as the frequentative 'whenever' to indicate that the speechlessness is suspended periodically for limited periods in order that Ezekiel can deliver oracles of judgment.[205] However, Greenberg insists that, however one understands the dumbness, it must represent a period that lasts without interruption from its inception to the prophet's release.[206] This must be examined again, in the light of other evidence.

---

[202] Block, *Ezekiel 1*, 155-6. He also suggests that further work in Akkadian influences may shed some light on this, referring (p.159) to work done by S.P. Garfinkel, *Studies in Akkadian Influences in the Book of Ezekiel.* (Ann Arbor: University Microfilms, 1983), 155–62, indicating that there are many examples of phrases used in this part of Ezekiel that are also used in Akkadian medical incantation texts, including tying/binding hands, feet, limbs (with ropes) and tongue.

[203] Block, *Ezekiel 1*, 156, summarises: 'In other words, Ezekiel's verbal *and* nonverbal behaviour is to be governed completely by the divine will.'

[204] Cooke, *Ezekiel*, 48 Wright, *Ezekiel*, 72, writes, 'Although this was not total dumbness in a physiological sense, it was a total dumbness in the social sense.' Craigie, Kelley, and Drinkard, *Jeremiah 1–25*, 26, comments that, as a servant of God told not to speak, that command would be as restricting as ropes tying him to a chair in his kitchen. K.G. Friebel, "Jeremiah's and Ezekiel's Sign-Acts: Their Meaning and Function as Non-Verbal Communication and Rhetoric," Ph.D. diss. (Madison: University of Wisconsin, 1989), 448, interprets it as 'a stylistic way of stating that the divine ability was given to Ezekiel to fulfill this difficult nonverbal behaviour over the required extended period of time.' Taylor, *Ezekiel*, 174, understands it as a ritualistic dumbness, or a divinely commanded refusal to make public utterances except under the direct impulse of God's word.

[205] Ralph Klein, *Ezekiel: The Prophet and His Message*, Studies on Personalities of the Old Testament (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1988), 39, and Leslie Allen, *Ezekiel 1*, 63.

[206] Moshe Greenberg, "On Ezekiel's Dumbness," *JBL* 77, no. 2 (1958): 102.

Of those who suggest psychological causes for the speechlessness, Tcacik regards Ezekiel as a prisoner of discouragement, from which he is freed only by a special communication from God.[207] Greenberg also connects it with the prophet's experience of rejection, and goes on to conclude that, in line with later Mishnaic Hebrew usage, the 'opening of his mouth' can refer to 'an occasion for complaint, a pretext for accusation.' The inference here would be that in the period of waiting, before the fall of Jerusalem, Ezekiel feels that he is deprived of such a claim. It is the incredulous, hostile attitude of the people that closes his mouth; in this time he loses the capacity for normal human contact (cf. parallels in Jer 15:17; 16:1) and feels particularly powerless to express himself to the people concerning their misdeeds, and so to act as a reprover.[208] However, this view is problematic in the light of Yahweh's prohibition of fear (2:6), because it requires Yahweh imposing something that goes against his own commands.

4) The fourth possibility is that it is a specific type of speech that is restricted. This cannot be simply 'promise' speech, as the division between judgment speech (first part) and promise speech (second part) is not clear-cut. Although the promise of restoration for the exiles in the first part is linked with condemnation for the Jerusalemites (ch.11), and the judgment on Israel's leaders (ch. 34) at the commencement of the second part lends hope for oppressed people, Renz sees the change better represented as 1) dissociating the people from the past and 2) associating them with Yahweh's purpose for the future.[209]

Robert Wilson proposes a solution of restricted speech that is dependent on the meaning of אִישׁ מוֹכִיחַ (v.26). He argues for the meaning of 'intercessor' rather than

---

207 Tkacik, "Ezekiel," 350.

208 Greenberg, *Ezekiel 1*, 121.

209 Renz, *Rhetorical Function*, 156.

'reprover' or 'one who chides'.[210] In taking this as the primary clue for interpreting the dumbness, he concludes that Ezekiel, like Jeremiah (Jer 15:1) is not permitted to intercede for the people. The time is too late for that, the divine decision is made; he is simply to announce coming judgment. Wilson builds on the observation that the language in the first watchman image is not consistently military, but describes a prophetic role of delivering a legal decision which Yahweh has already given.[211] Wright argues similarly that אִישׁ מוֹכִיחַ means 'to be a man of litigation' and most commonly implies one who rebukes or reproves, but gives evidence to show that he can be a neutral arbitrator or mediator in a dispute, or one who stands up to defend the victim of injustice (e.g. Job 9:33; 13:3,15; 16:21; 1 Chron 12:18; Amos 5:10). Similarly to Wilson, he thinks that Ezekiel's speechlessness is that he is not to carry the people's complaints to God and come back with an answer. His silence would then be a sign of the silence of God in response to their pleas for his intervention on their behalf.[212]

Renz sees two major problems with Wilson's view. First, he thinks that the root יכח seems to refer more specifically to arbitration by means of criticising, warning or calling to account, rather than carrying the sense of intercession. Second, he thinks that this view could describe Ezekiel's ministry in relation to the Jerusalemites, but not to the exiles.[213] Bovati acknowledges a wide range of meanings for יכח and concludes that the subject 'is to some extent a censor: he criticises, warns, calls to account, intervenes in order to establish justice.'[214] He sees an ethical and sapiential nuance, rather like the role of a father in a family, where the goal is the amendment

---

210 Wilson, "Ezekiel's Dumbness," 98.

211 Wilson, "Ezekiel's Dumbness," 96.

212 Wright, *Ezekiel*, 73.

213 Renz, *Rhetorical Function*, 158.

214 Pietro Bovati, *Re-Establishing Justice: Legal Terms, Concepts and Procedures in the Hebrew Bible*, trans. Michael J. Smith (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1994), 44–48; Bovati, *Re-Establishing Justice*, 44.

of the adversary, motivated by love. Bovati's study does not seem, to me, to exclude the possibility of an intercessory role, since an intercessor necessarily recognises a breach of justice and seeks to address it through the highest court, the divine one, in order to seek an amendment of those he loves who have breached justice. Nor does Renz's criticism that Wilson's proposal could not apply to Ezekiel's ministry among the exiles necessarily hold, for the book does portray some change in Ezekiel's ministry to them.

Glazov provides a more nuanced and integrated solution that both critiques and builds on aspects of Wilson's proposal.[215] Rather than focusing on the separateness of the 3:22-27 passage, he sees links with the silencing effect that swallowing the scroll (opening his mouth to its message of lamentation) has on Ezekiel earlier in this chapter (3:14-15) when Ezekiel returns to the exiles in bitterness, and sits among them stunned for seven days. He sees this effect as identifying with the people who will have to drink the bitter cup of the Lord's fiery wrath (e.g. Ezek 6:12; 7:8; 9:8; 14:19; 16:42; 20:8; 22:22). Drawing on Grüber's study of the metaphoric possibilities for 'I will make your tongue cling to the roof of your mouth' (3:26) he suggests that it refers to a dry throat caused by grief or depression, in this case meaning that Ezekiel would himself feel the grief and anguish that would come to his people.[216] Glazov accepts Wilson's explanation that the אִישׁ מוֹכִיחַ is here an intercessor, understanding it to mean 'an advocate-like person whose duty it was to rebuke not just one party in a dispute but the other as well', implying that God can also be rebuked.[217] However, he does not accept that eating the scroll and the role of אִישׁ מוֹכִיחַ are entirely restricted to intercession, but can also include rebuking. Obedience to the divine command is crucial, and by bearing the grief of judgment

---

215 Glazov, *Bridling*, 236–74.

216 Mayer I. Grüber, "Hebrew *Da'abon Nepes* 'Dryness of Throat': From Symptom to Literary Convention," *VT* 37 (1987): 365–69. Glazov, *Bridling*, 256.

217 Glazov, *Bridling*, 272.

due to sin without loud objection, in silence he is showing compliance with Yahweh's decisions (cf. 24:17 where he is to cry in silence over the loss of his wife). Glazov further argues that Yahweh is putting onto Ezekiel the penalty of a negligent watchman in this period, until he is liberated and vindicated as being faithful.

In summary, all of the problematic aspects of this passage need to have a solution which is integrated and fits the portrayal of the book. Taking the ropes and the speechlessness to be metaphoric, and the role of אִישׁ מוֹכִיחַ to be an intercessor, I take the period of speechlessness to be from the call until the release when Jerusalem falls. There is sufficient change evidenced in the book to justify seeing a significant shift in Ezekiel's public role at this time.

Although the lifting of the speechlessness is declared, there is no mention of release from the concomitant restrictions. However, the role of intercessor in relation to judgment on Jerusalem is no longer relevant, and the role of place seems to lose its importance. Whereas Ezekiel's location is mentioned a few times in the first half (e.g. by the river Chebar 1:1; in his house 8:1), it does not seem to be noteworthy in the second half and is, significantly, not mentioned at the beginning of the temple vision; here the place described in the vision is of more significance that the place where he lives and acts.

If the ropes are metaphoric and applied by the exiles, they cannot simply be the inducement of fear in Ezekiel, or Yahweh would not reinforce it. The evidence in the book suggests two possibilities: 1) some kind of restriction on Ezekiel's direct, public speech, leading him to use many sign-acts and allegories in his communication, and 2) an attitude problem (idols in their hearts, according to 14:3) that restricts Ezekiel's role in bringing their inquiries to Yahweh. In fact, it is likely that their attitude problem is responsible for creating restrictions on Ezekiel's public

speech. Whether there is any formal restriction by the elders or not cannot be determined.

I accept Glazov's metaphorical interpretation of the parched mouth referring to Ezekiel's grief. He does still bring messages of judgment (and the hope expressed in 11:16-20 comes in the context of a rebuke to those who smugly sit in Jerusalem), despite the restrictions of the 'ropes'. However, his freedom of speech is also severely affected by the grief that he bears on account of the coming judgment. This 'internal' restriction (i.e., from Yahweh) is sufficiently noticeable for others to see, even in retrospect, as a 'sign'. His role as intercessor is disabled. He cannot hope to change the mind of Yahweh, as Moses did (e.g. Ex 32:11-14) and he cannot bring inquiries from the people. Altogether, Ezekiel is more bound and more withdrawn than the other exiles—he is in a kind of double-exile. Although he is not permitted to express intercession through speech, he does stand between the people and Yahweh to the extent that he bears the sufferings of his people and acts as a sign of Yahweh's silence and anger to the people.

Once the judgment is completed, Ezekiel is vindicated, his speech is free and ceases to employ sign acts or allegory. The possibility of inquiry of the Lord becoming open is expressed (36:37), although there is no evidence of it in the second half of the book, and hope for the restoration of his people comes through more clearly.

2.3 COMPARISON OF CALL MATERIAL IN JEREMIAH AND

EZEKIEL

These two prophetic call passages show very obvious differences in length and style, although both accounts are presented as recollected, unexpected encounters between an individual and the initiative-taking divine presence, issuing in a call to go out as Yahweh's messenger. Jeremiah's account is written as a compact, verbally precise, intimate yet robust dialogue; Ezekiel's is presented as an extended theatrical drama, where imprecision and verbosity evoke notions of unfathomable divinity and Ezekiel is the overwhelmed audience. Comparing these narratives point for point is difficult. However, I will compare aspects that are of particular relevance for a study of prophetic ministry. These include setting, revelation of and interaction with Yahweh, together with the response and role of each prophet.

Introductions

The book of Jeremiah is introduced as 'the words of Jeremiah' (Jer 1:1) whereas the book of Ezekiel begins with 'and it happened' (ויהי); Ezekiel is introduced seeing visions of God (Ezek 1:1). These summaries encapsulate the core feature of each prophetic ministry, and point to the most obvious differences in their call narratives throughout the remainder of each book. In my view, Conrad is right in maintaining that the superscriptions suggest what is distinctive about each book, as a code to how each should be read, pointing to 'a different way of "seeing" the דבר of Yahweh'. This means that Ezekiel should not be read in the same way as Jeremiah (as a scroll concerning the words of Ezekiel) but as a narrative sequence about what happened to Ezekiel.[218]

Settings

---

218 Conrad, *Reading the Latter Prophets*, 86, 163.

Both call narratives commence with an identification of date. Jeremiah is dated, as is customary, from the commencement of a king's rule; Ezekiel takes his date, unusually, from the commencement of his king's exile, very likely considering that event of greater significance than an enthronement. Both narratives also identify the geographical setting. The difference between a call while still in Judah, with Jerusalem and temple intact, and a call after forcible removal from the homeland, especially where that has been given unusual prominence in the dating, has many implications for the prophets' ministries. This means that each prophet emerges from and will speak to people in different religious contexts. The exile brings a rupture in the perception of Yahweh's proximity and relationship to his people.

Priestly backgrounds

Both books place these prophets in named, priestly families, although Jeremiah's line has not been part of the Jerusalem temple operations. In addition, Ezekiel is referred to as a priest (Ezek 1:3) while Jeremiah is not. Jeremiah's call does not connect him with the functioning Jerusalem priesthood, but the language of prior consecration (הִקְדַּשְׁתִּיךָ, Jer 1:5) is reminiscent of priestly consecration (e.g. Ex 28:3). Ezekiel is given no explicit reference to prior divine election. However, Ezekiel's call 'in the thirtieth year' hints at some degree of overlap between his anticipated priestly appointment at age 30 and his new prophetic calling, in a context where temple worship and its associated priesthood cannot function. For both, this remembered call goes beyond any priestly role to which they are born; it is now portrayed as an experienced call, when each can understand and respond; it is personalised and specific.

Priestly ministry, as opposed to prophetic ministry, is associated with place, order and cultic worship. Whereas Jeremiah makes no comment about the specific place where he experiences his call, Ezekiel does. Whereas Jeremiah's call account stands

alone, Ezekiel's forms an integral part of the unusually ordered structure of the book. Whereas Jeremiah's account is presented as a private conversation, Ezekiel's has theatrical qualities befitting cultic worship on a grand scale. Already the scene is set for Ezekiel's ministry to differ from Jeremiah's in having some priestly qualities.

Portrayal of Yahweh

To Jeremiah, Yahweh is the one who is known here primarily through his personal word (דבר,1:4). Yahweh's prior actions, only revealed now through his speaking, have been in forming (יצר), knowing (ידע), consecrating (הקדשׁ) and appointing (נתן) (1:5). He tells Jeremiah that he is now sending (שׁלח) (1:7), commanding (צוה) (1:7) and appointing (פקד) (1:10). His future actions are also birthed in his word: his calling (קרא) of northern tribes (1:14), his pronouncement of judgments (דבר משׁפט) (1:16) and his deliverance of Jeremiah (נצל) (1:8,17-19). There is no visionary portrayal of Yahweh acting, apart from one act of divine touch imparting Yahweh's word to Jeremiah's mouth. Any visionary components in the book are simple and static (vv.11-13), and act as mere catalysts for Yahweh's word to be given, and stress the coming fulfilment of that word (vv.12, 14-16).

To Ezekiel, Yahweh is known here, and later recognised, primarily through the presence of his glory (כבוד, 1:28; 3:23, picked up again later in10:4; 31:18; 43:2). The divine hand (1:3 and later in 3:22) introduces Ezekiel to this realm (it is 'on him'); but the presence of the divine person is only revealed after seeing an approaching stormcloud, and at the end of a lengthy procession of strange, lesser beings who are more unlike than like elements in Ezekiel's world. The fire and lightning in the midst of these creatures accentuates their untouchability by a mere human. A vast distance stands between the onlooker and the throned personage. The divine portrayal is elaborately visual, with colour, movement and direction, and is accompanied by thunderous sound. The portrayal is of one enthroned in brilliant,

fiery glory (Ezek 1:28; 3:12; 3:23), yet somewhat resembling a human, supported by all-seeing, Spirit-propelled, multi-faceted, multi-winged, multi-wheeled creatures. Much is revealed through nouns and adjectives; many of Yahweh's actions are conveyed visually. Yet these 'visions of God' remain shrouded in mystery. The divine voice (קוֹל, not דבר) does speak, but not to invite response. Even when there is no movement, when the divine glory simply 'stands' (עמד) the effect is overwhelming (3:23). Yahweh's Spirit acts to set Ezekiel on his feet (2:2) and to lift him up and carry him away (3:12); his hand extends (שׁלח) the written scroll for Ezekiel to eat (2:10-3:2) but does not touch Ezekiel himself. In the space between the divine hand and Ezekiel stand written words of 'lamentation and mourning and woe'. The distance is emphasised by the medium (writing) and the content (emotions of alienation), as well as by the dominance of visual actions over speech. Yet Yahweh does speak, accentuating his authority by the use of the double title 'Lord Yahweh' (אדני יהוה) in Ezek 2:4; 3:11,27 (this becomes a dominant apellation in this book).

To Jeremiah, Yahweh is presented as a conversation partner, albeit the one who initiates and carries authority. He allows, and it seems, welcomes, free dialogue; he addresses Jeremiah by name (1:11, also later in 24:3), he listens carefully to Jeremiah's concerns (1:6) and answers them point for point, not once, but five times. Yahweh is the one who has had intimate knowledge of Jeremiah from his beginning (1:5), but through his personal conversation and unveiling of divine purposes also invites Jeremiah to know him in a close relationship. His ultimate promise to Jeremiah is relational: he will be 'with' him (1:8,19); his ultimate warning to Jeremiah is shame before his peers: Yahweh will 'break' Jeremiah before the people (1:17) if he breaks down before them.

To Ezekiel, Yahweh is more distant. He addresses Ezekiel by the impersonal 'son of man' (2:1,3,6,8; 3:1,3,4,10,17,25) and stresses the importance of his words over the words of others (2:7; 3:4,11,17,27). Through speech he declares that he sends (שׁלח, 2:3,4; 3:5,6), makes/appoints (נתן, 3:9,17), requires (בקשׁ piel, 3:20), makes speechless (אלם niphal, 3:26) and opens (פתח) the mouth. But Yahweh does not invite personal dialogue, or, at least, Ezekiel does not feel able to engage in dialogue. As in the case of Jeremiah, Yahweh promises protection for the one he sends (3:9) and eventual vindication (2:5). Yahweh's ultimate warning is 'death' if Ezekiel fails to give warning (3:17).

Response of the prophet

Jeremiah's first response to the word-dominated revelation of Yahweh is with words: words of protest (1:6), suggesting sufficient ease to be spontaneous and candid, rather than guardedly deferential. Jeremiah's replies to the divine questions in 1:11,13 are straightforward and uncomplicated. The scene portrays Yahweh and prophet in reciprocal, free conversation, as two people in close relational proximity. No language of emotion is used of Jeremiah here, beyond his protest. Physical proximity is also suggested by the medium of speech (Jeremiah and Yahweh are within conversational distance), and by the touch on Jeremiah's mouth (Jeremiah is close enough to receive it). Yet, within this easy interchange, Jeremiah gives way to Yahweh's superiority, using the double title 'Lord Yahweh' (אדני יהוה) in Jer 1:6.

By contrast, Ezekiel is overwhelmed in the divine presence, falling prostrate before Yahweh (1:28; 3:23); he makes no spoken reply at all within the call scenes, raises no spoken objections, and is still silent for seven days afterwards (3:15). His emotion of 'bitterness' (3:14) may reflect the emotional content of the scroll (2:10), although the same words are not used.[219] Ezekiel's reception of the divine word

---

[219] Similar emotion is expressed in Jer 15:17.

implies greater distance than does Jeremiah's reception, and takes a longer time, requiring not only listening but the delays of reading, taking, eating and digesting.[220] Ezekiel acts the part of an obedient, unquestioning, servant messenger receiving a prewritten message from an exalted, fiery king, thus responding to the divine being from a position of greater deference.

I suggest that the differences between the two portrayals of Yahweh and between the responses of each prophet may relate to the difference in contexts. Jeremiah and his people assume that Yahweh is near: his presence is evidenced in land and temple. Ezekiel and his people may well conceive Yahweh as being far away: his land and temple are now distant, and the exiles have been cast away from his presence.

The prophetic role

Jeremiah is appointed (נתן) to be a prophet (נביא) (Jer 1:5); Ezekiel is, however, appointed (נתן) to be a watchman (צפה) (Ezek 3:17). Ezekiel is also given an indirect affirmation that others will recognise that a נביא has been among them through his message (Ezek 2:5). Both are called to speak words from Yahweh (Jer 1:7; Ezek 3:4), and both internalise the word of Yahweh (Jer 1:9; Ezek 3:3). However, Ezekiel's role explicitly calls him not only to speak but also to look out for a coming enemy. Jeremiah must look carefully at neutral objects (Jer 1:11,13) as a prelude to hearing, but this is not looking out for a threat; Yahweh watches (שׁקד) over his word to do it, but the term צפה does not appear.[221] Ezekiel's 'watchman' role, with its sense of being set apart to see beyond what others can see and to give warning, requires him to distance himself from the people, for their sake.

---

220 Although Jeremiah is later represented as having eaten the word (Jer 15:16) the process is not elaborated as here.

221 The concept of watchman occurs in Jeremiah (Jer 6:17) together with the idea of Yahweh putting stumbling blocks in the way (Jer 6:21, cf. Ezek 3:20), but the image is not developed, and relates more to Yahweh's benevolence than to a prophet's call.

Although both prophets are called and sent out to speak the words of Yahweh, there is no restriction placed on Jeremiah's speech here, but there is a severe restriction placed on Ezekiel: he is also called to speechlessness until Yahweh releases him (Ezek 3:24-27). This, too, puts him at a distance from those to whom he would wish to speak.

Jeremiah's appointment is to the nations (Jer 1:5,10), but Ezekiel's audience is to be the house of Israel (Ezek 3:5,16), which is somewhat surprising considering that Jeremiah is located in Judah (Jer 1:2-3) and Ezekiel is on foreign soil (Ezek 1:1). The setting of Jeremiah implies that the people are settled (under a succession of their own kings); this appointment alerts the prophet (and the reader) to Jeremiah's otherwise unexpected involvement in international affairs. There may be a hint here that Jeremiah's message will address a people whose attitude is complacent and inward-looking, with a limited, domesticated perception of Yahweh—a people who will need to enlarge their understanding of the scope of their God's interest to include the international scene. Ezekiel's setting indicates that his message will come at a time when his people are very conscious of foreign power through their captivity; their own identity as a people has been severely shaken. Now is the time to turn their attention away from the wider world (particularly their captors) to reconnect with their God and their roots and to prepare for the re-establishment and strengthening of their own people.

Jeremiah's task 'over nations and kingdoms' is further elaborated through a series of six key verbs: נתש (pluck up), נתץ (pull down), אבד (destroy), הרס (overthrow), בנה (build), and נטע (plant) (Jer 1:10). None of these occurs in Ezekiel's call. They emphasise the catalytic role which Jeremiah is to have in both destruction (probably first and longest) and building, in relation to international affairs. The word of warning which Jeremiah is to bring is summarised in Jer 1:14-16. It is one of coming

'disaster' (רעה, v.14, a word which reappears throughout this book but is used seldom in Ezekiel). It threatens foreign intrusion. It will come on account of the people's 'wickedness' (רעה, v.16), which is explicitly identified as idolatry (v.16). Ezekiel's word of warning is different: that the wicked (רשע, Ezek 3:18,19) who refuse to heed the watchman's warning and 'turn' (שוב, v.19) will 'die'(vv.18-20), whereas the righteous (צדיק, vv.20,21) who take warning will 'live' (v.21). Ezekiel is given no mandate to destroy; the consequences of life and death are not imposed by him—he stands apart from the people and the threat merely to bring warning. There is a suggestion that Jeremiah's role will have him closely identify with Yahweh (a suggestion that is developed in Jer 18) and that Ezekiel's will be to stand apart from Yahweh and apart from the people.

The fact that both prophets are commanded not to fear (Jer 1:8,17; Ezek 2:6; 3:9) implies that their work will be difficult and conflictual (pictured through briers, thorns and scorpions in Ezek 2:6). Jeremiah will have active opposition from people at every level of the land (Jer 1:18,19); Ezekiel's audience is frequently characterised as 'rebellious'(מרי, Ezek 3:9,26,27; מרד, 3:3) and he is told not to be afraid of their words or dismayed by their looks (Ezek 2:6; 3:9). Jeremiah needs to be hardened to stand against the people (Jer 1:18); Ezekiel's people are 'impudent and stubborn' (Ezek 2:4) with 'a hard forehead and a stubborn heart' (Ezek 3:7) that needs to be countered by a hardening of the prophet (Ezek 3:8). Ezekiel is further told that he must speak 'whether they hear or refuse to hear' (Ezek 2:5,7; 3:11) and warned that they 'will not listen' (Ezek 3:7) because they will not listen to Yahweh (Ezek 3:7). To enable them to do their work, each prophet is given appointment (Jer 1:5,10; Ezek 3:17), words (e.g. Jer 1:9; Ezek 2:8,9) and protection (Jer 1:18; Ezek 3:8). Jeremiah is also assured of Yahweh's presence (Jer 1:8).

Conclusion

The two encounters portrayed here are initiated by Yahweh. Each new prophet is called and sent to bring messages from Yahweh, equipped by Yahweh. However, the details of these call accounts and the specific nature of what each prophet is called to do are quite dissimilar.

The obvious differences between the dominance of 'the word' in Jeremiah and 'visions' in Ezekiel, and between a setting in Israel and a setting in exile, are not disconnected from other differences in the call narratives, as Yahweh is thought to be near his people in Israel, but distant from the people in exile. Jeremiah's candid verbal responses to the divine but intimate conversation-partner stand against Ezekiel's overwhelmed and silent responses to a distant, divine king made known through fire and glory. The more intimate tone of Jeremiah's encounter with the divine, and the dominance of 'the word', a more personal medium than a grand visual display, fit the former perception of Yahweh's presence. The slow lead in to the divine, theatrical display and the greater relational distance between Ezekiel and Yahweh may be more fitting for the mindset of a people in exile who are acutely aware of their physical distance from Jerusalem, and sense of distance from Yahweh. Jeremiah's role appears to have a closer association with Yahweh with no restrictions on speech to the people and have few priestly overtones; Ezekiel's will place him at greater distance from both Yahweh and the people, have restrictions on his speech and have priestly elements. Jeremiah is to work, surprisingly, in an international arena from within his own people; Ezekiel is to strengthen the security and identity of his own community.

The outworking of each prophetic ministry is further illustrated by some key metaphors, drawn from the realm of everyday work, which I compare in the next chapter.

CHAPTER THREE
WORKER IMAGES OF PROPHETIC MINISTRY: ASSAYER, POTTER AND WATCHMAN

Both Jeremiah and Ezekiel are called to fulfill functions that are imaged as well-known worker occupations: assayer and watchman. In addition, Jeremiah's prophetic ministry is closely linked with another worker image that is applied to Yahweh: that of the potter. These are not merely occasional roles, but provide further elaboration concerning the outworking of the prophetic ministries. Although Ezekiel's initial call to be a watchman is introduced in my previous chapter, the development of that image is addressed in this chapter.

These images suggest more than literal, non-metaphorical speech will allow. 'The metaphor is the hinge between multiple lines of associations and manifold worlds of meaning.'[222] This capacity for multivalence in meaning can also permit mixing and permutation of metaphors, and can hold ambiguities.[223] Therefore it is necessary to probe any meanings, even if they appear surprising, that occur within the text as interpretations or developments of the image. Each of these images does, in fact, undergo some development, either within the same passage (the potter), in a second block of material (the watchman) or in fragments (the assayer's fire).

---

[222] William P. Brown, *Seeing the Psalms: A Theology of Metaphor* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2002), 8.

[223] David H. Aaron, *Biblical Ambiguities: Metaphor, Semantics and Divine Imagery* (Leiden: Brill, 2001), 1, writes, 'Most figurative, rhetorical devices thrive on ambiguity.'

3.1.1 JEREMIAH AS ASSAYER: Jeremiah 6:27-30

Many scholars have pointed out that the image of assayer given to Jeremiah for his prophetic ministry in Jer 6:27-30 stands at the conclusion of the first major section of the book, and functions as an *inclusio* with his call, described in Jer 1:4-19.[224] This parallels the function of the image of watchman in Ezek 3:17 which also stands at the conclusion of the first section (the call narrative) in that book. Whereas in Ezekiel the watchman image is further developed in one extended block (Ezek 33:1-20), in Jeremiah the assayer image is alluded to in several briefer and more indirect references, as is more typical in Jeremiah, yet is, in my view, an important motif in the outworking of what prophetic vocation means for Jeremiah.[225] I depart from the NRSV in using 'assayer' rather than 'tester' because 'assayer' preserves the reference to metal processing.

Textual notes

In this very compact section there are a number of words whose meanings are unusually difficult and are relevant for its interpretation and implications for prophetic ministry.

---

[224] Holladay, *Jeremiah 1*, 229, thinks this passage 'may offer an inclusio to "a prophet to the nations I have appointed you."' Walter Brueggemann, *A Commentary on Jeremiah: Exile and Homecoming* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 75, sees this as a personal word to Jeremiah concerning his vocation, as the end of an extended rhetorical unit. Thompson, *Jeremiah*, 266 writes, 'this brief oracle appears to be a deliberate epilogue to chs. 1-6.' *Louis Stulman, Jeremiah* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 2005), 80–81, sees these verses as the conclusion to the first major literary unit of chs. 2-6, with the call as a subtext to this passage. He considers that Jer 1:4-19 and Jer 6:27-30 together 'create an envelope-structure or thematic inclusion that holds together the first literary unit.' A.J.O. Van der Wal, "Toward a Synchronic Analysis of the Masoretic Text of the Book of Jeremiah," in *The Book of Jeremiah*, ed. Martin Kessler (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2004), 20 observes that chapters 1-6, 7-15 and 16-23, all begin with a prophetic narrative and end with a personal section. He writes, 'Jer 1-6 functions as a thematic cluster in which themes are introduced that are developed and expanded in subsequent chapters.' He also expresses the view that Jer 1:17-19 and 6:27-30 form an *inclusio*. Gunther Wanke, *Jeremia, 1–25,14* (Zürich: Theologischer Verlag Zürich, 1995), 86, also sees this section as belonging to the call narrative in ch.1 and together forming a frame around chs 2-6.

[225] Leslie C. Allen, *Jeremiah*, 91, relates this role to that of an inspector in Jer 5:1-2.

6:27 בָּחוֹן is a hapax, but the clear majority of modern translators take it to mean 'assayer', deriving from the verbal root בחן which means to assay, test, try precious metals by smelting. This meaning is supported by the following facts: 1) this verb is used five more times in the book of Jeremiah with the meaning of assaying, testing (9:6; 11:20; 12:3; 17:10; 20:12), although the subject is always Yahweh; 2) it occurs a further 20 times throughout the OT where it can be used in the technical sense of assaying metals or in the metaphorical sense of testing the character of people (e.g. Zech 13:9 and Job 23:10);[226] 3) the LXX uses δοκιμαστής which shows that the Hebrew was understood at that time in terms of 'testing';[227] 4) the elaboration in vv. 28-30 refers to the smelting of silver. It must, however, be noted that a minority, particularly of older translators with the sole support of the Targums, have taken this word to refer to a (watch)tower, reading it as a form of בָּחוֹן (as in Isa 23:13) and בַּחַן (as in Isa 32:14).[228] In my view, the incongruity of this minority view with the following description of the work involved, and its weaker textual support, justify a reading of 'assayer.'

The word מִבְצָר is difficult. As it stands it means a 'fortress', occurring 35 times and invariably referring to something which is well-fortified and inaccessible.[229] Some of the early translators associate this with 'my people' and translate 'among My enclosed people' (Lucian), 'among my besieged people' (Symmachus) or 'among

---

226 Holladay, *Jeremiah 1*, 229-230.

227 Theodore Laetsch, *Jeremiah*, Concordia Classic Commentary Series (St Louis: Concordia, 1952), 89, notes that the Greek term δοκιμαστής designates a Greek official whose duty it was to examine and approve candidates for citizenship or certain offices.

228 The AV translates 'I have set thee for a tower and a fortress among my people, that thou mayest know and try their way.' A more recent Jewish translation, Solomon B. Freehof, *Book of Jeremiah*, Jewish Commentary for Bible Readers (New York: Union of American Hebrew Congregations, 1977), 54, is almost identical. Freehof links the image of the watchman with the image of the tester, envisaging the watchman in a high tower seeing all the traffic in the city below, so that he might 'know and try their way.'

229 Laetsch, *Jeremiah*, 89.

strong nations'(Aquila and Theodotian). Luther similarly translates 'I have placed you as a smelter among my people, which is so hard' (as to be inaccessible to instruction). However, the word could well apply to Jeremiah himself, as in Keil's translation: 'I have placed you as a prover among my people, as a fortified city.'[230] This reading concurs with the use of the same word in Jer 1:18: 'I ... have made you today a fortified (מְבֻצָּר) city, an iron pillar and a bronze wall, against the whole land.' Most see it as a gloss, and, for this reason, many eliminate it.[231] Before coming to a conclusion as to whether to retain the gloss or not, some other readings need to be considered.

A different approach is to suggest that because בְּצָר signifies gold in Job 36:19 (however, the interpretation there is open to dispute),מְבֻצָּר can be taken as a contraction for מן בצר and so mean 'from gold.'[232] If this is so, then the testing would be to determine whether there is any gold in the people. Ernst Haag's German translation reflects this understanding: 'I have appointed you as a tester for my people, as a tester for gold.'[233] Driver has proposed an emendation to the text which several modern translators follow: מְבֻצָּר וְתֵדַע is altered to מִבְצָרוֹ תֵּדַע which means 'its testing thou knowest = whom thou wilt be able to test.'[234] He takes מִבְצָרוֹ as an Aramaising infinitival form, from which בָּצָר (tested metal in Job 22:24,25) is probably derived, with a singular suffix (agreeing with 'my people', even though later the collective plural suffix is used in דַּרְכָּם. He translates the second part of this

---

230 Laetsch, *Jeremiah*, 89.

231 McKane, *Jeremiah 1*, 154, gives examples of scholars who delete this word because it is explained either as a correct gloss on 'assayer' (Rudolph and Bright, following LXX, Vulg. Pesh.) or as an incorrect gloss on 'watchtower' (Cornill, Giesebrecht).

232 C.F. Keil, *The Prophecies of Jeremiah*, trans. David Patrick (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1880), 148–9, cites Gaab, Maurer and Hitzig as examples of this line of thinking.

233 Ernst Haag, *Das Buch Jeremia Teil 1* (Düsseldorf: Patmos-Verlag, 1973), 96, 'Zum Prüfer für mein Volk habe ich dich bestellt, zum Goldprüfer.' D.B. Duhm, *Das Buch Jeremia*, Kürzer Hand-Commentar Zum Alten Testament (Tübingen: Mohr, 1901), 73, translates similarly: 'Als Metallprüfer setzte ich dich in mein Volk, als Goldprüfer dass du erforschest und prüfest ihren Wert, allen Kaufwert ihres Goldes.'

234 G.R. Driver, "Two Misunderstood Passages of the Old Testament," *JTS* VI (April 1955): 85.

verse as 'whom thou wilt know how to test and whose conduct thou shalt assay.' This approach has the advantage of keeping the sense unified through the elimination of any reference to fortress or tower. The LXX (δοκιμαστὴν δέδωκά σε) most naturally reads, 'I have given you as a tester/assayer.'A few read δοκιμαστὴν in a passive sense, suggesting that Jeremiah is the one being tested, but the meaning must be active since the focus of the following verses is on the testing of the people rather than the testing of the prophet.[235] One commentator has seen a connection between the image of the watchman in Jer 6:17 and this image of assayer.[236]

Three interpretational possibilities remain: 1) retain the normal meaning of 'fortress' for מִבְצָר as an explanation of the hapax בָּחוֹן (understood as watchtower); 2) take מִבְצָרas a gloss on בָּחוֹן (understood as tester of metals) but repoint it as a piel participle מְבַצֵּר to mean 'examiner', and 3) take מִבְצָר as an intrusion from Jer 1:18 and delete it. De Waard takes the last one to be semantically the most natural, but advocates adding a footnote: 'Hebr. adds "as a fortified city," same word as in 1:18.'[238]

The subsequent verses confirm that it is Jeremiah who is to do the testing and they elaborate the image under which he is to do this: it is as an assayer testing silver. This leaves us with options 2) or 3), either of which would be acceptable. Option 2), in retaining the fortress concept, would not eliminate the image of assayer, but merely reassure Jeremiah that he will do this work from a protected (fortified) position. Although the matter can not be resolved, I lean towards retaining the fortress idea in the midst of the assaying work, and so would read 'I have made you

---

235 J.Alberto Soggin, "Jeremias VI:27–30," *Vetus Testamentum* 9, no. 1 (January 1959): 96, takes the LXX to be passive, but concludes that the MT gives the better sense.

236 Wanke, *Jeremia*, 86, thinks that the image of the assayer fits with the picture of the watchman that occurs within the same chapter (Jer 6:17).

238 Jan de Waard, *A Handbook on Jeremiah*, Textual Criticism and the Translator (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2003), 27–28.

an assayer and a fortress among my people' instead of the NRSV's 'tester and refiner.'

6:28 סָרֵי סוֹרְרִים appears to be an intensification, from the two roots סור and סרר, giving a combined superlative effect.[239] However, some manuscripts have שָׂרֵי instead of סָרֵי and this has led to suggestions of 'princely rebels' or 'arch rebels.'[240] The context, together with the repeated 'all of them' makes it clear that the rebellion is not restricted to the princely class, but is widespread across the whole people. The NRSV's 'stubbornly rebellious,' going with the superlative intent of the majority manuscript position, is accepted.

Many have observed that the same two metals, bronze and iron (נְחֹשֶׁת וּבַרְזֶל) are also paired in Jer 1:18. Some Jewish interpreters have seen the combination of 'bronze and iron' as representing strength. For example, Rashi takes it to indicate stubbornness and strength in their evildoings; Kimchi, following the Targum, thinks of brass (bronze) and iron being melted together to form a strong alloy.[241] Lundbom regards the combination as a fixed pair, for example, Deut 28:23.[242] Whereas in Jer 1:18 they denote strength for the prophet, in Jer 15:12 they denote the strength of the enemy. Thompson assumes that they must have some kind of metaphorical use, copper denoting 'brazen' and iron denoting 'obstinate.'[243] Isa 60:17 contrasts this same pair with gold and silver, which are obviously of far greater value.[244] In Ezek

---

239 Driver, "Two Misunderstood Passages," 85, argues for this, saying that this is a 'perfectly legitimate form of expressions, in which two homonyms from distinct roots are juxtaposed to heighten the effect.' He notes that the LXX has only one word, but does not see this as an adequate reason to eliminate one of the words.

240 Holladay, *Jeremiah 1*, 230, has the first, suggesting that this could be Jeremiah's twist on phrases in the eighth-century prophets, e.g. Isa 1:23 and Hos 9:15. The NEB has the second.

241 Freehof, *Jeremiah*, 54.

242 Lundbom, *Jeremiah 1–20*, 450.

243 Thompson, *Jeremiah*, 265.

244 Laetsch, *Jeremiah*, 91.

22:18, they are included with several other metals, as the dross of silver. This last comparison leads Lundbom to think that they are here describing a brazen people whose value is not precious like silver, but of inferior quality, in short, that of dross. The repetition of the same pair as in Jer 1:18 has also led many to think that this is part of the gloss that includes the idea of fortress.[245] Even if it is a gloss, reflecting the strength of the fortress, its effect is to suggest that the people have corresponding strength. Lundbom follows the majority of translators (e.g. NRSV) who see no reason to delete the pair as an export from Jer 1:18 or Ezek 22:18, as it suits the context and belongs to the poetic structure.[246]

6:29 נָחַר מַפֶּחַ presents the image of bellows working overtime, working so hard that they 'blow fiercely' (NRSV), 'puff and blow' (NEB) or 'snort.'[247] Older interpreters, such as Keil, take the phrase to mean that the bellows are burned, or scorched, by the heat of the fire (as AV), but this reading is no longer followed.[248] Spurgeon is quoted as likening Jeremiah to the bellows, in that 'he complains that he spoke with much pathos, much energy, much force of heart, that he exhausted himself, without being able to melt the people's hearts.'[249] The passage, however, likens Jeremiah to the assayer rather than to the bellows.

מֵאֵשׁ תַּם עוֹפֶרֶת follows the *qere* of the MT, as de Waard concludes (with NRSV's 'the lead is consumed by the fire') to be preferable, according to the metallurgical

---

245 e.g. Jones, *Jeremiah*, 140, who thinks that this marginal gloss has been attached inappropriately to the description of the rebellious people. He considers that the way in which the NEB and REV work this into the refining process in v.29 is highly speculative.

246 Lundbom, *Jeremiah 1–20*, 450.

247 Driver, "Two Misunderstood Passages," 85, writes that this is not the Niphil from חרר (glowed) since bellows are neither scorched nor burnt, for if they are they become useless! He concludes that it comes from נחר (snort).

248 Keil, *Prophecies*, 150.

249 H.D.M. Spence and Exell J.S., eds., *Jeremiah Vol 1*, The Pulpit Commentary (London & New York: Funk & Wagnalls, 1906), 175, but no indication of the exact source is given.

techniques of antiquity.[250] Holladay gives a very useful outline of the process used: the cupellation of silver.[251] This process could be used for silver found in lead ore (about 0.5 percent silver is often found in galena, lead sulphide) or for assaying any other silver, including that used in jewellery, that may have become contaminated.[252] The 'silver' was placed in a cupel (a small cup, from the French *coupelle*) of a porous substance, usually bone ash, under larger amounts of lead. The furnace was heated until the added molten lead became bright red (900 to 1000 degrees centigrade), and air was blasted across the molten lead in order to convert the lead to lead oxide (litharge) which carried off any alloys and was absorbed into the porous cupel, leaving the silver intact. If the amount of lead was too large to be absorbed into the cupel, the litharge flowed away and dissolved the oxides of other metals which might be present in the crude lead or mixed with the silver: for example, copper, antimony, arsenic. The process was affected by the presence of iron and tin, which could both reduce the success of the operation. In Jer 6:29 all the lead which has been added is used up, and 'consumed' or oxidised. There is no fault in the process, but the problem is with the 'silver' that was to be refined: in fact, it becomes clear that it was, in fact, all slag and contained no pure silver at all.[253] In addition, the passage suggests that the process has been abnormally protracted.[254] The bellows have been used excessively, and the lead which was to be used as a flux has by now been used up by the flames. Even after all this time and effort, the remaining metal does not have the requisite standard of purity and must be rejected.

---

250 de Waard, *Handbook*, 29.

251 Holladay, *Jeremiah 1*, 230-232.

252 Lundbom, *Jeremiah 1–20*, 451 and Philip J. King, *Jeremiah: An Archaeological Companion* (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox, 1993), 183–84, who gives examples of the importance of silver for ornaments, amulets, jewellery, decorations, cult vessels and images, as well as for money, in this period.

253 Thompson, *Jeremiah*, 267.

254 McKane, *Jeremiah 1*, 157.

The work of the assayer

Although some details of the ancient process of the assaying of silver and precious metals might be obscure, the main points are clear: 1) Jeremiah's ministry is to discover what there is of genuine value in his people, 2) the process will be arduous and protracted, and 3) the final result will prove the nation to be worthless and rightly rejected by Yahweh.[255]

The appointment, or making (נתן), of Jeremiah to be an assayer (Jer 6:27) parallels the appointment (נתן) to be a prophet (Jer 1:5). One striking feature of this appointment to be an assayer is that it is a call to a function that is normally performed by Yahweh. In several other passages within the book of Jeremiah Yahweh is the one who tests (or assays) the people. In Jer 9:6[7],Yahweh of Hosts says that he refines (צרף) and tests (בחן) the people because of their sin; in 11:20 Jeremiah looks to Yahweh of Hosts as the one who judges righteously and tries (בחן) the heart and the mind; in 12:3 Jeremiah acknowledges that Yahweh sees (ראה) him and tests (בחן) him; in 17:10 Yahweh tests (בחן) the mind and searches (חקר) the heart; in 20:12 Jeremiah addresses Yahweh of Hosts as the one who tests (בחן) the righteous, who sees (ראה) the heart and mind. Jeremiah is called to a realm of functioning that needs divine perspective.

The image of Yahweh as assayer is not confined to Jeremiah, and belongs to a wider stock of imagery in Israel.[256] The verbs בחן and צרף occur in parallel describing

---

255 John Skinner, *Prophecy and Religion: Studies in the Life of Jeremiah* (Cambridge: CUP, 1922), 156–57.

256 Holladay, *Jeremiah 1*, 229. Although the specific term for assayer is not used in Ezek 22:17-22, the function of Yahweh as an assayer or tester of silver (as a metaphor for being a tester of people) is explicit. There, too, Israel is the dross of silver, and is likened to inferior metals: bronze (or copper) and tin, iron and lead. The people are to be gathered into a smelter to be melted with Yahweh's fiery blast of wrath. In Zech 13:9 Yahweh will bring a third of the people into the fire and refine (צרף) them like silver, and test (בחן) them like gold. Job says 'When he has tested (בחן) me, I will come forth as gold' ((Job 23:10). The metaphor of the corrupted people being silver that has become dross is also used in Isa 1:22, and in verse 25 Yahweh threatens to smelt away (צרף) their dross and remove all their alloy. Similar imagery is used in other books, for example, Prov 17:3, The crucible is

Yahweh's role in Jer 9:6[7], Zech 13:9, Pss 17:3, 26:2 and 66:10; the use of these same roots relating to Jeremiah's role (בחוֹן in Jer 6:27 and צָרַף צָרוֹף in Jer 6:29) is noteworthy and suggests that the one who is the assayer or tester is also the one who is the refiner.

When Isaiah speaks of the refining process, he is speaking of the coming judgment of Yahweh. He is looking forward to a purified remnant (e.g. Isa 1:24-26, as above) and 'the removal of injustice and the restoration of the ancient virtues in the State.'[257] In Isa 48:10 Yahweh has refined (צרף) the people, but not like silver, and tested (בחר) them in the furnace of adversity. Ezekiel, in contrast to Isaiah, uses the refining image to mean the actual destruction of the Hebrew state by the Chaldean armies. He has come to the conclusion that the smelting only demonstrates the utter worthlessness of the people for the ends of God's kingdom (Ezek 22:17-22). For Jeremiah, whose view is similar to that of Ezekiel here, the refining process has failed: purification of the national character is now impossible.'[258]

The assayer and Yahweh

Jeremiah's call to take on one of Yahweh's functions is developed throughout the book as Yahweh instructs and guides Jeremiah as to how he must perform a task that does not naturally lie within a human being's native set of skills. The argumentative dialogue that repeatedly ensues between the two of them demonstrates the unnaturalness and uncomfortableness of the role for Jeremiah. Yet the frequent

---

for silver and the furnace is for gold, but Yahweh tests (בחן) the heart; Judges 7:4,Yahweh will sift (צרף) Gideon's men;1 Chron 29:17, Yahweh searches (בחן) the heart; Ps 7:10[Eng 9], Yahweh tests (בחן) minds and hearts; Ps 17:3, Yahweh tries (בחן) my heart and tests (צרף) me; Ps 26:2, Yahweh is asked to prove me (בחן) and try (נסה) me, to test (צרף) my heart and mind; and Ps 66:10,Yahweh has tested us (בחן) and tried (צרף) us like silver. In Mal 3:2,3 the terminology is even more explicit: the day of the Lord will be a time when Yahweh is like a refiner's fire (כְּאֵשׁ מְצָרֵף); he will sit as a refiner (מְצָרֵף) and purifier (מְטַהֵר) of silver, and he will purify (טהר) the Levites and refine (זקק) them like gold or silver.

257 Skinner, *Prophecy and Religion*, 159.

258 John Bright, *Jeremiah*, Anchor Bible (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1965), 50.

blurring of voices, suggests that, to some extent at least, Jeremiah does, at times, take on the voice of Yahweh and also the role of Yahweh.

Most modern interpreters take Jer 6:27 as spoken by Yahweh, and Jer 6:28-30 by Jeremiah, but a firm dividing line is not possible.[259] This dialogue falls into the category of lawsuit speech, with Jer 6:28 giving the indictment: 'They are all stubbornly rebellious, going about with slanders; they are bronze and iron; all of them act corruptly.' Irrespective of where the demarcation between speakers is drawn, the conclusions drawn in vv. 28-30 are to be taken as justified.[260]

The assayer and the community

The role of assayer also defines Jeremiah's relationship to his community. Brueggemann has rightly pointed out that the image of assaying not only engages Jeremiah's personal prophetic vocation but also the destiny of his community.[261] As the book unfolds we see *how* Jeremiah goes about testing, or assaying, the people and what this means for both his inner and outer life. We also see *how* the corruption of the people works out in deceptive teaching, unjust practice and rebellious decisions, together with the ensuing national destruction which concurs with the judgment given in the image: Yahweh's rejection of this so-called 'silver.' And importantly, we also see *how* the community's treatment of Jeremiah parallels their treatment (even if unrecognised) of Yahweh.

---

259 e.g. Holladay, *Jeremiah 1*, 229, has only v. 27 as divine speech, but Lundbom, *Jeremiah 1–20*, 447–48, divides the poem equally, attributing vv. 27-28 to Yahweh and vv. 29-30 to Jeremiah. He cites Jer 5:1-2 and Ezek 22:17-18 as similar examples where Yahweh gives the initial assessment of things first.

260 Thompson, *Jeremiah*, 266.

261 Brueggemann, *Exile and Homecoming*, 76.

The fire of the assayer

The most significant means which Jeremiah will need to use for assaying is fire (v. 29). This image of fire as used by the prophet is developed in three passages as the *fire of God's word*; I will look at each of these below:[262]

Jer 5:12-14

Yahweh will make his words in Jeremiah's mouth as a fire (Jer 5:14). These words add a further dimension to what is said in Jeremiah's call, 'I have put my words in your mouth' (Jer 1:9), where the words will have both destructive and constructive effects (Jer 1:10).[263] Holladay remarks that 'it is ironic that a mouth, which should eat food, should instead hold the fire which eats something else'.[264] The imagery used here is not unlike that used in Jer 6:27-30. As the assayer's fire consumes the lead (6:29), this fire devours the wood (5:14). In 5:10 the people are likened to a vineyard whose branches are to be stripped away. In both scenes, the people are to be purged, but the fire leaves nothing of value behind.

A contrast is set up with what comes out of the mouths of the deviant prophets.They do not have 'the word', and they are merely 'wind' (Jer 5:13), implying that they are completely ineffectual.[265] What they are saying is false: Yahweh will never bring harm to Judah (Jer 5:12). Stulman calls their theological position one of 'practical atheism' with 'human autonomy'.[266] Their words rely on a concept of a God who can only look benignly on his people, and keep them in peace (cf. Jer 6:14). There is no fire in their words; those prophets do not function as assayers.

---

[262] I am not dealing here with the image of fire used to denote Yahweh's anger and judgment. This is used in Jer 4:4; 21:10,12 with possibly more oblique references in 22:7; 34:2,22; 49:2.

[263] Holladay, *Jeremiah 1*, 183.

[264] Holladay, *Jeremiah 1*, 187.

[265] Although most occurrences of רוּחַ in this book refer to the wind of judgment, this occurrence has no such connotation.

[266] Stulman, *Jeremiah*, 73.

Jer 20:9

There is something like a fire burning within Jeremiah if he does not speak any more in Yahweh's name. Jeremiah's problem with the community is that he is mocked (Jer 20:7,10). His problem with Yahweh is that he has been overpowered (Jer 20:7). Yet he cannot escape the burning fire within; this is what has caused both problems. He complains, 'If I say, "I will not mention him or speak any more in his name," then within me there is something like a burning fire shut up in my bones; I am weary with holding it in, and I cannot.' (Jer 20:9).

The previous verse says that the word of the Lord has become a reproach and derision. Although 'the word' is not repeated in v.9 its repeated sense, identified with this fire within, is understood and made explicit by many translations. This internal burning is what drives him to speak; it is at his core. It is impossible for him to be detached, for the burning occurs at the point in which all his relationships intersect. This fire, for Jeremiah, is not a tool which he can pick up and put down at will, but something that lies at the centre of his prophetic vocation.

Jer 23:29

Once again the word of Yahweh is explicitly likened to fire. Here, too, there is a clear contrast between what the other prophets bring and what Jeremiah brings: whereas they bring dreams which are lies, 'the deceit of their own heart' (Jer 23:26) the true prophet has Yahweh's word (Jer 23:28-29). The difference is not simply one of comparative value, but of activity and power. The activity of the word of Yahweh is expressed through two parallel images: fire and hammer. The second image makes it clear that the activity is not only powerful, but destructive: the hammer is not being used for the purpose of construction, but is smashing that which is very

difficult to smash—rocks—and is obviously being used with considerable force.[267] The parallel with the destructive action of the hammer is sufficient for us to understand that we are not to think of Yahweh's word as a cosy fire that warms and comforts, but an irresistible force that leaves nothing flammable in its wake.

The wind of the bellows

The second ingredient in the assaying process is wind, seen in the bellows blowing fiercely. This aspect of the image is developed insofar as there are many references to Yahweh bringing a wind whose purposes are to scatter (e.g. Jer 13:24, where the people are scattered like chaff driven by a desert wind) and to bring judgment (Jer 4:11,12, where the wind is expressly said to be not for winnowing and cleansing but for judgment). Similar ideas are expressed in Jer 10:13; 18:17; 22:22 and 49:32,36. However, there is no direct engagement by Jeremiah with the wind; it is always sent by Yahweh and is under his control. Nor is there any explicit connection between the wind and Spirit in this book.[268]

3.1.2 YAHWEH AS POTTER: Jeremiah 18:1-12

Yahweh's work as a model for Jeremiah's work

The explicit link between Yahweh's work and Jeremiah's prophetic ministry comes in vv.7-10 through the repetition of five out of the six tasks which Jeremiah is appointed to do in Jer 1:10, but which now are enacted by Yahweh, imaged as potter. These are pluck up (נתש), break down (נתץ), destroy (אבד), build (בנה) and

---

267 Jack R. Lundbom, *Jeremiah 21–36*, Anchor Bible (New York: Doubleday, 2004), 208, notes that this is the hammer of a blacksmith. He also draws attention to a similar statement about Yahweh's anger in Nahum 1:6 which says 'his wrath is poured like fire; the rocks are shattered before him.'

268 In the book of Jeremiah, the only references to רוּחַ refer to wind (Jer 2:24; 4:11,12; 5:13; 10:13; 13:24; 14:6; 18:17; 22:22; 49:32,36; 51:1,16) with the exception of Jer 51:1 and 11 which speak of God stirring up a destroyer and stirring up the kings of the Medes.

plant (נטע); the one omitted is overthrow (הרס). There is an additional link through the focus on nations outside Israel (cf. 1:5). In this scene Jeremiah is to watch and learn; his ministry is dependent on what Yahweh the potter does. The change to a first person autobiographical style after a third person superscription (v.1), which indicates the start of a new unit, enables Jeremiah's personal perspective and involvement in the scene to be realised.

The initial word of Yahweh indicates that a further word will be given after Jeremiah goes down to the potter's house, presumably in a lower part of the city where there is access to water.[269] There he must watch first, before being able to 'hear,' as in 1:11-12 and 1:13-16, and similar to 24:1-10.[270] Whereas in other scenes Jeremiah is told to engage in an action (in 13:1-11, buy a linen loincloth; 19:1-15, break a jug; 32:6-12, buy a field) or to refrain from certain expected actions (16:1-9, don't marry or engage in either mourning or feasting) here his only action is to watch.[271] While some describe Jeremiah's watching at the potter's house as 'passive' in contrast to the 'active' symbolic actions, it must be understood that 'watching' is, in Jeremiah, a highly engaged occupation that is, in itself, active. He must watch well in order to be able to hear and act. On this occasion he is not told to speak until verse 11.

Potter and clay: Jer 18:3-4

---

269 James Philip Hyatt and Stanley Romaine Hopper, "The Book of Jeremiah," in *The Interpreter's Bible Vol. V* (New York: Abingdon Press, 1956), 961, suggest it is in the Hinnom valley, south of Jerusalem, where there is access to the valley drainage and the pools of Siloam.

270 Leslie C. Allen, *Jeremiah*, 213, regards the form of this unit as a hybrid between a symbolic action report (except that the prophet is the observer rather than the actor) and a vision-oracle report (as in Jer 1:11-14).

271 Further examples are 25:15-29 (taking the cup and making the nations drink of Yahweh's wrath), 27-28 (making and wearing a yoke around Jerusalem), 35 (testing the Rechabites with wine in the temple), 43:8-13 (burying stones at Tahpanhes).

The image of potter and clay, illustrating the relationship between Yahweh and his people, is not unique to Jeremiah and occurs elsewhere in connection with disputes. In Isa 29:16 and 45:9 the superiority of the sovereign knowledge and capabilities of Yahweh as Creator is contrasted with the arrogant presumptions of the people, and in Isa 64:8 there is a plea for mercy on account of the sins of the people in the face of the sovereign power of Yahweh. In Jer 18, the image of the potter's sovereignty in forming a pot (v.4) 'as seemed good to him' (כַּאֲשֶׁר יָשַׁר בְּעֵינֵי הַיּוֹצֵר) and the initial interpretation given in v.6, 'Can I not do with you, O house of Israel, just as this potter has done?' (הֲכַיּוֹצֵר הַזֶּה לֹא־אוּכַל לַעֲשׂוֹת לָכֶם בֵּית יִשְׂרָאֵל) is consistent with the usage in Isaiah that stresses the sovereignty of Yahweh.[272] However, the stress on the re-forming (שׁוּב with עשׂה) of clay that is marred (נִשְׁחַת) is unique to this passage and invites further interpretation.[273]

Within the book of Jeremiah the image of Yahweh as creator is clear (Jer 10:12-13 [=51:15-16]; 27:5; 31:35-36; 32:17); so is his ability to destroy his own creation, particularly through fierce anger (4:23-28).[274] Although Yahweh upholds the 'fixed orders' of creation (31:35-36; 33:20,25) the land can become desolate and mourn, and animals and birds can be swept away (12:4).[275] In the Jer 18 image, Yahweh can potentially be seen either as the sovereign in whom there is great hope (he can reuse clay to make a new, better pot out of something that is spoilt or even smashed) or as the one who threatens destruction (a pot that does not come up to the potter's

---

[272] Brueggemann, *Jeremiah 1–25*, 160, notes that the metaphor of potter and clay leads us to expect an unambiguous assertion of Yahweh's sovereignty, but the argument that follows in this passage is much more subtle.

[273] The verb שׁוּב is used in v.4, and again in v. 8 and v. 11. Combined with another verb it means 'do again.' In this verse its link with עשׂה produces the meaning 'return and make', i.e., 'remake'. See Holladay, *Jeremiah 1*, 516 and William L. Holladay, *The Root ŠÛBH in the Old Testament with Particular Reference to Its Usages in Covenantal Contexts* (Leiden: Brill, 1958), 66–72. Holladay, *Jeremiah 1*, 513, sees a comparison with the linen belt that is spoilt in 13:7. In that passage, Yahweh spoils the pride of Judah and the great pride of Jerusalem.

[274] Roger Mize, "The Patient God," *Lexington Theological Quarterly* 7 (1972): 88.

[275] Fretheim, *Jeremiah*, 30.

expectations will be broken down, so that a new pot can be made that does please him).This ambiguity needs to be explored. Some also point out the importance of the quality of the clay; if it is poor it *can* frustrate the potter's intention and cause him to change his plans.[276]

A key question: Jer 18:6

It needs to be recognised that the word that comes (v.6) is not a definitive statement but a rhetorical question; this raises alertness for something new and leaves the possibilities of interpretation open.[277] The one aspect that does seem clear is that Yahweh, the potter, has the power to do anything with the people who are his 'pots'; an implied appropriate response would be humility before him, perhaps what is called elsewhere the 'fear of the Lord.' In the light of other OT usage of the potter/clay imagery, in contrast to other interpersonal imagery used to denote divine/human relationships (e.g. father and child), the suggestion of any kind of genuinely mutual relationship between Yahweh and his people would be surprising.[278] However, rather than ruling out the possibility of a surprise, the command to watch before hearing anticipates the likelihood of a surprise.

Responsive changes: Jer 18:7-11

---

[276] Bright, *Jeremiah*, 125, and Thompson, *Jeremiah*, 433.

[277] Carolyn J. Sharp, *Prophecy and Ideology in Jeremiah: Struggles for Authority in the Deutero-Jeremianic Prose* (London: T&T Clark, 2003), 88, writes, 'Whether the potter's remaking of the clay vessel is to be read as positive (signalling the hope of reconstruction) or negative (signalling the threat of destruction) is meant to remain an open question.' Fretheim, *Jeremiah*, 271, also prefers to read v.6 as leaving the future open, and thus can more easily find correlation with the following verses, which confirm that the future is to be shaped, at least in part, by the human response to the word. Philip R. Davies, "Potter, Prophet and People: Jeremiah 18 as Parable," *HAR* 11 (1987): 24–25, describes Jer 18:1-6 as a prophetic 'parable' which requires application. Because 'the interpretation underexploits the parable by dealing only with the items of potter, clay and hand, and ignores the *action* of the parable, which consists of destruction and refashioning' ... 'it is thus obvious that the first offered interpretation does not close off the process, but leaves the way open for more interpretation.'

[278] R.W.L. Moberly, "God is Not a Human That He Should Repent (Numbers 23:19 and 1 Samuel 15:29)," in *God in the Fray: A Tribute to Walter Brueggemann*, ed. Tod Linafelt and Timothy K. Beal (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1998), 113, regards this image as evoking unilateral power, in contrast to the images of interpersonal relationships that do convey mutuality, e.g. king and subject, master and slave, husband and wife, father and son.

The term used for 'potter' (יוֹצֵר) denotes one who forms, a craftsmanof any kind, and echoes Yahweh's role in 'forming' (יצר) the man from the earth (Gen 2:7).[279] While the relationship between a craftsman and his material is not interpersonal, it is only a craftsman, or one who carefully observes the way in which a craftsman works, who understands that the craftsman's relationship to his material is all-important. It is more subtle and more complex than a flat stereotype would suggest. A craftsman's work requires an intimate knowledge of the unique qualities and limitations of his material. Watching the potter's fingers sensitively press and relax, shape and trim, within the rhythm of carefully controlled movement, invites Jeremiah to appreciate both the power of the potter and the movement of the clay.[280] It is not only the clay that responds to the potter; perhaps surprisingly, the potter is also responding to the clay.[281] The qualities of the clay, together with its inherent impurities, affect how finely it can be pressed, how smoothly it can be moulded, how well it will stand up to firing. The potter adjusts his actions accordingly, makes new plans, and sometimes starts again, shaping it as it seems best to him (v.4).[282] On closer inspection, sovereignty here does not mean aloof and rigid decision-making nor detached execution of previously made plans. As the potter continually adapts to the material under his hands, the sovereign maintains his freedom by both acting and reacting. Throughout the process, which is never quite complete (finished pots can

---

279 Lundbom, *Jeremiah 1–20*, 813, notes that the same word is used for workers in wood and metal.

280 The potter in this passage works on הָאָבְנָיִם , dual for two wheels or round discs. It is thought that they are referred to as stones because of their resemblance to millstones, but could be made of wood or stone. Hyatt and Hopper, "Jeremiah," 961, note the reference in Sir 38:29-30 where the potter rotates the lower, heavier one with his feet, while he works his pot on the upper one, the two discs being joined by a vertical shaft. See also the description and photos of Middle Eastern potters at work in R.H. Johnstone, "The Biblical Potter," *Biblical Archaeologist* 37 (1974): 86-106. Lundbom, *Jeremiah 1–20*, 813, adds that the potter sat at the edge of a shallow pit in order to rotate the lower wheel. Pottery in Jeremiah's time was generally of good quality, was characterised by an orange-red slip or clay decoration, but was not glazed.

281 Holladay, *Jeremiah 1*, 515, notes that, because of the centrifugal force developed on the wheel, the clay presses against the hands of the potter.

282 McKane, *Jeremiah 1*, 422, points out that it is not clear whether יָשָׁר refers to what is 'right' or 'chosen' by the potter.

always be broken down and re-formed) he changes his mind and formulates new plans and is clearly affected by the attributes and responses of the people.[283]

Perhaps the image may subtly address two opposite, yet related, tendencies in the people's thinking: 1) to usurp the sovereign rights of Yahweh by presuming they know his mind and will, and 2) to assume that they are powerless to influence him. Both of these tendencies betray a different concept of Yahweh and his relationship to his people than the one which Jeremiah is discovering here. It is not that the stereotype of the potter as sovereign is wrong, but rather that it needs further teasing out. For this, Jeremiah has to watch closely to see how it works, to really *know* Yahweh, in contrast to the many in this book who do not.[284]

The unfolding of this image invites an understanding of Yahweh's work in relation to his people that is far from wooden and rigid; it is finely nuanced, capable of development, and able to embrace such contrasting actions as destruction and building (vv.7-9). However, many interpreters, exemplified by Carroll, McKane, and von Rad, fail to engage with the subtleties of the image and reduce it to a simple, flat stereotype that will not permit any development or surprise. Carroll takes the potter's image as a rigidly positive one, so then reads the clay's capacity for making choices as something new and accounts for vv.7-10 as a later deuteronomistic addition.[285] Von Rad has difficulty in allowing a 'free' potter to act according to vv.7-10 because the latter sounds like 'law.'[286] McKane is over-literal in deciding that the interpretation of apostasy as the bad clay and repentance as the good clay is

---

283 Fretheim, *Jeremiah*, 270, says that 'the focus is not on God's power and control over the people, but on God's initiative, creativity, patience, and responsiveness in relation to the possibilities inherent in the situation.' He concludes (pp.277-78) that one could not speak of relationship in any significant sense if God were in total control. He prefers Brueggemann's concept of Yahweh's 'responsive sovereignty' rather than the traditional claim for God's 'complete' sovereignty.

284 e.g. Jer 4:22, 5:4-5; 9:2[3].

285 Carroll, *Jeremiah*, 372–73.

286 von Rad, *OT Theology 2*, 198–99.

forced.[287] Such reductionism actually fails to treat the metaphoric language appropriately. Although vv.7-10 are formulated in legal style, there is no need to detach them from the potter image, as it is not outside the bounds of prophetic licence to extend the meaning of a metaphor for rhetorical purposes, even through stylistic change in the language (cf. Ezek 18, where there is a similar priestly formulation, and Isa 1:18-20).[288]

Rhetorical Shifts: Jer 18:7,11

Jeremiah's rhetoric here is typical of his style: he restates a traditional, generally accepted presupposition and then challenges or modifies it for the purpose of argumentation.[289] In fact, the rhetorical shifts in vv.7 and 11 demonstrate a unified argumentative strategy: first addressing his audience, widening their view in order to establish a general principle, and then swiftly returning with the punch line. In fact, it is precisely because of these rhetorical shifts that vv.1-6 cannot adequately be viewed as standing alone.[290] He is not merely laying out choices, even though these are included in this passage; he is actively countering firmly entrenched opposing views and presenting the alternatives with passionate plea and threat. Also, he often plays on multiple meanings of a word (e.g. in vv.11-12, where a participle is followed by one or more occurrences of a noun from the same root חשׁב).[291] We also find some key roots from vv.1-6 picked up in vv.7-12, strengthening the interpretive connection between the workings of the potter and the actions here (יצר as the noun potter, forming a pot, vv.2,3,4,6, and as the verb with Yahweh as subject forming

---

[287] McKane, *Jeremiah 1*, 423.

[288] Jones, *Jeremiah*, 254–57.

[289] Lundbom, *Jeremiah 1–20*, 129 and Walter Brueggemann, "Jeremiah's Use of Rhetorical Questions," *JBL* 92 (1973): 359, cf. the pair of rhetorical questions in v.14.

[290] Sharp, *Prophecy and Ideology*, 88.

[291] William L. Holladay, "Style, Irony and Authenticity in Jeremiah," *JBL* 81 (1962): 46. Lundbom, *Jeremiah 1–20*, 134, gives other examples of play on multiple meanings: 6:30; 3:12,13,22; 6:7; 22:22; 1:14-15 etc.

disastrous plans, v.11; שׁוּב with potter as subject, v.4, any nation as subject, v.8 and you as subject, v.11).

Working with the nations: Jer 18:7-10

A statement of the same stereotype as in other OT passages is made in v.6: Yahweh, as potter, holds the house of Israel in his hand and has sovereign rights over it. However, there are two surprising and significant moves in the development of the image in vv. 7-10. One relates the responses of Yahweh to the movements of 'a/ny nation and a kingdom' rather than only to the 'house of Israel', which has been imaged as the clay in v.6. This broadening of Yahweh's concerns to the international scene is congruent with Jeremiah's appointment as a prophet to the nations (1:5). Such a rapid change of focus, moving from the present people group to other nations, is also consistent with prophetic rhetoric that is designed to startle (cf. Amos 1-2, where the movement is in the opposite direction but the effect is the same). The other surprise is that the same five verbs applied to Jeremiah's ministry in 1:10, are now ascribed to Yahweh; in fact, Yahweh is found to be the subject in every other occurrence of these verbs in this book, apart from 1:10.[292] This twofold move is suggestive of a strong link between the ways in which Yahweh works and the ways in which Jeremiah as prophet is to work.

As the image is developed, there is an appeal to a universalistic principle, whereby Yahweh is said to deal with all nations on the same basis. This is suggestive of the image of Yahweh forming (יצר) the first man (Gen 2:7), and therefore humanity, as well as Yahweh forming (יצר) Jeremiah (Jer 1:5). Here is an appeal to a creation principle that takes precedence over any perceived privileges of this one nation.

---

[292] Sharp, *Prophecy and Ideology*, 86–90, looks at all of the passages that are reminiscent of 1:10, namely 12:14-17; 18:7-10; 24:6; 31:28,40; 42:10 and 45:4. In 24:6; 31:28,40; 42:10 and 45:4 the application is to the people of Israel/Judah, or their city. In 1:10; 12:14-17 and here the application is to foreign peoples.

Consistent with the image of the potter changing his mind and adjusting his plans at any stage of the formation and life of the pot, these verses confirm the freedom of Yahweh to act either in accordance with his initial threat or promise, or to take a contrary path, once he sees the choice of each nation.[293] Yahweh has sovereign freedom to treat all alike. Jeremiah's prophetic ministry must, then, also treat the people of all nations alike and be capable of changed responses according to choices taken by others.

Elsewhere within the book of Jeremiah, other nations are characterised by the people as causes of fear or thin possibilities of help in a desperate situation. However, in the face of a pronouncement by Yahweh, whether of promise or threat, each nation is said to be able either to turn (שׁוּב) from its evil way (v. 8) or to do evil (רעה) in Yahweh's eyes and not listen to/obey Yahweh (v.10). If a nation turns back from its evil (רָעָה) then Yahweh will not bring the disaster (רָעָה) that he had planned to bring. Nowhere else in the book is there any indication of real nations undergoing real repentance (as there is in the book of Jonah); perhaps this suggests that what other nations do or do not do is not the primary issue at hand. Although Jeremiah does speak of certain other nations as untrustworthy or evil and under judgment (25:15-26; chs. 46-51), the book has far more frequent occurrences of his castigating speech concerning Israel. For Jeremiah the prophet, the calls to turn, the threats of disaster, and the possibilities of hope that he brings to Israel must not be tinged with partiality, but must reflect the universal concerns of obedience or disobedience, turning or refusing to turn.

---

293 Thompson, *Jeremiah*, 434, considers that the verb used here to indicate Yahweh's change (נחם) (v.8), indicates not so much a change of mind as a change of treatment. This is the preferred verb used of Yahweh, whereas שׁוּב is usually used of humans. Holladay, *Jeremiah 1*, 516, gives the meaning of נחם as 'retract one's decision'.

Destruction and building

The destructive acts of the potter fulfill a further purpose: to remake a suitable pot. Mize relates this to Jeremiah's call in 1:10, where building and planting follow the destructive actions, and finds many examples throughout the book where a destructive action executed by Yahweh is followed by a salvific verb, also executed by Yahweh (e.g. 2:30; 3:12; 4:27; 5:3,18; 7:28; 9:12;12:14-15).[294] In 12:14-15 one of the same verbs as here (and also in 1:10) is used: after Yahweh has plucked up (נתשׁ) he will have compassion and bring the people back. In these examples, destruction appears to be even instrumental for salvation. Mize also cites other examples in this book where coming destruction is contingent upon human action (2:21; 3:13-15; 4:18; 5:19; 6:16-17; 7:23-24; 11:4-5; 15:6) and sees an emphasis on the patience of Yahweh in the words 'any time'(רֶגַע, vv.7,9).[295] Jeremiah the prophet must also engage in both destructive and constructive processes. His work, like that of the potter, will also depend on the qualities and responses of the people (like the clay). In line with the constructive longer-term aims of the potter (and as borne out in other examples of Yahweh's actions) Jeremiah's destructive work may carry some potential for a constructive end. As Yahweh's work requires patience, so will Jeremiah's.

The image of the potter comes to mind once again when the shocking announcement is made that Yahweh is forming (יצר, v.11) evil/disaster (רעה) and devising a plan against Judah and Jerusalem. The possibility of an open reading of v.6 suddenly seems closed; the threat of destruction, not the promise of hope, seems to have been the intended interpretation, after all. Yet, this is not the final statement. It is immediately followed by an appeal: 'Turn!'(שׁוּב). The reiteration of the condition on which 'a nation or a kingdom' might avert disaster (v.8) is made, but this time, like

---

[294] Mize, "The Patient God," 89.

[295] Mize, "The Patient God," 90–92.

the threat of disaster, it is applied to Judah. So now it is made clear that the future is, indeed, open. The threat is real, but so is the possibility of hope.[296] The outcome, while in Yahweh's hands, is a response to the clay.[297] Even in the threat of destruction, the passionate plea of Yahweh for repentance shows that his desire is to abandon the threat.[298] The prophet will do his work of threatening disaster with a similar desire. As the potter is very personally involved with the clay under his hands and has a vested interest in the outcome of his work, the prophet will likewise engage in his work. The passionate cry of 'Turn!' (שׁוּב) in the hope of a constructive outcome, becomes one of the key words in Jeremiah's cries to the people throughout the book. In fact, it is characteristic of this book that many identical emotions and actions are accredited to both Yahweh and Jeremiah.

The people's choice

It is not clear whether Jeremiah or Yahweh, or possibly the narrator, is the speaker in v.12.[299] Such ambiguity of speaker, particularly of Jeremiah or Yahweh, occurs frequently in this book; boundaries between the speech of each are often without any markers (cf. Jer 6:7-30). The lack of identification of speaker takes the focus off the role of Yahweh the potter or of Jeremiah the observer/listener to direct it exclusively

---

296 Abraham J. Heschel, *The Prophets 1*, 174, in writing about this passage, says: 'Sin is not a cul-de-sac, nor is guilt a final trap. Sin may be washed away by repentance and return, and beyond guilt is the dawn of forgiveness. The door is never locked, the threat of doom is not the last word.'

297 Contra Philip R. Davies, "Potter, Prophet and People," 26–27, who thinks that in vv.7-10 the obvious reading of 'any nation' as the 'clay' makes no sense, and proposes that Yahweh's intentions are the 'clay', thus making the parable all about Yahweh.

298 Abraham J. Heschel, *The Prophets*, vol. 2 (New York: Harper & Row, 1962), 4–5,57, speaks of God's 'pathos', which is not unreasoned emotion, but the result of decision and determination. In prophetic thinking it is not self-centred, self-contained or feverish, but is always directed outward and upholds justice. 'All expressions of pathos are attempts to set forth God's aliveness ... His wrath can be unbearably dreadful, yet it is but the expression and instrument of his eternal concern.'

299 Holladay, *Jeremiah 1*, 517, thinks that Yahweh cannot be the speaker, or it would make a mockery of the hope expressed in v.11. Nor does he think Jeremiah is speaking this as an objection, as we would expect an introductory, adversative ו as in 1:6; 4:10. 14:13. So he concludes that Jeremiah added this some time later as his observed conclusion. Brueggemann, *Jeremiah 1–25*, 162, points to ch.2 for other similar statements that are alleged to be by the people, and treated as conclusive statements. Fretheim, *Jeremiah*, 6, adds 3:22b-25; 8:19; 14:19-22.

onto the position of the people: it is fixed—they will not turn. The freedom of choice, which Judah has had, has now ended; their decision has been made conclusively.[300] Perhaps they do not accept that it is possible to turn, or that turning will influence Yahweh's actions.[301] Their response: 'It's no use!' or 'We don't care' (נוֹאָשׁ) could be indicative of defiance or of despair and hopelessness.[302] Their choice amounts to isolation from Yahweh rather than relating to, or 'knowing' him. They will follow their own evil plans, and the stubbornness of their evil hearts.[303] In contrast to the passion expressed by Yahweh in v.11, the people remain unmoved and hard-hearted.[304] Judgment is now inevitable. Yet, within the image of the potter and clay, a recalcitrant pot can only be made to function well after it is destroyed, and then remade in a different form. Even within the inevitable conclusion of judgment, hope still lies dormant.[305] However, the addition of v.12 does indicate that although Yahweh remains free, the people have chosen not to be. Although Jeremiah's prophetic role also contains the freedom to range between plucking up, breaking down, destroying, building and planting, the fixed position of the people suggests that his role will, at least initially, be in the exercise of the destructive

---

300 Brueggemann, *Jeremiah 1–25*, 161, adds, 'The text is not interested in a theoretical question of free will. Rather it addresses the pastoral reality that resistance to God practised so long eventually nullifies the capacity to choose life.'

301 Abraham J. Heschel, *The Prophets 1*, 128, notes other references to the problem being centred in the stubbornness of their evil hearts: 3:17; 7:24; 9:13[Eng 9:14]; 13:10; 16:12; 23:17.

302 This expression occurs in 2:25 (and also Isa 57:10). Craigie, Kelley, and Drinkard, *Jeremiah 1–25*, 243, notes that either mood is possible here. Philip R. Davies, "Joking in Jeremiah 18," in *On Humour and the Comic in the Hebrew Bible*, ed. Yehuda T. Radday and Athalya Brenner, JSOT Sup 92 (Sheffield: Almond Press, 1990), 196, offers the possibility that the people could be speaking in defiance, meaning, 'Give up, you're wasting your time!' However, Yahweh does not give up. Lundbom, *Jeremiah 1–20*, 816, comments that there is no hope for the nation at this point, not because Yahweh is set in his ways but because the people are set in theirs. It is not the oracle that contains harsh judgment, it is the narrative, in v.12, that does.

303 Just as Yahweh has made plans, the people make plans, against Yahweh, and, as becomes clear later in this chapter, against Jeremiah. Holladay, *Jeremiah 1*, 517, wonders whether the people's plans, in the plural, may hint at divided loyalties, or even of polytheism. If this is so, it is not the main focus of the narrative at this point.

304 Abraham J. Heschel, *The Prophets 2*, 38, writes: 'The source of evil (in the Bible) is not in passion, in the throbbing heart, but rather in hardness of heart, in callousness and insensitivity.'

305 Fretheim, *Jeremiah*, 271, says: 'God is still engaged in pottery work, shaping his people for a future beyond judgment.'

verbs.

3.2 EZEKIEL AS WATCHMAN: Ezekiel 33:1-20

The placement of this second reference to Ezekiel's call to be a watchman (צפה) can be viewed either as the introduction of a new phase in his ministry or as the conclusion of the first phase. While the first watchman passage is followed by the prophet's speechlessness, the second is followed by a release from that speechlessness. The anticipation that Jerusalem will fall and the prophet's normal speech be resumed (ch.24) is dramatically suspended in the present structure of the book by the insertion of the prophecies against the nations (chs.25-32) and the new articulation of the watchman call; the resolution of that suspense only occurs in 33:21ff.

An end or a beginning?

Those who regard this second watchman passage as constituting a second commissioning for a new phase of ministry treat it as the beginning of the new section of the book in which messages of hope dominate.[306] However, others see its present placement as forming an intentional *inclusio* around Ezekiel's ministry prior to the fall of Jerusalem, and therefore saying something significant about the character of the first period of ministry.[307] Some, therefore, take it to refer exclusively to the early ministry.[308] Certainly, the content recapitulates themes from chs. 1-24 before announcing the final judgment in 33:21-22, rather than bringing a

---

306 e.g. Walther Zimmerli, *A Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Ezekiel Chapters 25–48*, trans. James D. Martin (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983), 182–83; Keith W. Carley, *The Book of the Prophet Ezekiel*, Cambridge Bible Commentary (London: Cambridge University Press, 1974), 220; Taylor, *Ezekiel*, 213.

307 Blenkinsopp, *Ezekiel*, 28, comments on the *inclusio* and the frequency of the device in ancient compositions, e.g. The Epic of Gilgamesh. He thinks it gives an important clue toward understanding Ezekiel's role.

308 e.g. Moshe Greenberg, *Ezekiel 21–37*, The Anchor Bible (New York: Doubleday, 1997), 679–80 and Joyce, *Divine Initiative*, 143.

new message. So it seems more likely that this second watchman passage is primarily placed to conclude and refer to the first phase of ministry, which coincides with the period of speechlessness. However, the possibility that the combined watchman/speechlessness passages in chs.3 and 33 both serve a Janus function must be considered. This is not the only place in the book where the turning point towards hope lies at the very point of judgment (cf. Ezek 11:16).

Recurring motifs: Ezek 3 and 33

Block and Fishbane have observed that the use of doublets or recurring motifs is a significant feature of this book.[309] Block calls this characteristic of Ezekiel's work 'resumptive exposition' and regards it as evidence of inner-biblical or inner-compositional exegesis—in other words, intratextuality. Although it is most obvious in many of the restoration oracles which intentionally answer earlier judgment pronouncements, there are many examples, like the watchman passages, where a theme is introduced, dropped immediately and then resumed later in the book with a fuller exposition, for example, 1) the vision of divine glory and the throne-chariot (1:1-28; 8:1-11:25; 43:1-9), 2) Ezekiel's speechlessness (3:26-27; 33:22), 3) Jerusalem like a cooking pot (11:1-12; 24:1-14), 4) allegories of Israel as harlot (ch.16 and ch. 23), 5) the problem of hubris (28:1-19; 29:1-8), 6) personal responsibility for one's fate (18:1-32; 33:10-20), together with a further 28 examples.[310] Certainly, the double attention to the watchman call points to its importance.

Made a watchman: Ezek 33:1-9

Again the 'word of Yahweh' comes to Ezekiel, addressed as 'son of man.' This is not couched in terms of a call narrative or a report of a prophetic recommissioning,

---

309 Block, *Ezekiel 1*, 24, builds on the work of Michael Fishbane, *Biblical Interpretation in Ancient Israel* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1985).

310 Block, *Ezekiel 1*, 24–25.

rather, it is divine speech telling him to speak publicly (v.2) about his watchman role.[311] The purpose is that his people will understand their critical need to heed the warning he gives and the dire consequences of failing to take it seriously.

As is typical in Ezekiel, and common in priestly writings, he uses an indirect, rather detached method of setting up typical cases for the people to consider.[312] He takes a parable framed as case law (v.2b-6) but uses it paraenetically. The style bears similarities to that used in Deuteronomy (e.g. Deut 13:1-5) including the homiletic attributes and polarised outcomes of life or death (cf. Deut 30:15-20), but is used here to address a prophetic concern.[313]

Whereas there is no mention of the trumpet, or shofar (שׁפר), in ch.3, there is here. The image of a watchman blowing a shofar, usually made of a ram's horn and capable of sounding a limited range of notes, would be well known. It would signal the first sign of danger, calling the warriors to take up their defensive positions at strategic points on the walls, while the women and children retreat to refuges within the city.[314] However, moving beyond what is stated in ch.3, here the coming enemy is identified as Yahweh who is bringing the sword (v.2), one of the recognised

---

311 Daniel I. Block, *The Book of Ezekiel Chapters 25–48* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 235.

312 von Rad, *OT Theology 2*, 222,231. He also notes (p. 225) that Ezekiel's relationship to the priestly, sacral tradition is curiously ambivalent: he is dependent on it, yet not bound by it. His solutions are those of a prophet. Childs, "Introduction," 362, argues that Ezekiel uses the traditional language and methods of the sacral-legal tradition in an effort to formulate a fresh and vigorous imperative.

313 Zimmerli, *Ezekiel 2*, 183, notes that the opening כי points to priestly legal casuistic language. In contrast to the cases presented in the Book of the Covenant (e.g. Ex 21:1-6), the 'case' here is not so much defined and delimited as described in narrative style. Leslie Allen, *Ezekiel 20–48*, WBC (Dallas: Word, 1990), 142 Leslie Allen, *Ezekiel 2*, 142, also notes the similarity with the style of the Holiness Code (Lev 17-26), especially the combination of case and verdict in Lev 24:17.

314 Block, *Ezekiel 2*, 240, also notes that the shophar was used in an announcement role in cultic observances, calling troops to war, signalling victory, etc., and became a symbol of war itself.

stereotyped dooms, alongside pestilence and famine.[315] This image of Yahweh wielding the sword against his own people is both horrifying and explanatory. In this narrative it is the people who have chosen the watchman (whereas in ch.3 it was Yahweh who chose him).[316] Yet, this watchman is held accountable, not to the people but to Yahweh (the one who brings the sword); he is accountable for the blood of the people. In this one parable, Yahweh is presented as the author of both judgment and salvation simultaneously. This may caution us against isolating judgment from salvation too rigidly throughout the rest of the book. However, it is fitting that both are brought together so powerfully in this turning point chapter. After this entire case narrative about a hypothetical third-person watchman, Ezekiel is addressed and identified as the particular watchman whom Yahweh has called. At this point his personal call, narrated in ch.3, is presented to the people; the placement within the book keeps this public presentation within the period of speechlessness.

Heed the warning: Ezek 33:7-9

The rhetorical strategy is not merely to present the role of a watchman and the fate of the wicked (רשע) in a detached, quasi-legal style, but to bring urgent motivation to the audience to avoid identification with the heedless wicked who incur unnecessary bloodshed on their own heads and, instead, to save their lives (v.5).[317] The parable does not invite identification with the watchman. However, sympathy with the watchman is evoked since he is given a position by the people and his job has life and death consequences.

---

315 See also Ezek 14:12-23. Michael Fishbane, "Sin and Judgment in the Prophecies of Ezekiel," in *Interpreting the Prophets*, ed. James Luther Mays, Achtemeier (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987), 184–85, notes that these stereotyped dooms are drawn from the covenantal curses in Lev 26 and Deut 28. There is no attempt in this book to correlate specific sins with specific judgments.

316 Block, *Ezekiel 2*, 239, draws attention to the fact that the watchman is not a volunteer, but a conscript.

317 William H. Brownlee, "Ezekiel's Parable of the Watchman and the Editing of Ezekiel," *VT* 28, no. 40 (1978): 407, comments that while 'Ezekiel reveals himself as possessing an exact legal mind ... at the same time his rhythmic utterances show his skill as a poet.'

The phrase 'house of Israel' occurs at the beginning of v.7 and the end of v.9, functioning as an *inclusio* to mark this as a small section.[318] The interpretation that follows the parable, in vv. 7-9, closely parallels 3:17-19. First, it serves, in this context, as a kind of *apologia,* where the prophetic role in which Ezekiel has been engaging since his call is made clear once and for all.[319] This is particularly fitting in the present setting, just prior to the announcement that Jerusalem has fallen. Since the only group of people mentioned in the parable is 'the wicked', this is the group dealt with first. Heeding the warning of the trumpet is now interpreted as turning (שׁוּב) from their ways (vv. 8,9). Rhetorically, this functions to call all of the people in Ezekiel's audience to assess whether they need to turn from their present ways.

The positioning of this parable right after the oracles against the foreign nations gives particular poignancy. In the oracles against the other nations Yahweh brings the sword in judgment, but now Yahweh brings the sword against his own people.[320] He now turns to treat his own people just as he treats their enemies (cf. Amos 1-2)! Any stereotypes of other nations as enemy and Yahweh as friend are being reversed.

Answering the people: Ezek 33:10-20

These verses are frequently described as a disputation speech; its construction is analysed by Block as follows:[321]

A. The first disputation	vv. 10-16
1) The popular quotation	v. 10
2) The prophet's response	vv. 11-16
a) The dispute	v. 11
b) The counterthesis	vv. 12-16
B. The second disputation	vv. 17-20
1) The popular quotation	v. 17a-b
2) The prophet's response	vv. 17c-20

---

318 Leslie Allen, *Ezekiel 2*, 143.

319 Block, *Ezekiel 2*, 243.

320 Brownlee, "Parable of Watchman," 399, points out this intentional antithesis.

321 Block, *Ezekiel 2*, 244. But see also his comments on the form and nature of disputation speeches in *Block, Ezekiel 1*, 33ff.

a) The counterthesis	vv. 17c-19
b) The dispute	v. 20

There are many close parallels, in both form and style, between this passage and ch. 18 (vv.1-3, 25-30). They both begin with a saying of the people, and include an identical divine oath (v.11, cf. 18:3),'As I live,'(חי־אני).[322] In 18:2 the saying is a proverb, but here it is a tripartite statement, in effective rhetorical style, with a rhythm and rhyme pattern that is characteristic of lament.[323] It is the final pressing question of this lament, 'How then can we live?' which is taken up in the divine response, beginning with, 'As I live.' The divine desire for life over death is expressed in the next statement, 'I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked'(v.11, also in 18:23) and reinforced in the passionate plea to turn (שוב). Within the extended passage, this functions as an explicit reinforcement of the implied motivation to avoid the fate of the wicked in the parable of vv.1-6.

However, the popular saying seems to indicate an acceptance of what Ezekiel has been telling them: they are indeed wicked, and they will bear the death sentence because of their sin. This is the first time in the book that the people are portrayed as admitting their own guilt as the cause of their suffering. However, the question remains as to whether this is sufficient. It may be a teachable moment or it may be little more than a cry of pain.[324] The divine response seems to indicate that something more is required: a turning away from the 'death' in which they are

---

322 Verses in Ezekiel where this same divine oath occurs are: 5:11; 14:16,18,20; 16:48; 17:16; 18:3; 20:3; 33:11,27; 34:8; 35:6,11.

323 Block, *Ezekiel 2*, 246, notes the triple –enu ending in the first line. He draws a comparison with Isa 59:12 and Jer 14:7,9,20. The word for 'wasting away' (מקק) in line two is used elsewhere of putrefying gangrenous flesh, cf. Ezek 4:17; 24:23. Leslie Allen, *Ezekiel 2*, 146, comments: 'Historically the lament gives expression to the aftermath of the catastrophe of 587 B.C. and to the social and religious disorientation that the crisis created (cf. Lam 3:42-47).'

324 Block, *Ezekiel 2*, 246. Eichrodt, *Ezekiel*, 454, notices that the people do not actually address God in their depression.

wallowing, depressed and hopeless.[325] Even at this late stage they have the power to choose against it, and to take an active step that will issue in life. Their final question: 'How then can we live?' indicates that they think life is impossible, but the answer is an insistent: 'No!'[326] Perhaps the point to which the people have come, of thinking that their hope is gone, is intentionally set out here as a parallel to the fall of Jerusalem (vv.21-22). Yet as the book, and this chapter, goes on to show, the end becomes the opportunity for a new beginning. But this opportunity can only be taken when the reality of a coming onslaught is accepted.

The question of how life might even be possible, in the light of a past which has already condemned them to death, is taken up in the counterthesis of vv.12-16. God is apparently only interested in the present, not the past. Neither former wickedness nor former righteousness has set the consequences in concrete. If the righteous person trusts in his righteousness and does evil, that is, becomes complacent and presumptuous, he will die for the evil he has done. If the wicked person shows by his actions that he is repentant (e.g. returns what he has taken), he will surely live.[327] As in ch.18, each individual has both responsibility and opportunity.[328] That leaves no one in a position that is beyond hope.

Indeed it is hope for the preservation of life, and not despair, that is a fundamental motivation for the function of watchman. However, the watchman needs to convince

---

325 Eichrodt, *Ezekiel*, 190, makes an astute observation that seems to be well illustrated here: man swings between defiance and depression. Life lies in neither, but only in repentance and turning towards God. Abraham J. Heschel, *The Prophets 1*, 191–92, adds, 'It seems that the only cure for wilful hardness is to make it absolute. Then it becomes despair, the end of conceit. Out of despair, out of total inability to believe, prayer bursts forth.'

326 Donald Gowan, *Theology of the Prophetic Books:The Death and Resurrection of Israel* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1998), 133, considers that this last question by the people is the theme of chs. 33-48.

327 Block, *Ezekiel 2*, 248, observes that Ezekiel is expressing his willingness to treat his audience not as apostatised righteous but as wicked who could repent.

328 cf. 18:28.

the people that what he sees, that is, the enemy coming, is right, especially when this prophetic watchman has competing voices from other prophets who claim to see something different. The role of this watchman, then, is not only military, but moral; his call is not only to prepare for battle but to turn people away from wicked ways.[329]

The second disputation begins with another popular saying: 'The way of the Lord is not just.'[330] This, in fact, makes it clear that the people's sorrow has not yet become repentance. Nor is their question about divine justice expressed directly to God.[331] In a summary form of the argument used in 18:25-30, and in a forceful restatement of the alternatives presented in 33:12-16, Ezekiel charges the people with being unjust, and affirms God's justice in judging each person individually according to that person's present ways.[332] Again he states that it is the last state of a person, rather than his past history, that is of final importance, thus affirming God's continuing moral demand and the need to 'turn' from wickedness. Those who continue to reject God's ways of dealing with justice, will ultimately have to be judged by him. As always, Ezekiel is jealous for the divine honour, and God's justice must not ultimately be questioned.[333]

Warning for the nation, not just for individuals

Ezekiel's stress on individual responsibility has caused many, like von Rad and Eichrodt, to see Ezekiel's later ministry as a pastor to individual exiles, involved in

---

329 Brownlee, "Parable of Watchman," 399.

330 Taylor, *Ezekiel*, 215, notes that the literal translation, 'The way of the Lord is not equal' (יְתֻכַּן) is an unusual metaphor taken from weighing in scales. It refers to scales that are not adjusted to the right standard, and so refer to the action of a dishonest salesman.

331 Lament which is acceptable to God is addressed directly to God, e.g. Ps 13:1; 22:1; 130:1.

332 Peter Craigie, *Ezekiel*, The Daily Study Bible (Edinburgh: The Saint Andrew Press, 1983), 237, comments that the people were in error in applying a rigid notion of justice to the fluid relationship with God.

333 Cooke, *Ezekiel*, 366.

the 'cure of souls'.[334] According to this view, Ezekiel needs to turn his attention to those individuals who might hear him, rather than attempt to speak to the nation. It is certainly true that the concept of the whole nation being dealt with as a unit is undergoing a serious transition in Ezekiel's time.[335] However, the role of a watchman is not to give warning to isolated individuals, but to the whole community, here the collective 'house of Israel' (vv.7,9).[336] It is only the accountability which is described in terms of individuals.[337] The watchman's job is to sound the warning to the community, but is not to supervise individuals.

Duration of the watchman call

The question concerning the duration of Ezekiel's call to be watchman has been raised. Alongside that question is another: whether this call suggests an identification of prophet and watchman; after all, there is nothing within the text, either here or in ch.3, that explicitly identifies the two roles. If Ezekiel's call to be watchman only lasts until the fall of Jerusalem, then his role as prophet continues longer than his role as watchman. Conversely, if the office of watchman is a continuing responsibility, the role of prophet is seen as more temporary. Westermann argues for the second view on the basis of observing a very different literary structure in ch.33 from the rest of Ezekiel's proclamations (ch.33 being

---

334 von Rad, *OT Theology 2*, 231–32, sees Ezekiel as the first prophet to enter this new sphere of activity: the pastoral office of 'cure of souls,' based in Ezek 33:11, arising from the emergence of the individual from the group, and with Ezekiel having been given responsibility for people's souls. He sees it corresponding to the NT's παράκλησις, involving exhorting, warning and comforting. Eichrodt, *Ezekiel*, 452, is happy to consider that Ezekiel as watchman is called to pastoral care so long as it is not understood to be confined to 'spiritual inwardness'. Gowan, *Theology of Prophetic Books*, 121, comments that we find Ezekiel responding pastorally to the needs being presented by the people in ways that are not made explicit in other books.

335 Buber, *Prophetic Faith*, 186–87, says, 'Ezekiel does see Israel as a community, but in his vision and reproof of the present he sees it as a multitude of individuals, each one responsible before God for himself alone ... The people no longer exists as a covenant partner, until God will make for it the "eternal covenant"; but in the time of transition there is opened to every man of Israel a covenant relationship to God, each one, as formerly the people, being set at the crossroads between life and death.'

336 Greenberg, *Ezekiel 2*, 679–80. Klein, *Ezekiel*, 31.

337 Klein, *Ezekiel*, 31.

paraenetic, marked by conditional sentences).[338] However, I see no reason to make literary structure the primary determining factor.

The term 'prophet' (נביא) is often used in a generic sense to refer to others, but it clearly refers to Ezekiel in two almost identical passages, 2:5 and 33:33 ('they shall know that a prophet has been among them') and in 14:4, as the one being consulted.[339] The first of these, in the call narrative, relates to speaking to the people about their rebelliousness and is congruent with the watchman call in ch.3. The second is placed soon after the present watchman passage and relates to Ezekiel's role to give warning regarding the coming sword (v.27). This placement suggests that the faithful execution of the watchman role will show that Ezekiel acts as a true prophet and aligns the two terms very closely. The related verb נבא is regularly used to describe the activity which Ezekiel is called to do, and is applied throughout the whole book, not to just one phase.[340]

In a military sense, a watchman's role may be temporarily fulfilled when the fulfillment of a specific warning occurs, so long as no further danger exists. In a moral sense, as Ezekiel's role clearly entails, there is nothing in the book that suggests a cessation of the need for continuing vigilance regarding danger signs within the community because they also bring risks of further divine threat.[341] Ezekiel's continuing directions to prophesy, and continuing concerns regarding issues of morality, support this. Up until now, Ezekiel's function would be perceived in terms of warning against doom; the watchman image gives a clear explanation to

---

338 Claus Westermann, *Prophetic Oracles of Salvation in the Old Testament*, trans. Keith Crim (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1991), 182–84, regards the prophetic role as intermittent.

339 References to נביא are in 2:5; 7:26; 13:2,3,4,9,16; 14:4,7,9,10; 22:25,28; 33:33; 38:17.

340 It occurs in the niphal in 4:7; 6:2; 11:4,13; 12:27; 13:2,16,17; 21:2,4,14,19,33; 25:2; 28:21; 29:2; 30:2; 34:2; 35:2; 36:1,3,6; 37:4,7,9,12; 38:2,14,17; 39:1 and in the hitphael in 13:17 and 37:10.

341 Wright, *Ezekiel*, 221, thinks that Ezekiel must still watch for danger signs, and ensure that those who repent stay living as righteous.

the people as to why this has been so. However, the theological understanding and motivation that lies behind the watchman call does not change in the next phase. The new emphasis on hope and life, which has always been the purpose of the warning, can now become more explicit, while the need to continue to warn people against complacency, backsliding and wickedness will continue.

Beyond self-centredness

Beyond the necessity for him to be alert and watching, and to speak words of warning, Ezekiel's responsibility involves his moving beyond self-centredness to count the call of Yahweh and the needs of others ahead of his own concerns, even though it is true that his own life is also at stake.[342] Although the watchman image is not specifically used in ch.13, it is clear that its characteristics lie behind Ezekiel's yardstick for evaluating the function of prophets. The deviant prophets say 'peace' when there is no peace (13:10), and 'have encouraged the wicked not to turn from their wicked way and save their lives' (13:22). Ezekiel's own work in knowing and naming violations of the law stands in contrast to their failure to do similarly.[343] In this work there is some degree of overlap with the traditional function of the Levites (Deut 33:10). However, the urgency of the watchman's role is prophetic.[344] The watchman's role is that of awakening people from lethargy, self-pity and moral paralysis, of warning people of devastating divine threat if no turning occurs, and

---

342 M.J. Buss, "The Social Psychology of Prophecy," in *Prophecy: Essays Presented to Georg Fohrer on His Sixty-Fifth Birthday 6 Sept 1980*, ed. J.A. Emerton (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1980), 9, writes about roles within society, and the need for a person to be "decentred" (i.e., not self-centred) in order truly to have a self. In other words, self-transcendence is an integral part of selfhood. The role of prophet here, in particular, as watchman, exhibits such self-transcendence.

343 Fishbane, "Sin and Judgment," 183, notes examples in chs. 18 and 22. Ex 22:10-11 seems to be dependent upon Lev 20:10-18.

344 Carley, *Ezekiel Among the Prophets*, 80, demonstrates the close working relationship between prophets and Levites. Just as the levitical singers of the Second Temple period could adopt prophetic roles in the course of worship (1 Chron 25:1ff; 2 Chron 20:14ff), the prophets could also be involved in the levitical task of teaching the law. Ezekiel's book shows particular parallels with both the Holiness Code and Deuteronomy. These both point to the figure of Moses, who was held up as the paradigm for a prophet, but was also a Levite closely associated with the teaching of the law. Carley thinks that the scholarly separation between prophetic and levitical roles has often been overplayed.

also pointing to the possibility of life and hope for those who heed the warning. Its most obvious function in this book occurs prior to the fall of Jerusalem, but the accuracy of the warning in that phase only serves to authenticate Ezekiel as a true prophet; this authentication enables him to speak more freely of further warnings, alongside more explicit hope, as a continuing watchman-prophet.

3.3 COMPARISON OF JEREMIAH AS ASSAYER AND POTTER WITH EZEKIEL AS WATCHMAN

This comparison of worker images focuses on the outworking of the prophetic role itself, expressed in metaphors. Since prophetic ministry necessarily relates to both Yahweh and to people, differences in the nature of these relationships will also be noted. Each of these images suggests change, whether destructive of impure or inadequate materials (assayer and potter), builder of new vessels (potter), or alertness in the face of a threat (watchman). The larger structures of each book (both pointing to the importance of the exile and the fall of Jerusalem) confirm that each prophet's ministry is set within a context of huge societal change where choices are critical. Although destruction seems almost inevitable, survival and rebuilding are possible.

The prophet in relation to Yahweh

One striking difference between the images used of each prophet is that the images that are either applied explicitly or suggested implicitly in regard to Jeremiah (assayer and potter) are usually also applied to Yahweh, whereas the watchman image applied to Ezekiel is not. The presence of some ambiguity of voice between the prophetic and the divine in both of the Jeremiah passages increases the sense of blurring between prophetic and divine roles, whereas no such blurring is present in

the watchman passages in Ezekiel. In terms of relational distance, Jeremiah's ministry is portrayed as being very close to functions of Yahweh; Ezekiel's is portrayed as being more distant: although Yahweh is depicted as the one who speaks the words of warning which the watchman is to pass on, he is also an enemy to watch out for.

The prophet in relation to the people

In Jeremiah, the focus of attention in the assayer image is on the metal being tested; the focus of the potter image is on the clay. Both materials are said to represent the people. Both images call for the worker's attention to be focused primarily on the material being worked, that is, on the people. Jeremiah's role is to 'know and test' the ways of the people, as an assayer tests metal (Jer 6:27), not unlike the necessity for the potter to recognise whether the clay under his hands is working well for the desired pot. The image of the watchman, however, places Ezekiel's primary attention outside the people, on the approaching enemy/speaker, Yahweh. However, this outward focus is for the purpose of fulfilling a critical role for the people, a role of warning, of blowing the shofar.

The task of the assayer is to draw close enough to the people to be able to test them by applying the fire; likewise, the potter must feel the clay close under his hands in order to form or destroy it. On the other hand, the task of a watchman requires him to look into the distance, to see what the people cannot see, and to use a non-intimate means of communication (the shofar) for his generalised, public warning. Many have noted that the book of Jeremiah has an abundance of individual names, suggesting many individual relationships with the prophet, and that the book of Ezekiel is decidedly deficient in indications of personal names and conversations. This difference is congruent with the differences in the images used. It is also significant that Jeremiah is portrayed as working in close emotional relationship with both Yahweh and the people; Ezekiel appears to be more distant from both.

In Jeremiah's potter passage the people are to be treated just as those of any other nation, in terms of obedience to the voice of Yahweh; their illusion of unconditional favour without corresponding compliance needs to be shattered through the prophetic message. In Ezekiel's watchman passage the people are envisaged as having a particular identity, inside a city wall; for them, whose identity and security have been damaged, the message of the prophetic watchman is to turn to the way that brings life.

Working for response

In both the potter and the watchman passages there is an impassioned call to the people to turn (שׁוּב, Jer 18:11; Ezek 33:11); here the crucial thrust of the prophetic work of both prophets to be response-seeking is most clearly expressed. The results of their work are clearly conditional; the response of the people is all-important. In each case the prophet is not to presume hopelessness in his task, but to convey a sense of urgency, in order to avoid destruction. In Jeremiah, the potter's call to turn is made to a nation: the people of Judah in v.11, the house of Israel in v.6. The choice to respond by turning or to refuse to turn is also made by a nation (Jer 18:8,10); there is no reference to individual responses. In Ezekiel, the watchman is also to warn the people as a whole (Ezek 33:3) but the responses are described as choices taken by individuals (Ezek 33:4ff). Although the exact nature of the turning is not made clear in the potter passage, it is specified in the watchman passage as turning from iniquity. It is stated in ethical terms: to 'restore the pledge, give back what they have taken by robbery and walk in the statutes of life' (Ezek 33:15), which is consistent with the moral turning specified in both prophets.

Tools of trade

In each of these worker images, the prophet must use some kind of tool or medium: the assayer uses the furnace fire and the wind of the bellows, the potter uses a wheel and his hands, the watchman uses a shofar and his words. Within the assayer imagery, the fire is instrumental in both destroying (causing inferior metals to be taken away) and refining (potentially revealing the precious metal content). The divine double purpose of destruction and building is congruent with this, although the verbs from Jer 1:10 are not repeated within the assayer passage, and although the imagery is different. The imagery of fire, as used by Jeremiah, when developed later in the book as the word of Yahweh within Jeremiah himself, heightens the close identification of the prophet with Yahweh. Within the potter imagery, the role of the wheel has no further significance. However, the destroying and shaping of the pots are done by the potter's hands, using the same verbs as have been used of Jeremiah. Once again, the means of both destruction and building come through the person of the worker, not through a detached tool.

In Ezekiel, the instrument of the shofar is blown in response to the word (Ezek 33:7), but it is never used as an image of that word. Nor is any further significance given beyond its role in warning the people. Although Ezekiel the watchman must use eyes, ears and mouth to fulfill his calling, there is no corresponding identification of a bodily part (like the hands of the potter) or an internalised attribute of Yahweh (like the fire of the word of Yahweh) that is said to have direct causation in what happens to the people. The use of fire imagery in Ezekiel is always associated with Yahweh, and especially with his anger and judgment, as also occurs in Jeremiah.[345] The wind of the bellows in Jeremiah has no correspondence in the

---

[345] Ezek 1:4,5,13,27; 8:2;10:2,6,7; 15:2-7; 21:36-37[Eng 31-32]; 22:21,31; 24:9-12; 28:14,16; 36:5; 38:19 with more oblique references in 5:4; 16:41; 23:25,47. Jer 4:4; 21:10,12 and possibly more oblique references in 22:7; 34:2,22; 49:2.

watchman imagery in Ezekiel, but there is a strong association of wind with divine Spirit in this book.

Destruction and hope

Both of the images in Jeremiah, assayer and potter, hold the capacity for direct, active destruction by the worker: the molten breakdown of metallic components, the smashing of a spoiled pot. The actively destructive roles of both Jeremiah and Yahweh are also borne out in the destructive verbs used of both in Jer 18:7 and 1:10: pluck up (נתשׁ), break down (נתץ), destroy (אבד). Ezekiel the watchman has no authorisation to bring destruction, but only to work towards salvation. His warnings are given with the hope of persuading the people to make any needed changes in preparation for the coming threat, so that they can save their lives (Ezek 33:5). However, his role in relation to the fall of Jerusalem and the suggestion that the people do not heed his warnings (33:17-20) relate his prophetic ministry to destruction.

All of the images carry the potential for hope: the assayer hopes to find some pure silver, the potter can rebuild a spoiled pot, the watchman can enable his people to be saved. However, the Jeremiah passages suggest that destruction is now inevitable, and in Ezekiel the salvation of his people appears very unlikely. The assaying process is said to be 'in vain' and the people are called 'rejected silver' (Jer 6:29-30). Although the house of Israel, as any other nation, has the opportunity to turn from evil and thus influence the potter's decision concerning its future, no turning is seen; the potter is 'shaping evil' against the people (Jer 18:11). Ezekiel's people also show no signs of taking the warnings of the watchman seriously and examining their own ways; instead, the people retort, 'The way of the Lord is not just' (Ezek 33:17,20).

Working with perseverance

All three images require the prophet to work patiently over time. None of them suggests that the prophetic role is confined to an isolated speech or intermittent events. The prophetic work is to be done carefully and thoroughly, facing resistance and hard labour, with the distinct possibility of being unsuccessful, yet with a hopeful and constructive goal for the lives of the people.

Conclusion

Some elements of prophetic work are similar for Jeremiah and Ezekiel. Their work is response-seeking, and the results are conditional on the choices of the people. They work for change, for a hopeful outcome, but they are also shown that hope is unlikely to be fulfilled. They must, however, work with perseverance despite difficulties.

Jeremiah's work is more closely identified with the work of Yahweh and he works more closely and directly with the people; his primary medium, as assayer, is fire, which is later identified with the word of Yahweh. Ezekiel's work is not identified with the work of Yahweh, although he needs to listen for and watch for Yahweh; he does not so much work with the people as for the people, remaining separate in order to see further, but acting in their interests. Jeremiah is entrusted with some destructive tasks, in addition to some that build up; Ezekiel has no mandate to work for destruction, has no authority to bring life or death directly, but is to work in the hope of salvation for his people. Jeremiah must hold his people accountable on the same level as those from other nations; Ezekiel only serves to strengthen his own people. The context of each prophet, outlined in ch.2, must again be seen as a critical factor in understanding each prophetic ministry.

Although these images all imply change, none of them addresses the institutions in society: cult and monarchy. In my next chapter I will compare texts dealing with prophetic ministry in relation to the Jerusalem temple, since the temple, even more than monarchy, represents societal security, and this must be involved in any work of societal change.

CHAPTER FOUR
THE PROPHET IN RELATION TO THE TEMPLE

Although both prophetic books refer to the Jerusalem temple, the amount of space devoted to it is vastly different. There is only one significant passage in Jeremiah which demonstrates the prophet's relationship with the temple: Jer 7:1-15. In Ezekiel, there are two such blocks of material, both part of the three-vision sequence which provides structure to the book: Ezek 8-11 and 40-44. In the interests of space, it is only possible to examine one of these blocks in this chapter. Since Ezek 40-44 refers to an idealised future temple rather than the present Jerusalem temple, Ezek 8-11 is the more appropriate choice to set beside Jer 7:1-15.

4.1 JEREMIAH'S TEMPLE SERMON: Jeremiah 7:1-15

The 'Temple Sermon' is one of the few places in which the book of Jeremiah speaks explicitly about the role of the Jerusalem temple in the lives of the people. The occasion is generally thought to be the same as that referred to in chapter 26, where the sermon itself is summarised very succinctly (26:1-6, 12-13) but the outcome for Jeremiah himself is made the focus.[346]

The term 'temple' (הֵיכַל) usually denotes a palace or royal residence.[347] Within this passage the word only occurs in v. 4, in the phrase which is given to sum up the deceptive words in which the people were not to put their trust: 'the temple of

---

346 Else Kragelund Holt, "Jeremiah's Temple Sermon and the Deuteronomists: An Investigation of the Redactional Relationships Between Jeremiah 7 and 26," *JSOT* 36 (1986): 85, regards ch. 7 as paraenetic, relating Yahweh's message to his people, while ch. 26 is didactic, describing the people's response to this message. Clements, *Jeremiah*, 44, notes that ch. 26 marks the beginning of a long sequence of narratives dealing with Jeremiah's personal fortunes, especially his rejection and suffering.

347 Bright, *Jeremiah*, 55.

Yahweh, the temple of Yahweh, the temple of Yahweh.' Outside this passage, it only occurs in 24:1 (where two baskets of figs are placed in front of the temple of Yahweh) in 50:28 and in 51:11 (in both cases destruction is threatened against Babylon because of Yahweh taking 'vengeance ... vengeance for his temple').

In both ch. 7 and ch. 26, as well as throughout the book, the temple is more usually simply designated 'house' (בַּיִת). It is 'Yahweh's house' in 7:2 and 26:2,7,9,10, as well as in 19:14; 20:1,2; 27:16,18,21; 28:1,3,5,6; 29:26; 33:11; 35:2,4; 36:5,6,8,10; 51:51; 52:13,17,20; 'the/this house that is called by/bears my name' in 7:11,14,30; 32:34; 34:15; 'my house' in 23:11; 'this house' in 7:10,11,14; and 26:6,9,12; and the 'mountain of the house' in 26:18. The frequent references to 'the house of Judah' and 'the house of Israel' as well as to 'the king's house' show that 'house' still carries the same capacity for double meaning as in 2 Sam 7:5,11.

Context

The passage begins: 'The word that came (or literally, was) to Jeremiah from Yahweh', in the same way that other similar blocks of prose begin (Jer 11:1-17; 21:1-10 and 18:1-12).[348] The first two verses are similar to those introducing ch. 26. No date is given here, but 26:1 informs us that it is 'at the beginning of the reign of King Jehoiakim', which suggests that it is probably in the autumn of 609 or the winter of 609/608 B.C., most likely at the time of a festival.[349]

---

[348] Stulman, "Prose Sermons," 43.

[349] Thompson, *Jeremiah*, 274. Jay A. Wilcoxen, "The Political Background of Jeremiah's Temple Sermon," in *Scripture in History and Theology: Essays in Honor of J. Coert Rylaarsdam*, ed. Arthur L. and Overholt Merrill, Thomas W. (Pittsburgh, PA: Pickwick, 1977), adds that the phrase 'the beginning of the reign' was a technical expression designating that portion of the year that remained after a new king came to the throne until the next official new year began, thus enabling the 609/608 date to be established. Lundbom, *Jeremiah 1–20*, 460, cites the contention of Volz that הִשְׁתַּחֲוֹת (worship, in 26:2) is a technical term meaning worship at a yearly festival, and acknowledges the possible connection with the so-called 'Liturgy of the Gate' or 'Entry Torah' as is mentioned above.

Jeremiah is to stand at the temple gate (7:1), or inner court, that provides access to the crowds of worshippers.[350] This location is used at other times by Jeremiah (19:14-15; 28:1; 36:5-6) but he also delivers other oracles at city gates (17:19; 19:1-2; 22:1-2). Some have suggested that Jeremiah has an official function in the cult.[351] This could perhaps be as a servant of the institution greeting the people and asking them to examine their moral lives before passing through the gates.[352] Within the temple liturgy itself there are examples of the cult being critiqued; like Jer 7, Pss.15 and 24 also stress the need for ethical integrity and the requirements of the Sinaitic covenant, implying a possible critique of the Zionist tendency towards 'an otherworldliness evasive of responsibility.'[353] Although it is possible that Jeremiah could be speaking from an official position within the cult, it is certainly not a necessity and perhaps not even a likelihood, for Jeremiah shows no other evidence of relying on or even utilising a cultic role in order to speak to the people. Moreover, the content of the sermon shows a greater concern with temple ideology than

---

[350] Lundbom, *Jeremiah 1–20*, 460, comments that this 'inner court' is to be distinguished from the 'great court' which was further distant and connected to the palace and other royal buildings. The gate may have led into the inner court. He also notes the LXX omission of 'who come through these gates to worship Yahweh' (7:2) as a possible haplography.

[351] Corrine Patton, "Layers of Meaning: Priesthood in Jeremiah MT," in *The Priests in the Prophets: The Portrayal of Priests, Prophets and Other Religious Specialists in the Latter Prophets*, ed. Lester L. Grabbe and Alice Ogden Bellis (London: T&T Clark, 2004), 160, is one who considers that Jeremiah is depicted as a cultic functionary, but is cautious about confining him to either a specifically priestly or prophetic role within the cult. She notes (p.163) the association of some oracles and laments with cultic or ritual actions or settings. As well as Jeremiah being in the temple area in 19:14; 24:1; 28:1; 38:14 and 35:1-4, he is prosecuted within the temple in 26:10-11, put in stocks within the temple in 20:2 and banned from the temple in 36:5. He is with priests in 19:1; 21:1-2; 27:16; 28:1 and 37:3.

[352] Craigie, Kelley, and Drinkard, *Jeremiah 1–25*, 120, indicate that Pss 15 and 24 suggest such a role. They think that if Jeremiah had not been appointed to such an official function, and especially if the custom of having such a person had lapsed, then he may have unofficially assumed it himself. They suggest that the most likely occasion would be the Festival of Weeks in 608 B.C. or possibly the Festival of Tabernacles in the autumn of 609 B.C. Carroll, *From Chaos to Covenant*, 87, regards the function of the sermon as an entrance torah.

[353] Jon D. Levenson, *Sinai and Zion: An Entry Into the Jewish Bible*, ed. Adela Yarbro Collins and John J. Collins, New Voices in Biblical Studies (Minneapolis: Winston Press, 1985), 208. He also comments (p.212) that whereas the Mosaic, or Sinaitic, covenant is more radically concerned for justice, the Davidic, or Zionist, is more concerned for order. Jeremiah is clearly more concerned for justice here.

entrance requirements, and within the book stands at the beginning of a collection of criticisms of cultic behaviour.[354]

The addressees are 'people of Judah', not called 'house of Judah' in this unit. The sermon itself follows a pattern that also occurs in other sermons in the book (e.g. 11:1-17; 17:19-27; 34: 8-22) and has been broadly outlined by Thompson as:

1) proclamation of Yahweh's word and law (7:1-7);

2) description of the nation's apostasy and her rejection of Yahweh's word and law (7:8-12);

3) announcement of judgment (7:13-15).[355]

There is a progression in tone: the first section is conditional preaching, similar to Deuteronomy, but rather than the call being to covenant obedience it is to a return to covenant obedience; the second section has a sharper tone, using rhetorical questions to frame admonitions and accusations; the third moves to unambiguous and categorical judgment, and uses the analogy of the Shiloh temple to provide physical evidence that the threat can be realised.[356]

The extended titles 'Yahweh of Hosts' and 'God of Israel' provide the authoritative basis for the proclamation. There is a locus of power beyond what is seen, and yet that powerful presence has been located with this particular people. This God has a historical and definitive right to speak to Israel, of which the 'people of Judah' form a part. The sermon concludes (v.15) with a reference to what this God has already done to their brothers, the offspring of Ephraim.

---

354 Carroll, *Jeremiah*, 209.

355 Thompson, *Jeremiah*, 274.

356 Lundbom, *Jeremiah 1–20*, 458.

Amend your ways: Jer 7:3

The central cry of the sermon, to 'amend your ways and your doings' (v.3), occurs elsewhere in the prose sections of this book (4:18; 18:11; 25:5) and in the poetry (17:10; 23:22), as well as in Ezek 14:22-23; 20:43; 36:17. At this point, Jeremiah's audience comprises temple worshippers, whereas later in the chapter others are judged for making offerings to other gods in other places (vv.18, 30, 31) in total disobedience to the commands of Yahweh (vv.23-24, 31). The clear inference of this opening call ('Amend your ways and your doings!') is that, for this audience at least, there is knowledge, even if buried, of a better way, and memory, even if dim, of what Yahweh requires.

Temple and land

The divine response to the people's amendment of their ways and doings is expressed with some ambiguity (v.3). There are two issues here: 1) whether the verb is pointed as piel (as MT), meaning 'I will let you dwell', or qal, meaning 'I will dwell with you' (as some manuscripts, and taken up by NRSV as 'let me dwell with you') and 2) whether 'this place' refers to this land (as in v.7, where an almost identical expression puts 'place' and 'land' in apposition) or to the temple.[357] If the verb is read as piel 'this place' suggests 'land'; if it is read as qal (with a couple of early texts), 'place' most naturally suggests 'temple'. The qal reading could suggest an early intertextual influence in the interpretation from Ezekiel.[358] Within this chapter, v.12 'place' does mean 'temple' (Shiloh); in Deuteronomic usage the

---

[357] Charles D. Isbell and Michael Jackson, "Rhetorical Criticism and Jeremiah VII 1 - VIII 3," *VT* 30 (1980): 21, comment that מָקוֹם 'place' is a key word in this section, but do not agree with Holladay's assessment that 'place' furnishes the glue that combines the various units in this passage.

[358] de Waard, *Handbook*, 29–30, show that the Vulgate and Aquila support the second reading, requiring qal vocalisation rather than the piel of MT (supported by LXX, S and T). However, although the OT often speaks of God dwelling 'among' his people it is never 'with' them in other passages; the preference is for the MT reading. Wilhelm Rudolph, *Jeremia*, Otto Eissfeldt, HAT Series 1 (Tübingen: Mohr, 1968), 50,54, also follows the second reading: 'so will ich bei euch wohnen an dieser Stätte', although he acknowledges the different interpretation given by the MT, and thinks that מקום refers to the cultic dwelling place of Yahweh until v. 14, where it refers to 'land'.

'place' that Yahweh chooses is regularly the temple (Deut 12:5,11; 14:23; 1 Kings 6:12f; 8:29f, 35 etc).[359] In Jer 7:20 'place' refers to 'land' or 'city' or a combination of 'city and land' (following on from v.17) and in ch.26, where the threat is seen more directly against the city (v.11), the ideas of 'temple' and 'city' are in apposition in vv.6, 9 and 12. In 26:20 Uriah's preaching is against the 'city and land'. The reading which is most consistent with the context of Jer 7:1-15 is that of the MT, since the warning given is that Yahweh will drive the people out (of the land) (v.15), so this is the reading I adopt.[360]

Land imagery occurs very early in the book, when Jeremiah is appointed to pluck up and pull down, destroy and overthrow, build and plant (1:10). Yahweh's role as giver of land is clear (e.g. 25:5; 32:21); he brings people out of lands, and into other lands (e.g. 2:5; 12:14; 16:13; 30:3; 31:8). He retains ownership of land that he has given to a people (e.g. 2:15) and is angered when his land is 'defiled' or 'polluted' by the people to whom he has given it (e.g. 2:7; 3:1). Although the land is not labelled 'holy' in Jeremiah, the presence of the 'Holy One of Israel' (Jer 50:29; 51:5) in his temple, which is located within the land which he gives, with his 'holy' people Israel (Jer 2:3) suggests the probability that the land, by extension, is also seen as 'holy.'[361]

In an era of rapid changes in leadership, and with concerns about the anticipated intentions of the superpowers (Babylon and, to a lesser extent, Egypt), questions about the continuing security of Judahites in the land may well be present. However, the link between land and temple does, to Jeremiah's audience, imply their security. Yet it is precisely this link that is challenged in the sermon. While Yahweh's strong authority over this land is asserted, Jeremiah raises a divine threat to their continuing

---

359 Bright, *Jeremiah*, 55.

360 With Lundbom, *Jeremiah 1-20*, 461 and Fretheim, *Jeremiah*, 133.

361 Levenson, *Sinai and Zion*, 167.

residence in the land. This implies 'the collapse of all public institutions and all symbolic expressions of well-being and coherence,' which necessarily includes kingship and temple.[362]

A deceptive word: Jer 7:4

In a book where the 'word of the Lord' dominates and a constant charge is that the people refuse to hear that word (e.g. 13:10; 32:33), Jeremiah identifies another word which has caught their attention. They are listening to a deceptive (שָׁקֶר) word, a word that is based on something which is not true; it is deceptive and groundless (v.4).[363] Although שָׁקֶר is a common enough word throughout the OT, its frequency escalates in this book, suggesting that it is a central concern here.[364] The combination 'deceptive words' (דברי השקר) only occurs here and in v.8, in the whole OT.[365] Later in the book it is associated with prophets who do not bring words from the Lord, but from their own imaginations; this false word, in the temple sermon, may well originate from or be associated with such prophets. However, priests, kings and prophets are all implicated in perpetuating delusion (2:8,26).[366]

The false word is simply represented by an exclamation: 'This is the temple of Yahweh! the temple of Yahweh! the temple of Yahweh!'[367] The repetition could

---

362 Walter Brueggemann, *The Land*, Overtures to Biblical Theology (London: SPCK, 1978), 109.

363 R. Laird Harris, Gleason L. Archer, and Bruce K. Waltke, eds., *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* (Chicago: Moody, 1980), Vol 2, 955.

364 Overholt, *Threat*, 1.

365 Holladay, *Jeremiah 1*, 242.

366 Thompson, *Jeremiah*, 277.

367 Bright, *Jeremiah*, 55, notes that the Hebrew is plural: 'these are...' most likely refers to the whole complex of buildings. C.F. Whitley, "A Note on Jeremiah 7,4," *JTS* NS5 (1954): 57–59, prefers to emend the text, taking המה as a corruption of מה with the addition of ה through dittography, making the reading: 'Do not trust in lying words, saying 'the temple of Jahweh, the temple of Jahweh, the temple of Jahweh. What? Is it stealing, murdering and committing adultery...' etc. Lundbom, *Jeremiah 1–20*, 462, notes that the LXX has only a twofold repetition of this phrase. There is another threefold repetition in Jer 22:29 (land, land, land) as well as in Isa 6:3 (holy, holy, holy), Ezek 21:32[21:27] (ruin, ruin, ruin) and, with modification, in Nah 1:2 (variations on vengeance).

evoke feelings of superlative trust, perhaps awe (maybe reminiscent of 'holy, holy, holy' in Isa 6:3), but it is more likely here to suggest the kind of mindlessness that is involved in what Levenson calls 'a mantra bled of meaning.'[368] In 5:17 it is said that the people have put their trust in fortified cities, which will be destroyed. Now it appears that they have also put their trust in the presence of the temple in their midst, and that this misplacement of trust might lie at the core of what Jeremiah sees as problematic and deceptive. Brueggemann goes so far as to say that the temple and its royal liturgy are here being exposed as tools of social control; in a time of crisis they will not keep their grand promises.[369]

Levenson suggests that Jeremiah's audience has adopted a portion of the idea of the 'cosmic mountain', but has 'taken the cosmos out of the cosmic mountain.'[370] Within this book, there is some poetic imagery of Zion as centre of the universe—Jeremiah does envisage people, even nations, gathering with joy in Jerusalem, on the heights of Zion (Jer 3:16,17; 4:6; 31:6,12,23). In cosmic imagery the Jerusalem temple is seen as the meeting point between earth and heaven, with the temple corresponding to the gate of heaven.[371] Jeremiah does not develop this aspect, and his analogy with Shiloh might suggest that he would not adopt this thinking in its entirety. However, while the people seem to accept some kind of cosmic function for the temple, they do not regard the temple with awe and do not sense a meeting with the divine presence there. Perhaps they have argued their 'temple theology' from Ps

---

368 Levenson, *Sinai and Zion*, 166.

369 Brueggemann, *Jeremiah 1–25*, 75.

370 Levenson, *Sinai and Zion*, 169.

371 Margaret Barker, *The Gate of Heaven: The History and Symbolism of the Temple in Jerusalem* (London: SPCK, 1991), 26 and 57, comments that the tabernacle had not included garden motifs in its decoration whereas the temple did, with palm trees, open flowers, pomegranate patterns, and the great lamp as a stylised almond tree. Gardens represented settled security as well as beauty. The garden imagery in the temple reminded people of the Garden of Eden (Isa 43:27-8; Ps 73:17, but not explicit in Jeremiah) and the waters (supposedly under the temple) reminded them of those four Edenic rivers which gave renewal of life to all creation. In her assessment (p.62) 'the temple was the centre, the key point of both space and time; it was the holiest place on earth ... it was also a place of power ... that power could be life or death.'

132:13-14 and 2 Sam 7:12-13;[372] perhaps their regard for the Jerusalem temple has intensified through the remarkable deliverance of Jerusalem in the face of Assyrian threat (2 Kings 18:13-19:37).[373] However, there is no gratitude, and no humility before a higher power. Levenson calls their understanding wooden; instead of allowing the temple to *correspond* to the gate of heaven, they think it *is* the gate of heaven. Instead of allowing their minds to be led to a higher realm of being, which the temple represents, they remain fixed within the framework of conventional spatiality.[374]

Lifestyle responsibilities: Jer 7:5-9

Jeremiah returns to his first call, with emphasis: 'If you *truly* amend your ways and doings ...' and cites three categories of relationships that need to undergo change (vv.5-6). First, they must treat their peers justly; second, they must not oppress[375] those who are under them;[376] third, they must not follow other gods, which perhaps could be conceived as being above them.[377] The last would be ' to their own hurt', without specifying the kind of hurt.[378] However, *if* they amend their ways, they will be allowed to stay in the land given to their forefathers 'forever'. If they don't amend their ways, the implication is that they may not, or perhaps will not, be able to stay,

---

372 Thompson, *Jeremiah*, 277.

373 Clements, *Jeremiah*, 46.

374 Levenson, *Sinai and Zion*, 169.

375 Holladay, *Jeremiah 1*, 243, notes that 'oppress' עשׁק is also found in Deut 24:14; Amos 4:1; Mic 2:2 and Jer 22:17 (and elsewhere) and often suggests extortion. The common triad of aliens, orphans (more correctly, fatherless) and widows also occurs in such places as Ex 22:20-21[22:21-22]; Deut 10:18;14:29; 16:11,14; 24:17,19,20,21; Ps 68:6; Isa 1:17 and Jer 22:3.

376 Overholt, *Threat*, 9, notes that spilling innocent blood has already been mentioned in 2:34 and occurs in 22:3,17 and 26:15,20-23. This is not the judicial execution of criminals, or killing in self-defence. It is known to have serious consequences for a community, e.g. 2 Kings 24:4.

377 Overholt, *Threat*, 10, shows that the theme of 'going after other gods' is recurrent in this book, e.g. 7:6,9; 11:10; 13:10; 16:11; 25:6; 35:15. Other verses indicate that the people were engaged in burning incense to them (1:16; 19:4; 44:5,8,15) and offering libations to them (7:18; 19:13; 32:29).

378 Overholt, *Threat*, 10, gives other passages in this book which interpret this detrimental effect as destruction and exile (1:15f; 16:10-13; 25:6,8-11).

even though they presume the land is given 'forever'.[379] This message is not portrayed as being entirely original. The sermon claims to follow a previous pattern of divine pleas (v.13); in 35:14-15 there is also a reference to previous prophetic calls to turn from evil ways and amend doings, with the same reward of continuing life in the land.

A startling implication of Jeremiah's speech is that, instead of the temple being able to protect the people, they must protect it![380] The condition of obedience to Yahweh's voice comes prior to bringing sacrifices (vv.21-23); fulfilling religious duties in the temple will not guarantee future security. In fact, their noncompliance with the call to obedience will determine whether or not they will continue to live with the temple, and the Lord's implied protection, in their midst.

It becomes quite clear that there is a difference in understanding of the covenant.[381] The people are relying on the Lord's covenantal protection unconditionally, as a unilateral arrangement; Jeremiah understands that both the Lord and the people have covenantal responsibilities. Jeremiah is aligning himself with the Mosaic tradition (e.g. Ex 19:5) that includes conditionality in covenantal blessings, and distancing himself from those promises which seem to be unconditional (e.g. 2 Sam 7:14-16).[382] The people's casting aside of covenantal responsibilities is 'from forever' (2:20).[383] The implication, therefore, of Jeremiah's words is that the covenant has been broken, not by Yahweh, but by the people.

---

379 Lundbom, *Jeremiah 1–20*, 464, also points out that Deuteronomy never says that the land is given 'forever', but that well-being and land tenure depend on Israel's obedience to Yahweh's commands.

380 Overholt, *Threat*, 6.

381 Overholt, *Threat*, 8–9. The requirement to deal with each other with מִשְׁפָּט, that is, justly (v.5), has close verbal associations with the covenant requirements (Ex 21:1,9,31; Lev 18:4; Mic 6:8). Elsewhere Jeremiah says that the people do not know of the מִשְׁפָּט of the Lord (5:1,4f,28; 8:7).

382 Brueggemann, *Jeremiah 1–25*, 75.

383 Overholt, *Threat*, 6.

Jeremiah has already given the areas in which the people are to 'amend' their ways and deeds (vv.5 and 6, elaborating on v.3); now these areas are made even more specific (v.9) with a rapid accumulation of verbs reflecting commandments 1-2 and 6-9 of the Decalogue.[384] The accusation that they are 'going after other gods' is placed at the end of the list here, probably as the most serious and fundamental violation of the covenant.[385] The people are accused of burning incense to Baal and swearing falsely לַשָּׁקֶר.(v.9).[386] Yahweh views any other attempts to relate to other gods as 'forsaking' him (2:13,17,19); it appears that false worship and failure to meet Yahweh's moral demands are linked.

Standing before Yahweh: Jer 7:10

The people do not seem to be aware that coming to stand before Yahweh is a serious matter (v.10); it should evoke respect, awe and submission. This is the house which is called by Yahweh's name (cf. vv.11,14,30; 32:34; 34:15 and in 25:29 'the city that is called by my name').[387] In fact, the precise phrase 'this house which is called by my name' occurs only in Jeremiah (but is similar to expressions in Deut 12:11; 14:23; 16:2,6,11; 26:2).[388] The phrase implies Yahweh's ownership; in coming to

---

[384] Lundbom, *Jeremiah 1–20*, 465, shows that such a rapid accumulation of verbs, creating asyndeton, is found elsewhere in Jeremiah's poetry. Classical orators use this technique to heap up praise or blame. Here Jeremiah builds up blame, as he declares that six commandments have been breached. Eustace J. Smith, "The Decalogue in the Preaching of Jeremias," *CBQ* 4 (1942): 197–209, sees evidence of the Decalogue being known by Jeremiah, not only here but also in 7:22-23;13:10; 16:11; 17:22; 26:4;44:23. He finds 12 references to the first commandment, 3 to the second, 1 to the third, 5 to the fifth, 4 to the sixth, 4 to the seventh, 10 to the eighth and 1 to the tenth. Only the fourth and ninth are missing from the book.

[385] Craigie, Kelley, and Drinkard, *Jeremiah 1–25*, 120-121, surmise that the references to the Decalogue and the saying (v.10) 'We are delivered' refer to part of a festival liturgy.

[386] Lundbom, *Jeremiah 1–20*, 465, adds that this same expression, with the article, sometimes translated as swearing to 'The Lie', is also used in 5:2,31; 8:8; 13:25; 20:6.

[387] Holladay, *Jeremiah 1*, 245. In this book people can also bear Yahweh's name (14:9, and Jeremiah in 15:16).

[388] Lundbom, *Jeremiah 1–20*, 466. Also, Kurt Galling, "Die Ausrufung des Namens als Rechtsakt in Israel," *Theologische Literaturzeitung* 81 (1956): 66–70, finds a connection between the formula 'called by Yahweh's name' and the ANE practice of the public, oral proclamation of the transfer of commercial property.

this house they must also face its owner. They have seen the temple as a shelter from harm and judgment, yet they have not counted on the owner of the temple being the one from whom judgment could come.

The people say, 'We are safe' (v.10).[389] This shows a similar complacency to that advocated by the deviant prophets who cry 'Peace, Peace' where Jeremiah says 'there is no peace' (Jer 6:14; 8:11). A presumption of well-being demonstrates no awareness of the dependence of security on their moral responsibilities.[390] Those who violate the Torah are attempting to hide in religious ritual, like robbers hiding in a cave.[391] But the owner of the temple,Yahweh, has been watching everything they have done in secret. A faithful relationship with Yahweh should exclude habitual violation of the decalogue.[392] Their absorbing self-interest and lack of real respect for Yahweh is a symptom of their not really knowing Yahweh (cf. Jer 9:3,6).

A precedent of destruction: Jer 7:12

There was once another temple which had also been called by Yahweh's name: Shiloh.[393] It contained the ark, an altar, and the lamp of God (1 Sam 1:21; 3:3,21;

---

389 Overholt, *Threat*, 16, gives the basic meaning of נצל as 'snatch away, rescue, deliver' (e.g. Judg 8:34; 9:17; 1 Sam 14:48) with the basic connotation of deliverance from physical peril. The cry of the people seems to imply that in a time of political instability Yahweh will guarantee the safety of their national state. Lundbom, *Jeremiah 1–20*, 467, says the idea of Yahweh as deliverer of his people is affirmed in Jer 20:13, and the concept of the temple as a sanctuary has a good basis (Ps 27:4-5) but the present conditions are not fitting for such claims.

390 Brueggemann, *Jeremiah 1–25*, 76, adds, 'Since the text addresses the power establishment it is fair to conclude that the crimes targeted are not simply individual acts of exploitation but are acts of the entire system.'

391 Lundbom, *Jeremiah 1–20*, 467, thinks that although the word could indicate an old ruin or a cave, a cave is the most likely meaning here. In Palestine caves are abundant and frequently serve as refuges for fugitives (e.g. 1 Sam 24:4 [24:3]) and places where robbers take their loot.

392 Levenson, *Sinai and Zion*, 168.

393 Craigie, Kelley, and Drinkard, *Jeremiah 1–25*, 121–2, tell us that Shiloh was north of Jerusalem in the territory of Ephraim. From archaeological research, it is known that it experienced some destruction in the Philistine period (late eleventh century B.C.) but the town recovered, receiving its final blow from the Assyrians about 722 B.C.

Josh 18:1; 19:51; 22:29 etc), but its time of destruction is unknown.[394] A family background from Anathoth might cause Jeremiah to relativise the importance of the temple in Jerusalem. However, he asserts that this temple is the one called by Yahweh's name (Jer 7:10-11). He is not, therefore, speaking against the Jerusalem temple itself.[395] The suggestion of a parallel with Shiloh would probably shock his audience. In Ps 78:56-72, Shiloh is rejected because of her association with the rebellious tribes; instead, Yahweh chooses Judah, Mt Zion and David, and builds his sanctuary 'like the high heavens, like the earth which he has founded forever'.[396] The people of Judah are now identified with those whose wickedness caused the downfall of that place; just as that house, which was called by Yahweh's name, was destroyed, so it can happen again (v.14), indeed, it will!

An end of patience: Jer 7:13-15

God's call to the whole people Israel has been persistent (v.13).[397] It has been a call that has been expressed through word, with the expectation that the people should listen. It is said several times in this book that the central problem of the people is that they refuse to listen (e.g. 13:10), where the implication is that 'listening' issues in obedience (e.g. 7:23). Because they have not heeded Yahweh's speaking, they will see his action: the same action of judgment that he has done before with Shiloh. The

---

394 Barker, *Gate of Heaven*, 14, also mentions other ancient temples at Dan and Bethel (Judges 17:14; 1 Kings 12:28-9; Amos 3:3; 4:4; 7:13), Gilgal (1 Sam 11:15; 15:33; Hos 4:15; 9:15; 12:11), Mizpah (1 Sam 10: 17,25) and Nob (1 Sam 21:6,9). However, Overholt, *Threat*, 20, regards Shiloh as the only actual temple outside Jerusalem.

395 Levenson, *Sinai and Zion*, 167.

396 Overholt, *Threat*, 19, comments that for Jeremiah 'Zion' does not carry the same sense of abiding security that it did for Isaiah. Jeremiah sees it primarily as the object of Yahweh's judgment (e.g. 4:6,31; 6:23) rather than the place which Yahweh will always protect . It will only be after she is destroyed that she will be vindicated by the defeat of Babylon (50:28; 51:10,24,35).

397 Carroll, *From Chaos to Covenant*, 88, draws attention to the Hebrew idiom here (v.13), הַשְׁכֵּם וְדַבֵּר which literally means 'rising early and speaking', suggesting getting up early to load up the pack animals, and indicates persistence or diligence. This phrase is also used in 25:3 and 35:14, and with variations in 7:25; 11:7; 25: 4,5; 29:19; 32:33; 35:15; 44:4,7, and is characteristic of Jeremiah when speaking of Yahweh's activity. It fits with the theme of the rejected prophet, as Yahweh's persistent speaking comes through the persistence of prophets passing on Yahweh's words.

trust which they have, in the temple and the land, will be shown to be misplaced. They might think of themselves as being in a safer place than their brothers from the north—after all, they do have the temple—but they will be thrust out, so that they will no longer be in this land, and will not be in Yahweh's sight, probably implying that they will be unable to come and stand before Yahweh in his temple.

4.2 EZEKIEL'S FIRST TEMPLE VISION: Ezekiel 8-11

Ezekiel 8–11 is generally taken as a cohesive literary unit in its present form and is dominated by a single theme: the departure of the glory of Yahweh from the Jerusalem temple. That this section is intended to be read as one visionary unit is indicated from the date (8:1) that marks a sectional beginning, the coming of Yahweh's hand (signifying an ecstatic, visionary quality which remains until 11:25) and the concentration of words of sight, for example, ראה and הנה.[398] This unit stands at the centre of a larger three-vision sequence (chs.1-3; 8-11; 40-48) concerning the absence and presence of Yahweh. It can also be seen as coming at the end of the signs and visions of woe for Israel/Judah (with Block), or at the beginning of a new section concerning the confirmation of the truth of prophecy (with Renz).[399] Within a book that is unusually well-structured, chapters 8–11 can also be seen to display a chiastic order in the answering of the four-staged tour of the temple area in 8:5-18 by the four-staged departure of the glory out of the temple and the city in chapters 10–11.[400]

Abominable practices: Ezek 8

---

[398] Frank Lothar Hossfeld, "Ez 8–11 methodische Zugänge," in *Ezekiel and His Book: Textual and Literary Criticism and Their Interrelation*, ed. J. Lust (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1986), 152.

[399] Block, *Ezekiel 1*, viii; Renz, *Rhetorical Function*, 68.

[400] Block, *Ezekiel 1*, 272-273.

The date given is around 17th or 18th September, 592 B.C., about 14 months after the first vision (1:1,2).[401] A visit of the elders, men with headship over families and important responsibilities on village councils, occasions the vision.[402] Their coming suggests that Ezekiel is now recognised and respected as a prophet; they sit before him in the likely anticipation of a hopeful answer to their inquiry of the Lord.[403] In the ensuing vision of the corruption in the temple it is elders, not priests, who are specifically named as being blameworthy. This implies that, instead of receiving a favourable response to their inquiry, they receive a categorical denunciation for their sins and the sins of the community they represent, even though there is no direct word of rebuke spoken to them, as in 14:2-6.[404]

The hand of Yahweh seems to fall upon Ezekiel suddenly and surprisingly.[405] On many occasions through the book it comes upon him as divine power working with him for positive effects (1:3; 3:14; 3:22; 8:1; 8:3; 33:22; 37:1; and 40:1).[406] In contrast, there are many other references in the book where the divine power is

---

401 Although the LXX variation 'fifth month' is preferred by some, e.g. Eichrodt, *Ezekiel*, 108, most, e.g. Greenberg, *Ezekiel 1*, 166, think that LXX offers no advantage in solving the problem of allowing sufficient time for the sign-acts of ch. 4 to be completed, since LXX reduces this time to 190 days (4:5,9). It is more likely that LXX changed 'sixth month' to 'fifth month' through assimilation to 'fifth day'.

402 Iain M. Duguid, *Ezekiel and the Leaders of Israel* (Leiden: Brill, 1994), 110–11. Block, *Ezekiel 1*, 278 adds that although King Jehoiachin is also in Babylon, he seems to have been stripped of authority, leaving the real leadership of the exiles in the hands of the elders.

403 The elders also come to Ezekiel in 14:1 and 20:1. On each of these occasions it is said that their purpose is to inquire of the Lord. In 33:31 it is also said that people come to Ezekiel to listen to his words. Zimmerli, *Ezekiel 1*, 236, notes that in 2 Kings 4:38 and 6:1 Elisha's disciples are sitting before him, and in 2 Kings 6:32 Elisha is sitting in his house when the elders sit with him.

404 Duguid, *Ezekiel and the Leaders of Israel*, 70, 112, points out that it is rather surprising to find no mention of condemnation of priests here, but, rather, of elders. Although the group of elders who come to Ezekiel are 'elders of Judah' and the elders in the vision (8:11f) and also those who inquire in 14:1 and 20:1,3 are called 'elders of Israel', it is unlikely that any significant difference is intended in view of the fact that the 'house of Judah' is indited in 8:17 but it is the 'house of Israel and Judah' in 9:9.

405 Greenberg, *Ezekiel 1*, 166, gives other examples of נפל על (fell upon, v.1) for the sudden onset of overpowering forces. These can be bad (e.g. Ex 15:6; Isa 47:11; Ps 105:38; Dan 10:7) or neutral or supernatural (e.g. Gen 15:12; 1 Sam 11:7; 26:12; Job 4:12f).

406 Carley, *Ezekiel Among the Prophets*, 22–23, finds parallels with the function of the hand of the Lord in the Elijah narrative.

against, or stretched out against, others, for example, the house of Israel in 6:14; deviant prophets in 13:9 and 14:9; Ammon in 25:7; Edom in 25:13; the Philistines in 25:16; Gog in 39:21.

As in the call narrative, the first thing that Ezekiel does is see (v.2). He gropes for words as he tries to describe the fiery divine image, but he recognises the 'glory of the Lord' (8:4) as being the same as in the first vision.

In v.3 the power of the divine hand lifts Ezekiel up, taking him by the hair to another place. In fact, most of the appearances of the divine hand with Ezekiel are associated with moving him from one place to another, the main exception being 33:22 where the hand is associated with opening Ezekiel's mouth after a period of 'speechlessness'. Although supernatural power is involved in Ezekiel's removal in 8:3, the language of slight uncertainty ('the form of a hand'), the unrealistic, gravity-defying action of taking Ezekiel by the hair of his head, the surrounding visionary language relating to the divine appearance, together with the specific mention of 'visions of God' (v.3), all point to Ezekiel's removal being part of a visionary experience.[407] The Spirit then lifts him up, as in 1:2 and 3:12,24.[408] Ezekiel is not just put on his feet, but removed, as in 3:14, and taken to the temple area in Jerusalem. He sees the glory of the God of Israel, as before, but is then horrified to see four scenes that cause profound offence to this glory.

---

[407] Contra M.E. Andrew, *Responsibility and Restoration: The Course of the Book of Ezekiel* (Dunedin: University of Otago Press, 1985), 47, who writes, 'That Ezekiel is grasped by a lock of hair indicates that what he is describing is not experienced by him in the imagination but as a fact.' Brownlee, *Ezekiel 1*, 128–29, also thinks that Ezekiel's visit to Jerusalem is literal and not visionary. Taylor, *Ezekiel*, 24, suggests, more plausibly, that it is highly unlikely that Ezekiel would have been allowed to return to Jerusalem. On the other hand, Blenkinsopp, *Ezekiel*, 51, calls the experience a 'state of trance'. However, a decision about the exact nature of Ezekiel's psychological state at this point is bound to be conjectural.

[408] Greenberg, "Vision," 150, translates רוח here as 'wind'. However, the obviously supernatural power of this visionary removal makes it clear that this Spirit/wind has little in common with any ordinary kind of 'wind', suggesting that 'Spirit' might be a more appropriate translation.

There is no specific identification of Ezekiel's tour guide. However, he identifies himself with Yahweh in several phrases (e.g. 'my sanctuary' v.6; the provocation of 'my anger' v.17; his dealing with the people in anger and without pity, just as it is said of Yahweh in 5:11 and 7:9).[409]

Scene 1: Ezek 8:3b-6

Ezekiel's attention is drawn to two contrasting presences: the first is an image of jealousy situated in the temple area (v.3b), the second is Yahweh's glory (v.4). This comes right after the initial contrast of two presences: the elders sitting before him (v.1) and the divine, fiery figure, v.2). The contrasting pattern, drawn more boldly in vv.3b-4, suggests a negative judgment on the leadership of the elders. Yahweh is not leading with them or through them, but holds the power of fiery judgment against them. After the sight of the image of jealousy, then the glory of the Lord, the focus returns to the image of jealousy, then, instead of seeing the glory again, there is a divine word: Yahweh's presence will be driven out of his sanctuary area on account of this image (v.6).

Accepting Yahweh's threatened departure on account of a defiled sanctuary has raised questions regarding divine freedom. Wong writes, 'Yahweh's departure as mentioned in various places in Ezek 8-11 is never described as involuntary or being forced by the cultic offences which render the sanctuary impure. If he leaves, he leaves out of his own accord.'[410] Wong claims to argue on linguistic grounds that it is not Yahweh who is driven out but the people. However, the word concerned, לרחקה, is an infinitive construct whose subject and object are not clear, so interpretation must be guided by context. However, it is entirely possible to see Yahweh's threatened departure as an act of freedom, rather than one of coercion.

---

[409] Block, *Ezekiel 1*, 284.

[410] Ka Leung Wong, "A Note on Ezekiel VIII 6," *VT* 51 (2001): 398.

Throughout this book, there is no divine tolerance of defilement to his name or his people. Yahweh is consistently shown to choose to move away from offensive practices and people.[411]

It is emphasised that the first scene takes place on the north side of the temple area (north is mentioned three times, in vv. 3,5). In Ugaritic mythology the mountain of the north is the home of Baal and his consort or mother Asherah.[412] However, the north side of the temple is often associated with the king.[413] The location, near a temple gate, suggests approach to worship. At the least, the presence of this image distracts worshippers as they make their way through the gate. But perhaps, as Wright suggests, its presence is more demanding: people may be required to pay deference to some kind of idol before going on to worship Yahweh.[414]

Centre stage is this image (סמל) of jealousy (הקנאה) which provokes to jealousy (המקנה, 8:3b).[415] There are further references throughout the book to Yahweh's jealous anger (16:38, 42; 23:25; 36:5,6; 38:19). However, all three of these Hebrew words have provoked questions. The last appears to set up a tautology, but some scholars pursue the LXX position, which treats it as a derivative of קנה (purchase) rather than of קנא (become jealous or angry). Torczyner finds parallels between קנה and גאל (redeem), suggesting that this is a stele which is regarded as a living agent

---

411 Block, *Ezekiel 1*, 274–75, gives examples of other OT prophets speaking of gods leaving, in Isa 46:1-2 (Babylon's gods, Bel and Nebo) and Jer 48:7 (the Moabite god Chemosh). The possibility of Yahweh leaving may be implied in Deut 31:17; Isa 41:17; 49:14; 54:7; Jer 12:7; 14:8,9; Ps 9:11 [9: 10]; 10 times in the Psalms; Lam 5:20; Ezra 9:9; Neh 9:28; 2 Chron 12:5. He suggests that the same idea underlies the question, 'Where is your/their God?' cf. Mic 7:10; Joel 2:17; Ps 42:4 [42:3]; 79:10; 115:2. However, it is Ezekiel who develops this theme most fully. Wright, *Ezekiel*, 121, notes that the glory of the Lord is said to have departed when the Philistines captured the ark, before the temple was built. A child was named 'Ichabod' to mark this departure (1 Sam 4:21-22).

412 Greenberg, *Ezekiel 1*, 168.

413 Taylor, *Ezekiel*, 96.

414 Wright, *Ezekiel*, 101.

415 Greenberg, *Ezekiel 1*, 168. Greenberg defines this jealousy or outrage as 'the passionate resentment one feels at seeing what is his being given to another.'

of redemption.[416] Odell treats המקנה as a hiphil participle of קנה (create) and argues that the hiphil form suggests that the סמל is not itself creative, but that it is used to express human zeal in order to invoke Yahweh's creativity; she refers to it as an 'image of zeal'.[417] However, I remain with the majority view and accept the more usual translation of 'idol' or 'image of jealousy which provokes to jealousy', accepting the tautology.

In looking for further clues as to what this סמל might be, it is necessary to look at 2 Chron 33:7, where the same word is used in combination with 'Asherah' to describe an image of Asherah set up in the temple by Manasseh (similarly in 2 Kings 21:7, but there simply referred to as 'Asherah'). It was removed (2 Chron 33:15), replaced and removed again and burnt by Josiah (2 Kings 23:6). Could this image have been reinstalled as the סמל in question here? Blenkinsopp's translation, the 'lustful image that incites to lust' could allude to the sexual rites associated with Asherah.[418] The word is also used in Deut 4:16 to qualify a פסל (idol): no פסל of any סמל in the form of a man or woman or living creature is to be made. Clearly, both of these passages use סמל in relation to some kind of idolatry, and its most obvious meaning is 'image.' But it does not necessarily imply an Asherah image. As Odell points out, there are no other references in Ezekiel to the worship of Asherah, and there are no people in this scene who are actually venerating this סמל. Dohmen sees this סמל as a votive statue, rather than an idol, meaning that it would represent a likeness of a human rather than a deity.[419] If this is the case, it could be an

---

[416] H. Torczyner, "Semel Ha-Qin'ah Ha-Maqneh," *JBL* 65 (1946): 293–301. Torczyner also argues plausibly for קנאת in Eccl 4:4 to mean 'acquire' rather than 'envy'; however, this only suggests the interchangeability of these verbal forms and does not definitively solve the problem. He points helpfully to a similar tautology in Ps 78:58, and suggests that סמל is an Akkadian loan word meaning 'merchant'.

[417] Margaret Odell, "What Was the Image of Jealousy in Ezekiel 8?" in *The Priests in the Prophets: The Portrayal of Priests, Prophets and Other Religious Specialists in the Latter Prophets*, ed. Lester L. Grabbe and Alice Ogden Bellis (London: T&T Clark, 2004), 137-140.

[418] Blenkinsopp, *Ezekiel*, 54.

[419] Christoph Dohmen, "Heisst סֶמֶל Bild, Statue?" *ZAW* 96 (1984): 263–66.

expression of someone's zeal in worshipping the deity in order to invoke divine blessings.[420] If so, it may not, strictly speaking, be subject to the same prohibitions as an idol. However, it is clear that the divine response is of utter repugnance to the point of threatening to leave on its account (v.6), so the offence involved in either constructing or using this סמל is extreme. Odell argues cogently for the possibility that the very construction of such a monument could likely involve child-sacrifice, most probably of royal heirs.[421]

Irrespective of whether the סמל is a votive statue or an idol, it represents some construction or object that is not authorised by Yahweh, and that is in defiance of Yahweh's commands. It epitomises the abuse of Yahweh's sacred space and the cause of his threatened departure. In 43:7-9, when the glory of the Lord returns to his temple, there is a further commentary on this. Yahweh's holy name is defiled by these abhorrent practices, and he will not tolerate them in close proximity to his presence (he cannot tolerate the placement of the threshhold of idols next to his).[422] In particular, the kings are indicted for unacceptable idolatrous practices. Strong feelings are aroused, feelings that are consistent with the other expressions of divine jealous anger found in this book, feelings that will lead Yahweh to take action in removing his presence from the place that represents his dwelling among his people. His presence among them, even in his holy temple, is clearly conditional, and this סמל represents the summary of the abominable practices that relate to 'prostitution' and idolatry of 'dead kings' summarised in 43:9.[423] Even though the specific details of these practices cannot be declared with certainty, idolatrous images and abominable practices are said elsewhere in the book to defile Yahweh's holy space

---

[420] Margaret Odell, "Image of Jealousy," 136-137, who says that cognates of the word in Phoenician and Punic inscriptions refer to anthropomorphic statues of both human beings and deities.

[421] Margaret Odell, "Image of Jealousy," 138–46.

[422] See also Deut 16:21-22 for the prohibition of sacred poles and stones beside Yahweh's altar.

[423] This verse is not absolutely clear in what it describes, but clearly relates to 8:3,5. Margaret Odell, "Image of Jealousy," 138–39, uses ch. 43 to argue her case for royal child-sacrifice.

(e.g. 5:11 and 44:6-8) and to defile the people themselves (e.g. 20:26; 23:7, 13,17,30; 37:23). Yahweh's intolerance of sharing space with any unauthorised object or image related to worship is quite clear, irrespective of the supposed justification. The very structure of this scene, with its contrasts between this image and Yahweh's presence, makes it clear that it represents something that Yahweh regards as an alternative rather than as a concomitant to worship. As far as Yahweh is concerned, it represents a rival claim for the people's allegiance, as a rival lover (cf. chs 16 and 23). It is viewed as a betrayal of covenant relationship, as spiritual prostitution, and, irrespective of intended purpose, is clearly judged to be functioning in an idolatrous way. The people cannot have both this and Yahweh's presence; one of them has to go. Yet, this is not all.

Scene 2: Ezek 8:7-13

While the previous image was displayed blatantly, in public space, this scene focuses on secret, hidden practices, rather like saying that the image outside was the 'tip of the iceberg' of all that was really going on. The location is clearly intended to be one which would not normally be accessible to the public, so cannot simply be the palace courtyard.[424] Although there is a hole in the wall, more digging is required before entry.[425] Ackerman suggests that it is a room in a house attached to the casemate wall and that most likely these men have gained access by another door which is not accessible to outsiders like Ezekiel; however, it would not normally hold 70 people.[426] Block suggests that it could represent a storage room for temple vessels or furniture, converted into an annual cult centre; this would be large enough.[427]

---

[424] Susan Ackerman, "A Marzeah in Ezekiel 8:7–13," *HTR* 82 (1989): 271. Contra Brownlee, *Ezekiel 1*, 133, who assumes it is the forecourt to the total palace and temple complex.

[425] This preexisting hole is omitted in the LXX.

[426] Ackerman, "Marzeah," 271.

[427] Block, *Ezekiel 1*, 289.

The number of elders (70) is presumably a representative number.[428] Jaazaniah, son of Shaphan, is surprisingly included (v.11), perhaps suggesting that corruption has spread into even the best of families.[429] It is full of incense smoke (v.11) and dark (v.12 MT).[430] The MT describes various images of living creatures covering the walls, while the LXX merely mentions 'vain abominations' (μάταια βδελύγματα); both add 'and all the idols of the house of Israel'(v.10). Most regard the MT's description of the images on the walls as a gloss on these 'vain abominations.' These animals may be largely based on Egyptian prototypes.[431] This group of 70 may be a pro-Egyptian party among the Jews who are plotting revolt against their Babylonian overlord.[432] However the inclusion of the following two scenes of Tammuz and Shamash might suggest a Babylonian cult.[433] Others suggest Semitic rituals.[434] It may be best to conclude with Greenberg that the evidence is not sufficient to identify this scene definitely with any cults known from extra-biblical records.[435] It seems

---

[428] Greenberg, *Ezekiel 1*, 170, says that this number implies that the corruption involves even the national council. Duguid, *Ezekiel and the Leaders of Israel*, 113, compares this group of 70 elders with a similar group in Ex 24:1-11 who have the unique privilege of seeing God and another such group in Num 11:16-30 who are endowed with the same spirit as Moses.

[429] Although Cooke, *Ezekiel*, 94, thinks it not likely that this Shaphan is the scribe of 2 Kings 22:3,8 because three other sons of his are mentioned in Jer 26:24; 29:3; 36:10-12, it cannot be discounted for this reason alone, as the absence of his name in Jeremiah could well indicate that he was not of the same mind as his brothers. Duguid, *Ezekiel and the Leaders of Israel*, 114; Zimmerli, *Ezekiel 1*, 241, and Eichrodt, *Ezekiel*, 125, are among the majority who think it is very likely to be the same one.

[430] Greenberg, *Ezekiel 1*, 170, gives other examples where incense is used in Num 17:12 [47]; Deut 33:10; and in other idolatrous practices in Isa 65:3 on bricks; and Jer 19:13 on rooftops. He notes the ironic echo of the Day of Atonement (Lev 16:2,13). Duguid, *Ezekiel and the Leaders of Israel*, 114, draws attention to the fact that the word for incense burner or censer מקטרתו only occurs in one other place in the OT, in 2 Kings 22:3-14, where Uzziah is also convicted of cultic irregularities.

[431] E.g. Eichrodt, *Ezekiel*, 124, and Wright, *Ezekiel*, 103. Although deities in animal form existed around the world of the ANE, they were most prolific in Egypt.

[432] Brownlee, *Ezekiel 1*, 134. Eichrodt, *Ezekiel*, 124, argues similarly that Babylonian gods would not need to go into hiding because the policy of Zedekiah was completely pro-Babylonian.

[433] Cooke, *Ezekiel*, 94.

[434] Theodor H. Gaster, "Ezekiel and the Mysteries," *JBL* 60 (1941): 290 and Ackerman, "Marzeah," 274–81.

[435] Greenberg, *Ezekiel 1*, 170.

that all 70 of these elders have separate images; each elder stands before his image or images with censer in hand.[436]

Their slogan 'Yahweh does not see us, Yahweh has forsaken the land' expresses the basis for their behaviour. They have, in their minds, severed the link between Yahweh and his people, between Yahweh and this land.[437] Because of this, they have given their attention to other gods, whatever cult these images represent, and now look to them for help. It is ironic that these people, who think that Yahweh cannot see, are the ones who see only dimly (they are in the dark).[438] They worship with images of creatures that cannot see, yet it is Yahweh and Ezekiel who can see.

Scene 3: Ezek 8:14-15

This very brief scene takes place by the northern gate of the inner wall of the temple. In Ezekiel the temple is sometimes referred to as the 'house of Yahweh' as here and sometimes as 'temple' as in 8:16. Women are engaged in some kind of Tammuz ritual involving weeping, the details of which are not given. Since this is the only mention of Tammuz in the OT, further information must be gained from extra-biblical sources. According to Sumerian mythology, Tammuz or Damuzi was an ancient shepherd boy king who was elevated to deity. Mourning rituals centred around his death, with a ritual of resurrection. There is debate as to whether these rituals were associated with the agricultural cycle, although most assume that they were and that the cult also incorporated fertility rites.[439] Any such agricultural rites deny Yahweh's rightful place as lord and giver of the land and its fruits (contrary to

---

[436] Block, *Ezekiel 1*, 293, cites Num 17:12-13 [16:47-48] as a comparison, where incense is used to ward off a deadly plague. If this demonstrates similar thinking, the elders may be attempting to stave off disaster. However, it is impossible to know if this is the motivation.

[437] Eichrodt, *Ezekiel*, 125.

[438] Greenberg, *Ezekiel 1*, 170, notes similarities to Pss 10:11; 94:7; Job 22:13f; and a similar mood in Zeph 1:12.

[439] Block, *Ezekiel 1*, 295.

Deut 26:1-15).[440] An annual ritual of Babylonian Tammuz mournings was observed by women and spread widely over the ANE, taking place in the fourth month, the Tammuz month; but this is the sixth month (v.1). However, the visionary nature of Ezekiel's journey may mean that this collage of images simply represents things which may occur at different times.[441]

This scene may simply demonstrate that the women, as well as the men, are involved in idolatrous rites; it might also serve to suggest that there is a level of desperation and sense of imminent danger through the society. Cries for help are extended to whatever gods are known to belong to more powerful nations, by imitating or adopting their rituals. Because this scene follows the slogan about Yahweh abandoning the land, Block suggests that the women might also be expressing the same idea as the elders, through identifying Yahweh with Tammuz, or by adopting a Tammuz type of ritual for the departure of another deity.[443]

Scene 4: Ezek 8:16-18

Now Ezekiel is brought into the inner court to witness the sight of about twenty-five men (LXX has 20) between the porch and the altar, in a position which is presumably contemptuous of Yahweh. Their backs, instead of their fronts, are to Yahweh and they are bowing down in the opposite direction, to the east. The implication of this is that Yahweh has a spatially located presence in the temple and that the person who prays should face in the direction of his presence.[444] The fact that these men are within this part of the temple area could suggest that they may belong to the temple establishment; one may easily imagine them as priests or as a

---

440 Wright, *Ezekiel*, 106.

441 Cooke, *Ezekiel*, 97, thinks that it may be possible that Tammuz mournings took place later in Israel than in Babylon.

442 Cooke, *Ezekiel*, 97.

443 Block, *Ezekiel 1*, 295.

444 Brownlee, *Ezekiel 1*, 136.

representative group of the ruling class.[445] But perhaps it is more likely that this group is to be identified with the first group who experience judgment in 9:6, the group of elders who are said to be in front of the temple.[446] Considering that this vision occurs in the context of the visit of the elders, it may well be that the last, and, by inference, worst group in this tour, the ones most directly bearing the responsibility for the violence filling the land, are indeed the elders. But the lack of specificity in the status of the group may be in order for the elders who are before Ezekiel to make that connection themselves.

Worship of the rising sun (v.16) is prohibited in Deut 4:19 and 17:2-5. In 2 Kings 21:5, Manasseh builds altars within the courts of the temple to all the starry hosts; in 2 Kings 23:11-12 Josiah removes from the entrance to the temple the horses that the kings of Judah have dedicated to the sun.[447] Many assume that this sun-worship derives from the Babylonian Shamash cult.[448] However, there is some solar language applied to Yahweh himself within the OT, for example, in Ps 84:12 [84:11] (as 'sun and shield'); Ps 27:1 (as 'my light and my salvation'); Ps 50:2 (Yahweh's beauty shines forth from Zion); Ps 63:3 [63:2] ('I have seen you in the sanctuary and beheld your power and your glory'); Ps 72:5 (may the king endure as the sun); Hos 6:3 (the Lord's appearing is as sure as the dawn) and also in Ezek 43:4 ('the glory of the Lord entered the temple by the gate facing east'). Perhaps expressions of faithful people 'seeing God' might be extensions of this concept.[449] Solar imagery is also

---

[445] Zimmerli, *Ezekiel 1*, 243, sets out the view that these 25 men are representatives of the 24 priestly classes (1 Chron 24:7-19) with the high priest. Block, *Ezekiel 1*, 297, mentions the suggestion that this is the same group of 25 who appear in 11:1 and are called 'leading officials of the people'.

[446] Duguid, *Ezekiel and the Leaders of Israel*, 114, and Taylor, *Ezekiel*, 103, also think that this is the first group to suffer in 9:6.

[447] Block, *Ezekiel 1*, 298.

[448] e.g. Eichrodt, *Ezekiel*, 127.

[449] Mark S. Smith, "The Near Eastern Background of Solar Language for Yahweh," *JBL* 109 (1990): 30-36. Expressions of 'seeing God' occur in Pss 11:7; 17:15; 27:4 (which is set in the temple); 27:13; 42:3 (Yahweh's face) and 63:3 [63:2] (in the sanctuary); Ex 24:10; 1 Sam 1:22 (presenting the boy before the Lord); Isa 6:1, and, in reference to future hope, in Isa 35:2 (seeing the glory of the Lord); 52:8 (they will see the Lord returning to Zion with their own eyes); 66:5 (let the

likened to a good ruler in 2 Sam 23:3b-4 (when one rules in the fear of God, he is 'like the light of morning, like the sun rising'). Perhaps it is the use of such imagery within biblical Yahwism that affords the development of a solar cult in the hands of monarchs who are attracted to the use of similar imagery in neighbouring lands.[450]

At the conclusion of the tour of idolatrous abominations inside the temple area, the focus of attention is turned to what is happening outside, throughout the land; the widespread problem is violence, חמס (v.17). This word also occurs in Ezek 7:11,23; 12:19; 28:16; and 45:9, where it is paired with שׁד, in parallel to 'evictions of my people' and in opposition to doing what is just (משפט) and right (צדקה); it also occurs around 60 times throughout the OT (e.g. Gen 6:11; Ex 23:1; Ps 11:5; Prov 3:31; Isa 59:6; Amos 3:10; Hab 1:2). Its most common synonym שׁד (as in Ezek 45:9) means violence against property and possession, whereas חמס means an attack on human life.[451] The charge of 'violence' shows that irregularities of cultic practice and problems in the social order are not to be divorced.[452] This can be seen as the climax of the tour of sins, if we are to take the statements at the conclusion of each of the first three scenes seriously (vv. 6,13,15 each speaking about greater abominations to come).[453]

Lord be glorified that we may see your joy); 66:18 (they will come and see my glory).

[450] Mark S. Smith, "Solar Language," 34–39, names Mesopotamian rulers Ur-Nammu, Amar-Sin, Lipit-Ishtar and Zimri-Lim, who are compared to the sun-god, as well as other Near Eastern gods, like Ningirsu, Assur and Marduk, who were described in solar terms. Smith concludes (p.39) that 'the solar cult in the Jerusalem temple seems to have been primarily an indigenous development.'

[451] H. Haag, "חמס Chamas," in *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament, Vol. IV*, ed. G.J. Botterweck and H. Ringgren (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), 480–81.

[452] Nahum M. Sarna, "Ezekiel 8:17: A Fresh Examination," *HTR* 57 (1964): 348, comments on the characteristic tendency for Ezekiel to alternate sins of idolatry with violations of the socio-moral code, citing the following examples, which frequently decry both idolatry and the shedding of innocent blood: Ezek chs 6-7 (especially 7:23); 16 (especially vv. 36,38); 18 (especially vv. 5ff); 22 (especially vv. 2-4, 6-7, 9, 12f, 25, 27, 29); 23 (especially vv. 37, 45, 49); 33 (especially vv. 25f); 36 (especially vv. 16-18).

[453] Sarna, "Ezekiel 8:17," 348, regards v.17 as climactic for this reason.

The gesture of putting a branch to the nose (v.17) is obscure and is often presumed to relate to the previous idolatries; it suggests some kind of obscene gesture.[454] A response of threatened action by Yahweh functions as counterpoint to the violence that is observed here.[455] This threat is worked out in the following scenes of chapter 9. In view of the clear connection between Yahweh's provocation over the violence filling the land and the divine counteraction to redress that in chapter 9, it seems clear that the 'branch to the nose' must also reinforce the provocation of uncurbable and unjust social violence rather than relate to the previous idolatries. The violence of 8:17 'filling' the land suggests the likelihood that it is indiscriminate, or at least of serious proportions and for no good cause. As in the rest of the OT, any legal action that might sound like violence to modern sensitivities, like capital punishment, is distinguished from חמס because it is a measured, legal response that fits the crime, which is exactly what the response of Yahweh is. In the words of an expression that occurs several times within this book, always referring to Yahweh (see 5:11; 7:4,9; 9:10; 20:17), his eye will show no pity on these offenders, nor will his ears hear their loud cries.[456] Because the violence of the Jerusalemites presumably overrides any pity that could have been stirred by their eyes or any shrieks that might have been heard by their ears, they will experience what they gave out. Unlike their violence, which was unprovoked, widespread and grossly unjust, the Lord's anger is provoked and exactly measured: they receive as they have given.

Executing judgment: Ezek 9

---

[454] Joyce, *Ezekiel*, 101. Cooke, *Ezekiel*, 100, comments that traditional Jewish interpreters make a silent manuscript correction from 'my nose' to 'their nose' because it seems too offensive to be said of Yahweh. H.W.F. Saggs, "Notes and Studies: The Branch to the Nose," *JTS* XI (1960): 318–29, who acknowledges that ancient versions do not understand the rite, cites some representations in art of a worshipper holding an object to the nose, and proposes that the rite in Ezekiel 8 could be a form derived from Sumerian practices with phallic overtones that may also relate to Tammuz worship and a solar cult.

[455] Sarna, "Ezekiel 8:17," 349–50, gives the following references for this 'measure for measure' justice: Ezek 11:21; 22:31; 36:19.

[456] Kohn, *New Heart*, 91. In these other references there is no mention of Yahweh not hearing, i.e., only not seeing with pity.

The executioners: Ezek 9:1,2

The vision continues, with many obvious links between chapters 8 and 9.[457] Although Ezekiel is not addressed in this scene, he hears the divine ordering judgment, and he sees those who are to carry it out.[458] Six men (said to be executioners of the city) with deadly weapons, and another man clothed in linen, carrying a writing case, can be viewed as a symbolically complete group of heavenly agents.[459] The scene which unfolds suggests parallels with other biblical angelic destructions: the overnight killing of firstborn sons by the angel in the Passover tradition (Ex 12:23); the destruction of Sennacherib's army by an angel during the night (2 Kings 19:35) and the angelic striking of Israel on account of David's census (2 Sam 24:16f and 1 Chron 21:15).[460] However, although it is generally understood that this group represents angelic figures, the grouping of seven angels is not clearly attested elsewhere within the OT.[461] The man in linen is dressed ready to stand

---

[457] Block, *Ezekiel 1*, 302, gives the following links between these two chapters: 1) the waw-consecutive form at the beginning showing a continuation in the narrative sequence , together with the alternation of 'And he brought me ...' and 'And he said to me ...'; 2) the expression 'in my ears' is the same as in 8:18, even though the subject is changed; 3) the expression הִנֵּה in vv. 2,11 indicates that what Ezekiel is seeing is visionary; 4) the 'no-pity' formula with which 8:18 closed is repeated twice (vv. 5,10); 5) the elders before the temple in 9:6 have been mentioned before (Block identifies these with the group in 8:7-13, but I suggest that they are the group in 8:16-18); 6) the expression in 9:9 'they have filled the land with violence' echoes the similar expression in 8:17; 7) Yahweh's quotation of the people's rationalisation (9:9) is an adaptation of the words in 8:12.

[458] Greenberg, *Ezekiel 1*, 175, notes that the repetition of בְּאָזְנָי (in my ears) fits with a characteristic pattern of Ezekiel, to use identical words with different meanings. The play on this word is lost in the LXX as this phrase is missing from 8:18.

[459] Greenberg, *Ezekiel 1*, 175-6, sees this number symbolising completion. He describes the writing set as a palette with a slot in which pens were kept, and hollowed places for ink, generally black and red. Cooke, *Ezekiel*, 104, says that the idea of a heavenly scribe was common to Babylon, where Nabu is the writer, with stylus in hand, of the Book of Fate, and to Egypt, where Thot exercises the same functions as Nabu. He also suggests that the present narrative influenced the account of the 70 destructive angel-shepherds in Enoch 89:59ff.

[460] Zimmerli, *Ezekiel 1*, 246.

[461] Zimmerli, *Ezekiel 1*, 246, finds allusions in Rev 15:6 and the seven evil spirits in Matt 12:45. He acknowledges that many see an analogy in the seven great deities of the planets, but thinks that this is less likely. Greenberg, *Ezekiel 1*, 175, thinks that there is a clearer line of descent from the Babylonian planet deities to the later Jewish conception of seven archangels (Rev 8:2,6; Enoch 20:1-8).

before the Lord, either as priest (Ex 28:29-42; Lev 16:3-4) or angel (Dan 10:5; 12:6f), since linen, normally bleached, signifies purity.[462] His function in this scene shows aspects of both. This whole group comes to stand beside the bronze altar, the Solomonic altar which Ahaz moved to the north of his new altar (1 Kings 8:64; 2 Kings 16:14).

Unsettled glory: Ezek 9:3

Anticipation is heightened by the awareness of a portentous movement to the side of the scene. The one presence that most truly belongs in this temple, the divine glory (כבוד) (from 8:4), has become unsettled; it moves from its proper location above the cherubim in the Holy of Holies to the temple threshhold. The voice of the Lord is heard again, first to direct the man in linen to put a mark (ת) on the foreheads of those who share Yahweh's grief over the detestable things that are being done, those who dissociate themselves from them. Then there is the command to the others to kill all remaining people, of any age or gender, without pity. The visual representation of the threatening movement of Yahweh and the verbal account of the twin actions of salvation and judgment clearly belong together.

The mark: Ezek 9:4

Whereas the saving mark at Passover is on a household, this mark is placed on individuals, as is consistent with the individual responsibility taught in Ezek 14:12-20 and ch. 18. Its shape, in pre-exilic Hebrew, would be like an X; since it can be used as a signature (Job 31:35) it might suggest God's signature claiming these people as his own.[463] Cain is also given some kind of mark with an apotropaic

---

462 Greenberg, *Ezekiel 1*, 176.

463 Brownlee, *Ezekiel 1*, 144–45, also notes the use of the divine mark in Rev 7:2-3 and 14:1 on the foreheads of the 144,000. Cooke, *Ezekiel*, 106, adds Rev 13:16f and another use in Gal 6:17 (στώματι'). He also gives other OT examples that indicate the awareness of signs of ownership by a deity in Isa 44:5; Lev 19:28; 21:5; Deut 14:1. In the last three examples, warning is given against inflicting signs on oneself. In the present passage and the NT examples it is Yahweh who places the sign, or arranges for its placement by an angelic messenger.

function (Gen 4:15), but its exact nature is not agreed.[464] It is given to one who has committed an abomination instead of one who laments over abominations.[465] In this passage the recipients are those who grieve over the same things that cause Yahweh to grieve; these, by implication, are the kinds of things portrayed in chapter 8. There may be a resonance with Ezekiel's own experience of 'bitterness' (3:14) and the words of 'lamentation and mourning and woe' on the scroll (2:10), even though there are no verbal links. This mark signifies having a heart response that shows covenantal allegiance to Yahweh, and is in tune with the heart of Yahweh, it identifies those whose hearts are soft (Ezek 11:19; 36:26) rather than hard, those who do not have idols set up within them (Ezek 14:2). It demonstrates that it is still possible for individuals within an unfaithful nation to retain personal faithfulness, and for Yahweh to recognise that.[466] However, we are not told if any people in this category are found.

No pity: Ezek 9:5

The destroyers are to have the same attitude as Yahweh (9:5, cf. 8:18, and repeated in 9:10), that is, without allowing their eyes to move them to pity or to show

---

464 R.W.L. Moberly, "The Mark of Cain - Revealed At Last?" *HTR* 100 (2007): 11–28, argues for this mark being the divine saying, 'Whoever kills Cain will suffer sevenfold vengeance' rather than a corporeal sign. While this is an intriguing and plausible option for Cain's mark, it highlights a difference from, rather than a similarity to, the mark in Ezekiel in that it is on the guilty, rather than the innocent.

465 Wright, *Ezekiel*, 112–13, highlights the rhyming quality of the words used here הנאנחים והנאנקים which some have tried to convey in translations, e.g. 'moaning and groaning' (Block) and 'sigh and cry' (KJV), cf. Jeremiah looking for such people and finding none (Jer 5:1-5).

466 Contra Eichrodt, *Ezekiel*, 131, who cannot accept that genuine individual responsibility is involved here and sees collective retribution in the inclusion of wives and children in the destruction. Surely wives and children are also capable of personal allegiance to Yahweh, and therefore of eligibility for salvation, accountability for unfaithfulness and liability for judgment. Zimmerli, *Ezekiel 1*, 248, gives futher statements about the faithful remnant in 5:3f; 6:8-10; 12:16; 14:2f.

compassion.[467] That they are to begin at Yahweh's sanctuary (מקדשׁ) suggests that the root of the problem lies here. Whereas, in 2 Kings 11:15, Athaliah was dragged out of the sanctuary before being executed, the temple now is defiled. This confirms that the temple is no longer a fit place for the presence of Yahweh to dwell.[468] The first candidates for slaughter are most likely to be the last group of elders mentioned in 8:16-18. It is this group which is most closely identified with the bloodshed throughout the land (9:9 and 8:17). The catchcry that was first associated with the group of 70 in secret idolatrous worship ('the Lord does not see us, the Lord has forsaken the land' in 8:12b) is repeated in 9:9 with inverted order to characterise the attitude of all who are not eligible to receive the mark. This suggests that the group of 25 who boldly bow to the sun outside are not regarded as entirely distinct from the group of 70 who worship secretly in hidden chambers. The crime is not only idolatrous cultic practices, but extensive unjust social violence. In this vision, abominable idolatries and detestable social practices are inextricably entwined. Those whose hearts lament with Yahweh must, presumably, lament on both accounts. When both have escalated to an intolerable degree, judgment is inevitable.

Pleading with Yahweh: Ezek 9:8

The extensive slaughter, taking place away from Ezekiel's sight but with his knowledge, moves Ezekiel, who is now left alone, to plead with Yahweh. It is only here, and similarly in 11:13, apart from his protest about eating defiled food in 4:14,

---

[467] Block, *Ezekiel 1*, 308, notes the additional uses of this formula in Ezek 5:11 and 7:4,9, all in reference to Yahweh. Taylor, *Ezekiel*, 103, adds comparisions to Gen 18:22f and Amos 7:1-6. Ka Leung Wong, *The Idea of Retribution in the Book of Ezekiel* (Leiden: Brill, 2001), 169, claims that the punishment envisaged is a כרת penalty, which serves not only to punish offenders but, more importantly, to maintain a pure, cleansed environment. Although ritual impurities can be removed by ablutions and restrictions, moral impurities resulting from unrepented sins need their source removed by the כרת penalty.

[468] Greenberg, *Ezekiel 1*, 177–78.

that Ezekiel's passive silence in Yahweh's presence is broken.[469] Even when he is told that his wife, the delight of his eyes, is to be taken (24:15) he remains silent. Perhaps his outburst here is the more significant in view of his restricted 'speechlessness'. His plea is for the remnant in Jerusalem.[470] Perhaps he hopes, as Abraham (Gen 18), that there might still be enough faithful people to save the city; perhaps he is clinging to hope like Isaiah's, who named his son 'a remnant shall return' (Isa 7:3) and looked forward to a divine building on a cornerstone (Isa 28:16).[471] However, he receives no guarantee that there will be any remnant. Instead, Yahweh justifies his anger by summarising the causes shown in chapter 8 into three points: 1) the extent of the sin is enormous; 2) there is widespread bloodshed (דָּמִים, a common term in Ezekiel) and injustice; 3) they regard Yahweh as having already left the land.[472] Although cultic sin is not explicitly mentioned in this summary, these points allude to the scenes of cultic abominations in chapter 8. This answer does not satisfy Ezekiel, and still leaves him wondering about a possible remnant. When his plea arises again in 11:13, Yahweh's further answer continues the challenge to his understanding of divine presence and temple.

The glory departs : Ezek 10

---

469 Brownlee, *Ezekiel 1*, 145, proposes that 9:9-10 is really a displaced answer to 11:13b for which another passage (11:14-20) was substituted. However, this passion for eliminating one supposed member of a doublet does not sufficiently allow for repetition and suspense in the storytelling of cultures which are more oral than literary.

470 Many refer to this plea as intercession. However, Wright, *Ezekiel*, 117 - 118, correctly identifies it as a challenging question to Yahweh about his intentions. It is only intercession by implication. It is based not merely on pity for the people but on concern for the glory of Yahweh's name and purpose.

471 Eichrodt, *Ezekiel*, 132, adds other supporting references from Isaiah: Isa 1:25f; 14:32; 29:18f.

472 Greenberg, *Ezekiel 1*, 178, notes the strange combination of the house of Israel and Judah, whereas in 8:6,10-12 it has been 'of Israel' and in 8:1,17 it has been 'of Judah'. The combination would seem to suggest that the sin is as widespread among Yahweh's people as is possible. He also finds an echo of the language used in the Flood story, cf. 7:23 and 8:17.

Repetition with variation

Many elements in this chapter are repeated, with variations, from chapter 1. Instead of assuming assimilation or even confusion in the text, such repetition needs to be accepted as a frequent characteristic of this book.[473] Whereas the initial vision leaves the prophet unable to describe confidently much of what he sees, this vision is clearer, and both the prophet and reader now understand the purpose for several obscure details in the first vision (e.g. the hands beneath the wings of the living creatures which now bring out the live coals).[474] So the similarities here are not merely a slavish repetition, but serve to allow the reader to journey with the storyteller, to accentuate the link with the first vision, emphasising the central role which this series of three visions has in the book, and to carry the movement of the story forward.

Ezekiel's attention is turned back to what looks like a throne (10:1, cf. 8:2 and 1:26-28); however, there is no longer the mention of a divine figure on the throne. As the divine glory is said to have been above the cherubim in 9:3, now the divine throne is over the heads of the cherubim. It quickly becomes apparent that the cherubim are to be identified with the living creatures of the first vision in the book (10:15, 20); Ezekiel is now more confident in his description.[475] However, there is one change

---

[473] With Greenberg, *Ezekiel 1*, 26, who writes, 'Repetition with variation features prominently in the book; variety is an irreducible concomitant of Ezekiel's repetition and pleads against the critical tendency to assimilate repeated elements to each other.' This stands against the approach by Halperin, "Ezek X 9–17," 129–30, who thinks that there is, in ch. 10, especially verses 9-17, a 'general impression of chaos' and finds its *Vorlage* (Ezek 1:15-21) 'confusing'. Although still assuming a dependence on ch.1, a more balanced position is taken by Houk, "Ezekiel 10," 54, who considers the editor's redaction to be 'a literary accomplishment with definite theological purpose', not merely the work of a copyist or interpolator.

[474] Block, *Ezekiel 1*, 314–17.

[475] Houk, "Ezekiel 10," 45-46, notes that even the mixed usage of feminine and masculine suffixes of ch.1 has become consistent. However, he cautions against making too much of this. Taylor, *Ezekiel*, 104-105, surmises that Ezekiel's initial uncertainty about the identity of the living creatures may be due to the fact that he had not qualified as a priest and so had not seen the cherubim within the Jerusalem temple. However, he would have heard about them, so perhaps in the second vision he is

from the first vision: the four faces now have a cherub instead of an ox, and the cherub face is named first (10:14).[476] Within the OT, cherubim are mounted by Yahweh, when he parts the clouds and comes down, and has dark clouds under his feet (Ps 18:11[10]). Cherubim are put in place to guard the east side of the Garden of Eden, together with a flashing, flaming sword (Gen 3:24).Winged creatures are present in Isaiah's temple vision (Isa 6:2), and God is said to be enthroned between the cherubim over the ark in the Holy of Holies (Ex 37:7-9; 1 Sam 4:4; 2 Sam 6:2;1 Kings 6:24-28; 2 Kings 19:14[15]; 2 Chron 3:13b).[477] In that image, the cherubim can be viewed as taking up the position of a divine vehicle in the shape of a throne, with the arms, legs and sides of the 'throne' created by the anatomy of the cherubim and their wings.[478]

The wheels again are said to have a wheel within a wheel, and can move in any direction (10:10-12, cf. 1:16-17); there are multiple eyes (10:12, cf. 1:18) although these are now said to be all over their bodies rather than on the rims of the wheels, which are prominent.[479] Some of the description is abbreviated, but the identification of the beings with those described in the earlier vision indicates that the fuller description is to be assumed. Now that the 'living creatures' of ch.1 are identified as

---

then able to recall what others have said and make the connection more definitely.

[476] Halperin, "Ezek X 9–17," 139-140, suggests that the ox may have been erased because of its suggestion of the calf-worship in the wilderness. However, there has been no editorial attempt to harmonise these two descriptions. Greenberg, *Ezekiel 1*, 182, says that the plain sense of the MT is that in this scene, each cherub has four of the same faces, with the form of the face different for each cherub, whereas in 1:10 each creature has four different faces. He also notes that there is no mention of these faces in the LXX as v.14 is missing.

[477] Brownlee, *Ezekiel 1*, 12, comments that the winged creatures in Isa 6 and in Rev 4:8 need a third pair of wings in order to cover their faces. In Ezek 1 the creatures have no need to hide their faces because a dome above them shields them from being able to see the divine presence on the throne, so they need only two pairs. In this passage the creatures only look straight ahead, not up. Cooke, *Ezekiel*, 15, notes that the seraphim of Isa 6 are worshiping, whereas here they seem to be giving support and movement to the throne. Rev 4:6-8 seems to combine the functions of each, suggesting that the two functions may not be so far apart as they might appear to be.

[478] Barrick, "Straight-Legged Cherubim," 546–47.

[479] Halperin, "Ezek X 9–17," 137-140, proposes that the primary concern of this passage is angelological and precursor to the Jewish mystical system, but this does not do justice to the overall theological movement within this literary context.

'cherubim', perhaps the capacity for independent movement demonstrated through these wheels accentuates the fact that these visionary creatures do not need to be carried by humans, unlike the cherubim fashioned above the ark in the Jerusalem temple. Yahweh and his supporting beings are free from the constraints of human actions and a physical building.

Burning coals: Ezek 10:2,6

The critical action now concerns the man clothed in linen who has returned to report the completion of his first assignment (9:11). He whose role has been seen as the agent of salvation in chapter 9 now becomes, by implication, an agent of destruction. It is he who is to go into the midst of the wheels, receive burning coals from one of the cherubim and scatter them over the city (vv. 2, 6-7).[480] The purpose of the burning coal imagery in chapter 1 is now made clear. In parallel with this action is an observation that a cloud fills the inner court (cf. the cloud filling the temple in 2 Chron 5:13-14); then the glory of Yahweh rises from above the cherubim and moves to the threshhold.[481] This is as in 9:3, just before the man clothed in linen is commanded to put the salvation mark on the foreheads of the faithful. Now, as an intensification of this movement, the glory of Yahweh fills the court, and the loud sound of the wings, like the voice of God Almighty, warns that further movement is imminent (vv. 3-5).[482]

Departure of the glory

---

[480] Zimmerli, *Ezekiel 1*, 250, refers to the priestly ability to handle holy fire and the destructive anger of Yahweh against those who are not authorised to handle it (Num 16:35). Wright, *Ezekiel*, 120, adds that the fire which is usually reserved for the burning of Yahweh's enemies (e.g. Ps 97:3 and Isa 26:11) is now being scattered over his own people. Perhaps the judment on Sodom and Gomorrah is also in mind (cf. 16:44-52).

[481] Houk, "Ezekiel 10," 45–46, comments on the active, individuated role of the divine glory in this vision, compared with the more undifferentiated impression of the divine glory in the first vision (1:28) where the language is very hesitant.

[482] Brownlee, *Ezekiel 1*, 150, sees significance in the title of Yahweh at this point, i.e., as El Shaddai, which designates Yahweh as head of the divine assembly. If this is so, the members of the assembly in this context would be the seven agents of judgment which appear in 9:1-2.

The departure of the man in linen (v.7) is a defining moment. No more mention is made of the other six agents of destruction, nor of their destructive work. A new section follows: v.9 begins with 'I looked' just as the chapter opened. From this point on, there is no more lingering of the divine glory in the temple precincts; it immediately leaves the temple of Yahweh and moves eastwards, lingering for a time over the east gate. This is the first time since 8:16 that the term 'temple of Yahweh' rather than 'house' has been used, perhaps reflecting Yahweh's growing alienation from it.[483] The direction is opposite to that of the sun which the 25 elders had worshipped. The divine glory is later seen above the mountain to the east of Jerusalem (11:23) on its continuing journey beyond. Zimmerli makes the point that the description of the glory of the Lord is no less splendid in his departure than in his appearance in chapter 1, leaving the impression that the glory of the Lord is to be praised even in the midst of active judgment.[484]

The leaders are judged: Ezek 11:1-13

Relationship to the preceding account

Chapter 11 does not continue smoothly from the preceding account. It has its own formal introduction (11:1), uses a different literary genre (a disputation address), assumes that the judgment portrayed in chapter 9 has not yet occurred, does not include any mention of cultic irregularities, and seems to interrupt the departure of the glory of the Lord.[485] However, it opens with Ezekiel being lifted up by the Spirit and suggests a continuation of the visionary mode. It creates a dramatic delay in the final departure of the glory of the Lord, further exposes the attitude of the Jerusalem leaders and also allows the vitally important question of 11:13, which had a preliminary airing in 9:8, to be put and answered. Attempts to posit editorial

---

483 Block, *Ezekiel 1*, 326.

484 Zimmerli, *Ezekiel 1*, 256.

485 Wong, *Retribution*, 159, says that 11:1-13 has the form of a disputation.

insertions to link this chapter with chapters 8–10 only create more, not fewer problems.[486] Regarding chapter 11 as part of the vision sequence allows Ezekiel's prophesying and Pelatiah's death (11:13) to be viewed within the visionary mode.[487]

It is not necessary to conceive of the group of 25 men as being survivors of the judgment in chapter 9, as if a strict chronological order needs to be maintained. Within the visionary mode, it is quite allowable for this group not to have experienced judgment yet. The dramatic irony of the situation is that this group is overconfident of their future, but both Ezekiel and the reader know what their real future will be.[488] Within the vision narrative it is quite possible to imagine Ezekiel being removed from within the temple precincts to observe what is taking place outside. It is also possible to envisage the killing as having begun within the temple and even in some quarters of the city. Although realism needs to be suspended to imagine that this group has not heard of any of this destruction, strict realism does not pertain to this sequence any more than it does to that in chs 8-10.

Leaders

Two men, Jaazaniah and Pelatiah, are named; one of whom drops dead later in the chapter, most likely as a portent of what is to come for the rest of the group.[489] Perhaps it is surprising that no mention is made of the king or chief priest, but it is noteworthy that they are never mentioned within this book. In view of the fact that Ezekiel's immediate audience is a group of elders, it is the role of the elders and other lay leaders that is most applicable here. The two roles of king and high priest are now irrelevant to the exile community; putting blame onto them could blind the

---

[486] Eichrodt, *Ezekiel*, 134–35.

[487] Taylor, *Ezekiel*, 107.

[488] Renz, *Rhetorical Function*, 187.

[489] Eichrodt, *Ezekiel*, 135, says this Jaazaniah is not the son of Shaphan in 8:11 nor the prince referred to in Jer 40:8. Greenberg, *Ezekiel 1*, 186, notes that these two names are common in monarchy texts. It is possible that they are leaders who come from branches of the royal family.

exiles from facing the necessary issues. This group is identified as שׂרי העם, leaders or rulers or princes of the people who fulfill a similar role to that of the elders in exile.[490] The unfolding of the scene suggests that these men have a role in determining official public policy.[491]

False hopes

Instead of witnessing practices which are self-evidently wrong, as in chapter 8, this time Ezekiel is told by the Lord about their wicked scheming (vv.2-3). Completely oblivious to the departure of the Lord and to the danger that is looming, these arrogant men display an unjustified optimism and an absurd elevation of their own self-importance. As happens elsewhere in the book, a saying by these people is turned around by Yahweh. In the cooking pot analogy (used again in 24:3ff, where it also refers to the city) these men see themselves as the choice meat (v.3), but Yahweh declares that they are offal, to be thrown out (v.7).[492] Their message seems to be just another variation of the false hopes of 'Peace' declared by the deviant prophets (13:10).

The meaning of the leaders' advice is rather cryptic. Taylor gives the possibilities as: 1) 'It is not near (i.e., the judgment); let us build houses', displaying an unwarranted optimism; 2) 'the house-building (in exile) is still a long way off', ridiculing Jeremiah's advice; 3) 'Is not the time near to build houses?'meaning 'We are quite safe: let us carry on our normal peace-time occupations', again expressing unwarranted optimism; and 4) 'the time is not near to build houses.' Options 1) and

---

[490] Zimmerli, *Ezekiel 1*, 257, finds this title only in post-exilic texts (Neh 11:1; 1 Chron 21:2; 2 Chron 24:23; Est 3:12) and says that it is not the same as the single office of שׂר העיר in Judg 9:30; 1 Kings 22:26; 2 Kings 23:8, but is rather like the שׂרי יהודה of Jer 26:10; 29:2; 34:19; 52:10; Hos 5:10; Neh 12:31f, except that it is less precise.

[491] Brownlee, *Ezekiel 1*, 157.

[492] Wright, *Ezekiel*, 122, writes that in ancient Israel the best cuts of meat were cooked in a pot, probably by boiling. The poorer pieces and offal were fried over an open fire or discarded.

3) seem to fit the context best.[493] Because of their arrogant optimism, they make policies that actually put their people in catastrophic, imminent danger. This grossly misleading and incongruous message is declared wicked, because their own behaviour blatantly ignores Yahweh's covenantal requirements (v.12), conforming more to the standards of surrounding nations (v.12), and their advice, like that of the deviant prophets, only confirms the evil course of action which many of the people are on. Their arrogant attitude comes to a head when they dismiss those who have already been sent away from Jerusalem (v.14), and assume that their position, on account of still being in Jerusalem, is inviolable.[494]

Judgment

Through the activity of the Spirit coming upon Ezekiel again, he is called to prophesy to this group (v.5). The one specific, named crime of this group is that they have engaged in widespread and unjust killing (v.6). Their violence will be met by Yahweh's violence (vv. 8-10); they will be killed. No mention is made of cultic malpractices, but the background of chapter 8, where there is specific mention of violence filling the land (8:17), justifies an assumption that idolatry and social evils here go hand in hand. Their specific claim of inheritance of the land (v.14) is met by Yahweh's threat to drive them out of the land, to give them into the hands of foreigners (v.9) and to execute judgment at the borders of Israel (v.10). The recurring formula 'then you will know that I am Yahweh' (vv.10b, 12) seals the words of Yahweh's judgment. It will be Yahweh, not these leaders, who is seen to

---

493 Taylor, *Ezekiel*, 108–09. Also, Wright, *Ezekiel*, 122-123, suggests that these leaders may be using ruthless tactics to seize land and property, as former leaders in Micah's time had done (Mic 2:1-2, 8-9; 3:1-4).

494 Renz, *Rhetorical Function*, 188, notes that nowhere in chs. 8-11 is the exile regarded as the punishment for the inhabitants of Jerusalem. Wong, *Retribution*, 179, argues for the exile being a removal of impurity.

have the final judicial power; and it will be in Israelite territory, not somewhere else, that his judgment falls. Their hope of security in Jerusalem will be shattered.[495]

Ezekiel's distress: Ezek 11:13

Having been shown the extensive wickedness of those who are still in Jerusalem, and in response to the sudden death of Pelatiah, Ezekiel now cries out in distress. Any hope which is left, that some in Jerusalem will keep faithfulness to Yahweh as a 'remnant' (שְׁאֵרִית), is now dashed. This cry is an intensified repetition of that in 9:8.[496] Pelatiah is a representative leader (11:1) of those who are left in the land; his death means that no 'remnant' remains.[497] Ezekiel's utter devastation, in seeing, even in visionary form, the death of a personally recognised representative of this remnant, suggests that while he accepts the judgment on the exiles, his hope for the future has been lying, not with those in exile, but with those who are still in the land. If this remnant is wiped out, it means the utter end of his people Israel.

Although the term שְׁאֵרִית is used frequently to mean simply those who remain as survivors in any place after others have gone, it also carries the idea of hope for the future.[498] In terms of God's people, it often represents the faithful minority. Although Jeremiah speaks of people being thrust out from Yahweh's presence (Jer 7:15), he also refers to a remnant being gathered from the countries to which they have been scattered (Jer 23:3) and includes a prayer of hope for Yahweh to save 'the

---

[495] Block, *Ezekiel 1*, 360, writes that when Yahweh abandons his people, they lose all right to his protection and favour. For Ezekiel, the true point at which this loss of protection begins is the departure of the glory of the Lord. Any historic events, such as the Babylonian capture of Jerusalem, only flow from this reality in the heavenly sphere.

[496] Block, *Ezekiel 1*, 338–39, notes that although both cries are very similar, 11:13 seems to transform the question of 9:8 into an affirmation. However, it is still a startled affirmation that wants an answer.

[497] Zimmerli, *Ezekiel 1*, 259, thinks that Ezek 11 appears to parallel Jer 28, with the death of Pelatiah being parallel to the death of Hananiah. For Jeremiah, Hananiah is representative of the false prophets with their advocacy of false trust and misplaced proclamation of peace, but he does not represent the 'remnant' and there is no recorded cry of anguish by Jeremiah over Hananiah's death.

[498] E.g, Jer 11:23; 25:20; 41:10; 44:14.

remnant of Israel' (Jer 31:6[31:7]).[499] Ezekiel himself is asked to enact a scene, in which his hair is divided to represent destruction for almost all, but a small proportion, a remnant, is kept safe (ch.5). This thought is echoed in 6:8-10, and seems to be present in 10:4, in the people who can receive the mark on their foreheads. The death of this remnant presents a crisis of hope and faith.

The cry in 11:13 (together with the cry in 9:8) has, perhaps, a more pivotal function within the book of Ezekiel than is often realised. Ezekiel's own crisis represents the wider crisis of faith for any who find it difficult to accept that there can be judgment within the land of Israel. However, his response to this crisis is a direct cry to the Lord (v.13) which is answered (vv.14-21). This contrasts with a notable absence of any direct cry to the Lord on the part of those who are left in Jerusalem. Throughout chapters 8–11 they make statements about the Lord, for example, that he cannot see them, but they never address him. The divine reply, then, is illustrative of the fact that the Lord is present to Ezekiel in a way that he is not to those who might be supposed to be the remnant.[500] Now, if any group functions as the true remnant it is the group which Ezekiel represents, the group of exiles. Ezekiel's cry becomes the springboard on which his understanding is opened to move a significant step beyond what it has been, a step that involves an acceptance of judgment.

Surprising hope : Ezek 11:14-25

In contrast to the rest of the material in chapters 8–11, 11:14-25 is largely non-visionary (apart from vv.22-25) and mostly comprises divine speech. The

---

499 This term also appears with a similar meaning in Mic 2:12; Zeph 3:13 and 2 Chron 34:9.

500 In my Th.M. thesis, Kathleen M. Rochester, "Israel's Lament and the Discernment of Divine Revelation," Th.M. Dissertation (Vancouver: Regent College, 2000), I found a relationship between lament, where appropriate, and discernment. Ezekiel's cry in v.13, as well as the similar cry in 9:8, constitute laments to God, and the subsequent verses indicate that he received some significant discernment that expanded his own thinking. The Jerusalemites fail to lament, when chapters 8–11 indicate that there is reason to do so. They never address God at all and never receive discernment nor any real indication of his presence.

introductory and concluding formulae (vv.14, 21) suit prophetic oracle material, rather than a visionary report. Like the first thirteen verses, this section also is in the form of a disputation address.[501] This second half of chapter 11 is a response to the first half (1-13). In the first half, the leading citizens of Jerusalem are dragged out for judgment and destruction (verses 7-11), but in the second half, the exiles who have been dragged out will be gathered for restoration (verses 16-17).[502]

Ezekiel's kindred: Ezek 11:14

Ezekiel's attention and concern is jolted away from his grief over the people in Jerusalem (v.13) to think tenderly on those of his kindred who are with him in exile.[503] Although the LXX and some other manuscripts regard the repetition of 'your brothers'(v.15) as dittography, its emphatic force should be retained (cf. Jer 7:4); the NRSV translates: 'your kinsfolk, your own kin.' Ezekiel is being directed to distance himself from the disregard by the Jerusalemites for those in exile (they see them as 'gone far from the Lord' v.15).[504] The exiles are Ezekiel's kinsfolk and theirs and the subject of Yahweh's attention. Perhaps the perception of the Jerusalemites is not far removed from Ezekiel's own. They are part of the 'whole house of Israel' (v.15, used again in 20:40; 35:15; 36:10).

The literal MT apellation 'men of your redemption' (אַנְשֵׁי גְאֻלָּתֵךְ, v.15) suggests the function of a גֹּאֵל, a close relative who is a 'redeemer' according to the law in Leviticus 25 (e.g. Boaz in Ruth 4:7f; Jeremiah in Jer 32:7f). This person has the

---

501 Block, *Ezekiel 1*, 342.

502 Wright, *Ezekiel*, 124.

503 Zimmerli, *Ezekiel 1*, 261, comments on the reference to Ezekiel's 'brothers' here as being unusually personal.

504 The verbal form רְחָקוּ is imperative in MT and LXX. 1 Sam 26:19 gives a similar imperatival usage, when David says to Saul, 'They have driven me out today from my share in the heritage of the Lord, saying, 'Go, serve other gods.' Although Brownlee, *Ezekiel 1*, 163, keeps the imperative and translates the phrase as, 'Get you afar from Yahweh; this is ours!' It is generally repointed רָחֲקוּ to read in the perfect as in NRSV.

responsibility of buying back property that has been sold to pay a debt, of redeeming a relative from slavery, or of avenging the death of a relative who has been murdered. It speaks of tribal and family solidarity.[505] Although the term probably refers primarily to Ezekiel's close relatives, it can also connote a subtle contrast between those who feel bound by their kinship relationship, with its obligations of redemption, and those (the Jerusalemites) who have chosen to reject those obligations (towards their family members who are in exile). Allen suggests that the term 'develops the motif of possession of land'.[506] Because Yahweh is often imaged as father/husband within this book, Yahweh is, in terms of Lev 25, in the position of closest male relative, with the rights and responsibilities of 'redeemer'. Perhaps this is pressing the image too far, but there could be a foreshadowing of the idea of Yahweh's right of redemption that has so far escaped the reckoning of the Jerusalemites. The NRSV rendering 'your fellow exiles' is based on the LXX τῆς αἰχμαλωσίας σου. While the context indicates that it must, indeed, refer to those who are in exile with Ezekiel, the additional subtle nuances implied by the MT's redeemer relationship should not be ignored.

A little sanctuary: Ezek 11:16

The divine statement, that Yahweh has been, literally, 'for a little sanctuary'(לְמִקְדָּשׁ מְעַט) is somewhat perplexing. There is no parallel in the OT where Yahweh himself becomes a sanctuary, a term that usually designates a cult site or building.[507] In the book of Ezekiel there are many references using the קדשׁ root; there are holy offerings, garments, sabbaths, things and places, and the Lord's name is very often

---

505 Helmer Ringgren, "גָּאַל גְּאֻלָּה ," in *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, vol. 2, ed. G.Johannes Botterweck and Helmer Ringgren, trans. John T. Willis (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975), 350–55.

506 Leslie Allen, *Ezekiel 1*, 129. His view is supported by Zimmerli, *Ezekiel 1*, 261, who says, in relation to the idea of 'men of redemption', that 'the following divine oracle has to do with the question of a share in the ancestral land.'

507 Block, *Ezekiel 1*, 349, Block cites the closest analogues as John 2:19-22 and 3:21-23.

spoken of as holy. Although the terminology in this verse relating to Yahweh himself is somewhat surprising, it is, perhaps, not such a huge jump from the centrality of the holiness of the Lord's name. While humans have defiled the place that was set apart for the holy place, or sanctuary, the holiness of the Lord himself remains untouched. He himself has been the (only) holy place in the midst of the people. From this position he can sanctify Israel (Ezek 37:26,28).[508]

The perception of divine distancing by the Jerusalemites (8:12 and 9:9) seems to be motivated by self-pity rather than any acceptance of divine judgment on those who live in the land. The Jerusalemites who are quick to gloat over the judgment experienced by others (v.15 'they are far away from the Lord') are blind to the reality and cause of their own distance from the Lord (chapters 8 to 11 give evidence of this) and to their own candidacy for judgment.[509] Their statement, cast in legal terms, is met by the divine response which effectively takes the side of those who otherwise could not be represented in court.[510] Those who have clearly experienced judgment (those whom the Lord sent far away) have also experienced divine proximity (a sanctuary) within that judgment.[511] Could this point to a broader principle? Those who accept divine judgment are in a position to experience divine presence; conversely, those who refuse to accept divine judgment are in a position to experience divine absence.[512]

---

508 Helmer Ringgren, "קדש Qds," in *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament, Vol. XII*, Douglas W. Stott, G.J Botterweck, Ringgren H, and Fabry H-J (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 538.

509 Other prophets speak of the Day of the Lord as bringing judgment for those in Israel (e.g. Joel 2:1-2). Yet there is to be rejoicing through judgment (Joel 2:21-23).

510 D.M.G. Stalker, *Ezekiel* (London: SCM, 1968), 112.

511 Note the change in person between verses 15-16 and verse 17 onwards. The Jerusalemite saying refers to the exiles as 'they', so the first reply keeps the same person. Verses 17-21 change to 'you', when promises for the future are addressed to the exiles themselves.

512 Many of the psalms (e.g. Ps 98:9) call for the people to rejoice in divine judgment. See Ellen F. Davis, "Psalm 98," *Interpretation* 46 (1992): 171–75.

Within this section (11:14-21) there are many phrases that can also be found in Jer 32:37-40 and Ezek 36:24-28; 37:21-27.[514] However, this phrase 'little sanctuary' is unique and its exact meaning is not clear. If it is interpreted adjectivally, it might signify deference to the great tradition of the importance of the Jerusalem temple as the true sanctuary.[515] If it is interpreted adverbially it can refer to temporal duration, for a little while, leaving the possibility open that this temporary situation could undergo change. Within the movement of the Lord's glory through the book, the Jerusalem temple *has been* the location of the sanctuary, and the future visionary temple *will be* the sanctuary, but in this interim period, the Lord himself is the sanctuary for his people in exile, 'in the countries where they have gone' (v.16). Whichever translation is preferred, the surprise in the statement remains, as does the effective rebuttal of the Jerusalemite claim. However, this interim sanctuary can also be regarded as qualitatively less than the glory apparent in the Jerusalem temple. So perhaps some ambiguity can be retained.

Future hope: Ezek 11:17-21

The final departure of the glory of the Lord is, dramatically, further delayed. It is not until the finality of the Lord's judgment has been spoken, protested and defended, that an unexpected hope emerges.[516] It is not a hope that bypasses judgment, rather it embraces judgment, and assumes that a genuine eviction and dispersion of the people occurs (v.17). But it speaks of a future hope that builds upon this judgment,

---

[514] Adrianus van den Born, *Ezechiel*, De Boeken Van Het Oude Testament (Roermond en Maaseik: J.J.Romen & Zonen - Uitgevers, 1954), 74, sets out parallels.

[515] Block, *Ezekiel 1*, 350. Block compares this to 'a little help' in Dan 11:24. He translates the phrase as 'in small measure'. Cooke, *Ezekiel*, 125, says that usage elsewhere would indicate degree rather than time. In his view, it indicates that although the exiles were deprived of temple worship, they had not forfeited his protection. He refers to the medieval Jewish name for a synagogue as 'little sanctuary'. Joyce, *Ezekiel*, 113, similarly.

[516] Taylor, *Ezekiel*, 110, comments that although most prophecies of hope come after the actual fall of Jerusalem, in ch. 33 onwards, there are some other early indications of it, e.g. 5:3; 6:8,9; 12:16; 16:60. This does have some correspondence with the hope that emerges in Jeremiah, e.g. Jer 24:7; 31:33; 32:39f.

and looks forward to a gathering instead of a scattering (v.17).[517] It speaks now to the exiles, rather than to the Jerusalemites (vv.14-16) and promises a future identification of the hearts of the people with the heart of Yahweh (v.19).[518] This will lead to their abhorrence and removal of all the images and idols that have been so disgusting to Yahweh (v.18). The heart (לב) is identified as the core of the problem (v.21) and the locus of real change, with Yahweh as the agent of this change. Such a change also needs the action of the divine Spirit (רוח). The outward evidence will be that which was intended from the beginning of the covenant relationship: obedience to Yahweh's laws (v.20).[519] The formula of relationship which has been uttered on many other occasions will be more truly fulfilled: they will be Yahweh's people and he will be their God (v.20). And there will be a return to their land, a new Exodus.[520] But there will be some who, even through judgment, will not allow their hearts to be changed. In adhering to their old idolatries, they will have nothing to look forward to except further judgment (v.21).

Final departure: Ezek 11:22-25

Now there is nothing more to be said. Yahweh's complete removal is inevitable, but an indication that he has not fully finished with his people has been given. The cherubim and the wheels are activated to lift the glory of the Lord and remove it towards the east, to stop over the Mount of Olives.[521] That is enough for Ezekiel to

---

[517] Block, *Ezekiel 1*, 345, notes that the 'therefore, say' at the beginning of v.17 seems redundant after its occurrence in v.16, perhaps indicating a new section.

[518] The MT has 'one heart' while the LXX has 'another heart' (from אחר instead of אחד) and a few manuscripts have 'new heart' (חדש). All variations are understandable within the context and reinforce the change. Taking the MT, Greenberg, *Ezekiel 1*, 190, interprets the problematic condition of having two hearts to mean one heart fixed on the abominations, with the other, perhaps, on Yahweh; the 'one heartedness' would bring a single-minded focus on Yahweh.

[519] Joyce, *Ezekiel*, 116, warns against interpreting this in an individualistic way, since 11:15 defines the recipients as the corporate 'whole house of Israel'.

[520] Block, *Ezekiel 1*, 354, sees here a demonstration of the fact that both Jeremiah and Ezekiel stress that the gift of land is a demonstration of the covenant, not the prerequisite to it.

[521] In 43:1-4 the glory of the Lord returns from the east.

know that it has gone; no further protests or questions are permitted. The Spirit once more lifts him up and returns him from his Spirit-given vision to the exiles in Babylonia. And now he passes on its contents—although the elders are not specifically mentioned, they must, surely, be included in his exile community. The reception his vision receives is not told; within this book, it is of no account. For in this very theocentric narrative the majesty, the holiness, the power and the glory are the Lord's, and it is the Spirit that has made it known to Ezekiel.[522]

4.3 COMPARISON OF TEMPLE MATERIAL IN JER 7:1–15 AND EZEK 8–11

The amount of space devoted to the Jerusalem temple in the book of Ezekiel, its role in the book's key three-vision sequence, and its detailed physical descriptions give the temple a dominant place in that book, in marked contrast with its position in the book of Jeremiah.[523] The difference in genre is also striking: whereas Jer 7 is the first major prose section in that book, set out in the structure of an orally-delivered sermon, Ezek 8–11 is an extended written account of visionary material. The differences in material also need to be related to the differences in setting.

The place of the temple

For Jeremiah and his people the temple is very present. He speaks right at the temple gate (Jer 7:1-2), in the crossflow of worshippers who come to the temple for cultic purposes. The physical presence of this building dominates the skyline and its

---

[522] Renz, *Rhetorical Function*, 137, writes that radical theocentricity is an important feature of this book, and is demonstrated through the structure of the narrative. He comments further that Ezekiel is not cast in the role of a mediator between Yahweh and his people, but of the first audience. Ezekiel's reaction is, then, the prototypical response to Yahweh's word.

[523] Davis, "Psalm 98," 11, referring to Ezekiel, says that these 'divine visions show the point of orientation for the prophet's message ... one central image serves the threefold function of prophetic validation, theodicy and promise.'

presence represents security for the people (Jer 7:4). However, Jeremiah insists that trust in the temple is misplaced; words proclaiming its importance are 'deceptive'. Jeremiah calls for a reduction in the perceived importance of the building by pointing to the person who holds the real power: the Lord of the temple (Jer 7:10,14,15). His omission of any description of the physical attributes of the temple may be partly because its appearance is well-known through its regular use for worship. This omission may reinforce his concern to down-play the inflated value which many in his audience place on this building. Or it may simply reflect the limited amount of visual detail given in that book. In any case, the future of this temple is under threat (Jer 7:14) and it is, surprisingly, the responsibility of the people to secure its future, rather than to depend on it to secure their future. The Lord of the temple, Yahweh, requires that the ordinary people amend their ways and doings (Jer 7:5,9) in accordance with known commandments in order to keep the temple in their midst. In this whole scene there is no special mention of the role of leaders.

Unlike Jeremiah, Ezekiel is inside his house, far from the temple and temple worshippers, needing to give an answer to visiting elders. For him and his people the temple can only be pictured in the imagination. Its memory evokes both longing and lament over shattered security. In fact, it is this grievous absence from the temple that dominates the book and demands understanding. Ezekiel's visionary journey is guided by a 'man clothed in linen'. It slowly and painstakingly uncovers a succession of shocking corruptions. The level of detail and the inclusion of sensory (even if visionary) experiences (e.g. being lifted up and moved [Ezek 8:3;11:1,24], digging into a wall [Ezek 8:8] and falling facedown [Ezek 9:8; 11:13]) suit the needs of grief, giving time to linger on its subject and to reflect on causes of the people's present predicament. The journey through the temple precincts provides a sense of ordered progression appropriate to a people whose order and stability have been

shattered. Understanding is given as various shocking and secretive idolatrous practices are uncovered, practices which are perpetrated by many who are leaders, though not royalty, and very close to the central operations of the temple. Some of these visionary perpetrators are elders; perhaps this reinforces the responsibility of the elders whose presence before Ezekiel is instrumental in initiating the vision. Alongside this idolatry is widespread violence and the shedding of innocent blood. Ezekiel sees the effect of judgment, beginning even in the temple. Some, though, who grieve with Yahweh over these abominations, are saved. The movement of the glory of the Lord parallels Ezekiel's journey through the temple. It no longer resides in the temple; the present Jerusalem temple can no longer represent a place of hope. Instead, the presence of Yahweh in exile and his new work in hearts must take precedence.

Divine presence in temple and land

The temple is naturally associated with the land as Yahweh's gift (Jer 7:7; Ezek 11:15). Threats to the temple bring threats to the Israelites' occupation of the land (Jer 7:3,7,15); Ezek 11:16). The conditional statement about Yahweh's presence in the land (Jer 7:7), together with the claims that the Lord has forsaken the land (Ezek 8:12 and 9:9) and the Jerusalemite saying (Ezek 11:15), indicate that the Lord's presence or absence is a vital question in both books, precisely because it is perceived to be rooted and bound up in the physical presence of temple and land.[524] To a people who are still resident in the land, with an intact temple, the divine

---

[524] Paul E. Fitzpatrick, "The Disarmament of God," *CBQ Monograph 37* (2004) (Washington D.C.), 125-130, draws attention to the fact that a god abandoning his 'turf' is not a new theme in ANE literature. However, gods usually abandon their place because of fear in the face of more powerful gods, or because they cease to care for a particular place. Neither is the case here. In Ezekiel's account, Yahweh's departure confirms and asserts his sovereignty. Andreas Ruwe, "Die Veränderung yempeltheologischer Konzepte in Ezechiel 8–11," in *Gemeinde ohne Tempel*, ed. Armin Lange, Peter Pilhofer, and Kathrin Ehlers, Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen Zum Neuen Testament (Tübingen: Mohr, 1999), 3–18, argues that the whole of chapters 8–11 is to be understood as a narrative discourse dealing with the traditional conception of the temple-theology during the exile. Ezek 11:16b shows that the function of the sanctuary (i.e., to mediate the presence of Yahweh) is, for the exiles, ascribed to his person. The basis of Ezekiel's argument is the vision in Ezek 10:8-17 (which refers to Ezek 1:4-28). See also Stalker, *Ezekiel*, 113.

presence is taken for granted (Jer 7:10); for the exiles, it is the divine absence which is taken for granted (the location of the glory of the Lord in the Jerusalem temple, from which they are distant, is presumed). Yet the divine counter-statement in Ezek 11:16, suggesting that Yahweh's presence is, surprisingly, not absolutely tied to the land, and the movement of the glory eastwards, open the possibility of encountering the divine presence outside the land. Jeremiah's declaration that Yahweh can destroy his own temple (Jer 7:14) demonstrates a similar belief in divine freedom over temple, and, by implication, land.

As Jeremiah gives no details about the temple, he gives no details here of the land and very little elsewhere. In fact, he shows little interest in the physical demarcation of space. Ezekiel, however, pays great attention to space and its boundaries, especially the protection of sacred space. His details in these chapters are consistent with the later careful descriptions of land division (chs. 45, 48).

Temple terminology

Within Jer 7 and Ezek 8–11 the terminology for the temple itself is not significantly different: both prophets usually refer to the temple as בית (house [of the Lord], Jer 7:2,10,11,14; Ezek 8:14,16; 9:3,6,7; 10:3,4 [twice],18,19; 11:1), but both also use the term היכל (temple, Jer 7:4 [three times],14; Ezek 8:16 [twice]). However, Ezekiel pays attention to specific locations within the temple precincts, so his temple vocabulary is more extensive (e.g. the entrance to the gateway of the inner court that faces north [Ezek 8:3], the room with images behind the wall [Ezek 8:9,12] and the entrance between the porch and the altar [Ezek 8:16]). In contrast, Jeremiah identifies only the gate to the Lord's house (Jer 7:1) where he is to stand. Ezekiel also highlights a wall within the temple area that hides secretive abominable practices (Ezek 8:8,9). Although Jeremiah creates an image of secrecy—den of robbers (Jer 7:11)—he does not point to any walls within the temple area.

Yahweh, not the temple

Both prophets work to turn the people's trust and hope away from the temple (the building and its worship rituals) to the person of Yahweh. Jeremiah comes to this point quickly, calling people to attend to the one who watches the deeds of all who come to worship in the temple. Nothing they do can be kept secret. Yahweh is, after all, the one whose name is borne by the temple, and who has the power to destroy the temple, including one that bears his name. As Jeremiah gives no visual description of the temple, he gives none of Yahweh. There is little elaboration of the divine character in this scene, only summaries of his known commands and a sense of urgency because his patience is quickly running out. Jeremiah is concerned to stand against deceptive 'words' about the temple, and to call people to hear instead the 'word of Yahweh' and to put it into practice in terms of their 'ways and doings'.

Ezekiel's temple of the imagination is developed slowly and steadily. Consistent with the focus on Yahweh himself in the first vision, Ezekiel demonstrates that it is still Yahweh who takes priority over the temple. The visions come from Yahweh (Ezek 8:1; 11:25) and are called 'visions of God' (Ezek 8:3). The person of Yahweh is described first (Ezek 8:2-3) and is referred to again (Ezek 10:1,2) together with his attendant cherubim and wheels (Ezek 10:2-22; 11:22). The movement of Yahweh's glory is a key focus. It is Yahweh (or his agent) who directs all aspects of the tour. It is his evaluation that is given for every scene, his grief that is expressed as the 'abominations' (תועבות) unfold, and his judgment that is executed (ch.9). It is to Yahweh that Ezekiel cries, and it is before Yahweh that Ezekiel falls face down (Ezek 9:8; 11:13, cf. 1:28). Although the Jerusalem temple becomes bereft of Yahweh's presence, there is surprising comfort that Yahweh has been 'a little sanctuary' to those who have been scattered (Ezek 11:16). In the wider movement of the book, these scenes serve to whet the reader's appetite for the anticipated return of the presence of Yahweh in his new temple when he will again speak (Ezek 43:6,7).

In addition, Ezekiel offers a bold, radically new idea: that Yahweh himself has become 'a little sanctuary' for his exiled people, even where no temple is present (Ezek 11:16). This can be seen as 'a daring attempt to deal with exiled Israel's physical, psychological and above all theological dislocation.'[525] Although Jeremiah stresses the priority of relationship with Yahweh, he maintains a clear distinction between the temple and its divine owner. He addresses a perception of unhealthy fusion between the building and Yahweh and does not need to deal with Ezekiel's issues of dislocation.

Metaphors of hearing and seeing

In Jeremiah, the dominant portrayal of Yahweh is of the one who has repeatedly spoken to his people (Jer 7:13); the problem, on the people's part, has been a longstanding failure to listen and, in turn, to obey (see also Jer 7:23, 26). The call now, by implication, is primarily to listen to, rather than to see, Yahweh, and to trust in his words. In Jeremiah, there is no lingering over visual descriptions of what Yahweh sees; rather it is summed up through reference to known words (Jer 7:5-6, 9), perhaps summarised by 'justice' (מִשְׁפָּט), demonstrated through respect for the 'alien, orphan and widow' and protection of the innocent (Jer 7:6). The root sin of the people is addressed as 'trusting in deceptive (שֶׁקֶר) words' (Jer 7:8). This term שֶׁקֶר denotes a key problem for Jeremiah (whereas the term is only used once in Ezekiel, in Ezek 13:22). Jeremiah's ministry is to stand against deception, against lies, against words that distort the truth about Yahweh. He characteristically calls the people to 'amend' (יטב hiphil) their ways in accordance with the true words.

In Ezekiel's temple tour, although Yahweh speaks (e.g. Ezek 8:5;11:5) and listens (Ezek 8:18), and, as in Jeremiah, requires obedience (Ezek 11:12,20), it is his seeing

---

[525] Paul M. Joyce, "Dislocation and Adaptation in the Exilic Age and After," in *After the Exile*, ed. John Barton and David J. Reimer (Macon, Georgia: Mercer University Press, 1996), 58.

that receives dominant representation.[526] Whereas the concept that Yahweh sees beyond external pretence is merely a declaration in Jeremiah (Jer 7:11), it receives much more extended treatment in Ezekiel. The elders say, 'Yahweh does not see us' and engage in idolatry in a hidden, dark place where *they* cannot see properly, but Yahweh can (Ezek 8:12). In fact, the whole tour, with all of its visual detail, serves as an elaborate answer to that saying. Its style is congruent with the book's frequent use of well-developed metaphors.[527] Yahweh, who has seen first, now calls his prophet to see what is going on in the secret places (e.g. the guide's questions to Ezekiel, 'Do you not see what they are doing?'in Ezek 8:6, and similar in Ezek 8:15,17). In addition to being asked to look at the details of evil, Ezekiel is also presented with the visual representation of Yahweh's presence and movement. Perhaps the more elaborate visual images of the divine figure counter the visual lure of the idolatries.

Jeremiah's people can already see the temple, but they need to move from the position of spectator to that of partner in their relationship with Yahweh, and engage in the more intimate act of listening, which implies the necessity of obeying. Ezekiel's people, at a great physical distance from Jerusalem, are neither seeing the temple nor hearing Yahweh. Perhaps the experience of people in immediate post World War II Germany, when a sense of God's absence was noted, bears some

---

526 Levenson, *Sinai and Zion*, 148–49, notes that there are differences between worldviews dominated by the ear or by the eye. He writes, 'It is characteristic of the ear to absorb only one message at a time, in other words, to perceive sequentially, whereas the eye is capable of a panorama.' He comments that the dominance of ear over eye 'does seem to be characteristic of ancient Israelite sensibility.' However, he also notes one important area where the relationship is reversed: the temple (e.g. visual descriptions in 1 Kings 5-7 and Ps 48). The sight of the temple was intended to convey a revelation about God.

527 Karin Schöpflin, "The Composition of Metaphorical Oracles Within The Book of Ezekiel," *VT* 55 (2005): 101, 118, notes that although Ezekiel uses imagery that is basically familiar from prophetic writings preceding him, his metaphorical speech is much more extensively developed and the arrangement of metaphorical passages within the book more systematic and deliberate.

parallel to that of the exiles.[528] Through Ezekiel's role of spectator in the visionary temple, his people are also invited to become spectators: to see the repugnance of idolatries and to look at the one who is to be worshipped. Since the language of 'seeing' tends to suggest greater distance than the language of hearing, it can act as a preliminary step towards a renewed relationship with Yahweh. What is placed before one's eyes is critical (whether idols or Yahweh, the alternatives suggested by Ezek 8-11) and a right ordering of the visual surroundings of the temple area is a priority.

Temple worship

Although both prophets address failures of the people that ignore Yahweh's presence in the temple, Jeremiah does not address cultic worship as such, apart from referring to the unacceptability of Baal worship and going after other gods (Jer 7:9). Nor does he depict the temple as a desecrated, God-forsaken sanctuary, or call for its reordering or cleansing.[529] Although Yahweh is not pleased with the behaviour of his people, he is still perceived as being in his house, and in a relationship with his people. Jeremiah's word to the people still uses this privileged language of intimacy—listening and speaking, rather than merely speaking about the visual aspects of worship.

Ezekiel, however, does long for a thorough cleansing of the temple and reordering of external forms of worship (Ezek 11:18 supported by the subsequent temple vision in Ezek 40–48); for him, the level of desecration there is now such that Yahweh can no

---

528 Martin Keller, "Eine Rede und eine Besinnung: von der Gotteslehre zur Gottesleere," in *Prophetie und Psalmen: Festschrift für Klaus Seybold zum 65. Geburtstag* (Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 2001), 78, refers to Nietzsche's saying that 'God is dead' and considers that it is not so much a doctrinal claim as an observation that something that used to be present has gone. He claims that many contemporary people now experience the church as empty, whereas once people found God there; it seems as if something has been ripped out from the core of its being. I wonder if the exiles in Ezekiel's time felt a similar sense of loss of God's presence.

529 Duguid, *Ezekiel and the Leaders of Israel*, 66.

longer remain in his house (ch.10; 11:2-23). Although, like Jeremiah, Ezekiel speaks out against unjust behaviour in everyday life (e.g. unmeasured violence and bloodshed, Ezek 8:17; 9:9), he specifically names sins that show aberrations in cultic worship within the temple grounds: setting up an 'image of jealousy' (Ezek 8:3), hidden idolatry (Ezek 8:9-12), weeping for Tammuz (Ezek 8:14) and prostrations toward the sun (Ezek 8:16). Although there is only one occurrence in Ezek 8-11 of the root קדשׁ (holy) (מקדשׁ sanctuary, in Ezek 11:16), there is a markedly strong appearance of this root throughout the rest of the book of Ezekiel in relation to the temple and its attendant people and objects (e.g. Ezek 28:14; 41:4,21; 43:12; 45:1-4; 22:26; 42:13,14,20; 44:13,23,24).[530] In contrast, it (קדשׁ) is not applied to the physical temple in Jeremiah (Jer 25:30 does apply it to Yahweh's habitation, but its context suggests a more metaphorical application). In Ezekiel, the emphasis is on keeping the holy temple area free from unholy things. The divine presence cannot tolerate the pollution of his holy space and so departs from his temple.

Divine anger, jealousy and judgment

Both prophets speak of Yahweh's anger. Jeremiah's warning appeals to precedent (unlike Ezekiel) as he points to Yahweh's previous destruction of the Shiloh temple (Jer 7:12,14). He speaks of the divine threat of casting the people out of his sight (Jer 7:15). Yahweh's anger is referred to again later in the chapter, in vv.18 (כעס), 20 (אף and כמה) and 29 (עברה) as well as elsewhere in the book. In Ezekiel, it seems to be Yahweh's jealousy (קנאה, Ezek 8:7) that leads to the first angry response in this section. While Yahweh's jealousy is referred to several other times throughout Ezekiel (16:38,42; 23:25; 36:5,6; 38:19) it is never explicitly named in Jeremiah. In Jeremiah's context, although the relationship between the people and Yahweh is thin, there is enough present for the language of pleading ('Amend your ways!') to

---

530 Levenson, *Sinai and Zion*, 127–28, says that 'the temple (or tabernacle before it) is a place that guards the perfection of the divine presence ... Once something has been designated for the realm of the sacred, once it has passed into that zone of perfection, it cannot be easily withdrawn (Lev 22:12-16; Num 6:9-21), for the sanctuary is an enclave of ideal reality within the world of profanity.'

be used, before the threat of an angry rupture. The language of jealousy is used in Ezekiel for the transgression of the boundaries of a relationship by another taking the place of Yahweh. More direct expressions of divine anger follow, in Ezek 8:18 and 9:8, shown in mass killing and destruction, but killing that is said to be measured to fit what the people have done (Ezek 9:10 and 11:6,21). However, Ezekiel's distress over the apparent destruction of the remnant (שׁארית) in Ezek 11:13 has no equivalent in Jeremiah, who remains confident that even in the midst of judgment Yahweh will maintain a remnant (e.g. Jer 3:3; 31:7). Fire imagery in this section of Ezekiel (ch. 10) which is associated with theophany (as in chs 1–3) also symbolises divine destruction (Ezek 10:2,6).

Messages of hope

Jeremiah gives no promise of return to the land in this chapter, even though the book does provide for it elsewhere. His ministry, at this point, is to declare the urgency of the situation and to announce the very real divine threat to temple and land. Ezekiel's ministry, at this point, includes a measure of comfort (although Yahweh has left the Jerusalem Temple, he is with the exiles) and there is hope of a promised return to the land (Ezek 11:17-21) for those whose hearts do not go after abominations.

Ezekiel is to declare Yahweh's promise of giving the people 'one heart' (לב אחד, Ezek 11:19) perhaps implying a heart that is unified in its devotion to Yahweh, a heart that keeps its space holy for Yahweh and allows no other idolatrous presence. By implication, the 'heart' is placed in parallel with 'temple' since both are spaces for the divine presence. Although Jeremiah mentions none of this here, a similar message occurs in Jer 31:28-34, but with an emphasis on covenant and law as may be alluded to in this passage (Jer 7:5-9). Ezekiel is also to promise a 'new spirit' (רוח חדשה), something which is never mentioned in Jeremiah, but which resonates with the frequent mention of 'spirit' in Ezekiel.

While Jeremiah can only envisage the expression of judgment as the end, in relation to the temple (Jer 7:12-15), Ezekiel does not portray judgment as the end, since Yahweh has been a 'sanctuary' among the people since their exile. Paradoxically, judgment no longer appears as the opposite of salvation but as the vehicle for salvation.[531] In scattering his people far away from their land, Yahweh, it turns out, has gone with them in the very act of scattering.[532] In agreement with this, the expression of divine judgment also brings recognition of his power: [they] 'shall know that I am the Lord' (Ezek 11:10,12).

Conclusion

Proximity to the temple makes a crucial difference to the presentations of the messages of these prophets. Jeremiah's audience needs no description of the building in their midst. Instead, they need their misplaced trust in the building to be shattered and they need to listen to the word of Yahweh and to obey it. Ezekiel's people are in grief concerning the exile; this needs to be worked through, specifically in relation to the temple. The steady, detailed progression of his temple tour addresses needs of the imagination, to visualise the horror of the abominations and the departure of the glory of Yahweh. While Jeremiah shows little interest in the details of worship, Ezekiel is concerned for cultic cleansing, for Yahweh's holiness cannot tolerate unholiness. Both prophets point to the priority of the person of Yahweh over his temple. Yahweh's anger is clear in both prophets; but Jeremiah still

---

[531] The idea of God being 'with' them in the very act of punishment by scattering is congruent with the discovery made by Moses in his self-inflicted exile for murder, when he encountered the divine presence in the burning bush. In both accounts, God is found within the very place of punishment. What appears to be 'permanent' distancing from God turns out to be merely a distancing from the place where God was known, and not, ultimately, from God himself.

[532] It seems that irrespective of whether the divine command is to 'go away' or 'come here' the divine presence is 'with' the movement that is called for. Each movement, then, can become a different kind of opportunity of experiencing the divine presence and of engaging in relationship. Kutsko, ***Between Heaven and Earth***, 94, notices in Ezekiel the striking associations between the wilderness wanderings and the exile. The exile is seen as both a means of punishment and an opportunity for divine presence.

pleads for a turning, while Ezekiel feels the break in the relationship between Yahweh and people, expressed through Yahweh's jealousy. Jeremiah must bring a message of threatened judgment; at this point no hope is expressed beyond that. Ezekiel can see beyond judgment to hope; after all, he and his people have already experienced a measure of judgment. His surprising news is that Yahweh has been a 'little sanctuary' with them and offers new heart and spirit (although Jeremiah also offers new heart later in his book).

Jeremiah and Ezekiel have ministries that are radical and unpopular. In order to maintain integrity with their callings, they stand against alternative models of prophetic ministry. My next chapter compares their comments on deviant prophets, in order to gain further elucidation about their own perspectives on what, for each of them, is important in prophetic ministry.

CHAPTER FIVE
DEVIANT PROPHETS

5.1 JEREMIAH AGAINST THE PROPHETS: Jeremiah 23:9-32

Because there is more material about deviant prophets in the book of Jeremiah than in any other OT book (Jer 2:8,26-30; 4:9; 5:13,31; 6:13=8:10;13:13; 14:13-18;18:18; 20:1-6; 23:9-40; 26:9-16; 27:8-18; 28:1-17; 29:8-9,15-23; 32:32; 37:19) there is also more scholarly ink spilt about this subject in the book of Jeremiah than in any other book.[533] Jer 23:9-32 brings most of Jeremiah's views on this subject together and provides a useful comparison with Ezek 13. Although the unit is generally considered to extend from Jer 23:9 to 40, the rhetoric of the last section (vv.33-40) has a different focus and will not be treated here.[534]

A superscription, 'Concerning the prophets' (23:9) heads this collection of sayings, which directly follows sayings concerning kings (headed by a similar superscription in 21:11) and shows word links with that section.[535] There are further word links

---

533 A sample of monographs that deal specifically with the issue in Jeremiah includes: Overholt, *Threat*; Ivo Meyer, *Jeremia und die falschen Propheten* (Freiburg: Universitätsverlag, 1977); Carroll, *From Chaos to Covenant*; and Sharp, *Prophecy and Ideology*. In addition, James L. Crenshaw, *Prophetic Conflict: Its Effect Upon Israelite Religion* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1971); Robert P. Carroll, *When Prophecy Failed: Reactions and Responses to Failure in the Old Testament Prophetic Traditions* (London: SCM, 1979); Armin Lange, *Vom prophetischen Wort zur prophetischen Tradition*, FAT 34 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2002) and R.W.L. Moberly, *Prophecy and Discernment* (Cambridge: CUP, 2006) are examples of others that deal with the subject more widely, but necessarily pay significant attention to the issue in Jeremiah.

534 These verses are usually regarded as an appendix, e.g. Wilhelm Rudolph, *Jeremia*, HAT (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1947), 133; Holladay, *Jeremiah 1*, 648; Brueggemann, *Jeremiah 1–25*, 207. Meyer, *Jeremia und die Falschen Propheten*, 140, omits this section from his discussion of false prophets.

535 Craigie, Kelley, and Drinkard, *Jeremiah 1–25*, 335. These are the rare דחח (thrust out, stumble) in v.12, being assonant with and nearly identical in form and meaning to נדח (thrust out) in vv 2,3,8; נאות (pasture) from נוה in v.10 is similar to נוהן (their pasture) in v.3 from the same root; פקד (visitation) in v.12 recalls the three occurrences in vv.1-4. Drinkard comments that this use of assonance and the use of similar or identical roots is quite common in Jeremiah. Carroll,

between vv.1-6 and 7-8 (MT).[536] Although the material in 23:9-32 can be divided legitimately in several different ways, each linked to some variation in interpretation, I am adopting the five divisions made by Carroll (vv. 9-12, 13-15, 16-22, 23-24, 25-32).[537]

Such ungodliness: Jer 23:9-12

Whereas the section on the kings commences with a fairly detached, even though strong, exhortation to rulers to fulfill their responsibilities well (21:12), this passage begins with a very distraught personal reaction on Jeremiah's part (23:9). Although there are no clear dating indicators, and although there is a common understanding by scholars that the passage comprises a collection of sayings that could come from different periods, the strength of Jeremiah's personal reaction is consistent with his direct involvement in the frequent prophetic conflicts that are referred to elsewhere in the book and that seem to be most fiercely focused during the reigns of Jehoiakim and Zedekiah.

The opening words are in the nature of a lament (v.9).[538] The language bears strong similarities to that used elsewhere in the book when Jeremiah finds himself separate from and in conflict with others (e.g. 15:17-18; 20:7-9), on account of hearing and bearing Yahweh's word of disastrous judgment (e.g. 4:19-22). Closely akin to this is his language of sorrow for his people (e.g. 6:24; 8:18,21-23; 10:19; 14:17). Many commentators assert that Jeremiah is not actually 'broken-hearted', meaning that he is not affected emotionally, but that he is deeply disturbed or shattered in his mind or

---

Jeremiah, 404, views this section as part of an appendix (21:1 to 24:10) to Part 1 of the book, consisting of two cycles of poems and prose.

536 The LXX places vv.7-8 immediately after this section on the prophets.

537 In most of these divisions Carroll, *Jeremiah*, 455, follows the precedent of Rudolph, *Jeremia*, 127–33, and Artur Weiser, *Das Buch ses Propheten Jeremia*, ATD (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1960), 200–11, but he also separates vv.23-24.

538 John Berridge, *Prophet, People and the Word of Yahweh: An Examination of Form and Content in the Proclamation of the Prophet Jeremiah* (Zürich: Evz-Verlag, 1970), 181–82. Holladay, *Jeremiah 1*, 625, likens this to the lament type found in Ps 31:11-13.

is in a state of physical and mental collapse.[539] While it is true that לב in the OT very frequently refers to the mind rather than the emotions, it is difficult to conclude that Jeremiah is anything less than fully engaged and therefore affected in both mind and emotions (cf. Ps 69:21[20]).[540] It is precisely Jeremiah's complete personal engagement, 'because of Yahweh and because of his holy words' together with their full ramifications, that stands in contrast to the position of the deviant prophets who are not so engaged.

Although similarities to drunkenness can sometimes be attributed to an ecstatic state (cf. 1 Sam 10:1-13; 19:23-24), there is no support anywhere in the book for taking this description as an indication of ecstasy.[541] Rather, there is support for this kind of anguish being consistent with Jeremiah's response to Yahweh's word, the people's 'wounds', or personal opposition (see above). The text explicitly tells us that it is on account of the first of these. In searching for the particular 'holy words' which evoke this response, it seems likely that they are the words that follow—probably not just vv.10-12, but the whole of the ensuing word of Yahweh concerning these deviant prophets.[542] If Jeremiah's eyes are being freshly opened by Yahweh to see a level of wickedness among the prophetic leaders which he has not seen before, as Rudolph thinks, it could be understandable for Jeremiah to be severely shaken, with bodily effects that resemble drunkenness.[543]

---

539 Thompson, *Jeremiah*, 493 and McKane, *Jeremiah 1*, 568.

540 Overholt, *Threat*, 50. Drinkard, in Craigie, Kelley, and Drinkard, *Jeremiah 1–25*, 336, also concludes that more than his reason is involved, that the trauma is both mental and emotional, and that his whole being has been shaken and shattered.

541 Even though Fretheim, *Jeremiah*, 332, thinks that the similarity of the description here to that of prophetic ecstasy in 1 Samuel could support Jeremiah's own claims of prophetic experience, adding weight to his argument of standing in the divine council in vv.16-22.

542 Moberly, *Prophecy and Discernment*, 71, takes this view since the divine address is more or less consistent throughout the chapter.

543 Rudolph, *Jeremia*, 129.

However, Yahweh's word cannot, in this instance, be separated from the other two sources of anguish, since a fully engaged reception of those words cannot help but ponder their emotion-laden implications. Throughout this book, engagement with Yahweh's word often issues in engagement with Yahweh's emotions (e.g. Jer 4:19-22; 8:23). Jeremiah cannot look at wickedness dispassionately, any more than Yahweh can. Likewise, his knowledge, from Yahweh's word, that both people (vv. 17,19) and land (v.10) will experience calamity, is painful. Although Jeremiah's distress is not, at this point, on account of personal mistreatment by the other prophets, the awareness of Yahweh's true word brings acute agony in the face of the fraudulent promotion of an opposite message, purporting to be Yahweh's word, by others of prophetic responsibility. Instead of upholding godliness, the prophets and priests blasphemously dare to bring wickedness right into the heart of their duties (v.11; cf. Jer 7:10). Instead of engaging intimately with Yahweh, as Jeremiah does (vv.18,22), the prophets spread false words that have not originated with Yahweh (vv.21,32). Instead of responsibly attempting to stop the spread of wickedness, and, in turn, calamity, they promote it (vv.14,15).[544]

The next verse (v.10) begins with כִּי indicating that what follows gives specific content to the 'holy words' that provoke Jeremiah's strong reaction.[545] The first is a widespread charge of adultery, similar to that in 9:1. This could indicate infidelity in marriage or spiritual apostasy, and it is both possible and likely that it suggests both.[546] Within this book the same root is used in 7:9 and 29:23 to signify immorality, specifically by deviant prophets in the latter example, and in 3:1-9; 5:7; 13:27 to signify spiritual apostasy. Some occurrences (9:2; 23:10,14) could signify

---

[544] Moberly, *Prophecy and Discernment*, 71, puts it well when he writes, 'Jeremiah's feelings are not those of superiority or triumphalism, but rather an acute anguish, discomfort, and disorientation that words and deeds that are incompatible with YHWH's holiness should be ascribed to YHWH.'

[545] Fretheim, *Jeremiah*, 332.

[546] Carroll, *Jeremiah*, 452–53, suggests this in the light of Jer 9:2 and Hos 7:4 and adds that such a general charge may be the equivalent of the phrase 'this adulterous and wicked generation' (Mark 8:38; cf. Matt 12:39; 16:4).

both, very likely with intentional double meaning. In fact, spiritual apostasy may very likely also be evidenced by immoral cultic rituals.[547] If so, the desire for increased fertility of the land, expressed through immoral rites to Baal, leads to the precise opposite (v.10).[548] Spiritual apostasy is also evidenced by violation of the commandments (Jer 7:9), so ethical violations such as sexual infidelity in marriage are not regarded as an entirely separate matter from spiritual apostasy. While the charge here is general ('The land is full of adulterers') it becomes progressively clearer that the chief culprits in this adultery are the religious leaders, and more particularly the deviant prophets.

The cause of barrenness of the land is here said to be 'the curse' (v.10). The cause of the curse is not given explicitly in this passage, but in Jer 11:3 a curse can arise from covenantal disobedience, turning away from Yahweh to trust in man (17:5), or failing to heed the words of Yahweh's prophets that would bring the people back to following the law (Jer 26:6).[549] The implied cause of the curse here is the behaviours outlined in vv.9-12, led by prophetic and priestly leaders (cf. 22:28-30, where a king's behaviour is also imaginatively linked to the condition of the land).[550] The causes in 11:3 and 17:5 are consistent with Jer 23's covenant infidelity (the 'adultery' of v.10) and turning away from Yahweh (v.11). The severity of the problem is heightened in that it is not merely a failure to heed the words of Yahweh's prophets; it *is* the prophets who are responsible for bringing the curse.

---

[547] These may not technically be adulterous, in that sexual intercourse may be with an unmarried, rather than married, person, but would still violate Israelite understanding of the requirement to be faithful in marriage. Thompson, *Jeremiah*, 493, and Clements, *Jeremiah*, 140, make this link. Clements thinks that the defilement of Yahweh's house by both prophets and priests (v.11) is indicative of this scenario.

[548] Clements, *Jeremiah*, 140.

[549] Fretheim, *Jeremiah*, 333. Lundbom, *Jeremiah 21–36*, 183, also names drought as one of the covenant curses in Deut 28:23-24 and cites Isa 24:4-7 as a parallel passage in linking covenant infidelity with the drying up of the land.

[550] Walter Brueggemann, *The Land* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1977), 110, writes, 'The central issue in [Jeremiah] is how land is kept and how it is lost and who makes those decisions.'

The image of poor shepherding is used earlier in the chapter (23:1-4). Although it refers primarily to kings, since it is contrasted immediately with the Davidic king who will rule wisely (23:5), the image may represent other kinds of leaders also, if 17:16 is taken as Jeremiah's self-identification with 'shepherd'.[551] Jeremiah elsewhere lays the primary blame on the shoulders of 'the shepherds' for turning a pleasant field into a desolate wilderness (12:4,10-11).[552] This is entirely congruent with his charge here. It is, therefore, not unreasonable to assume that there is an implied charge of false shepherding in relation to the curse that is responsible for the decay of the land; this contrasts with Jeremiah's own faithful shepherding and the part of his calling which is to 'build and plant'(1:10).[553] The deviant prophets do not 'build and plant' with respect to the people or to the land. Although Jeremiah's call also includes the charge to 'uproot and tear down, to destroy and overthrow' (1:10) this image of land becoming parched is different. It suggests a gradual decay due to neglect, and an absence of tending and watering, in short, an absence of careful shepherding.

Prophets and priests form an unholy, rather than a holy, alliance—they are said to be 'ungodly', 'polluted' or 'defiled' (חָנֵפוּ, cf. Jer 3:9, where Israel polluted, חנף, the land), suggesting that their holiness is lost.[554] Their joint problematic influence is not

---

551 It is acknowledged that there are textual difficulties here: instead of 'shepherd' רֹעֶה, the word is pointed as רָעָה in some mss to mean 'disaster'; in the LXX it is rendered as κατακολουθῶν 'following after', (preferred by Holladay, *Jeremiah 1*, 504–06). McKane, *Jeremiah 1*, 409–12, gives the three lines of exegesis that arise from the differences of opinion about this phrase and argues to retain the vocalisation of the MT. However, McKane takes the image of 'shepherd' to apply to Yahweh. Although the identification of Jeremiah with 'shepherd' cannot be proven conclusively, Berridge, *Prophet, People*, 140, argues, in my view convincingly, for its likelihood. This is adopted by the NRSV.

552 Other references in the book that imply a link between poor shepherding and the land are 25:34,35,36 (shepherds roll in the dust; the Lord is destroying their pasture) and 33:12 (desolation has replaced pasture).

553 Fretheim, *Jeremiah*, 333.

554 Lundbom, *Jeremiah 21–36*, 183.

only in peripheral matters, but, most blasphemously, in the very centre of their operations: in Yahweh's house (cf. Jer 7:10,30; 11:15; 32:34). In 12:7 the dramatic threat is given that Yahweh will abandon his house, and in 7:14 that he will destroy his house. Prophets and priests are also linked detrimentally in Jer 2:8;4:9; 5:31; 6:13=8:10;14:18 and 18:18 (with the wise). These two groups of leaders also call for Jeremiah's death in Jer 26:11. Holladay suggests that behind v.12 lie two other passages (Prov 4:19 and Ps 35:6a) which speak of the way of the wicked being like darkness, a common biblical metaphor for calamity and judgment.[555] If this is so, the clear implication is that Jeremiah is equating the prophets and priests with 'the wicked'. Both of these groups of leaders are grossly misusing their spiritual and moral authority. As a result, their path becomes slippery and more difficult to negotiate because of the darkness. Their own irresponsibility contributes to the difficulty of the way ahead (v.12ab) but it becomes clear that Yahweh himself actively delivers judgment on them (12c).[556] The רעה of prophets and people (e.g. v.10) is answered by the רעה of Yahweh (v.12).

Worse than Samaria: Jer 23:13-15

The focus of Jeremiah's attention now narrows to his prime target in this section, the deviant prophets of Jerusalem; the priests are no longer mentioned. He uses the rhetorical strategy of first speaking of the widely-known wickedness of the northern Baal prophets, who were in blatant breach of the first commandment. The shocking assertion is then made that the prophets of Jerusalem are worse (cf. the rhetorical strategy of Amos 1-2)![557] This comparison touches a very sensitive spot; the southerners disdainfully distance themselves from the northerners and their fate.[558]

---

555 Holladay, *Jeremiah 1*, 628.

556 McKane, *Jeremiah 1*, 572.

557 Carroll, *Jeremiah*, 455, comments that the description of the northern prophets' syncretistic activities is rather mild (תִּפְלָה), especially for apostasy bordering on idolatry, compared with the word used for the activity of the Jerusalem prophets (שַׁעֲרוּרָה).

558 Weiser, *Jeremia*, 203.

The allegory of the two unfaithful sisters in Jer 3:6-11 makes the same point (cf. Ezek 16:44-52 and Ezek 23). In fact, these Jerusalem prophets have reached the despicably low level of the proverbial Sodom and Gomorrah (cf. Isa 1:9,10); the implication is that they are candidates for similar destruction.[559]

The indictment of the Jerusalem prophets is threefold: 1) they commit adultery, 2) they walk in lies, and 3) they strengthen the hands of evildoers (v.14).[560] Because of the reference to Sodom and Gomorrah, the adultery here could refer to sexual sin.[561] The other charges could relate to the same problem by covering up the prophets' own adulterous practices, and condoning more widespread immorality. This may be included in the charge, but as in the previous similar passage (vv.9-12) these terms are likely to include a wider range of problems, of which marital adultery may be only one manifestation.

Holladay suggests that the second charge refers to Baal as being 'The Lie.' He then takes the adultery charge to imply prophesying by Baal.[562] The descriptor שׁערורה (horrible) is also used in Jer 5:30, where prophets are also prophesying בשׁקר (by lies) and priests are ruling by their own authority; a similar word is used in 18:13 regarding spiritual apostasy and incense burned to idols. However, although there is evidence that Baalistic practices do take place in Jerusalem (including the specific mention of Baal in Jer 7:9) the derogatory comparison with the more overtly Baalistic departures of the northern prophets suggests that the issue in the south is

---

559 Meyer, *Jeremia und die Falschen Propheten*, 121.

560 Holladay, *Jeremiah 1*, 631, notes a comparison with Jer 7:9, where questions are posed (Will you steal and murder, commit adultery and perjury?). In the present passage no more questions are asked; rather there is an accusation. He also notes the irony that those charged with religious leadership should be the ones to break the covenant norms.

561 Brueggemann, *Jeremiah 1–25*, 202, says, 'The poet understands that perverted sexuality goes along with a general distortion of public life that touches every phase of economic and political policy.' Lundbom, *Jeremiah 21–36*, 187, also thinks that the adultery here is marital.

562 e.g. Holladay, *Jeremiah 1*, 631, cites parallel imagery in Hos 4:12-14.

not, at least overtly, exactly the same. Rather, it seems that the southern prophets are practising deceit of a more subtle sort.

The word שׁקר (lies) is a prevalent descriptor, throughout this book, for things that are 'groundless, without basis in fact or reality' and are therefore deceptive, or for behaviour that is 'contrary to a contract' and therefore faithless.[563] Although the term occurs fairly frequently throughout the OT, its dramatic increase in the book of Jeremiah suggests that it has special significance to its message.[564] It regularly describes the words and activities of deviant prophets and is not confined to the more specific deception of Baalistic practices. Its uses in Jer 3:10,23; 5:2,31; 7:4,8,9; 8:8; 9:4; 10:14; 13:25; 14:14; 20:6; 23:14,26,32; 27:15; 28:15; 29:9,23,21,31; 37:14; 51:17 can suggest either deliberate pretence (e.g. 3:10) or something that is not based on fact (e.g. 7:4). However, in this context, considering that these prophets are also charged with adultery and strengthening the hands of evildoers, walking in שׁקר suggests behaviour that is not grounded in either truth or faithfulness, here indicating a breach of covenantal responsibility and hypocrisy. Their lifestyle is incongruous with their vocation; their claims are empty. Perhaps their likely association with the royal court and its policies accounts for the pressures to compromise their role.[565] However, their departure from the firm ground of truth is portrayed as complete. By their unacceptable behaviour and their failure to curb evil, the outcome of their function as prophets is the opposite of what it should be: the spread of ungodliness instead of the spread of godliness.

---

563 Hermann J. Austel, "'Sheqer'," in *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, ed. R.L. Harris, Archer (Chicago: Moody, 1980), 956, and Ernst Jenni and Claus Westermann, *Theological Lexicon of the Old Testament*, trans. Mark Biddle (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1997), 1399. See also Moberly, *Prophecy and Discernment*, 55–75, for a useful discussion of the term.

564 Overholt, *Threat*, 1.

565 Clements, *Jeremiah*, 141.

Not in the council of Yahweh: Jer 23:16-22

Addressed to the people, urging them not to be deceived, this section shows that the deviant prophets not only live lives that are characterised as שׁקר, but their speech, hopes and visions are also characterised as שׁקר, although the word is not explicitly used until vv.26 and 32 to summarise what is detailed here. Essentially the same charge is given in Jer 14:13-15. Although there is no expressed disapproval of visions *per se*, the word חזון (vision) only occurs within these two passages in this book (23:16 and 14:14), both times in relation to deviant prophets.[566]

The criticism here concerns the content of their speech: it is incongruent with the conditional nature of covenantal revelation and is unrealistic.[567] Their hope of peace is, therefore, illusory and empty. In Jer 2:5 the same root הבל (emptiness, vanity) is also used to describe what the fathers chased after and became themselves.[568] A similar sense is given in 5:13 where these prophets are said to be like wind, because there is a misapplication of words of peace (cf. 5:12-13; 6:14=8:11; and the extended example of Hananiah in ch.28). These deviant prophets do not discern the incongruity of giving such words to those who despise Yahweh and continue to follow the stubbornness of their own hearts (v.17). In short, their talk is nothing more than wishful thinking. It assiduously avoids the responsibilities of relationships, and naively promotes the pursuit of self-centred hedonism. To use the analogy of v.28, Jeremiah discerns that their content is like straw rather than wheat.[569]

The reason for this false hope is that their words and visions do not come from the mouth of Yahweh, but from themselves, לבם, from their own hearts (v.16).

---

[566] Holladay, *Jeremiah 1*, 634.

[567] Weiser, *Jeremia*, 205.

[568] Lundbom, *Jeremiah 21–36*, 191.

[569] Rudolph, *Jeremia*, 131.

Jeremiah, in contrast, has had Yahweh's words put into his mouth (1:9; 5:14) and becomes as Yahweh's mouth (15:19). In fact, these men have not stood in the council (סוד) of Yahweh to see or hear his word (vv.18,21,22) as, it is implied, true prophets like Jeremiah have done (cf. 15:19; 18:20).[570] Nor have they been sent by Yahweh (v.21, and also 14:14; 27:15; 29:9).[571] If they had, they would have been given a message that would turn people from their evil deeds (v.22).

The image of a divine council (סוד is council, v.18) where Yahweh presides over a gathering of supernatural beings, occurs frequently in ANE literature, but is generally accepted to have a more metaphorical and less mythological role in the OT than it has in other ANE material.[572] It is, perhaps, noteworthy that the divine declaration is described as being from Yahweh of hosts יהוה צבאות (v.16), an apt descriptor for a divine council setting.[573] In implied contrast to the deviant prophets, Jeremiah has not joined the סוד of the merry-makers (15:17) but has eaten Yahweh's words (15:16 cf 1:9) and has been in the divine סוד. Also, the language of Jeremiah's call suggests a divine council setting, suggested also by the parallel between Yahweh touching Jeremiah's mouth (1:9) and the seraph touching Isaiah's

---

570 Robert P. Gordon, "Standing in the Council: When Prophets Encounter God," in *The God of Israel*, ed. Robert P. Gordon (Cambridge: CUP, 2007), 191-195, adds that the terminology of 'standing' here is a *terminus technicus*, i.e., it has a very specific sense for experiencing revelation in a different mode, and is comparable to the Akkadian usage.

571 Thompson, *Jeremiah*, 499.

572 Robert P. Gordon, "Standing in the Council," 191–92, cites the Mesopotamian diviner who was thought to have access to the divine council, and the prophets in the Mari texts and in the Deir 'Alla plaster who are also said to have witnessed sessions of the gods in council. Lundbom, *Jeremiah 21–36*, 195–96, also gives examples of the divine council in ANE literature. Carroll, *Jeremiah*, 462, shows that within the canon the divine council is portrayed most clearly in Ps 82:1; Ps 89:6-9[5-8];1 Kings 22:19f as well as Jer 23:18,21,22. It is also implied in Isa 6 and Zech 3, as well as perhaps in Gen 1:26; 3:22; 11:7; Deut 33:2; Job 1-2; Dan 7:9-22, where the word סוד does not appear, but the concept seems to be present; traces may lie behind Jer 5:1-5. In Amos 3:7 a similar audience is envisaged, although סוד refers to Yahweh's plan or counsel.

573 Weiser, *Jeremia*, 205.

mouth (Isa 6:7).[574] Taking all of the references to divine council into account, it is clear that Jeremiah understands the role of the true prophet to be a messenger of Yahweh. Yahweh speaks and prophets proclaim these words to the people; Yahweh sends and prophets go at his bidding.[575] Although Jeremiah is not at this point accusing these prophets of deliberate lies, he does accuse them of not drawing close to Yahweh to listen, an implied fundamental necessity for a prophet. Because of this they have not heard his words, so they do not have his message to proclaim; even though they rush forward to speak ('run', v.21) they have not been sent.[576]

Scholars have differed in their assessments of vv.19-20. Do they form an entirely separate unit that simply affirms Jeremiah's message of doom rather than the empty message of peace proclaimed by the deviant prophets? Or do they form the actual word which the Lord speaks in his council (v.18)? The image of the storm or whirlwind of Yahweh (used also in Jer 25:32 and 30:23), prefaced by the call to look הנה, is consistent with biblical tradition of theophany (the term סער or סערה of the Lord occurs with similar judgmental intent in Ps 83:14-16; Isa 29:6; 40:24 and Ezek 1:4; 13:11,13). Jeremiah also uses the very similar image of strong wind (e.g. 4:11-12; 13:24; 18:17; 25:32; cf. Zech 7:14) as well as raging fire (4:4; 21:12) to denote divine wrath.[577] In Jer 23:19 there is no suggestion that Yahweh's stormy coming

---

574 Robert P. Gordon, "Standing in the Council," 196. Moberly, *Prophecy and Discernment*, 80–82, uses examples of Moses (Deut 5:23-33) and Abraham (Gen 18:17-19) standing before Yahweh as a heuristic guide in assessing a prophet's presence or absence in the divine council. Because these accounts show no interest in 'ecstasy' or in any content that could only be validated in hindsight, he suggests that it refers to moral and spiritual proximity to Yahweh

575 Craigie, Kelley, and Drinkard, *Jeremiah 1–25*, 344.

576 Lundbom, *Jeremiah 21–36*, 199, thinks that the essence of what these deviant prophets were supposed to proclaim can be found in Jer 7:3; 18:11; 25:5; 26:3; 35:15; 36:3,7.

577 Fretheim, *Jeremiah*, 337. Throughout Israelite biblical tradition, it is not uncommon to find Yahweh attributed as the powerful originator of storms and whirlwinds in general (e.g. Ps 107:25,29; Ps 148:8) and also of particular storms expressing his displeasure (Jon 1:4,12). Both storm clouds and fire are frequently associated with Yahweh's presence, and it can be out of these that he speaks (e.g. Ex 3; Ex 19:9,16-19; Job 38:1; 40:6) with no harm to those who listen to him. Elijah is taken up to the heavens in and by Yahweh's stormy wind and fire without any sense of harm or threat (2 Kings 2:1,11). Yahweh is even said to bring salvation for his people through his stormy coming (Zech 9:14).

will bring salvation to anyone; rather, it bears divine wrath and will 'burst upon the head of the wicked'. Ironically, if these prophets had come close enough to the cloudy presence of Yahweh to listen to him, they would have experienced something very different: the divine word. However, because they did not and will not, they are classed with the wicked who will only experience the other side of that same divine presence: the stormy wrath of judgment.

So, within the present literary context, verses 19 and 20 function as Yahweh's true word to Jeremiah from the divine council. The storm is the vindication of the speaker and brings judgment on those who refuse to listen to Yahweh's words.[578] Otherwise, they would have been given a message that would turn the people from their evil ways and deeds (v.22).[579] Perhaps if the task had not been left to isolated prophets like Jeremiah, but taken up by the wider body of prophets, the turning of the people would have been effective.

Yahweh sees: Jer 23:23-24

In the first of the three rhetorical questions that make up this section (cf. the rhetorical questions in 2:31) a small but significant difference occurs between the MT and the LXX. Whereas the MT begins with the interrogative ה, the LXX translation does not treat the first sentence as an interrogative but as a statement. This has the effect of appearing to give it an opposite meaning. Since the LXX meaning appears to be consonant with the majority of biblical passages referring to Yahweh's nearness or distance, it cannot simply be dismissed. Lemke's examination

---

[578] Carroll, *Jeremiah*, 461.

[579] Carroll, *Jeremiah*, 463, unreasonably argues that Jeremiah failed to turn people away from evil, so says that the argument of v.22 lacks cogency as well as coherence. McKane, *Jeremiah 1*, 584, recognises that the sense is not strained by understanding 'turning them from their wicked ways' as 'exerting themselves to turn them from their wicked ways.' Fretheim, *Jeremiah*, 338, more sensibly argues that the focus here is on the nature of the word to be spoken rather than the success of the prophet; there is a vast difference between their reinforcing wickedness and Jeremiah's stand of calling for change.

of the biblical concepts as well as the text of this passage is helpful and will inform my discussion.[580]

Jer 23:23 in the LXX reads thus:

θεὸς ἐγγίζων ἐγώ εἰμι, λέγει κύριος, καὶ οὐχὶ θεὸς πόρρωθεν.

I am a God at hand, says the Lord, and not a God afar off.

The two contrasting adjectives קרב (near) and רחק (distant) in relation to Yahweh can each find support elsewhere in the OT, whether used in a spatial or temporal sense. However, Yahweh's distance usually occurs because of people's sin. Both immanence and transcendence are strongly affirmed elsewhere, and both could well fit the meaning of the question. The MT would suggest that Yahweh is not merely a local parochial god with limited vision, but one who is greater and sees further because he can see all in heaven as well as in earth (cf. Jer 31:3) This could stand against the prevalent temple ideology of the day.[581] It could also counter the delusive thinking of the prophets that ignores the distance between mankind and Yahweh and identifies one's own thoughts and words with those of Yahweh.[582] Such thinking sees God and creature too closely bound together, with the possible result that God is manipulated. The notion of God being confined to the scribes' interpretations of the written Torah (Jer 8:8-9) could be under attack, as well as the false piety that keeps God 'near' on their lips, but 'far' from their hearts (Jer 12:2).[583] In Ps 139:2 the psalmist says 'you discern my thoughts from far away.' A more striking likeness to the thought in Jer 23:23 is expressed in Ps 138:6 where the Lord 'perceives the haughty from far away'. Although these prophets are not labelled as 'haughty' or

---

580 Werner Lemke, "The Near and the Distant God: A Study of Jer 23:23–24 in Its Biblical Theological Context," *JBL* 100 (1981): 541–55.

581 Brueggemann, *Jeremiah 1–25*, 205.

582 Weiser, *Jeremia*, 208.

583 Lemke, "Near and the Distant God," 554.

'proud', the description of their behaviour and attitude suggests that, at root, the problem is the same as that addressed by the Psalmist. Von Rad concludes that because Yahweh is 'far off' there can be no standard method by which he grants revelation.[584]

The LXX reading would mean that Yahweh is not just far away, ignorant of what these prophets are saying and doing, but that he is within earshot. This would counter the thinking that Yahweh is only near to receive cultic offerings and defend his people from their enemies; rather, he is also near to see and know what people are saying and doing.[585] In either case, the meaning is clear from v.24: Yahweh can, indeed, see; he does, indeed, know! This statement has a similar impact to Jer 7:11.[586]

The polemical context suggests that the issue is not an academic one of immanence or transcendence, but that it concerns Yahweh's knowledge, rather than ignorance, of what is going on. 'Seeing' here refers to 'knowing' of the sort that keeps its distance (in line with Yahweh's response to human sin). It stands in the place of the intimate 'knowing' of Jeremiah by Yahweh in 1:5 (and of speaking). Nor have these deviant prophets 'known' Yahweh as Jeremiah has 'known' him. So, once again, Jeremiah's accusation of the lack of a two-way relational knowledge between these prophets and Yahweh is implied.

Perhaps a second aspect of the delusion of the deviant prophets is the working assumption, even if not consciously articulated, that Yahweh is confined to one

---

584 Von Rad, *The Message of the Prophets*, 179.

585 Craigie, Kelley, and Drinkard, *Jeremiah 1–25*, 346.

586 Lemke, "Near and the Distant God," 554, notes that in Jer 8:8-9 the notion of a 'near God', whom the scribes imagined they could confine to their interpretations of the written Torah, could be under attack. In Jer 12:2 a false piety that has God 'near' on their lips but 'far' from their hearts is attacked. In Jer 18:18 Jeremiah may also be attacking 'near God' notions whom priests, prophets and wise men imagine to be in their permanent and exclusive possession.

realm. If he is only on earth, concerned with merely earthly matters, these prophets do not need to move beyond that realm to the heavenly council. If Yahweh is only in heaven, he will not know what the prophets say, so they might assume that they can get away with anything. Jeremiah insists that behaviour with regard to both realms is important, and is known by Yahweh. Without listening to Yahweh in the heavenly, they cannot speak for him in the earthly. Without keeping covenant loyalty in the earthly, they cannot maintain a relationship in the heavenly. In conclusion, I agree with Lemke's suggestion that the preferred meaning is: 'God is not only a near God, but also a distant God.'[587] Although the MT's position seems somewhat more congruent with the rest of Jeremiah's theology than the LXX the context demonstrates that the issue is primarily relational and behavioural rather than an argument about a formal theological doctrine.[588]

The word has priority: Jer 23:25-32

A contrast is set up between the dreams of these deviant prophets and the word of Yahweh. To determine whether the true point of this contrast is the medium of divine communication or its content, it is necessary to look at other references to prophetic dreaming, both within this book and beyond. Apart from this chapter (vv.25, 27, 28, 32) prophetic dreaming occurs within this book in 27:9 and 29:8, in every case referring to the dreaming of deviant prophets with a negative qualifier about the content of their dreams. There is a similar reference in Zech 10:2. It has often been observed that the writing prophets of the OT do not generally claim divine inspiration through dreams, with the possible exception of Zechariah in his night vision (Zech 1:8f), although the words used are different from those used in

---

[587] Lemke, "Near and the Distant God," 553, proposes adding a מ to the end of the אלהי in each case, since nouns do not normally stand in a construct relationship to an adverbial modifier. He suggests that the likely cause of the missing מ is haplography, since the next words in each case begin with מ.

[588] Rudolph, *Jeremia*, X-XI, argues for priority of the MT. He cites examples in Jeremiah that point to the understanding of Yahweh as creator with wide knowledge of the whole of his creation.

Zech 10:2.[589] Jeremiah's own recorded experiences involving visual imagery occur only in Jer 1:11-13 and ch. 24, but these are not said to be dreams, and meaning is always given through the divine word. Joel 3:1 [2:28] appears to be the only clear positive reference by the writing prophets to prophetic dreaming, but it is to occur as part of the pouring out of the divine spirit on all people.[590]

The persistent claim by the deviant prophets in Jeremiah's time to experience divine dreams suggests that prophetic dreaming is an accepted practice within the community. It is also assumed in Deut 13:2-6[1-5] that prophets and dreamers will arise, and that certain criteria apply for testing their genuineness. The people have a responsibility to test them (Deut 13:4[3]) because Yahweh is, in fact, testing them to find out their true allegiance. The test does not concern the nature of their experience, but which god they follow and whether they turn people away from Yahweh. However, in Num 12:6-8, there is a differentiation made between ordinary prophets of Yahweh, who do find divine revelation in dreams and visions, and Moses, with whom Yahweh speaks face to face, through word. Jeremiah's own position of receiving divine communication through word, rather than through dreams as these other prophets claim to do, is one of several features of the book that paint Jeremiah as the 'new Moses'. However, although this passage is the strongest polemic in the Bible against dreams and dreamers, there is no outright prohibition of prophetic dreaming (v.28). In line with the criteria for testing such dreams in Deut

---

589 Ernst Haag, *Jeremia 1*, 254. Zech 1:8 simply says רָאִיתִי הַלָּיְלָה. In Zech 10:2 the words for dreams and visions are more specific: וְהַקּוֹסְמִים חָזוּ שָׁקֶר וַחֲלֹמוֹת הַשָּׁוְא

590 In the Former Prophets dreams are mentioned in relation to two kings: Solomon experiences a divine dream (1 Kings 3:5-15) and Saul expresses frustration that he has no answer by dreams, by Urim and Thummim nor by prophets (1 Sam 28:6,15). In the Writings dreams are often considered ephemeral (e.g. Ps 73:20; 126:1; Job 20:8; Eccl 5:2); in one example both dreams and words are classed together as meaningless (Eccl 5:6). However, there is some recognition that divine communication can occur through dreams (Job 33:15) and that divine help can be given to interpret dreams (Dan 1:17 and ch.2). The accounts which affirm divine inspiration through dreams occur mostly in the Torah (e.g. Abimelech Gen 20:3,6; Jacob 28:12-15; Laban 31:24; Joseph 37:5-9; Pharaoh ch 41; Gideon's man Judges 7:13-15); divine help in dream interpretation is also present for Joseph in Gen 40:8-22 and ch.41.

13, Jeremiah concludes that these dreams are deceitful (vv.26,32) and turn people away from Yahweh (v.27,32). They also originate from each other (v.30), rather than from the divine source.[591] These prophets are bolstering up each other's reputations, perhaps thinking that they are therefore appearing to mouth the right words, without any direct hearing from or regard for the one whose messengers they should be.[592]

Three images of the divine word (vv.28b-29) portray differences in character and effect between the true prophetic word and the dream content conveyed by the deviant prophets. The word as wheat is valuable for feeding and nourishing life, whereas these dreams as straw are worthless and should be discarded. The word as fire burns within Jeremiah (Jer 5:14; 20:9), but these dreams have no spark that would ignite the fires of anyone's passion. The true word also has the capacity to consume unworthy people in anger, as Yahweh's word within Jeremiah in 5:14 can do.[593] The word as hammer has the force to strike and crush, whereas these dreams speak only of a vacuous peace without any power to bring it into effect (v.17).[594]

The fire image, which recurs in Jeremiah as an image of Yahweh's wrath (e.g. Jer 4:4; 17:27; 21:12) can be seen in parallel with the stormy wind imagery in 23:19. As mentioned above, these two elements have long, traditional associations with divine theophanies in the OT. Those who receive the divine word, and even hold it within, are not destroyed by its fire (e.g. Ex 3; Ex 19:9,16-19; and Jer 20:9) but those who

---

591 Meyer, *Jeremia und die Falschen Propheten*, 135, summarises Jeremiah's concerns as three questions which are implied in the text (vv.26-29): 1) 'How long' will they continue doing this? 2) 'What plans are they making to make the people forget Yahweh?' and 3) 'How does what they say compare to Yahweh's word?' (implying that there is nothing in common).

592 R.J. Zwi Werblowsky, "Stealing the Word," *VT* VI (1956): 105–06, suggests that in v.30 the verb גנב 'stealing' Yahweh's words (by a comparison with its use in Job 4:12) is used semi-technically in connection with nocturnal revelations. He concludes, with others, that everyone is looking to his colleague as a source of inspiration. Holladay, *Jeremiah 1*, 645, thinks that the plural use of 'my words', when Yahweh's word is usually given in singular form, is like using quotation marks and underlies the irony. Fretheim, *Jeremiah*, 339–40, concludes that the prophets may at times speak Yahweh's words, but the language is stolen from true prophets and used for self-seeking purposes or for a situation to which it no longer applies.

593 Holladay, *Jeremiah 1*, 187, cf. v.10.

594 Holladay, *Jeremiah 1*, 644, says that the context assumes it is the hammer of a smith.

turn away from Yahweh and will not receive it are at risk of being utterly consumed by it. In similar vein, the blacksmith's hammer can shatter the common rock but shape the ore that remains into an implement of usefulness.[595]

As in the opening of this section (v.9), Jeremiah's own personal engagement and lament response breaks through with his 'How long?' question (v.26).[596] He conveys Yahweh's thrice-stated stance of judgment against these deviant prophets (vv. 30,31,32) whose dreams are pronounced to be 'lying' (שֶׁקֶר, a characteristic term in the book referring to their deceitful quality). Such dreams are sarcastically contrasted with Yahweh's word ('my word' repeated, in vv 28,29).[597] These men cannot be innocent in their purveyance of lies (v.32) and Jeremiah summarises their contribution as being 'of no profit to this people' (v.32).[598]

5.2 EZEKIEL AGAINST THE PROPHETS: Ezekiel 13

Chapter 13 forms the core of Ezekiel's writings against deviant forms of prophetic behaviours. It is in two distinct sections, each beginning with a separate call to prophesy.[599] Verses 1-16 are addressed to the male prophets, and verses 17-23 to the women who prophesy. However, this section is embedded in a wider unit, from 12:21 to 14:11, that deals with various aspects of prophecy.[600] In order to keep a direct comparison with Jer 23:9-32, and within the constraints of space, I will

---

595 Craigie, Kelley, and Drinkard, *Jeremiah 1–25*, 350.

596 Lundbom, *Jeremiah 21–36*, 207, cites other instances in this book where this lament phrase is used: Jer 4:14,21; 12:4; 13:27; 31:22; 47:5.

597 Rudolph, *Jeremia*, 133.

598 Lundbom, *Jeremiah 21–36*, 210, comments that this language is Jeremianic, cf. 2:8,11; 16:19.

599 Zimmerli, *Ezekiel 1*, 290–91, notes the identifying breaks and is of the view that the two halves are intended to correspond like diptychs. He gives further analysis of the subsections within each half and concludes that each half of the chapter is a two-strophe structure.

600 Leslie Allen, *Ezekiel 1*, 193, writes that Ewald was the first to identify this unit. See G. Heinrich von Ewald, *Commentary on the Prophets of the Old Testament, Vol. IV*, trans. J.Frederick Smith (London: Williams & Norgate, 1880), 69, 73–80.

confine my detailed comments to ch.13. However, I will first make some pertinent comments about the rest of the unit, in order to place ch.13 within its immediate literary context.

The frame: Ezek 12:21-28 and 14:1-11

There are two sayings and their refutations in 12:21-25 and 12:26-28, concerning the reliability and fulfilment of prophetic visions.[601] These employ some significant vocabulary in common with chapter 13. For example, חזה (to see, used in seeing visions) occurs as a root five times in 12:21-28: vv.22,23,24,27 (twice). A whole phrase that becomes a recurring theme in ch.13 is also found in 12:24: חָזוֹן שָׁוְא וּמְקֻסָם חָלָק (false vision and flattering divination). Talmon and Fishbane have demonstrated that all of the occurrences of this word combination (including כָּזָב instead of חָלָק) through the book of Ezekiel occur in this section (12:21 to the end of ch.13) or within the two later passages that appear to derive from the same *Leitmotif* : 21:34a[Eng.29a] and 22:28.[602]

In 14:1-11 the link is not so much through vocabulary as through meaning and structure. 14:1-11 consists of two different sections (vv. 1-8, 9-11), sometimes seen to counterbalance those in 12:21-28. The first section concludes with the familiar 'and you shall know that I am Yahweh' (14:8) and the second concludes with another refrain recurring through this book, 'They shall be my people and I will be their God, says the Lord Yahweh' (14:11). This passage deals first with elders who inquire of the Lord but have attitudes precluding them from receiving true prophecy

---

601 Eichrodt, *Ezekiel*, 155, observes that this method of arguing against a saying is a favourite method of Ezekiel and occurs elsewhere in the book in 18:2f; 25:29; 33:10,17; 37:11 with only a few isolated examples in other prophets, e.g. Isa 30:15f and Jer 2:23.

602 S. Talmon and M. Fishbane, "The Structuring of Biblical Books: Studies in the Book of Ezekiel," *Annual of the Swedish Theological Institute* 10 (June 1975): 137.

(cf. 20:1-4).[603] By implication, these inquirers are vulnerable to being led by false prophecy (14:1-8). Warnings to those prophets who deal falsely with their inquiries follow (14:9-11). Both groups are given severe warnings.

Chapter 14 also employs its own key recurring phrases that are used to describe those who appear to seek the Lord but who have separated themselves from the Lord in their hearts and so cannot hear the true prophetic word:

1) הֶעֱלוּ גִלּוּלֵיהֶם עַל־לִבָּם (they have taken their idols in their hearts) in 14:3,4,7.

2) וּמִכְשׁוֹל עֲוֹנָם נָתְנוּ נֹכַח פְּנֵיהֶם (and placed their iniquity as a stumbling block before them), also in 14:3,4 and 7, where the verb שִׂים can be used instead of נתן.[604] Whereas in chapters 8–11 the major emphasis is on external idolatry, with a focus on idols in the temple, the emphasis here is on internal idolatry, where the idols are in the heart.[605] Although these two phrases are not used anywhere else in 12:21-28 or in ch.13, they continue the use of internal visual language in connection with the reception of the true prophetic word. For both prophet and people, *looking* at the wrong things (e.g. empty visions and wicked stumbling blocks) interferes with the ability to *hear* the right words (from Yahweh or his true prophet).

The first phrase also continues the 'heart' language used in ch.13, where the deviant prophets, both male and female, prophesy 'out of their hearts.'[606] The judgment

---

603 Leslie Allen, *Ezekiel 1*, 195, observes that the pattern here of a private explanatory oracle to the prophet (v.3) followed by a commissioning to deliver a public oracle (v.4-11) occurs elsewhere in Ezekiel, e.g. 22:18 + 19-22; 23:2-21 + 22-27; 36:17-21 + 22-23 (or 32). The call to be a watchman is also first delivered as a private oracle (3:17-21) and later made public (33:1-20).

604 Talmon and Fishbane, "Structuring," 137–38, note that the book of Leviticus similarly interchanges these two verbs, e.g. Lev 20:3,5,6. They think verses 4,5 and 7 should not be regarded as doublets, since by deleting some the wordplay would be lost. A similar paranomastic technique is used in the vine simile of Ezek 15:1-8.

605 However, in Ezek 11:21 (their hearts are devoted to their vile images and detestable idols) the problem of idolatry is acknowledged to be a matter of the heart. This idea recurs in 20:16. Block, *Ezekiel 1*, 422, lays out some helpful parallels in the sequences of events between 8:1–11:25 and 14:1-11.

606 Although the NRSV has 'prophesy out of their own imagination', I prefer to retain the Hebrew reference to 'heart' here to show the continuity of the image.

against elders and ordinary Israelites who set up heart idols is essentially the same as for deviant prophets: they will be cut off from the people (14:8 and 13:9).[607] This reinforces the characterisation of deviant prophets as those who, like the elders and Israelites in ch.14, do not hear Yahweh because he has not spoken and will not speak to them in a manner that is expected (14:3; 13:7). Those prophets who do, then, answer the inquiries of those with idolatrous hearts are clearly deviant and suffer the same judgment as the deviant prophets of ch.13: Yahweh will stretch out his hand against them and destroy them from the midst of the people (14:9 and 13:9). In both chapters, these deviant prophets have neglected to confront the people with their moral failures and the corresponding divine judgment, probably out of a fear of the people, and experience divine judgment themselves.

Ezekiel's conviction that the word of the Lord is totally reliable is articulated clearly in the first part of this larger unit, in 12:21-28. However, in this last section, the deviant prophets who do not discern the idolatrous hearts of inquirers, or who discern them but discount their significance, and, by implication, bend to the wishes of the people rather than confining themselves to the true word of the Lord, are subject to 'deception' (פתה) by Yahweh in their prophetic utterances (14:9). The end result in what they speak does not meet Ezekiel's standards of reliability, as expressed in 12:21-28. In this situation the importance of discerning, accepting and communicating the *absence* of the word of the Lord (cf. 13:7) is absolutely crucial for any prophet.

The problem of what happens if a prophet moves beyond the absence of the true word of the Lord, in order to find a word to speak, is stated in different ways in chapters 13 and 14: a prophet can speak out of his own heart (13:2 and 17), or he can utter a prophecy that is said to arise from the deception of the Lord (14:9). Although

---

607 Leslie Allen, *Ezekiel 1*, 207–08, finds allusions to cultic law in the punishments here, specifically Lev 20:10-20.

specific circumstances are given for the second phenomenon, and although the first seems to be a more general comment, the relationship between these two statements concerning what appears to be the origin of deviant prophecy is worthy of further exploration, so will be developed below. The last section of this wider unit concludes, then, with a reiteration of the serious responsibility of those who profess to prophesy, which is, of course, developed most fully within the central section 13:1-23, which will be the focus of my more detailed treatment here.

The structure of Ezekiel 13

The two oracles in ch.13 are carefully structured. After the announcement of the 'word of the Lord' (13:1) under which both sections are subsumed, both begin with a preamble (13:2-3a and 13:17-18a) with an address to Ezekiel as 'Son of man' (13:2 and 13:17).[608] They proceed with an elaboration of wrongdoings (13:3b-7 and 13:18b-19) followed by specific judgments (13:8-16 and 13:20-23) which are, in turn, subdivided into two further sections each (13:8-9, 10-16 and 13:20-21, 22-23).[609] At the end each of these last four sections the recurring divine recognition formula 'then you shall know that I am Yahweh', with its recognisable reference to the Exodus narratives (Ex 3:13-18; 6:2-8,29; 7:5,17 [cf. 5:2]; 8:18[22]; 10:2; 12:12; 14:4,18; 15:26; 31:13) serves as the conclusion.[610] The words and phrases that are in parallel are printed in bold in the following chart so that they can be seen more clearly. However, there are also many conceptual parallels, for example, the men act as 'jackals among ruins'(v.4) while the women 'ensnare my people but preserve their own lives'(v.18).

---

608 departing here from the NRSV's 'mortal' for the literal translation.

609 Graham I. Davies, "An Archaeological Commentary on Ezekiel 13," in *Scripture and Other Artifacts: Essays on the Bible and Archaeology in Honor of Philip J.King*, ed. Michael D. Coogan, J.Cheryl Exum, and Lawrence E. Stager (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1994), 109, notes that the classical pattern of the prophetic judgment speech, as outlined by Westermann in 1967, is followed.

610 In the second of these sections this phrase occurs in v.14 rather than in v.16, the end of the section, but its force is still that of a conclusion. See Block, *Ezekiel 1*, 38.

13:1 The word of the LORD came to me:
2 **Son of man,** [בֶּן־אָדָם]
prophesy [הִנָּבֵא] **against** [אֶל]
the prophets of Israel,
who are prophesying.
[הַנִּבְּאִים]
Say to those who prophesy
out of their own imagination:[מִלִּבָּם]
'Hear the word of the LORD!

3 **Thus says the Lord GOD:**
[כֹּה אָמַר אֲדֹנָי]
Alas [הוֹי] for the senseless prophets
who follow their own spirit,
and have seen nothing!

4 Your prophets have been like jackals among ruins,
O Israel.
5 **You** have not gone up into the breaches,
or repaired a wall for the house of Israel,
so that [ל] it might stand in battle
on the day of the LORD.

6 They have envisioned falsehood
and lying divination:
they say, "Says the LORD,"
when the LORD has not sent them,
and yet they wait for the fulfillment of their word!

7 Have you not seen a false vision
or uttered a lying divination,
when you have said, "Says the LORD."
even though I did not speak?

8 Therefore **thus says the Lord GOD:**
[לָכֵן כֹּה אָמַר אֲדֹנָי יְהוִה]
Because you have uttered falsehood and envisioned lies,
(look)[612] [הִנְנִי],
I am against [אֲלֵיכֶם] you"
say the Lord GOD.
9 My hand will be against the prophets
who see false visions and utter lying divinations:
they shall not be in the council of my people,
nor be enrolled in the register
of the house of Israel,
nor shall they enter the land of Israel;
and you shall know that I am the Lord GOD.
[וִידַעְתֶּם כִּי אֲנִי אֲדֹנָי יְהוִה]

17 "As for you, **son of man,** [בֶּן־אָדָם]
set your face **against** [אֶל]
the daughters of your people,
who prophesy
[הַמִּתְנַבְּאוֹת]

out of their own imagination; [מִלִּבָּהֶן]
prophesy [וְהִנָּבֵא] **against them** [עֲלֵהֶנָּ][611]

18 and say, '**Thus says the Lord GOD:**
[כֹּה אָמַר אֲדֹנָי]
Woe [הוֹי] to the women
who sew bands on all wrists,
and make veils for the heads
of persons of every height,
in the hunt for human lives!
Will you hunt down lives among my people,
and maintain your own lives?
19 **You** have profaned me among my people
for handfuls of barley and for pieces of bread,
[ל] putting to death
persons who should not die
and keeping alive persons who should not live,
by your lies to my people,
who listen to lies.

20 Therefore, **thus says the Lord GOD:**
[לָכֵן כֹּה אָמַר אֲדֹנָי יְהוִה]

(look) [הִנְנִי]
I am against [אֶל] your bands
with which you hunt lives;
I will tear them from your arms,
and let the lives go free,
the lives that you hunt down like birds.
21 I will tear off your veils,
and save my people from your hands;
they shall no longer be prey in your hands;
and you shall know that I am the Lord.
[וִידַעְתֶּם כִּי אֲנִי יְהוִה]

---

611 This line repeats the parallels with the earlier part of v.2, which comes right after the address 'Son of Man'.

612 The NRSV does not use any word here to translate the Hebrew הִנְנִי, but I have added 'Look' to make the parallel clearer here and in the same place in v.20.

10 **Because,** [וּבְיַעַן] in truth,
because
they have misled my people,
saying, "Peace,"
when there is no peace;
and because, when the people build a wall,
these prophets smear whitewash on it.

11 Say to those who smear whitewash
that it shall fall.
There will be a deluge of rain,
great hailstones will fall,
and a stormy wind will break out.

12 When the wall falls,
will it not be said to you,
"Where is the whitewash you smeared on it?"

13 **Therefore,** [לָכֵן] thus says the Lord GOD:
In my wrath I will make
a stormy wind break out,
and in my anger there shall be
a deluge of rain,
and hailstones in wrath will destroy it.

14 I will break down the wall
that you have smeared with whitewash,
and bring it to the ground,
so that its foundation will be laid bare:
when it falls you shall perish within it;
and you shall know that I am the LORD.
[וְיִדַעְתֶּם כִּי־אֲנִי יְהוָה]

15 Thus I will spend my wrath upon the wall,
and upon those who have smeared it
with whitewash:
and I will say to you,
The wall is no more,
nor those who smeared it -
16 the prophets of Israel
who prophesied concerning Jerusalem
and saw visions of peace for it,
when there was no peace,
says the Lord GOD.

22 **Because** [יַעַן]
you have disheartened the righteous falsely
although I have not disheartened them,
and you have encouraged the wicked
not to turn from their wicked way
and save their lives;

23 **therefore** [לָכֵן]
you shall no longer see false visions
or practice divination;
I will save my people from your hand.

Then you will know that I am the LORD.'
[וְיִדַעְתֶּם כִּי־אֲנִי יְהוָה]

Despite structural similarities, these two separate oracles are far from identical in their content. Although they both address the problem of deviant prophecy, they elucidate the specific abuses that, in Ezekiel's context, are gender-based. Judgments against men and women are not identical, although some elements are in common.

MALE PROPHETS: Ezek 13:1-16

Introduction: Ezek 13:1-3a

Ezekiel is commanded to prophesy 'against' the male prophets, as he is also commanded to prophesy 'against' the women (v.17). In both of these verses, as well as in three other places in this chapter (vv.2,8,9,17a,20) the preposition אֶל is used to mean 'against' where we would normally expect to find the preposition עַל, even though the latter is also used here (vv.3,17b) without any obvious difference in meaning. Throughout the chapter the sense of Yahweh being and acting 'against' them is reinforced (Yahweh is 'against you' (אֲלֵיכֶם) in v.8; Yahweh's hand is 'against the prophets' (אֶל־הַנְּבִיאִים) in v.9. Yahweh is also 'against the wall (בַּקִּיר) and those who have smeared it with whitewash' (v.15), as well as being 'against (אֶל) the bands of the women (v.20).[613] This clear-cut stance of separation against those on the other side of a divine boundary-marker is characteristic of Ezekiel; compare the vision in chs. 40-48, where boundaries that had become blurred are made clear again and people need to be taught again to distinguish between the holy and the common (44:23).

Ezekiel first addresses the 'prophets of Israel' (13:2), in his call to 'prophesy against them'.[614] The phrase 'prophets of Israel' is unique to Ezekiel and is only used in this chapter (vv.2,16); Ezek 22:25,28 has 'her prophets' (i.e., Israel's prophets). There is

---

613 In v.15 NRSV has 'upon' the wall. Although there is a change of preposition from אל or על to the prefix ב, the force of Yahweh's wrath functions 'against' the wall and its builders.

614 Cf. Ezek 34:2, where Ezekiel is called to prophesy against the shepherds of Israel.

also the extended phrase 'my servants, the prophets of Israel' in Ezek 38:17, which denotes faithful prophets of Yahweh.[615] However, the shorter version, simply 'prophets of Israel', has more room for ambiguity. The fact that these people belong to Israel is reinforced by two other references to Israel within the chapter (vv.4,5), so the phrase that is used here effectively excludes any possibility that Ezekiel is addressing prophets of some other nation (e.g. Babylonian prophets) and implies that they are operating within the official religion of Israel and are not prophets of some other god (cf. 1 Kings 18:19, where prophets of Baal and prophets of Asherah are specifically designated thus). Although at least some of those whom Ezekiel is addressing are specifically said to have prophesied to Jerusalem (v.16), they and possibly others seem to be operating now in the exile, for their punishment will be that they will not enter the land of Israel (v.9).[616] In calling them 'prophets of Israel' rather than 'prophets of Yahweh' Ezekiel may be indicating that their deviancy lies in their primary allegiance: it is to the people group Israel rather than to Yahweh.[617]

The redundant phrase 'the prophets of Israel who are prophesying' (Ezek 13:2) is seen by several commentators to have sarcastic overtones.[618] The explanation for the sarcasm follows immediately: they are prophesying, or prophets, 'from their own hearts.'[619] The Hebrew construction, of construct form ('prophets,' לִנְבִיאֵי) before

---

615 Block, *Ezekiel 1*, 398.

616 Jer 29:8-9, 15,21-23 indicates that Jeremiah is very aware of deviant prophecy occurring among the exiles. Georg Fohrer, *Ezechiel* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1955), 68, thinks that Ezekiel uses the term intentionally to include prophets who are still in Israel as well as those who are in exile.

617 Edward F. Siegman, *The False Prophets of the Old Testament* (Washington: Catholic University of America, 1939), 2, observes that false prophets are often described in terms of a connection with people rather than Yahweh. Examples include Jer 23:13 (prophets of Samaria),14-15 (prophets of Jerusalem); Mic 3:11 (her prophets); Lam 2:14 (your prophets); 4:13 (her prophets). These are all in contexts where the prophets are acting falsely. Any references to 'prophets of Yahweh' refer to faithful prophets; examples include 1 Sam 3:20 (Samuel); 1 Kings 18:4,13 (the faithful prophets who were being killed by Jezebel); 18:22 (Elijah); 22:7 (a prophet requested by Jehoshophat–Micaiah); 2 Kings 3:11 (another prophet requested by Jehoshophat–Elisha); 2 Chron 18:6 = 1 Kings 22:7; 28:9 (Oded).

618 e.g. Horace D. Hummel, *Ezekiel 1–20*, Concordia Commentary (St Louis: Concordia, 2005), 366, Block, *Ezekiel 1*, 399.

619 Literally 'heart'. NRSV has 'imagination' for 'heart'.

the preposition מִן, is unusual but is attested elsewhere. It can be an abbreviation for 'prophets who speak from their own hearts'.[620] It is clear that Ezekiel does not ever conceptualise the 'word of the Lord' as coming from or out of the prophetic heart, but always sees it standing in contrast to anything that comes out of a human heart. In the call vision, Ezekiel is asked to take the divine words into his heart (3:10). He is to speak Yahweh's words to the people, but only after he has eaten the scroll, from the divine hand, containing words of divine origin (2:9–3:4). The Israelites are said to be hard of heart (חִזְקֵי־לֵב) in Ezek 2:4 and obstinate of heart (קְשֵׁי־לֵב) in Ezek 3:7. This imagery implies that they have set up a barrier to prevent any penetration by the word of the Lord into their hearts. In Ezek 14:5 the Lord wants to recapture the hearts of the Israelites who have deserted him for idols; indeed, the image of adulterous hearts is also used in Ezek 6:9. It is not only the foreigner who has a problem of the heart—it is uncircumcised (Ezek 44:7,9)—but it is Israel who needs a new heart (Ezek 11:19; 36:26).

Excursus: Can words 'out of one's own heart' originate from Yahweh's deception?

Ezek 13:2,17 and Ezek 14:9 refer to the origin of deviant prophecy. I will now pause to consider whether prophesying 'out of one's own heart' and prophesying by the 'deception of Yahweh' signify the same phenomenon. The statement in 14:9 is particularly shocking and provocative because Yahweh himself becomes implicated. This is not the only occasion in the book where Yahweh turns out to be involved in an action that is initially said to be from the enemy (see 3:17-21 and ch.33, where

---

620 Block, *Ezekiel 1*, 395, finds this form also attested in Gen 3:22; Isa 28:9; Jer 23:23; Hos 7:5. He sees this as 'an oral expression ... preserved in a literary text'. Although the LXX simply reads 'prophesy to them' (πρὸς αὐτούς for אליהם) in v. 2, it includes the reference to prophesying 'out of their hearts' (ἀπὸ καρδίας αὐτῶν) in v.3.

Yahweh sets up Ezekiel as watchman against the enemy, then the enemy is seen to be Yahweh himself).[621]

Ezekiel is not the first prophet to speak of the possibility of a prophet being deceived or enticed. In Deut 13:1-6 it is not clear whether the deviant prophet who dreams and even performs miraculous signs, but leads people to follow other gods, is himself 'deceived' or is blatantly rebellious or intentionally deceitful. However, the idea of a prophet being deceived does occur more explicitly in the narratives in 1 Kings 13 (the old prophet deceives the man of God who goes from Judah to Bethel) and, of particular relevance to our passage, in 1 Kings 22, especially verses 19-28 [= 2 Chron 18:18-27], where Micaiah describes the Lord deceiving or enticing (פתה) the prophets by sending lying spirits into their mouths.[622] Jeremiah uses the same word when he accuses the Lord of enticing or deceiving him (Jer 20:7). Although some have made much of the possibility of sexual connotations for this word, there seems to be no supporting evidence for finding this sense in any of these texts or in Ezek 14:9.[623]

In Ezek 14:9a [וְהַנָּבִיא כִּי־יְפֻתֶּה וְדִבֶּר דָּבָר אֲנִי יְהוָה פִּתִּיתִי אֶת הַנָּבִיא] the verb פתה in the qal means 'to be gullible, foolish'.[624] The basic idea of the verb is to 'be open, spacious, wide' and relates to a simple, immature or foolish person who is open to all kinds of enticement because there is no developed discriminating judgment as to what is right or wrong.[625] The closely related noun פֶּתִי is rooted in the wisdom

---

621 See also Ezek 20:25f, which Crenshaw, *Prophetic Conflict*, 87, notes is an equally striking and unique claim that appears to contradict the holy character of Yahweh's law.

622 Moberly, *Prophecy and Discernment*, 109–29, gives an insightful and cohesive analysis of this narrative with which I am in essential agreement.

623 R. Mosis, "פתה *pth*; פתי *peṯî*; פתיות *pᵉṯayyûṯ*", in *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, Vol. 12, ed. G.Johannes Botterweck, Helmer Ringgren, and Heinz-Josef Fabry (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 171, concludes that it is 'extremely unlikely' that this verb in Jer 20:7 and similar contexts is intended 'to evoke the notion of sexual-erotic seduction'.

624 Jenni and Westermann, *Lexicon*, Vol 2, 1037.

625 Harris, Archer, and Waltke, *TWOT*, Vol 2, 742.

literature, especially Proverbs, and describes the simple or immature person who foolishly 'believes anything' (Prov 14:15). In Ezek 14:9 the verb occurs in the piel with Yahweh as the subject, as it does in Jer 20:7, and in the pual with the prophets as the subject (cf. the niphal in Jer 20:7 and pual in Jer 20:10, where Jeremiah is the subject). In fact, this verb occurs most often in the piel, where it means 'to fool, mislead' (pual 'to be fooled').[626]

The obvious problem concerns the moral integrity of Yahweh's deceptive or misleading action, especially in the light of warnings against deceivers, and specific instructions not to deceive neighbours in Prov 24:28—'Do not be a witness against your neighbour without cause and do not deceive with your lips.' In an attempt to solve this moral problem, many scholars have argued that the Hebrew language does not allow for discrimination between direct and indirect causation and so attributes to Yahweh, as ultimate first cause, actions which originate from another source. Crenshaw argues that this is the price Israel pays for rejecting dualism, but says that 'the demonic must be understood as God's means of testing Israel' with the ultimate motive of mercy for the ultimate purpose of salvation.[627]

Not all scholars are happy to resolve the problem in this way, considering it an unnecessary rationalisation.[628] Some see Yahweh as being active in responding in a manner in keeping with the attitude of the people, bringing a form of poetic justice that is reinforced by word play.[629] Block takes this approach with Ezek 14:9, writing,

---

626 Jenni and Westermann, *Lexicon*, Vol 2, 1037.

627 Crenshaw, *Prophetic Conflict*, 88–90.

628 e.g. Brownlee, *Ezekiel 1*, 204.

629 J.J.M. Roberts, "Does God Lie? Divine Deceit as a Theological Problem in Israelite Prophetic Literature," in *Congress Volume: Jerusalem 1986*, VT Sup 40 (Leiden: Brill, 1988), 219–20, argues for this approach: 'In the theology of the OT there comes a point at which Yahweh's patience is overtaxed. When God's people refuse to see and hear ... in God's poetic justice they eventually get what they ask for.' He cites Isa 29:10 in support, and points to a similar line of thinking in the NT in 2 Thess 2:9-12.

'Yahweh answers insincerity with insincerity. Unrepentant kings and unrepentant people, who seek confirmation of their perverse ways, and who clamor for reassurances of well-being, do not deserve a straight answer.'[630] Inquiries from people who will not obey a word already given regarding idols do not receive a further answer because it is making a mockery of God.[631] However, God, in turn, makes a mockery of the inquirers and of the prophets who dare to speak.

Taking Ezek 14:9 as casuistic in form, v.9aα is the transgression and v.9aβ the judgment sentence, rather than motive statement leading to transgression. If read in this way, the meaning is as follows: a prophet who allows himself to be enticed, or made a fool, by the idolatrous inquirers, is then enticed, or made a fool, in judgment by Yahweh.[632] The next statement, which is more obviously a judgment statement, would then be read in parallel to 9aβ. The action of Yahweh's hand against such prophets, in destroying them from among the people of Israel, continues the idea of making thorough fools of these prophets, and fits with their characterisation as 'fools' (הַנְּבָלִים) in 13:3.[633]

The idea of deception raises the question of the sincerity of the prophets in ch.14.[634] Even in ch.13 it is possible to envisage the prophets as sincere, even though Ezekiel would consider them to be sincerely wrong. These prophets are either 'prophesying out of their own hearts' when Yahweh has not spoken (ch.13) or acting as accomplices to people of power who refuse to put aside 'idols in their hearts' (ch.14). Both of these situations suggest very strongly that the prophets speak and act

---

630 Block, *Ezekiel 1*, 434–35. He cites 2 Sam 22:26-27 (=Ps 18:26-27 [Eng 25-26]) for similar poetic justice.

631 Louis Goldberg, "פָּתָה," in *TWOT, Vol. 2*, ed. R.Laird Harris, Gleason L. Archer, and Bruce K. Waltke (Chicago: Moody Press, 1980), 743.

632 G.Johannes Botterweck, Helmer Ringgren, and Heinz-Josef Fabry, eds., *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament, Vol. XII*, trans. Douglas Stott (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 171.

633 NRSV has 'senseless' for 'fools'.

634 Brownlee, *Ezekiel 1*, 204, is one who considers that these prophets may be sincere.

out of a primary motivation of self-interest. In both chapters, the prophets effectively mock Yahweh by presuming to speak for him illegitimately. The language of 14:9 then suggests that, as they do that, Yahweh himself makes fools of them.

Senseless prophets: Ezek 13:3b-8

Ezekiel launches into a Woe Oracle (v.3b—he does the same for the women in v.18b) signifying that a kind of death has occurred. The word translated 'woe' here (הוֹי) is only used three times within the book: here twice and then once in Ezek 34:2, where Ezekiel is also speaking against false leaders.[635]

These men are 'fools' (הַנְּבָלִים). No one else in this book is described in this way. Jeremiah uses the same term for the man who gets riches through unjust means (Jer 17:11) because in the end these riches will desert him. In Ezekiel's argument it becomes clear that the gain and popularity that these men currently enjoy will also come to nothing (v.9). In fact, it is because they began with nothing ('they have seen nothing' v.3) that they will end up with nothing. The term נָבָל conveys something that is much more serious than momentary stupidity, but denotes a settled disposition that is contrary to the path of wisdom, righteousness and respect for God, and proves to be based on emptiness and futility.[636] Such people are, at heart,

---

635 Hummel, *Ezekiel I-20*, 353, comments that the interjection apparently originated in laments for the dead but in prophetic literature it focuses attention on the grief that will inevitably accompany the fulfillment of oracles of doom. Ezekiel also uses the synonym אוֹי in 16:23; 24:6,9 against Jerusalem, first in an allegory, and then when addressing it as a 'city of bloodshed'.

636 Some of the other occurrences of this term are in Deut 32:6,21; 2 Sam 3:33 and 13:13; Isa 32:5,6; Ps 14:1; 39:9[Eng 8]; 53:2[Eng 1]; 74:18,22; Job 2:10 and 30:8; Prov 17:7,21; 30:22; Jer 17:11. In 1 Sam 25 it occurs as the name of a man whose behaviour is consistent with his name. It is a significant category in wisdom literature, especially in Proverbs, and is treated in more detail in Isa 32:1-8. M. Saebo, "'Nabal'," in *Theological Lexicon of the Old Testament*, ed. Ernst Jenni and Claus Westermann (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1997), 711, gives the basic verbal idea as expressing 'an unconsidered (both inappropriate and stupid) act (e.g. Prov 30:22) the opposite of the wise and considered act.' Louis Goldberg, "נבל," in *TWOT, Vol. 2*, ed. R.Laird Harris, Gleason L. Archer, and Bruce Waltke (Chicago: Moody, 1980), 547, writes that this category of persons is 'ignoble and disgraceful'. His 'insensibility to God, as well as a moral insensibility, close the mind to reason'. Taylor, *Ezekiel*, 120, adds that the fool is 'inclined to blasphemy and atheism, churlish and arrogant like his namesake Nabal of Carmel, the antithesis of the wise man in terms of spiritual perception, self-discipline, restraint, godly fear and humility'.

arrogant; they elevate themselves to a higher position than is rightfully theirs and take honours that do not belong to them. They refuse to seek, listen to or understand the one who is their true superior: Yahweh (Deut 32:6,21). They are practical atheists (Ps 14:1; Ps 53:2[Eng 1]) who may well be religious functionaries but who act as if there is no God. They are so confident that Yahweh will not challenge their impudence that they mock him (Ps 74:18,22), and both practise and advocate ways that are wicked (Isa 32:5,6; Ps 14:1; Ps 53:2[Eng 1]). They epitomise the proud man who is heading for a fall (Prov 16:18).

In the book of Ezekiel the 'Spirit' of Yahweh plays a significant and powerful role in initiating actions to and with the prophet.[637] In the opening vision it is the 'Spirit' who empowers Ezekiel to stand after lying prostrate (Ezek 2:2), and who lifts Ezekiel up and moves him around (e.g. Ezek 8:3); it is the Spirit who animates the dry bones and brings them to life (Ezek 37). However, these deviant prophets are not moved by that Spirit but by their own spirits (Ezek 13:3).[638] In following after their own human spirits, they seem to be either unaware of or resistant to the possibility of being moved by the divine Spirit, as Ezekiel is. They are looking to their own human spirits to do something that can not be done by the human spirit, something that can only be done by Yahweh's Spirit.

Within this next section there are several changes of person, and this can be somewhat confusing. Ezekiel begins his attack on the prophets in the third person (v.3), then swings around to address Israel in the second person (v.4). Israel here

---

[637] The context suggests that רוּחַ here refers to divine spirit. Carley, *Ezekiel Among the Prophets*, 23–33, gives a useful summary of the concept of the spirit in Ezekiel and other prophetic passages. Subsequent analyses are given in Daniel I. Block, "The Prophet of the Spirit: The Use of *RWH* in the Book of Ezekiel," *JETS* 32 (1989): 27–49, and James Robson, *Word and Spirit in Ezekiel* (New York, London: T&T Clark, 2006).

[638] Robson, *Word and Spirit*, 122–23, comments that here רוח could be understood as a synonym for לב, but by exploiting possible ambiguity with רוח here Ezekiel could be making a direct assault on their claim to authority. On p.142 Robson notes that this is the only verse where רוח rather than לב is used in the accusations against the deviant prophets, cf. Ezek 13:2,17 and Jer 14:14; 23:16,26.

seems to bear some responsibility, because these prophets are hers. Hard on the heels of this comes the charge that 'they have not gone up to the breaches or repaired a wall for the house of Israel' (v.5). The initial expectation is that the group addressed here is still 'Israel', but the development of the sentence makes it clear that it is the prophets who are the intended addressees. In the next sentence (v.6) Ezekiel returns to speaking of the prophets in the third person, and immediately follows this by another second person accusation (v.7) addressed to these same prophets. The alternation between second and third person continues in verses 8 and 9; Block has argued convincingly that a different set of inconsistencies in another part of this book can point to the involvement of emotional factors.[639]

Jackals among ruins: Ezek 13:4

Although it is not specifically mentioned in this chapter, the image of the deviant prophets as 'jackals among ruins' stands against the image of 'watchman' for the faithful prophet, Ezekiel. Both images relate to threats to the city walls and the security of those who live within them. Whereas the watchman, earnestly concerned for the safety of the people, blows the trumpet to warn of an impending attack, the jackals, concerned only for themselves, utilise any weakness in the walls for their own well-being and actually contribute to their deterioration and so to the security risk for the people.

Middle Easterners, then and now, are not always careful to distinguish between jackals and foxes in their nomenclature. The word שׁוּעָל has sometimes been translated as 'fox' and sometimes as 'jackal', but the context here suggests that 'jackal' is more apt. Although both animals are of similar size, the three species of fox that are found in Israel and Egypt are members of the *Vulpes* genus, but jackals are members of the *Canis* genus and can interbreed with dogs. *Canis aureus*, the

---

639 Block, "Text and Emotion."

particular jackal in this area, is dirty yellow in colouring, mixed with reds and blacks. Whereas foxes tend to be solitary hunters, jackals go about in packs.[640] Jackals are nocturnal, carnivorous, cowardly scavengers frequently found in large numbers around the walls and ruins of old cities and live in holes or burrows which they dig.[641] Whereas a fox is not used as an omen of desolation, the jackal is consistently used to suggest ruin and destruction, as well as crying in the night. Taking into account the fact that there is more than one Hebrew word that can refer to jackals, other OT references that allude to jackals prowling around ruined cities and wilderness areas are: Neh 2:13; Ps 44:19; Isa 13:22; 34:13; 35:7; Jer 9:11; 14:6; 49:33; 51:37; Lam 4:3; 5:18; Mal 1:3.[642] The image invites Ezekiel's hearers to think of Jerusalem as a society in ruins.[643] It also suggests that the protection of its society (the strength of its broken walls) is being further undermined by the activities of these prophets, who are like jackals digging around and under ruined walls in order to make their own burrows.

They fail to repair the wall: Ezek 13:5

The word used for 'wall' in this image is גָּדֵר. It has a wide range of meanings, but in this context most naturally indicates a city wall, or at least a protective wall.[644] It would be built specifically for defence because of the reference to battle (v.5).

---

640 George Cansdale, *Animals of Bible Lands* (Exeter: Paternoster, 1970), 125.

641 Harriet N. Cook, *The Scripture Alphabet of Animals* (New York: American Tract Society, 1842), www.ccel.org/c/cook/animals/h/webdoc8.htm, accessed 23/07/07. Also Roland K. Harrison, "Jackal," in *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia Vol 2*, ed. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), 947.

642 Walter A. Elwell, ed., "Animals," in *Encyclopedia of the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1988), 106, notes that most use the word תַּנִּין (often 'dragons' in older translations); one uses תַּנּוֹת (Mal 1:3) and one uses שָׁעַל (Lam 5:18).

643 Block, *Ezekiel 1*, 401.

644 Graham I. Davies, "Archaeological Commentary," 111, shows that this word can be used for a wall that surrounds a vineyard to protect it from wild animals (Isa 5:5; Ps 80:13; cf. Num 22:24), a wall that blocks a path (Hos 2:8; cf. the verb in Job 19:8; Lam 3:9) and a city wall (Mic 7:11; cf. possibly Ezra 9:9). He also notes that the more usual word for a city wall is חוֹמָה, used in Ezek 26:4. Some scholars, e.g. Greenberg, *Ezekiel 1*, 244, suggest that Israel is here likened to a ruined vineyard and the wall is the protective fence around it. This is possible, as it would use similar imagery as in Isa 5, especially v.5, even though the word used is different, but the meaning is ultimately the same.

Although no specific cause of the breaches is named, it can be surmised that they are there through either deliberate damage done in previous battles, most likely by battering rams, or neglect of maintenance by the city-dwellers themselves.[645] The second cause seems much more likely in this context since no previous battles are mentioned and there is a clear accusation that these prophets are contributing to the ongoing decline of the city's defences.

Ezekiel's given role as watchman is to sound the alert for any potential attack against the people, and, by implication, against their walls. He implies that the role of these other prophets should also carry a responsibility of protection: they should either stand in the breach in order to turn away intruders or to repair the wall.[646] In Ezek 22:30 this implication is made more explicit ('I sought for anyone among them who would repair the wall and stand in the breach before me on behalf of the land, so that I would not destroy it; but I found no one') and concurs with an important image of Moses, the prophet *par excellence*, who did stand in the breach and did keep Yahweh's wrath from destroying the people (Ps 106:23).[647] In Ezekiel's view, prophets clearly have a responsibility for the defence of the people.[648] Whatever this means precisely, there is no doubt about Ezekiel's view that it means public responsibility for the well-being of their whole society rather than private responsibility for a small circle of people they might influence. It is like a soldier's duty to act courageously, decisively and self-sacrificially, no matter what is required,

---

[645] Graham I. Davies, "Archaeological Commentary," 112.

[646] Block, *Ezekiel 1*, 401.

[647] Cooke, *Ezekiel*, 139.

[648] Moberly, *Prophecy and Discernment*, 137, makes a similar point in relation to the chariots and horses of fire that accompany Elijah's transportation to heaven. He suggests that these are not actually necessary for the removal of Elijah because the whirlwind achieves that, but are rather symbols of divine power expressed in military images. He goes on to say that 'in the person who speaks and acts for God in such a way as to mediate the divine will and power, is Israel's true strength to be found.'

right at the most perilous moment of a siege in order to save the people.[649]

The question still needs to be addressed as to how these prophets are to protect and save the people. Over the years scholars and preachers have interpreted this need to repair the walls primarily in two ways: 1) as intercession, and 2) as teaching with exhortation to repent from sin in order to restore morality.[650] While intercession is the standard rabbinic interpretation, it is noteworthy that Ezekiel, the contemporary prophetic exemplar, is not shown to be an effective intercessor. In 11:13 he cries out to Yahweh with an urgent intercessory question, 'Will you make a full end of the remnant of Israel?' (similarly in 9:8) and receives no assurance of mercy, unlike Moses when he pleads for the people (Ex 32:11-14) and Amos when he begs for Jacob's survival (Amos 7:2-6). The attempts of both Ezekiel and Jeremiah to intercede do, at least, confirm that intercession is a natural instinct for a true prophet, but Ezekiel's limited effectiveness and Yahweh's direct prohibition to Jeremiah against intercession (Jer 7:16; 11:14; 14:11-12) suggest that intercession is not the key characteristic of their prophetic functions.[651]

---

649 Zimmerli, *Ezekiel 1*, 292–93, describes the duty of those concerned for their city, in a time of impending war, to go up into the breaches caused by the enemy, and 'to climb up on the threatened places in the face of hostile fire, or, if others were already there, to work feverishly for the setting up of a new defense wall hurriedly built from stones.'

650 1) Examples of those who take it as intercession: Leslie Allen, *Ezekiel 1*, 210; Greenberg, *Ezekiel 1*, 244. Samson H. Levey, trans., *The Targum of Ezekiel*, in *The Aramaic Bible, Vol. 13* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1987), 44, renders Ezek 13:5 as 'You have not stood up for yourselves in the gates, and you have not performed good deeds for yourselves, to petition for the House of Israel, to stand up and pray for mercy on their behalf, at the time when those who make war came against them, in the day of the Lord's anger.' Zimmerli, *Ezekiel 1*, 293, also thinks that the prophetic task of intercession may be in mind, but gives no specific evidence from the book of Ezekiel to support this. He refers to Jer 27:18, where Jeremiah calls the prophets, rather sarcastically, to plead with Yahweh that the furnishings remain in the temple and the palace.

2) Examples of those who take it as teaching repentance: John Calvin, *Commentaries on the First Twenty Chapters of the Book of the Prophet Ezekiel, Vol. II*, trans. Thomas Myers (Edinburgh: Calvin Translation Society, 1850), 11; Hengstenberg, *Ezekiel*, 113; Brownlee, *Ezekiel 1*, 188. Block, *Ezekiel 1*, 402, equates 'standing in the breach' with 'denouncing evil', and 'reconstructing the wall' with 'calling for the renewal of the covenant relationship'.

651 The lack of evidence of intercessory prayer by these other prophets is of no significance; an outside observer, such as Ezekiel, would not be in a position to know what they say to God in the privacy of their own personal prayers. Ezekiel can, however, justifiably comment on what they speak out in the public arena.

A variation of the second interpretation is suggested by Zimmerli, who thinks that the wall-building consists of giving warnings of imminent judgment, citing the book of Jonah as the prime example of how a city could be saved by the giving of a threatening message of judgment.[652] This is certainly supported by the watchman image, as well as the concern that Ezekiel expresses for the imminent Day of Yahweh. Although Zimmerli does not elaborate on the nature of the warning, his reference to Jonah suggests that repentance is necessary to avert danger. This conclusion brings him in line with the traditional advocates of the second view, like Calvin, who claims that the prophet is to build up the breaches by teaching 'faithfully ... to recall the people from their impiety, and to exhort them to repentance'.[653] Calvin claims that when a people causes breaches through violation of God's law it is as if they are laying themselves bare from the protection of God. Calvin does not spell out exactly what kind of repentance is needed, but the book of Ezekiel makes it clear that it needs to be wide-ranging, covering personal morality and societal relationships, use of land, time and all aspects of worship. This is precisely what the deviant prophets fail to address. Their avoidance of speaking of such things means that they do not contribute to the building up of the moral defences of the nation.

Readiness for the day of Yahweh: Ezek 13:5

Ezekiel shows his concern for an imminent Day of Yahweh by referring to it about ten times, with additional references to 'the day' when punishment will come on certain people groups. Although it is called here and in Ezek 30:3 the 'Day of Yahweh', in Ezek 7:19 it is the 'Day of Yahweh's wrath' and in Ezek 22:24 it is the 'Day of wrath' (cf. other references to the Lord's anger in Ezek 5:13; 7:8; 9:8; 13:13;

---

652 Zimmerli, *Ezekiel 1*, 293.

653 Calvin, *Ezekiel II*, 11. He does, however, take the next part of the verse, with the image of standing in the battle on the day of Yahweh, as intercession.

16:42; 20:21,34; 21:31; 22:20-22,31; 36:6; 38:19; 43:8). This is what motivates Ezekiel to bring the watchman's warning. In contrast, the deviant prophets show no concern to keep the wall strong for the Day of Yahweh, talking only of 'peace' (v.10). Perhaps it is because their visions do not include any anticipation of this day of coming judgment, or, if they do, they do not expect it to be imminent. Perhaps they have no awareness that Yahweh's anger could be directed towards their own people, or even towards them (v.11) if they fail in their responsibilities as prophets.

False visions: Ezek 13:7

Ezekiel does not deny that these other prophets may have visions.[654] From Ezek 7:26 it seems that a prophet is expected to have visions. In Ezek 12:21-28 visions seem almost interchangeable with the word of the Lord; the first proverb is against visions which are false, but the second supports a prophetic vision of divine origin, because the Lord God will fulfill his words, which by implication are identified with that vision. Ezekiel himself is addressed by the Lord through both word and vision, and the dominance of visions in Ezekiel's own experience suggests that the medium of vision is not, in itself, in question in this book. However, there is a clear issue here concerning the origin of the visions: they are not from the Lord but from the 'hearts' of these prophets (vv.2,3). These visions are false (שָׁוְא, a frequent descriptor in this chapter, used of these visions in vv.6,7,8,9,23); their content is nothingness, emptiness, vanity. In addition, there is another problem with the effect of the visions: it does not build up the broken wall but contributes to its decay. This has dire consequences for a people whose security is already threatened and for whom time is running out.

Lying divinations: Ezek 13:7

---

654 Cooke, *Ezekiel*, 139.

As well as visions, these other prophets rely on divination. The methods are not specified but the canonical evaluation of divination is clear in its disapproval.[655] The term used here for divination (מִקְסָם, together with its related words, קֶסֶם divination and קָסַם to divine) is again used disapprovingly in regard to Israelites in other places within the book of Ezekiel (12:24;13:7,9,23; 21:34[29]; 22:28) without any further indication of specific methods (cf. Jer 14:14; 27:9 and 29:8).[656] Other prophets also associate divination with deviant prophets (Isa 44:25; Mic 3:6,7,11; Zech 10:2).[657] Although Zechariah associates it with lying visions, the others give no further specifications regarding its exact nature.

While a precise definition of divination is difficult, some consider that its essence lies in an act of human initiative in 'wringing a secret from the gods' as opposed to being a prophetic messenger through divine initiative.[658] Ezekiel's charge that 'Yahweh has not sent them' (v.6) might suggest that the issue concerns who is the initiator of communication. Certainly, Ezekiel is portrayed as showing little initiative in his call or other revelatory experiences. However, there is an abundance of canonical approval for genuine human approaches to Yahweh by both priests and

---

655 I am not taking a 'history of religion' approach here that might simply trawl the OT for evidence of the occurrence of certain practices, but a theological approach which takes the canonical evaluation of practices as its yardstick. Examples of disapproval are in Deut 18:10,14;1 Sam 28:8; 2 Kings 17:17. Sometimes it is associated with non-Israelite practice (e.g. Num 22:7; 23:23;1 Sam 6:2; Isa 2:6). Only one reference, where the meaning is somewhat different, does not carry negative connotations (Prov 16:10).

656 However, in Ezek 21:26[21] and 28[23], where no explicit evaluation is given, the king of Babylon practices divination with the accompanying acts of casting lots by arrows, consulting his idols and examining a liver.

657 Leslie Allen, *Ezekiel 1*, 201, comments on the occurrences in Mic 3:6-7, saying that the true prophet (Micah) seems to have been prepared to credit false prophets with divine gifts that they had abused by self-seeking and so were doomed to lose.

658 Abraham J. Heschel, *The Prophets 2*, 458–59.

prophets, especially in inquiring of Yahweh on behalf of others; the act of initiating communication with Yahweh cannot, in itself, be the entire issue.[659]

The question of human manipulation may be more to the point, and its absence may be demonstrated in Ezekiel's reactions of surprise and shock (e.g. Ezek 1:28; 3:15). When Ezekiel is visited by elders, with the expectation that he will inquire of the Lord for them and receive an answer (Ezek 8:1; 14:1; 20:1), Ezekiel does receive some divine communication (vision in ch.8, word in chs. 14 and 20) but in each case the response is not within the expected categories of the inquirers. The divine response is clearly free and unexpected, and calls the inquirers to meet certain conditions before being able to receive the answer to their question.[660] The implication is that Ezekiel does not pass on any answer until or unless a response is initiated by Yahweh.

One significant factor in Ezekiel's prophetic answers to inquirers is that his personal favour with the inquirers is put at risk. In receiving and passing on divine responses Ezekiel finds himself standing alone, no longer speaking for the inquirers, but against them. This has ample canonical support with the narratives of other prophets (e.g. Micaiah in 1 Kings 22 and Jeremiah in Jer 42:1-7) and the more enigmatic figure of Balaam (Num 22:8).[661] In addition to the lack of popularity of the message received, some of these stories have a waiting period, which again reinforces the freedom of Yahweh to initiate a response that cannot be controlled by human time scales.

---

659 See the numerous examples in B.O. Long, "Divination," in *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible: An Illustrated Encyclopaedia (Supplementary Volume)* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1976), 242–43.

660 This is consistent with what happens when King Saul's attempts to gain divine answers to his inquiries but receives none (1 Sam 14:37 and 28:6).

661 Moberly, *Prophecy and Discernment*, 138–49, gives an insightful analysis of this rather perplexing story that generally paints Balaam in a positive light (except for the time when the donkey shows him up) when many other canonical references to this story paint him negatively. What is essentially at stake is Balaam's motives, specifically, with regard to pressure for financial gain.

Many define divination as an art that uses rulebound techniques and mechanical devices.[662] Although answers received through divination tend to be either 'yes' or 'no' like those received through the use of the Urim and Thummim (approved in other canonical books, but not mentioned in Ezekiel), Ezekiel does not explicitly discard their authenticity purely on that basis.[663] The men use the same verbal conventions as prophets in the Jeremiah-Ezekiel tradition in introducing their messages (e.g., נְאֻם יְהוָה 'says Yahweh', v.7), perhaps thinking that the mechanical use of these words invokes divine authority.[664] Here the use of such formulae causes confusion, unlike the Elijah conflict where the prophets of Baal speak in the name of that god rather than Yahweh (1 Kings 18).[665] Throughout the OT the line between approved and divinatory means in seeking divine guidance can be thin and ambiguous, even though the boundary appears to be firm in Ezekiel's mind.

We know considerably more about Ezekiel's own process in inquiring and bringing the 'word of Yahweh' than about the kinds of 'divinatory' practices that these deviant prophets are using. Allen makes the point that the addition of the adjective 'false' may indicate that Ezekiel is judging the results rather than the nature of the process.[666] These men fail the ultimate test of authentication in the fulfilment of their message (Deut 18:22); it becomes clear to Ezekiel that Yahweh has not sent them (v.6).[667] Sadly, these men may be sincere in their delusion, but any hope will collapse when their words are not fulfilled.

---

662 See Leslie Allen, *Ezekiel 1*, 201, Cooke, *Ezekiel*, 139, Thomas W. Overholt, *Channels of Prophecy: The Social Dynamics of Prophetic Activity* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1989), 129–30.

663 Overholt, *Channels of Prophecy*, 137.

664 Hummel, *Ezekiel 1-20*, 369.

665 Millard C. Lind, *Ezekiel*, Believers Church Bible Commentary (Scottdale, PA: Herald Press, 1996), 108.

666 Leslie Allen, *Ezekiel 1*, 201.

667 Overholt, *Channels of Prophecy*, 133, points out that 1 Sam 9:6 gives another example of a prophet's genuineness being confirmed by this test.

It is significant that there are no accounts of divination being used by Ezekiel or by any other OT prophet. However, Ezekiel does experience divine communication through the medium of vision, even though it is invariably in connection with the medium of word.[668] So, instead of the definitive divine-human communication coming through vision and word, as it does for Ezekiel, these deviant prophets are characterised as receiving it primarily through vision and divination (13:6,7,9,23). Divination, then, replaces word; this marks a distinct change, not only in the primary medium, but in the relationship between the prophet and Yahweh.

More importantly, the words of these deviant prophets do not have the quality of having come from a separate, holy, divine source who has been free to initiate speech. They lack the characteristic of detachment from the human desires of both the 'prophets' and those who may have asked them to inquire on their behalf. These 'prophets' do not act as those who are messengers for one whom they serve with reverence, respect and fear. Instead, their words and behaviour point to themselves.

Judgment against the male prophets: Ezek 13:8-9

Yahweh's power (his 'hand' v.9) will be shown as greater than any power that the words of these 'prophets' have. In addition to the non-fulfilment of their words (v.6), there will be a three-fold judgment against them. Other uses of this gesture by Yahweh against those who are threatened occur in Ezek 6:14; 14:9,13; 16:27; 25:7,13,16; 35:3.[669] This same divine power, which was used to establish Israel, now

---

668 Other senses are also involved at times, e.g. touch (Ezek 2:2) and taste (Ezek 3:3), but these are not said by Ezekiel to mark significant differences between his prophetic ministry and that of the deviant prophets.

669 Zimmerli, *Ezekiel 1*, 294. He also notes the command to Ezekiel to use a similar gesture in Ezek 4:7. In Ezek 20:33f Yahweh will rule over Israel with a mighty hand and outstretched arm. In Isa 5:25; 9:11,16,20; 10:14, 'outstretched hand' signifies judgment. Zimmerli associates this 'hand' of Yahweh with the divine outstretched hand of the Exodus, where it is used for both the deliverance of Israel and the destruction of her enemies.

threatens her prophets and the integrity of the nation. These men come from the people (they are 'prophets of Israel' v.2) but they will be rejected by the people (v.9). Yahweh's power will ultimately be effected in severing the relationship between prophets and people, and bringing to an end their strong dependence on and enmeshment with each other. Although Ezekiel also comes from the same people, his relationship to the people is different: he stands apart from them in order to bring the 'word of Yahweh' to them.

The three judgments listed in v.9 'strike at the heart of what it means to be an Israelite'.[670] The first one concerns the membership of these prophets in the council (סוֹד) of the Lord's people. Although the term is used for the 'divine council' in other passages (e.g. Jer 23:18,22) it can be used of any association of people who have something in common and are closely connected (e.g. of friends Jer 6:11; 15:17; Job 19:19; of a congregation Ps 111:1; of an association of people Gen 49:6; Ps 64:3). While Taylor suggests that this judgment refers to their loss of a place of honour among the leading citizens, the fundamental implication is loss of relationship within the community.[671] However, because of their leadership function, their exclusion from the community would also include loss of honour. This might very well suggest that their exclusion from the earthly council is based on their non-participation in the heavenly council.[672]

---

[670] Block, *Ezekiel 1*, 404.

[671] Taylor, *Ezekiel*, 122. Zimmerli, *Ezekiel 1*, 294, suggests that because the word also denotes the content of what is decided in private discussion and because these prophets are supposed to be those who know about the divine secret (Amos 3:7), they would now be excluded from the trusted circle of the people of God.

[672] Block, *Ezekiel 1*, 404. Robert P. Gordon, "Standing in the Council," 194, thinks that behind this lies an understanding that a true prophet has access to the divine סוֹד, such as is suggested in Jer 23:18,22. Those who have had no experience of the divine סוֹד find themselves excluded from the ordinary 'sodality' of their own people.

The second judgment, of not being listed in the records of the house of Israel, makes the exclusion concrete.[673] King David's census of fighting men establishes tribal rolls (2 Sam 24:2,9), although other early censuses have been taken (Num 1-4; 26). In 1 Chron 1-9 various lists of clans are kept, and records of some kind are suggested by Jer 22:30. In Ezra 2 and Neh 7 the necessity of having one's name in the family records for the returning exiles is seen.[674] So the existence and importance of citizenship rights being established through records of the house of Israel is clear.

The third judgment follows logically from the second. If these deviant prophets are excluded from the records of the house of Israel, they are excluded from the possibility of claiming rights in the land of Israel, like others who could not prove their Israelite descent on their attempted return from exile (Ezra 2:59-63 = Neh 7:61-65).[675] The deprivation of any future possibility of returning to their land strikes at the heart of 'the one hopeful prospect which made exile endurable'.[676] In Ezek 12:24-25a and 20:38 there are other indications that the new Israel will exclude these deviant prophets.[677]

As Eichrodt has observed, these judgments meet the standard of ancient Israelite legislation. That is, they follow the principle of the *ius talionis*, which requires the punishment to fit the crime as closely as possible.[678] They have abandoned their responsibilities to the community of Israel so they will be cut off from Israel. They

---

673 Graham I. Davies, "Archaeological Commentary," 114-115, notes that the word כְּתָב which literally means 'writing' must here refer to a census list or to an individual entry in one. He also refers to other evidence of census-taking outside Israel, e.g. at Mari and in the Assyrian Doomsday Book. Greenberg, *Ezekiel 1*, 237, notes that it is a late word, used only in Esther, Ezra, Nehemiah and Chronicles, and appears to refer to a civil census list rather than a heavenly 'book of life' alluded to in Ex 32:32f; Isa 4:3; Ps 69:29; Dan 12:1.

674 Zimmerli, *Ezekiel 1*, 294.

675 Graham I. Davies, "Archaeological Commentary," 114.

676 Taylor, *Ezekiel*, 122.

677 Brownlee, *Ezekiel 1*, 189 and Greenberg, *Ezekiel 1*, 237.

678 Eichrodt, *Ezekiel*, 167.

have turned aside from their task of being messengers of Yahweh's true word concerning judgment and have distorted it into a false hope, so they will be deprived of participation in Yahweh's true word of hope and restoration beyond judgment. They receive instead the judgment they tried to avoid. It will be then that they will know that Yahweh is Lord. In this judgment there is moral integrity that arises from the moral character of the God for whom Ezekiel speaks; Ezekiel and his God are free from nationalistic and personal interests, which characterise the messages of these deviant prophets.[679]

Whitewashing the wall: Ezek 13:10 -16

Once again, an image involving a wall is used. Instead of fulfilling their implied prophetic responsibility to strengthen a damaged wall, these men, like shoddy and deceitful workmen, merely cover it cosmetically with whitewash, to make it look as though the job has been done. This image is parallel to that used by Jeremiah when he says that the deviant prophets of his day fail to treat the wound of Yahweh's people seriously (Jer 6:14; 8:11). Whereas in Jeremiah it is as if a plaster is being applied to a wound that really needs surgery before it can be healed, in Ezekiel it is as if a different kind of plaster that has no binding ingredient is used to cover over a dangerously rickety wall without attending to its structural weakness. Ezekiel does not say that these prophets are doing nothing to repair the wall, but he is saying that what they are doing has no real effect—this is because they are using utterly inadequate means.[680] More dangerously, their use of such means masks the problem so that it is no longer visible by others.

The wall in this image is no longer a large, fortified city wall, but a rougher wall. The word חַיִץ is a *hapax legomenon*, so its meaning is not certain. Zimmerli says it

---

679 Lind, *Ezekiel*, 109.

680 Eichrodt, *Ezekiel*, 168.

is 'a light partition wall, not filled in with dust, i.e., not firmly cemented with mortar', and wonders if it is referring to 'a loosely layered wall of Babylonian style made out of clay bricks'.[681] Although many commentators think it refers to an internal wall in a house, its coming exposure to the elements suggests that an external wall is envisaged.[682] Strictly speaking, it is not 'whitewash' that is being applied (the word is תָּפַל), but a kind of mud plaster; the context demands that it is something insubstantial, like untempered plaster.[683] However, I prefer to keep the common translation 'whitewash', as the NRSV does, because it has appropriate emotive connotations that come partly through the association with Matt 23:27 (echoed in Acts 23:3).[684]

What is it that these prophets are doing that Ezekiel considers to be 'whitewashing?' The passage indicates that it is speaking of 'peace' (שָׁלוֹם) when there is no peace (vv.9,16); their 'peace' declares that 'all is safe and sound' in the society of Israel.[685] They ignore the warning signs associated with moral decay and mislead the people to think that there is no danger.

The whitewashed wall will crumble! In line with Ezekiel's call to be a watchman, he is called to warn these deviant prophets that Yahweh himself will undo and expose the futility of their work. The means of judgment are given twice: rain, hailstones

---

681 Zimmerli, *Ezekiel 1*, 295. Jacob Levy, "חַיִץ," in *Neuhebraisches und Chaldäisches Wörterbuch über die Talmudim und Midraschim* (Leipzig: Brockhaus, 1879), Vol 2:45, says that it is a wall made by simply laying stones upon stones, without filling them in with rubble or cementing them together with mortar.

682 Leslie Allen, *Ezekiel 1*, 203.

683 Graham I. Davies, "Archaeological Commentary," 117–20, cites archaelogical evidence for wall construction in houses, and both mud and lime plastering. He concludes that mud plaster is intended here. Levey, *Targum of Ezekiel*, 44, renders this section of v.10 as 'they are like one who builds a flimsy wall and plasters it with plain mud, not mud mixed with straw.' Greenberg, *Ezekiel 1*, 237, explains תָּפַל by quoting Rashi (at 22:28) as 'anything that lacks an essential ingredient'.

684 Lind, *Ezekiel*, 109, makes a similar choice; he says that the word 'whitewash', though scientifically incorrect, 'communicates the correct emotional tone'.

685 Brownlee, *Ezekiel 1*, 190.

and stormy wind (in reversed order the second time). The move from 'they are going to come' (v.11) to 'I (the Lord) will send them in my anger' (v.13) clearly identifies the bringer of judgment (as in Ezek 33:2b) as the one they claim to represent. Both their work (the wall) and the workers (the deviant prophets) will go. Yahweh's anger will prevail; then they will know that the one who does this is Yahweh (v.14).

PROPHETIC WOMEN: Ezek 13:17-23

A unique address to women

Ezekiel 13:17-23 is one of only a few passages within the OT that address women as a separate group. The others are Isa 3:16–4:1 (regarding their haughtiness and finery), Isa 32:9-12 (their complacency) and Amos 4:1-3 (their greed at the expense of the poor). The Amos passage also refers to breaks in a wall which clearly fails in its role of protection for those inside the community; the women in that context will experience the judgment of being taken out through the breaks in the wall by hooks. However, this passage, Ezek 13:17-23, is unique in addressing 'women who prophesy', and has several surprising elements.[686]

Are these women 'prophetesses'?

Some commentators do not consider that Ezek 13:17-23 actually deals with female prophetic figures, particularly because the title 'prophetess' is not used. Only a few modern commentators follow an older view, that the basic problem is that of women attempting to act prophetically when they are not of the appointed gender to do so, like Hummel who wonders whether Yahweh deemed it 'even worse that women

---

[686] Zimmerli, *Ezekiel 1*, 296, comments, 'Whereas the two-part oracle against the prophets has been strongly influenced by the older prophetic preaching in its content and even to the text of certain formulations, here the striking thing is the novelty of the content and the formulations.'

should pretend to hold the sacred office.'[687] The absence of a label of 'false prophetess' is of no account, since there is nowhere in the MT that any prophet, male or female, is actually labelled as a 'false prophet.'[688] In addition to the fact that Ezekiel does not argue this way, the use of the honorific title 'prophetess' for Miriam in Ex 15:20, Deborah in Judg 4:4 and Huldah in II Kings 22:14, together with the example of Noadiah in Neh 6:14, who is judged negatively because of her stand against Yahweh's plans, show that gender *per se* cannot be the basis of the evaluation.[689]

Commentators commonly call the women 'witches' or 'sorceresses' on account of the practices described in vv.17-21, even though their exact nature is far from clear.[690] However, if a label that properly lies outside the realm of mainstream Yahwism is given, it is then all too easy to regard the women as 'outsiders' in terms of religious practice. This can lead either to blindness in recognising the importance of their threat within Yahwism, or to despising and dismissing their activities as being much worse than those of the men. It is the absence of such a label that is significant here.

---

687 Hummel, *Ezekiel I-20*, 374. Similar views in older commentators include John Skinner, *The Book of Ezekiel*, Expositor's Bible (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1910), 122, who calls the practices of the women 'a still more degraded type of prophecy' and describes these women as private fortune-tellers who were engaging in magical trafficking with dark powers for gain. Calvin, *Ezekiel II*, 27, writes, 'Satan's lies were not spread among the people so much by men as by women.' Hengstenberg, *Ezekiel*, 116, associates such women with 'accommodation theology' which is 'effeminate' because it blends heathenism with the church instead of meeting it with manful resistance.

688 Siegman, *False Prophets*, 1, says that Hananiah is only described as a 'false prophet' in the LXX version of Jer 28:1(=Jer 35:1 LXX).

689 Blenkinsopp, *Ezekiel*, 70, finds that in the ANE prophecy appears to have been an equal opportunity profession, for both men and women.

690 Cooke, *Ezekiel*, 144, calls the women witches or sorceresses and considers the title prophetess 'too good' for them. Greenberg, *Ezekiel 1*, 241,244, calls the women 'fortune-tellers'. Brownlee, *Ezekiel 1*, 194, regards their role as magical, not oracular, so questions whether they should be conceived of as prophesying at all, despite the fact that the text does. Block, *Ezekiel 1*, 412, calls them 'witches' because he regards these women as frauds, in contrast to other female prophets both inside and outside Israel. However, the text makes it clear that the male prophets in this context are also frauds.

Some are prepared to accept that these women are acting in the name of Yahweh as Israelite 'holy women,' but that they are profaning the name of Yahweh among his own people by using the methods of witchcraft.[691] Others call these women 'prophetesses' but may qualify the title by describing their activities in terms of non-Yahwistic practices.[692] The significant point here is that the boundary between acceptable Yahwistic prophetic practices and practices adopted from other sources seems to have become blurred within the society.[693] This is one of many examples in the book of Ezekiel where the prophet considers that the boundary between the holy and the common is not firm enough.

Some think the avoidance of the term 'prophetess' indicates a 'private' rather than a 'public' ministry, where these women deal with individuals rather than the nation as a whole.[694] The examples of the women's activities do suggest that they may often operate within the personal or 'private' sphere. However, caution must be exercised in making a judgment based on a category that is not deemed significant within the text. Even if we surmise that these women might be regarded by some others as

---

691 e.g. Bruce Vawter and Leslie J. Hoppe, *A New Heart: A Commentary on the Book of Ezekiel* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 84–85.

692 e.g. Taylor, *Ezekiel*, 123–25, Hummel, *Ezekiel I-20*, 374–77, Alfred Bertholet, *Das Buch Hesekiel* (Freiburg: Mohr Siebeck, 1897), 71, Fohrer, *Ezechiel*, 73–75, and Karl-Friedrich Pohlmann, *Das Buch des Propheten Hesekiel (Ezechiel) Kapitel 1–19* (Göttingen: Vandenhoek & Ruprecht, 1996), 192–94, all call the women prophetesses, but think Ezekiel's language suggests that they dealt in magical powers, and were more like witches or sorceresses, like the witch of Endor (1 Sam 28:7). Lind, *Ezekiel*, 110–13, is one of the few commentators who is prepared to call the women 'female prophets' and does so on the basis of careful parallelism with the male prophets. Margaret S. Odell, *Ezekiel*, SHBC (Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys, 2005), 150, calls the women prophetesses, even though she acknowledges that Ezekiel avoids using that term, because they are said to 'prophesy' and their punishment implies that they saw visions and practised divination as did the male prophets (13:23 cf 13:6,7).

693 Joyce, *Ezekiel*, 121, writes, 'It should not be assumed that the practices referred to here were outside the range of Yahwism, which was no doubt a good deal broader than the received Hebrew Bible would suggest.'

694 Graham I. Davies, "Archaeological Commentary," 110. Leslie Allen, *Ezekiel 1*, 204, writes, 'Their concern was not to interpret political issues but to resolve the personal problems of their clients, like the prophets of Mic 3:5.' Eichrodt, *Ezekiel*, 168–69, contrasts them with Miriam, Deborah, Huldah and Noadiah, who 'like male prophets, dealt with matters concerning the people as a whole'.

being in a secondary or unofficial position within the society, Ezekiel's close comparison with the male prophets, emphasised especially in vv.22-23, suggests that he does not. In fact, he suggests that these women have a very significant impact, to the extent that the Lord needs to save his people from their hand (v.23)!

While these women are never actually addressed as 'prophetesses' within the text, they are denoted as a group of women who 'prophesy'. The participle that is used for 'prophesying', from נבא, does move from niphal for the men (vv. 2,16) to hithpael for the women (v.17), while Ezekiel is commanded to prophesy, in each case against them, using the niphal form (vv. 2,17). Some think that this transition is significant. Cooke thinks it gives 'a touch of contempt', Hummel wants to translate it as 'playing the prophet' and Greenberg suggests that the niphal form 'tends to be used for verbal prophesying' while the hithpael 'for the external behaviour peculiar to prophecy (e.g. signs of possession)' while still maintaining that both forms mean 'act as a prophet'.[695] However, other scholars find no significant semantic distinction. Wilson writes that 'the niphal and hithpael forms of this verb often appear together and seem to carry the same meaning (e.g. 1 Sam 10:5,6,10,11,13; Jer 26:20, where the hithpael is used for a true prophet of the Lord, and Ezek 37:9-10, where Ezekiel uses both the niphal and hithpael forms for his own prophesying).'[696] Siegman takes the forms used here to be equivalents, meaning either 'to speak or act as a prophet' or 'to conduct oneself as a prophet'.[697] Jeremias finds that the distinction is not rigid; the niphal is the more usual choice for prophetic discourse,

---

[695] Cooke, *Ezekiel*, 145, Hummel, *Ezekiel I-20*, 352 and Greenberg, *Ezekiel 1*, 239.

[696] Robert R. Wilson, "Prophecy and Ecstasy: A Reexamination," *JBL* 98 (1979): 329. He summarises the common reconstruction of semantic development in this way: the hithpael forms, dominant in the early texts, seem to have had links to ecstasy, although this could also be true of the few, early niphal forms. In time, the niphal came to be associated with intelligible prophetic speech whereas the hithpael continued to be used for prophetic activity. Later, in the period of classical prophecy, the meanings of the two merged until both forms were used interchangeably.

[697] Siegman, *False Prophets*, 1.

but in the later period the hithpael can also describe discourse.[698] If a subtle distinction is intended here, which is by no means certain, it may simply reflect the differences brought out in the descriptions of the dominant prophetic practices of each gender group. However, the evidence cannot support a significant difference on the basis of the verb form alone.

It must be acknowledged that in vv.17-21 there is a focus on certain objects, and on more visual and kinesthetic forms of behaviour than the 'words' (v.6) that are critiqued of the men. However, the words of the men are heavily dependent on vision reports and divinatory activities, and both men and women prophesy 'out of their own imaginations' (v.17, cf. v.2). In vv.22-23 the focus changes, and the women are described and judged in terms that closely resemble those used for the men (e.g. v.23, cf. v.9). The clear parallelism of vv.1-16 and vv.17-23 suggests that 1) the whole of vv.17-23 can and should be read as relating to the women's 'prophesying'; 2) Ezekiel addresses these women as female counterparts to the deviant male prophets, and 3) the essential nature and gravity of the sin in both the men and the women is similar, even though the particularities of the deviations can be described differently for each gender.[699]

Set your face against the daughters of your people: Ezek 13:17

Ezekiel is called to 'set his face against' these women (v.17) as well as to 'prophesy against' them, whereas for the men he is simply called to 'prophesy against' them (v.2). The expression is unique to Ezekiel among the prophetic books, and resonates

---

698 Jeremias, J. " נָבִיא Nabi' Prophet." *Theologisches Handwörtesbuch zum Alten Testament Vol. 2.* edited by Ernst Jenni and Claus Westermann. Gütersloh: Chr. Kaiser, 1975, Fourth edition 1993:7-26.

699 Margaret S. Odell, *Ezekiel*, 150, thinks it is significant that their activity is described in prophetic terms, related to that of the men, and is nowhere within this passage characterised as witchcraft; she concludes that the women must have been giving some kind of Yahwistic message in a prophetic idiom. Lind, *Ezekiel*, 110–13, says that 'the careful parallelism of these two critiques suggests the seriousness with which Ezekiel took the women prophets, taking the women prophets as seriously as he does the men, regarding them as their equals.' He acknowledges their powerful effect upon the social order, an effect which Jeremiah credits to prophets generally (Ezek 13:22; cf. Jer 23:14).

with the idea of Ezekiel's face and forehead being made hard, like the hardest stone (3:8,9). This command to 'set your face against' (שִׂים פָּנֶיךָ with either אֶל or עַל) occurs nine times throughout the book (seven are to places: the mountains, in Ezek 6:2; the south, in Ezek 21:2[20:46]; Jerusalem, in Ezek 21:7[21:2]; Ammon, in Ezek 25:2; Sidon, in Ezek 28:21; Mount Seir, in Ezek 35:2; Gog, in Ezek 38:2 and two to people: Pharaoh in Ezek 29:2 and the prophetic women here). The command always leads to devastating judgment which often includes 'cutting off' and is always followed within the thought unit by the formula 'then you shall know that I am Yahweh' or a variation on it.[700] Similar expressions occur elsewhere in the book: 'set your face toward the siege of Jerusalem and prophesy against it', with תָּכִין and אל in Ezek 4:7; 'I will set my face against them' (literally, 'against the man'), Yahweh against those who set up idols in their hearts, using the verb נתן and the preposition ב in14:8; and 'I will set my face against them', Yahweh against the inhabitants of Jerusalem, twice using נתן and ב the first time, בְּשׂוּמִי and ב the second time in 15:7.[701] These are also followed by destructive judgment. All except 4:7, where the face is Yahweh's rather than Ezekiel's, are also followed by the same formula. A close parallel exists with two passages in the Holiness Code: in Lev 17:10 Yahweh says, 'I will set my face against that person who eats blood' and in Lev 20:3,5, 'I myself will set my face against them' (those who give their offspring to Molech). In these verses נתן and ב are used with the threat of a 'cutting off' action. A similar phrase is used of Balaam, who 'set his face toward the wilderness' וַיָּשֶׁת אֶל־הַמִּדְבָּר פָּנָיו in Num 24:1. Elisha 'fixed his gaze and stared at (Hazael, until he was ashamed)' וַיַּעֲמֵד אֶת־פָּנָיו וַיָּשֶׂם in 2 Kings 8:11, but the

---

700 The main variations are that Ezek 21:2 [20:46] is followed by 21:4 [20:48], 'all flesh shall see that I Yahweh have kindled it' and 21:7 [21:2] by 21:10 [21:5], 'all flesh shall know that I Yahweh have drawn my sword.'

701 Joyce, *Ezekiel*, 85.

significance there is not the same.[702]

The expression 'prophesy against' is often used in conjunction with 'set your face against' to stand before a sentence of judgment, as in 13:17, but is used on its own in 11:4; 13:2; 34:2 and 39:1 with similar result. In each case, it is also followed by a version of the formula 'then you shall know' within the same thought unit. However, in 36:1 and 37:4,9 the result is life rather than destruction and can be translated as 'prophesy to'.

It is difficult to determine whether the addition of the expression 'set your face against' for the section on the women adds weight or significance to the command to 'prophesy against them'. Both sections reinforce the sense of Yahweh being 'against' the women and their activities (vv.8 אל, v.9 אל, v.15 ב for the men and v.2 אֶל for the women). Although the women have the additional weight of 'set your face against', the men have the additional weight of Yahweh's 'hand' being against them (v.9) and the repetition of Yahweh being 'against'. The strongly visual nature of the malpractices of the women may particularly suit the expression used for the women. More than any other prophet, Ezekiel speaks out against one's eyes being enticed by idols (e.g. 6:9). When he looks at the objects used by the women, he must leave no room for enticement, but he must keep his face (and his eyes) rigidly set against them.

---

[702] Carley, *Ezekiel Among the Prophets*, 40–41. He also cites Ezek 7:22, 'I will avert my face from them, so that they may profane my treasured place', as another text where a facial turning is significant, and comments that Yahweh is also said to have set his face toward people as a gesture of both divine favour and disfavour. Another use of the expression 'set their faces' toward something or someone is found in the Ugaritic texts of Ras Shamra, but here the meaning seems to be no more than facing a person to give a message or looking towards a destination without any suggestion of ominous judgment. The texts are found in G.R. Driver, *Canaanite Myths and Legends from Ugarit*, Old Testament Studies, III (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1956), 37,89,97,113, in Keret 1 vi 37; Baal V iva 37; Baal II iv 20; Baal III iv 7.

These women are called 'daughters of your people' (v.17), a phrase that parallels 'prophets of Israel' used for the men (v.2). Once again they are denied any recognition of being 'prophets of' or 'daughters of' Yahweh. The phrase 'sons of your people' is used in Ezek 3:11 (literal translation), where it simply means 'exiles'.[703] The terminology suggests distance between Yahweh and the prophetic women as well as between Yahweh and the people. This is quickly followed by Yahweh identifying himself several times with those he calls 'my people', who are being mistreated by these women. This identification occurs earlier in the chapter in vv.9 and 10, but is reiterated more frequently and more passionately in this section, in vv.18,19a,19b,21,23. Here the people are depicted as victims who need to be released from the illegitimate control of the women and restored to the rightful ownership of Yahweh. The outcome of this explicit clash of powers between Yahweh and the women is summarised in the refrain 'then you will know that I am Yahweh' (vv.21,23).

Strange practices: Ezek 13:18-21

One of the difficulties in determining the exact nature of the practices of these women is that some unusual vocabulary is used. In 13:18 they sew כְּסָתוֹת on the joints (אַצִּילֵי) of their hands, which I take to mean 'wrists' although some think it refers to elbows.[704] Because these כְּסָתוֹת are manufactured by sewing, and can be torn off (vv.20-21) they may be made of textile.[705] The usual translation is 'bands' or 'magic bands', but a few think that the evidence from the LXX (προσκεφάλαια) and

---

703 Block, *Ezekiel 1*, 412.

704 Cooke, *Ezekiel*, 145, Zimmerli, *Ezekiel 1*, 297, and the NRSV take it as 'wrists' but Greenberg, *Ezekiel 1*, 239, Taylor, *Ezekiel*, 124, and Brownlee, *Ezekiel 1*, 195, allow that it can mean either wrists or elbows because although יָד generally means 'hand' it can sometimes refer to the arm.

705 Marjo C.A. Korpel, "Avian Spirits in Ugarit and in Ezekiel 13," in *Ugarit, Religion and Culture*, ed. N. Wyatt, W.G.E. Watson, and J.B. Lloyd (Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 1996), 102.

tannaitic Hebrew suggests 'cushions'.[706] Archaeological evidence of unearthed figures with wires twisted around their arms or ankles suggests magical notions of 'binding' and 'loosing,'with the possibility of binding the enquirers' hands for rituals dependent on sympathetic magic.[707] However, the exact nature of the practice is unknown.[708] Most commentators assume that it derives from, or at least uses, some forms of borrowed magical practices from other nations. If so, Ezekiel is speaking against the adoption of entirely non-Yahwistic practices. In view of the frequent mention of idolatry in the book, including the presence of the 'image of jealousy' in the temple precincts (8:3) and the women weeping for Tammuz (8:14), this is possible.[709] However, it is by no means certain.

These women are also making הַמִּסְפָּחוֹת which are placed on heads; these are just as obscure in meaning. Both כְּסָתוֹת and הַמִּסְפָּחוֹת only occur within this chapter. The latter word is mostly translated as 'veils' even though no adequate explanation has

---

[706] Block, *Ezekiel 1*, 413, like others, associates this word with the Akkadian verb *kasû*, 'to bind' in the magical sense. Suggestions for these objects include band, charm or amulet, from New (Late) Hebrew כסת usually = cushion, bolster, pillow (Francis Brown, S.R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs, *The New Brown-Driver-Briggs-Gesenius Hebrew and English Lexicon* [Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1979], 492); cushions attached to the arms of the women (Greenberg, *Ezekiel 1*, 239); black patches on all elbows (Levey, *Targum of Ezekiel*, 45).

[707] Cooke, *Ezekiel*, 145–46,and Graham I. Davies, "Archaeological Commentary," 121–22. Block, *Ezekiel 1*, 417, says that the reason that Ezekiel refuses to identify these women as prophets is that 'they act like pagan prophets ... attempting to manipulate Yahweh as they exploit other divinities, but their methods and aims are sinister.'

[708] Pohlmann, *Hezekiel I*, 192–93, concludes that the technicalities, the sense and the purpose of the objects used by the women can only be the subject of speculation. Zimmerli, *Ezekiel 1*, 297, acknowledges that no relevant explanation of Ezekiel's statements in this passage have yet been advanced. Eichrodt, *Ezekiel*, 169–70, thinks that, although the details are not clear, these objects point to magic arts from Babylonia, especially recalling the evidence found in libraries of Babylonian incantations. He notes that the rhyming prayers in the Jewish ritual can also be seen to have magical powers in serving as protection against evil spirits.

[709] Yehezkel Kaufmann, *The Religion of Israel: From Its Beginnings to the Babylonian Exile*, trans. Moshe Greenberg (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1961), 87, says that 'we know of no magician caste in Israel; the Bible fails to prohibit magic in the name of Yahweh.' He concludes that 'in Israel magic was not present in the form we know it elsewhere. What magic was practised was under foreign influence ... not an expression of the national religion.'

been offered for their use.[710] There are, however, two main alternative translations that are worthy of consideration:

1) The word refers to 'nets' through a metathesis of סחף to ספח. Saggs thinks that Ezekiel is addressing a popular notion concerning external souls (cf. the imagery used in Ps 91:3; 124:7; 140:6[5]; 142:4[3]) and suggests that women are using nets to take away 'vigour' from their victims, analogous to the manner of Babylonian witches.[711] In similar vein, Korpel thinks the women are using nets or scarves, as in some other magical practices, to hunt for souls in order to turn them into evil-spirit fledglings which they can catch and manipulate.[712] However, it is also possible that it is Ezekiel himself who likens their activities to those of bird-catchers, calling their paraphernalia snares and nets, and making a mockery of them by calling them 'soul catchers' just as he makes a mockery of the men by calling them 'jackals among the ruins'.[713]

2) The word refers to attachments to the head, instead of to loosely-laid veils; these attachments are related to the bands on the wrists, like amulets or phylacteries.[714] Origen takes this approach and translates both words as phylacteries

---

[710] Levey, *Targum of Ezekiel*, 45, renders it as 'embroidered shawls'. The NRSV, NAB, REB, NASB, NIV and JB have 'veils'. The LXX and Syriac have 'mantle'. Bertholet, *Hesekiel*, 71–72, draws comparisons with the earrings which Aaron used to make the golden calf in Ex 32:2, the *ephod* which held special holy powers to give oracles when worn by priests and was required to be removed 'so that they may not communicate holiness to the people with their vestments' (Ezek 44:19), the *tephillim* which were tied to one's left hand for prayer, and the *tallith* which was later used to cover one's head for prayer (cf. Matt 23:5).

[711] H.W.F. Saggs, "'External Souls' in the Old Testament," *Journal of Semitic Studies* 19 (1974): 5–7. Block, *Ezekiel 1*, 415, also thinks that Ezekiel is using language that represents rhetorical accommodation to the thought patterns of those he is addressing.

[712] Korpel, "Avian Spirits," 103–05.

[713] In making this suggestion I am influenced by comments made by Bertholet, *Hesekiel*, 72.

[714] Block, *Ezekiel 1*, 414, associates this word with the Hebrew root ספח which means 'to join, attach' rather than to the Akkadian *sapahu* which means 'to loosen, to scatter', the association favoured by those who translate it as 'veil'.

(φυλακτήρια).[715] Orel, a more recent advocate of this reading, suggests that the women are binding them onto the heads and arms of men.[716] We do know, from talmudic sources, that the possibility of confusing phylacteries and amulets is real, since their external appearance is similar (capsules containing inscriptions attached to the body). It is very possible that the educational purpose of these phylacteries has become distorted, so that they are treated as amulets to protect the wearer (perhaps containing magical inscriptions together with or instead of ihu;hlklhbiblical ones, or treating biblical passages in a magical way).[717]

The role of the barley and bread is also unclear; does it play a part in the religious techniques that these women use or is it payment for services? One suggestion is that the barley and breadcrumbs, through their association with sacred offerings, are used for divination.[718] Another is that grain and bread can be used to ward off hungry demons. This idea comes from Mesopotamian childbirth incantations, where tying and binding rituals were used to stop profuse vaginal bleeding during pregnancy or to prevent sorcery from causing miscarriages.[719] However, the least speculative interpretation is to see the barley and bread as payment (cf. 1 Sam 9:7, where a similar payment of bread is made to a man of God); this makes sense of the reference to the women maintaining their own lives (v.18).[720] If these items represent payment, then the women's behaviour with enquirers contrasts with Ezekiel's: in 14:1-11 he does not provide a prophetic service simply to suit clients.

---

715 Fridericus Field, ed., *Origenis Hexaplorum, Vol. 2* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1875), 800.

716 Vladimir Orel, "Textological Notes," *ZAW* 109 (1997): 408–13.

717 Jeffrey H. Tigay, *The JPS Torah Commentary: Deuteronomy* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1996), 441–42.

718 Pohlmann, *Hezekiel I*, 193, cites Num 5:15 and Lev 2:5 for Yahwistic worship. Also Greenberg, *Ezekiel 1*, 240.

719 Nancy R. Bowen, "The Daughters of Your People: Female Prophets in Ezekiel 13:17–23," *JBL* 118 (1999): 424.

720 Zimmerli, *Ezekiel 1*, 297, and Joyce, *Ezekiel*, 121.

Since these women are practising openly within Israelite religion, and are said to be 'prophesying', it is possible to give a reading that alludes to recognised practices but justifies Ezekiel's indictment. The fact that they are said to profane Yahweh (v.19) suggests that they operate in his name and use enough elements of mainstream Yahwistic practices to deceive many people. If they are prophesying for payment in conjunction with the tying on of phylacteries, especially if the manner of the binding has picked up magical overtones, the significance of the condemnation lies in the distortion of motive (for personal gain), the distortion of symbolism (phylacteries are not used to remind people to place Yahweh's commands on their hearts), and the distortion of message (telling lies that lead to the death of those who should live) and to maintenance of life for those who should die, v.19). If at least some of the outward forms of their activities (phylacteries, words, and even payment) come from within mainstream Yahwistic practices, the condemnation is more startling than if the practices are obviously borrowed from elsewhere, and the parallels with the specific deviations of the male prophets become more apparent.

Irrespective of the exact nature of the practices of these women, the issue cannot be that they use visible means, otherwise Ezekiel would stand condemned. After all, he builds a model of Jerusalem under siege (Ezek 4:1-3); lies on each side for particular periods (4:4-8); bakes a specific amount of bread to eat at fixed times (4:9-17); cuts and divides his hair (5:1-17); digs through a wall with baggage (12:1-11); eats and drinks with trembling (12:17-20); cries and wails, striking his thigh (21:11-12); joining two sticks together (37:15-28).[721] And there is a wealth of other OT examples of genuine prophets using visible means.

---

[721] Georg Fohrer, "Prophetie und Magie," *ZAW* 78 (1966): 30–33. In addition there are signs of a lack of expected visible or audible means: no public mourning for his wife (24:15-24) and being made 'dumb' and then speaking again (3:22-27; 24:25-27; 33:21-22).

Perhaps rather surprisingly, Ezekiel gives no explicit statement concerning the origin of the particular objects he names, nor any non-Yahwistic association, so we cannot make any definite conclusions about their source or associations. However, the use being made of them is unacceptable, just as the use made of words by the men is unacceptable. For both men and women, the problem does not simply lie in the means used, but in the purpose and in the message proclaimed through them. In fact, the problem lies within the people who are prophesying. They are misusing their intended role to lead people into truth (vv.10, 22). While the women may well be using these objects in their divination (condemned in v.23) the men are also accused of divination and no objects are mentioned in connection with them.

Issues of power: Ezek 13:18-21

What we do know is that the issue with the women concerns power. Within these few verses there is an unusual and explicit build-up of power vocabulary: the women 'hunt' the people (vv.18, 20a and 20b); Yahweh will 'let go free' and 'save' the people (vv.20, 23) from their hands, so that the people will no longer be 'prey' in their hands (v.21). This idea of hunting, rather like the men (hunting) like 'jackals among ruins' (v.4) suggests that their own interests are being served at the expense of something or someone else (they use 'people', the men use the 'ruins'). This vocabulary suggests a strength of power or control that is like witchcraft, irrespective of whether or not the outward rites conform to those of witchcraft. The objects which the women use may appear to hold divine power, but they are completely devoid of it, just as whatever the men claim to see is really 'nothing' (v.3). A true prophet places both the prophet and the people under the power of Yahweh, but here power is being exercised from another source, from the women themselves, since the people need to be saved 'from their hands' (v.21).

Just as the wall that was whitewashed by the men will be broken down, the objects used by the women will be torn off (vv.20, 21).[722] The false support and security which the people have relied on will be exposed and the people will be freed from their false dependence (vv.14, 23b). When their power is broken they will be forced to recognise the superior power of Yahweh (vv. 21,23). In a subtle parallel with the Exodus story (Ex 10:2) these people who claim to be operating in the power of Yahweh are, in fact, like Pharaoh, whose hardness of heart causes him to keep Yahweh's people in bondage and who only knows the power of Yahweh when it is pitted against him.

Life and death matters: Ezek 13:19,22

Both Ezekiel and these women are dealing with life and death matters. As watchman, Ezekiel is accountable for the blood of the wicked if he fails to warn them of coming judgment (Ezek 3:20; 33:8). These women are also held accountable, which suggests that they do, indeed, hold prophetic responsibility. They are judged not only for failing to warn the wicked, but for actually encouraging them not to turn from their evil ways (v.22) (cf. Jer 23:14). Both men and women tell lies (vv.10,22).[723] They give messages that are purportedly divine but which are, in fact, directly contrary to Yahweh's mind. Like the men proclaiming 'Peace!'(v.10) they pander to what people want to hear (v.22) and will probably pay for, but they jeopardise the future for all of them. It is the righteous, instead of the wicked, who are disheartened (v.22). In fact, there is no expression of interest in the morality of the people, unlike Ezekiel, and there is an absence of awareness of coming judgment (cf. the men, v.5). Death and life are apparently in their hands, but have become confused.

---

[722] Zimmerli, *Ezekiel 1*, 297, comments that a 'bold anthropomorphism' is used here. Cooke, *Ezekiel*, 147, suggests that 'your arms' could be a copyist's error for 'their arms'. As it stands, v.20 suggests that the bands are on the arms of the women, rather than on those of their clients.

[723] Joyce, *Ezekiel*, 122. Note that in v.22 this is the only occurrence of the word שֶׁקֶר for lie, a word that is used 37 times in the book of Jeremiah.

Judgment against the women: Ezek 13:23

Yet the judgment against the women does not appear to be as severe as that against the men. Although their power over the people is broken, and they 'shall no longer see false visions or practise divination' (v.23), they will apparently not suffer more than the loss of their influence and livelihood.[724] There is no equivalent to the threefold threat against the men in v.9. Perhaps this is because their knowledge of the ways of Yahweh is less than that of the men, so they are less culpable. Their different losses relate to their respective gains from prophetic activity (community standing for the men, and food for the women). However, the women are not regarded as entirely ignorant; they are charged with knowing dishonesty and pretending to offer more than they actually have.

The point that the parallel structure makes is that the different kinds of deviations, characteristic of men and women, all evoke anger from Yahweh. Whether the abuse of prophecy involves conventional forms, such as words, dreams and phylacteries, or whether it involves borrowed forms and materials from surrounding nations, such as divination and magic, the fundamental deviation is that it comes 'out of their own hearts' (vv.1,17) rather than from Yahweh. Any who engage in prophetic activities, whether men or women, in 'public' or 'private' spheres, are all held accountable on the same basis as Ezekiel.

5.3 COMPARISON OF DEVIANT PROPHETS MATERIAL IN JEREMIAH 23 AND EZEKIEL 13

Both Jeremiah and Ezekiel have strong words against those who purport to prophesy from Yahweh but do not. It is not just that these people prophesy from their own

---

[724] Taylor, *Ezekiel*, 123–25.

hearts (Jer 23:16; Ezek 13:2,17), or even that they do not speak words heard from Yahweh (Jer 23:16,18; Ezek 13:7), or that they have not been sent by Yahweh (Jer 23:21; Ezek 13:6), all fundamental requirements for a prophet, but that their prophesying also spreads evil and has a widespread detrimental effect (Jer 23:14,15; Ezek 13:22). Jeremiah is emotionally broken as he considers Yahweh's 'holy words' in the face of this abuse (Jer 23:9), while Ezekiel stands, with Yahweh, resolutely and repeatedly 'against' these abhorrent and illegitimate practices (Ezek 13:2,8,9,17,20). While much is in common, there are, again, significant differences, most obviously in Ezekiel's specific inclusion of women who prophesy. Further comparison can be made of what each prophet stands against, to reveal more about what they each understand of their own ministries.

The gender of the prophet

Although people of both genders are described in prophetic roles elsewhere in the Scriptures, Jeremiah only speaks of men as prophets in Jer 23, and, indeed, throughout the book. However, it is possible that he has no need to speak explicitly of women if their prophetic role and/or their deviant behaviours are essentially the same as for the men. Ezekiel's statements in ch.13 about women who are prophesying are particularly significant because he is the only prophet in the OT to directly address women who are said to be engaging in deviant prophetic practices. He is also the only prophet to identify gender differences in deviant prophetic practices. Jeremiah does not address women as an independent group directly at all, but does refer to women engaging in practices that quite obviously lie outside the boundaries of mainstream Yahwism (Jer 7:18 and 44:15-30, comparable with Ezek 8:14); however, these are not practices that could be called 'prophesying'. In Ezekiel's context, where there are marked differences in the prophetic expressions of the men and the women, separate treatment is required. The men seem to have a more public role and the women more individual and private; the men's abuses

centre around verbal messages, the women's around the use of objects. However, the parallel structure of his statements about men and women, and the respective judgments, suggests that neither gender is barred from genuine prophecy, and both genders are held fully accountable for any deviancy.

The heart

Both Jeremiah and Ezekiel agree that one's own heart, mind or imagination (לב) cannot be the source of true prophetic messages or activity (Jer 23:16; Ezek 13:2,17). In fact, Jeremiah further declares the heart of the deviant prophets to be deceitful (Jer 23:26).[725] Jeremiah's own heart is shown to be tender and able to be affected by Yahweh's 'holy words', as well as by Yahweh's grief over sin and suffering (Jer 23:9f).[726] The deviant prophets give no evidence of being moved by such things; instead, they confirm people in stubborn-heartedness (23:17).

Ezekiel's description of the deviant prophets suggests that the hearts which are the source of their deviant prophecy are arrogant.[727] They readily speak without divine mandate and prey on the misfortunes of others (Ezek 13:4-6, 18-21). Perhaps they are unable to hear Yahweh because he will not speak, except in judgment, to those who have idols within their hearts (Ezek 14:3-7). In addition, the deviant women have no compunction about disheartening those whose hearts are righteous (13:22).

---

[725] Further references in Jeremiah for the deceitfulness of the human heart are 14:14; 17:9. The human heart can also be uncircumcised (4:4; 9:25[26]), evil (3:17; 7:24; 11:8), stubborn (7:24; 16:12; 23:17) and proud (48:29; 49:16). It is Yahweh who searches it and knows it (11:20; 12:3; 17:10). It is necessary to turn to Yahweh with one's 'whole heart' (3:10; 24:7; 29:13), to have one's heart washed from evil (4:14), made able to 'know Yahweh' (24:7), to fear him (32:40) and to have his law written on it (31:33).

[726] In Jer 20:9, the true prophet has the word of Yahweh burning within his heart. Moberly, *Prophecy and Discernment*, 131–2, gives a relevant parallel with Jesus' teaching: 'Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God' (Matt 5:8). For Moberly, this means that 'moral integrity and a consistent focus upon God, a kind of recovery of fundamental simplicity in the midst of complexity', is of crucial importance in discerning or seeing God.

[727] cf. Ezek 28:2,5,6,17; 31:10. Hearts are often said to be stubborn, hard and stony (2:4;11:19;36:26); they can go after idols, detestable things or gain (11:21; 20:16; 33:31). Foreigners are said to be uncircumcised in heart as well as flesh (44:7,9).

Ezekiel also associates the human spirit (רוח) with the human heart as an inadequate source of prophecy (Ezek 13:3).[728] His use of the expression 'follow their own spirit' suggests that these deviant prophets are engaging in a form of self-idolatry, because 'follow after' (הלך אחר) is usually used of false gods.[729]

The divine council

Although both prophets emphasise that the source of all genuine prophecy must be Yahweh, Jeremiah adds the concept of the need for a prophet to stand in the divine council (סוד) to see and to hear Yahweh's word (Jer 23:18,21). In view of Jeremiah's call account being given as a private dialogue between two persons: Yahweh and Jeremiah, the introduction of a divine council here is somewhat surprising. Ezekiel, on the other hand, gives no indication of a heavenly gathering in ch.13, yet his call vision includes a plurality of beings.

Prophetic visions and dreams

Jeremiah's mention of 'seeing' (ראה) the word, as well as hearing it, is unexpected (Jer 23:18), but could imply that the prophet's experience of the divine word is more profound than one sense might suggest. It also covers claims of divine visions. For Jeremiah, it is not only words but visions that should come from the 'mouth' of Yahweh (Jer 23:16).[730] For him, then, the divine word can be experienced through verbal or visual forms, even though the prophet is characteristically associated with the 'word' in this book (Jer 18:18). He stands firmly against the deceitful dreams of these deviant prophets (their חלמות are שֶׁקֶר, Jer 23:32) and appears somewhat more hesitant than Ezekiel to accept visionary material as genuine. Jeremiah returns to his

---

[728] Both need to be cleansed and renewed (Ezek 11:19; 18:31 and 36:26-27).

[729] Hummel, *Ezekiel 1-20*, 353, observes that although it is commonly said that people 'follow' or 'go after' false gods (e.g. Deut 4:3; 13:3[2]), it is only here that someone is said to 'follow after spirit'.

[730] Jeremiah himself has had Yahweh's words put into his mouth (1:9; 5:14) and becomes as Yahweh's mouth (15:19).

central theme: the dominance of the 'word' of Yahweh, as he contrasts those deceitful dreams with the 'word', as worthless straw is to valuable wheat (Jer 23:28).

In Ezekiel a link between word and vision is implied in the charge that the deviant prophets say, 'Hear the word of the Lord... and have seen nothing' (Ezek 13:2-3). Visions and the word of Yahweh are treated in parallel, and as if interchangeable, in Ezek 12:21-28. Regarding Ezekiel's own significant visionary experiences, Robson comments, 'the divine word in visions is not to be restricted simply to divine speech *within* visions, but encompasses the visions themselves.'[731] In a book structured around key visions, albeit with frequent references to 'the word of Yahweh', and where the prophet is said to be associated with the vision (Ezek 7:26), there is no indication that Ezekiel is critical of the visionary medium *per se* when he distances himself from the 'visions of falsehood' (חֲזוּ שָׁוְא) of the deviant prophets (Ezek 13:6, cf.vv. 7,8,9,23).

Jeremiah's preferred descriptor of inauthentic visions/dreams is שֶׁקֶר, or deceitful, fraudulent, deceptive or manipulative (Jer 23:32), since they purport to bear truth but do not; they are untrustworthy (cf. Jer 7:4). This term suggests a distortion of relationship between prophet and people, and, ultimately, of relationship between Yahweh and prophet. For Ezekiel, the key concern is, rather, that the visions are שָׁוְא, or empty.[732] This contrasts with Ezekiel's own experience of visions being 'of God' (Ezek 1:1) and so filled with divine presence. Because these false words lack Yahweh's word (Ezek 13:7) they lack Yahweh's power and will not be fulfilled (Ezek 13:6); they are likened to ineffectual 'whitewash' (Ezek 13:10). Also, the people will be discouraged from placing their confidence in Yahweh's words (e.g. Ezek 12:24-28; 13:6). Whereas Jeremiah is more concerned about a false message

---

731 Robson, *Word and Spirit*, 39.

732 Jeremiah never describes them in this way, but does use שׁוא four times to mean 'in vain' and once in 18:15 to refer to the delusory idols that the people worship.

that distorts the reality and urgency of the coming threat and the subsequent need to submit to Babylon (e.g. Jer 23:17; 27:14-16), Ezekiel is more concerned about the prophets giving a message that will necessarily lack fulfillment.

Divination

Ezekiel makes it clear that 'lying divination' (קֶסֶם כָּזָב) is unacceptable, and associates it with false visions (Ezek 13:6,7,9,23). Its absence in Jer 23 does not indicate approval from Jeremiah, since it is condemned elsewhere in that book.[733] Ezekiel also warns against divination in other passages.[734] Unlike the visions, where the falsity of the content rather than the medium of vision is the issue, divination is never accepted by either prophet. Ezekiel's addition of כָּזָב, which is never used in Jeremiah, brings a further condemnation of the deceitfulness of the practice. Since כָּזָב is also used of the lies told by the deviant women prophets to the people, lies that the people listen to (Ezek 13:19) and the lying visions (Ezek 13:8), Ezekiel implies that divination is part of a broader package of deceitful behaviour. However, Ezekiel's specific association of the deviant prophets with 'lying divination' several times in Ezek 13 and Jeremiah's omission of it in Jer 23 may suggest that the divinatory practices of prophets purporting to be Yahwistic are more blatant and more prevalent in Ezekiel's context.[735]

Objects associated with prophecy

Jeremiah makes no mention of any objects associated with prophecy, whereas Ezekiel is one of the few writing prophets who names any objects used by people prophesying in the name of Yahweh. These are different objects from those named

---

[733] Divination is spoken against in Jer 14:14, 27:9 and 29:8. Soothsaying and sorcery are also unacceptable (Jer 27:9).

[734] Ezek 21:21,22,29 (where it is associated with arrows, teraphim, inspecting a liver and lots) and in 22:28.

[735] It is acknowledged that Jeremiah also identifies prophets practising divination in Jer 14:14; in Jer 27:9 and 29:8 prophets and diviners may not be the same people.

for the king of Babylon's divination (21:21-29). These may be used in prophetic divinatory practices (13:23) but the link is speculative. Although Ezekiel devotes considerable space to these unacceptable objects, his descriptions appear to be sufficiently explicit for any within his context to identify the forbidden practices, but they are sufficiently unclear for contemporary readers to determine their nature with any certitude. However, although both men and women are condemned for divination (the men more often), the use of objects is only associated with the women. It may be likely that additional objects have been absorbed into Israelite worship from surrounding Babylonian influences, and that these have had particular appeal to women who have more limited opportunities to speak (the men are condemned primarily for their false words). The book of Ezekiel as a whole gives far more attention to outward details of religious practices than the book of Jeremiah. Through Ezekiel's parallel treatment of the men and the women in this chapter, Ezekiel suggests that although there is a gender difference in the types of deviant practices, deviancy through the use of illegitimate objects is not necessarily worse than deviancy through false words.

The lifestyle of the prophet

The lifestyle of the prophet is important to Jeremiah. His charge that the deviant prophets are adulterous in Jer 23:14 (cf. the charge that the land is full of adulterers in 23:10), seen in conjunction with Jer 29:23 (where the adultery is with neighbours' wives) suggests that many deviant prophets are guilty of marital infidelity. There is also the charge that they 'walk in lies', deceitfully speaking that which Yahweh has not given them (Jer 23:21) and 'strengthen the hands of the evildoers so that no one turns from wickedness'(23:14); they also are responsible for spreading ungodliness throughout the land (Jer 23:15). This is congruent with the charge that people who break the commandments of Yahweh (Jer 7:9) should not expect to stand protected in the presence of Yahweh (Jer 7:10), which is a necessity for a prophet (Jer

23:18,22). Any would-be prophet who lives in ethical violation is not hearing the true words of Yahweh (Jer 7:13, such people are deaf to the truth which Yahweh is speaking). Jeremiah sums up the ways in which these prophets lead people astray as by 'lies' (שׁקר) and by 'recklessness' (פחזות) (Jer 23:32).

Ezekiel's charge against the prophets does not include marital infidelity or explicit mention of the violation of particular commandments. The accusation that the men are like 'jackals among ruins' (Ezek 13:4) and that the women 'maintain their own lives' (Ezek 13:18) suggests that their prime motivation is self-serving. They are in need of knowing that Yahweh, not they themselves, is the Lord (Ezek 13:9,14, 21, 23); the men speak of that which they have not heard from Yahweh as if they have, exercising an unlawful authority and telling lies (Ezek 13:6, cf. Jer 23:21), and the women exercise unlawful power as they 'hunt for human lives' (Ezek 13:18,20) and treat them as 'prey' (Ezek 13:21). They also use cover up techniques to disguise that which cannot stand before Yahweh (Ezek 13:10-14). Instead of curbing the tide of evil, they promote evil (Ezek 13:22). The motives of these prophets are, for Ezekiel, important. In Ezek 10:18, Yahweh's favour and protection, and even presence, is under threat if unholy elements are allowed to invade Israelite society. Although the same principle is not made explicit in ch.13, there is enough evidence throughout the book to surmise that if these unholy elements reside in the lifestyle of the prophet, the ability to be in Yahweh's presence, in order to see and hear what Yahweh says, is impaired.

The role of the prophet

For Jeremiah the prophetic role is to call people to 'turn' or 'return' (שׁוב) to Yahweh, and away from wickedness. These deviant prophets do not do that (Jer 23:14). Prophets have power that is not to be distorted for evil (Jer 23:10); rather, it should be used to spread godliness (23:15). Then the land will be blessed instead of

cursed (23:10).[736] They must declare that which they have heard from Yahweh, by standing in his council (23:18) and to go where Yahweh sends them (23:24); they must not prophesy by another god (23:13) or from their own hearts (23:16). They must refrain from speaking lies (23:32) and declare the truth concerning the anger of Yahweh and the coming calamity (23:17,19,20); they must promote the name of Yahweh and not lead people to forget it (23:27).

Ezekiel shows similar expectations that prophets will declare the word which they have heard spoken by Yahweh (Ezek 13:7), submit to his superior power (knowing that Yahweh is the Lord), and prepare the 'house of Israel' to stand in battle in the coming day of Yahweh (13:5). They are to encourage the righteous in their living and to discourage the wicked from continuing in their wicked way (13:22); they are to speak truth (13:19) that will be fulfilled (13:6). The term שׁוּב only appears once in this passage, in13:22 (he does use it elsewhere, but not nearly as frequently as Jeremiah). What is significant in Ezekiel is the imagery he uses to illustrate the prophetic role.

The prophet as wall-builder

Ezekiel's image of wall-building, to convey a function of the prophetic role, is reinforced through two parallel deviations, 1) failing to repair a wall (Ezek 13:5) 'so that (the wall) may stand in battle on the day of Yahweh'(13:5), and 2) using whitewash to cover up poor workmanship in wall repairs (13:10). Since this is clearly one or two metaphorical wall(s) which could potentially carry more than one meaning, a wall may suggest functions of protection and/or separation. Ezekiel's distinctive concern for walls and boundaries throughout the book raises interesting

---

[736] See also Jer 3:12,22; 4:1; 15:19; 18:11; 25:5; 35:15. Moberly, *Prophecy and Discernment*, 55–75, illuminates Jeremiah's use of this term well.

interpretive questions.[737] Jeremiah shows no comparable interest in expressing his concerns as walls or boundaries.

The need to build and maintain a strong city wall is to protect the citizens of the city.[738] Ezekiel has a sense of urgency to be ready for a coming battle, on the 'Day of Yahweh' (Ezek 13:5).[739] If the wall does not stand on that day, the people will be in grave danger. Both prophets have frequent expressions of Yahweh's anger and take it seriously.[740] True prophets, then, are to anticipate that Yahweh's anger will bring heavy judgment, and to prepare for its imminent coming. The battle, then, is a battle against Yahweh. This is what motivates Ezekiel to bring the watchman's warning;[741] it also motivates Jeremiah to plead with the people to 'turn' to Yahweh. The talk of 'peace' by these other prophets (Ezek 13:10 and Jer 23:17) stands in strong contrast to their messages. Ezekiel and Jeremiah, then, are in agreement that the prophetic role is to build up protection for the people for the Day of Yahweh, but Ezekiel's wall imagery is unique.

---

[737] Walls are mentioned 40 times in Ezekiel, compared with 13 in Jeremiah. Four main words for 'wall' are used in the book of Ezekiel: גָּדֵר, חַיִץ, חוֹמָה, and קִיר, the first two and the last occurring within this chapter. Jeremiah's 13 occurrences all use the word which does not occur in this chapter, חומה , referring to city walls. In Ezekiel's final temple vision journey, which begins with the description of a wall (Ezek 40:5), many other walls are laboriously measured and given a greater narrative weight than anywhere else in Scripture. They are to separate holy places from common places (e.g. Ezek 42:20). Walls are also mentioned in the temple vision of chs. 8-11, and he is to dig through a wall as a sign in ch.12.

[738] Joyce, *Ezekiel*, 121, takes the wall here as a metaphor for the state of the nation and also evokes the wall of Jerusalem.

[739] The Day of Yahweh is referred to about ten times in both Jeremiah and Ezekiel in addition to other references in both books to 'the day' or 'that day' when punishment will come on certain people groups. Only here and in Ezek 30:3 is it called the 'Day of Yahweh;' elsewhere it is referred to by variant names e.g. 'the day of the wrath of Yahweh' (Ezek 7:19) or 'the day of their calamity' (Jer 46:21).

[740] Some examples in Ezekiel are Ezek 5:13; 7:8; 9:8; 13:13; 16:42; 20:21,34; 21:31; 22:20-22,31; 36:6; 38:19; 43:8 and in Jeremiah are Jer 3:4,5; 4:8; 5:9; 6:11,12; 7:20; 10:10; 12:13; 18:20; 23:19,20; 25:15,16; 30:23, 24.

[741] Note that the watchman image in Jeremiah (Jer 31:6) is used to announce the happy call for people 'to go up to Zion, to the Lord our God.'

Ezekiel's concern to keep boundaries secure, especially boundaries between the holy and the common, derives from the importance which he places on 'holiness' itself. Jeremiah and Ezekiel both apply 'holy' (קדשׁ) to Yahweh (e.g. Jer 50:29; Ezek 20:41) and to Israel (e.g. Jer 2:3; Ezek 37:28), but Ezekiel is lavish in his application of 'holy' to many other things relating to Yahweh in a secondary way. These include Yahweh's name (Ezek 36:22-23; 39:25; 20:9,14,22; 39:7); land (43:12; 45:1-4; 48:12,20-21); mount (28:14; 43:12); most holy place (41:4,21); sabbaths, signifying holy time (Ezek 20:12,20; 22:26); garments and offerings (Ezek 42:13-14,20; 44:13,23-24); things (22:26). Although Jeremiah speaks of Yahweh's 'holy' words in Jer 23:9, this usage is not characteristic of Jeremiah, nor is a preoccupation with 'boundaries.' For Ezekiel, the holy people, together with the holy places and holy objects, should be kept separate from the common, and any intrusions into holy space are 'abominations' (תועבות, e.g. Ezek 8:6). The city wall may, then, also represent a boundary which must be kept firm in order to separate the holy people, places and objects inside it, from the unholy influences outside it.[742] The flimsily-built house wall may also suggests separations, especially since a house wall is not designed primarily for protection.

The particular role of establishing boundaries is priestly.[743] Ezekiel, as prophet, speaks to declare that the priests have failed in this duty.[744] Whereas Jeremiah sometimes treats prophets and priests together (Jer 23:11 cf. 2:8,26), Ezekiel does not. Jeremiah's charges to the priests is not in terms of failure to keep boundaries.

---

[742] Kenneth D. Hutchens, "Defining the Boundaries: A Cultic Interpretation of Numbers 34.1–12 and Ezekiel 47.13 - 48.1,28," in *History and Interpretation: Essays in Honour of John H. Hayes*, M.Patrick Graham, William P. Brown, and Jeffrey K. Kuan (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1993), 225–26, gives many examples throughout the OT where the land is considered either 'clean' (Israel) or 'unclean' (land outside Israel), or polluted by sin (Israel) and needing to be cleansed.

[743] Jacob Milgrom, *Leviticus 1 - 16*, Anchor Bible (New York: Doubleday, 1991), 615, writes 'The making of distinctions is the essence of the priestly function. Ezekiel scores the priests of his time precisely on this point.'

[744] In Ezek 22:26 the priests are charged with not distinguishing between the holy and the common, and not teaching people how to discern the differences. In the vision for the future the Zadokite priests are to teach people these differences (Ezek 44:23-24).

Ezekiel may well be saying to the deviant prophets that they have failed in their prophetic role to check that priestly boundaries between the holy and the common are maintained.

For Ezekiel, a weakened boundary that allows defilement of people and place, brings the very real risk of the withdrawal of Yahweh's favour (Ezek 5:11), which puts the protection of the people at risk. So the matter of separation between the holy and the common is directly related to the protection of the people in battle on the Day of Yahweh. I suggest, then, that this wall image for Ezekiel combines these two aspects of the prophetic role: 1) to build up protection against the Day of Yahweh (as for Jeremiah) and, closely associated with that, 2) the identification of and call for separation from unholy elements, especially if the priests have failed in their responsibility.[745]

Standing against opposition

In both books, the deviant prophets issue a false message of 'Peace'(Jer 23:17; Ezek 13:10,16). Not only is this a message of inappropriate optimism that fails to take warning signs seriously, it is a message that points to the likelihood of prophets being unwilling to stand against human opposition. Both Jeremiah and Ezekiel are warned of this danger in their initial calls (Jer 1:8,18; Ezek 2:6; 3:9) and demonstrate courage in conveying unpopular messages. It is possible that fear of the people has become a kind of idol in the hearts of these prophets that prevents them from hearing the true word of Yahweh (Ezek 14:4). In addition, Ezekiel points out that the deviant prophets are not preparing the people for the 'day of Yahweh' (Ezek 13:5), implying that genuine prophetic motivation arises from divine concerns, rather than being swayed by popular opinion.

---

[745] This particular interpretation of the wall image is not found in standard commentaries, because it arises from more extended reflection on related imagery throughout the whole book of Ezekiel.

Deception of a prophet

Ezekiel's discussion of a prophet being 'deceived' (פתה) by Yahweh (Ezek 14:9) places the responsibility for wrong-doing on the shoulders of the prophet; he will be judged like the inquirer who has 'idols in his heart.' Jeremiah does not include this language in Jer 23, but does use the same verb of Yahweh deceiving him in Jer 20:7,10. However, in Jeremiah the fear is expressed that Yahweh may be the wrong-doer. Jeremiah is remaining true to the word of Yahweh but suffers reproach from others. Is it Yahweh who has deliberately made a laughingstock out of him? For Ezekiel it is unthinkable that Yahweh, the holy one, could have any deviousness in him. Once again, the concepts expressed, even though the verb is the same, suggest that Ezekiel places himself at a greater distance from Yahweh, and Jeremiah feels close enough to articulate his feelings, as if in a close human relationship.

Language of emotion and metaphor

Jeremiah's language concerning the deviant prophets opens with a laboured expression of personal, very emotionally engaged grief: his 'heart is crushed within' him, his 'bones shake,' he has become 'like a drunkard' (Jer 23:9). He also notices that the land 'mourns' (Jer 23:10). While Jeremiah is able to take a more distant stand against the 'shepherds' and utter the expression of curse, 'woe!' הוי (Jer 23:1), he does not do that to his fellow prophets. Elsewhere in the book, he is more likely to use the term 'woe' to speak of grief, and to apply it to himself than to use it as a curse on his opponents (e.g.אוי in Jer 4:13,31;10:19;13:27;15:10; 45:3).

Ezekiel's language lacks the element of personal grief. Both the men and women who are prophesying have his pronouncement of 'woe' הוי on them (Ezek 13:3,18).[746] While both Jeremiah and Ezekiel express Yahweh's anger in coming

---

[746] The NRSV translation is inappropriately inconsistent in giving 'alas' for the men (13:3) and 'woe' for the women (13:18). While this word is associated with the idea of lament, it is used here as a curse, which is a statement of distance.

judgments, Ezekiel is given the additional call to distance himself from the other prophets by prophesying 'against' them (Ezek 13:2,17), reinforced by several statements of Yahweh also being 'against' them and their works (Ezek 13:8,9,20). Ezekiel is also asked to set his face against the women (Ezek 13:17), using an expression (שׂים פניך אל) which is not found at all in Jeremiah. Although the idea of Jeremiah prophesying against something is found within the book (Jer 25:13,30) and the idea of Yahweh standing 'against' these deviant prophets (Jer 23:32) is expressed within this section, this language is more dominant in Ezekiel.

In Jeremiah, the ideal of a prophet being in close proximity to Yahweh is stressed, especially through his allusion to the divine council (Jer 23:18,22). The prophet needs to stand close enough to both see and hear Yahweh's word, especially to be close enough to hear what comes from his mouth, which requires a more intimate distance than seeing (vv.16,18). If the prophet doesn't draw that close, Yahweh will still see him for it is not possible to hide (v.24). The offence of the people against Yahweh is very personal: they 'despise the word of Yahweh' (v.17) and the prophets make Yahweh's people forget his name (v.27). Yahweh's response to both deviant prophets and people is one of grief: 'How long? Will the hearts of the prophets ever turn back..?'(v.26) as well as anger (e.g. v.20), both of which are reflected in Jeremiah's own, interwoven personal responses.

Ezekiel also declares that the deviant prophets have seen and heard nothing from Yahweh (Ezek 13:3,7), but the departure from the prophetic ideal is then expressed through images of prophetic function within the community e.g. jackals among ruins (v.4), building and whitewashing a wall (vv. 5,10), hunting down lives (v.18). The offence against Yahweh is that of 'profaning' him (v.19), an offence which is typically Ezekielian and which speaks more of the violation of holiness than of a relational hurt. Anger is expressed in actions, such as cutting male prophets off from

the council of Yahweh's people (v.9), sending pelting hailstones and violent winds (v.11,13), utterly tearing down the whitewashed wall (v.14) and tearing veils off the women (v.21), as well as 'saving' people from their hand (vv.21,23). In the end the prophets will know 'that I am Yahweh' (vv.9,14, 21, 23), not the 'knowing' of an intimate relationship (e.g. Jer 1:5), but of more distant recognition that Yahweh's power is superior. The language of Yahweh's response is more distant.

Whereas Jeremiah's language is more developed in evoking emotions, Ezekiel's is more developed in its use of metaphors.[747] Jeremiah builds up parallel phrases which allow the reader/hearer to engage more fully with the feelings associated with the situation he is describing, like Jeremiah's personal distress in v.9, the experiences of those on the slippery path in v.12, the emotions of Yahweh over the shocking misdemeanors of the prophets of Jerusalem v.14, the effects of the poison that will be given to the prophets v.15. Ezekiel, instead, extends his metaphors so that they become quite complex and multifaceted. Instead of inviting emotional engagement, they invite clarification. In this passage his 'wall' imagery undergoes modification and association: from the broken city wall, his thoughts move to jackals among its ruins, then a whitewashed house wall. His jackal imagery (Ezek 13:4) is also more extended than a similar reference in Jer 9:11.

Conclusion

Many convictions about prophetic ministry are similar, although Jeremiah has no mention of women prophets and Ezekiel devotes substantial space to them. Both insist on the prophet being sent by Yahweh, but Jeremiah adds the image of the divine council. Both agree that the human heart cannot be the source of prophecy, but Jeremiah tends to regard this distortion as being deceptive, where Ezekiel is concerned about arrogance. Both stand against any kind of divination, but only

---

[747] Carroll, *When Prophecy Failed*, 197.

Ezekiel writes of objects associated with prophetic activities (used by the women). The lifestyle of the prophet is important for both, but Jeremiah expresses his concerns in terms of known violations of commandments (e.g. adultery) and Ezekiel notices self-serving behaviours (like jackals among ruins, and prophesying for bread). Although both allow genuine prophetic visions and dreams, Jeremiah is cautious, labelling false visions as 'deceitful' and returns to the importance of the 'word' of Yahweh; Ezekiel, who has rich visionary experiences, is against visions which are 'empty' and so will lack fulfillment. Both deplore the lack of courage in deviant prophets who give a false message of 'Peace' to boost their own popularity. Jeremiah expresses much through the language of emotion, while Ezekiel tends to develop metaphors.

In all of these comparisons, the initial call experience of each prophet has its influence. Jeremiah's focus on the 'word' of Yahweh and his linked use of relational language remains. Ezekiel's visual language, preferring metaphors over emotional expression and descriptions of cultic irregularities over decalogue transgressions, also remains. Yet both imply that humility before Yahweh, truthfulness in message, and integrity in lifestyle are paramount.

CHAPTER SIX
CONCLUSIONS

There is much in common between the prophetic ministries of Jeremiah and Ezekiel. Both experience a remembered, personal encounter with Yahweh, in which they are addressed, commissioned and sent out to bear messages from Yahweh. Both speak of the need to turn away from wickedness in its various forms, and to conform humbly with Yahweh's requirements. Both must persevere in unpopular work, in the face of opposition which is, at times, strenuous. Both call for the person and presence of Yahweh to be regarded more highly than his temple and its cult. Both give warnings in relation to the fall of Jerusalem and its temple. And both speak out forcefully against prophets who have not been sent, whose messages are not from Yahweh, and whose lifestyles and motives are without integrity. For both, the purposes and commands of Yahweh carry ultimate authority and effectiveness in shaping the whole of their life's work.

Naturally, there are many features of each prophetic ministry that are idiosyncratic, because these prophets are portrayed as particular people working in particular contexts. However, the differences between these two prophetic ministries are sufficiently striking to invite reflection and even explanation. It is the contention of this thesis that a serious acceptance of the settings given in each book, rather than speculation about factors outside the scope of the texts, offers some help with this. For each prophet comes to his relationship with Yahweh and his prophetic role from within the context of his people, and each must then act as a prophet to and for his specific people.

In Jeremiah, where people are still in their land with their temple intact, there appears to be a superficial overfamiliarity with Yahweh without genuinely 'knowing' him, and not crediting Yahweh with any genuine 'knowing' of what is going on in the lives of the people and the nations. Yahweh is perceived as close—he is among them; intimacy with Yahweh is presumed. Jeremiah, the one who genuinely 'knows' Yahweh, does, indeed, relate to him in intimate terms, in spoken dialogue in which the prophet feels free to be candid and argumentative. The spoken word is the medium most fitting for intimate relationships since those involved must be within earshot; this is precisely the medium of Jeremiah's communications with Yahweh.

In Ezekiel, where people have been forcibly removed from their land and their temple, there is an assumption that they have also been distanced from their God, Yahweh, who dwells in his temple in Jerusalem. Even Ezekiel, as one of his people, must begin to perceive Yahweh from a different starting point: a point of distance. These people must learn again to respect Yahweh's independence and majesty and holiness before being able to draw close to him in any sense of true intimacy. The divine hope is not that the people will 'know Yahweh' but 'know that' Yahweh has acted, or that a prophet has been in their midst. The medium of sight can be used to reach those who are too distant to hear. Theatre is for an audience, rather than for a friend. Ezekiel's visions place him as audience and are dominated by the medium of sight. He is not close enough to speak frankly, as friend to friend, to this holy God.

Each prophet comes to Yahweh as a representative of his people; his way of relating to Yahweh arises from each context. Each prophet is also sent to his people as a representative of Yahweh. This means that the people's perception of closeness to or distance from Yahweh will also influence how they receive each prophet and his message.

Jeremiah brings his messages through the 'word' of Yahweh, the medium associated with proximity and directness. He accuses the people of not listening and obeying the words brought in previous generations. The images of his prophetic work, assayer and potter, require him to be close to people—close enough to touch them and test them—but also close enough to bring destruction of anything worthless, especially through the fire of Yahweh's word, and to build. The book is known for its references to numerous named individuals.

Ezekiel is known for his extensive visual imagery and attention to visual detail. Although the word of Yahweh also comes through Ezekiel, it is often expressed less directly, through or with unusual visions or extended metaphors, which take longer to get to the point, and can be more laboured and repetitive. Ezekiel's language, therefore, is expressive of greater distance between the prophet and the people. Ezekiel's prophetic work image of watchman places him at a distance from the people, in order to act for their good. He is also given the difficult charge of being 'speechless' for a time, which necessarily implies that he will be even more distant from his people for a season. His book names few individuals and portrays him as a man who often stays in his house, and whose messages are sometimes given through public, visual signs.

Jeremiah's primary call is to 'turn' back to what is known, to 'amend' ways and doings in accordance with Yahweh's instructions. His expressions of emotion, his pleading tone and the intermittent blurring of Jeremiah's and Yahweh's voices support a perception of a relationship between Yahweh and his people that is still intact, but under threat. The deviant prophets encourage complacency, considering wicked lifestyles to be no threat to the divine relationship; perhaps they are responsible for the people's trust in the deceptive words that all is well because Yahweh's temple is in their midst. Jeremiah's view of the prophet sent by Yahweh is

of one who has stood close to Yahweh, who has heard his words, who has been sent by Yahweh, and who calls people to 'turn' back to him.

Ezekiel's primary call is to holiness, to separate from those things which are intolerable to the presence of Yahweh, represented by his glory. Although Ezekiel speaks and acts for Yahweh, his voice and Yahweh's voice remain distinct from each other, and the language of emotional pleading is absent. Yahweh's holiness, and the holiness of anything associated with Yahweh, must be properly respected. Yahweh is a jealous God; the relationship with his people has already become damaged and distanced. Surprisingly, Yahweh remains present to his people on the other side of judgment. There is hope, even of return to their land, but this hope requires separation from all unholy things. The prophetic role is imaged as wall-building, and this, too, is related to maintaining the separation between the holy and the common, and, where necessary, taking the priests to task for their failure to do this.

Each of my Chapters 2 to 5 has taken one significant aspect of prophetic ministry: call, metaphors of prophetic work, relationship to the temple, and words against deviant prophets. The most striking differences are often related to the differences in context. People who have not yet experienced judgment and people who have recent memory of defeat are in different theological contexts. Their perceptions and their needs are addressed not only by differences in words but by differences in genre and in media of communication. Prophetic ministry, standing between the people and Yahweh, and between Yahweh and the people, both reflects and addresses such differences.

This comparative study demonstrates that our understanding of Israelite prophetic ministry is made richer by placing the ministries of two quite different prophets side

by side. This approach shares characteristics of Hebrew parallelism. Attempts can be made to itemise similarities and differences, but many interesting details will not quite conform to either of those categories. In the end, a fuller understanding comes from holding and engaging with the full textual material of both prophetic ministries, from reading them separately and together, from hearing what each has to say, and from hearing the combined resonance of parallel voices.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Aaron, David H. *Biblical Ambiguities: Metaphor, Semantics and Divine Imagery*. Leiden: Brill, 2001.

Ackerman, Susan. "A Marzeah in Ezekiel 8:7–13." *HTR* 82 (1989): 267–81.

Allen, Leslie C. *Jeremiah: A Commentary*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2008.

Allen, Leslie. *Ezekiel 20–48*. WBC. Dallas: Word, 1990.

———. *Ezekiel 1–19*. WBC. Dallas: Word, 1994.

Andrew, M.E. *Responsibility and Restoration: The Course of the Book of Ezekiel*. Dunedin: University of Otago Press, 1985.

Austel, Hermann J. "'Sheqer'." In *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, edited by R.L. Harris, G.L. Archer, B.K. Waltke. Chicago: Moody, 1980: 956.

Baltzer, Klaus. "Considerations Regarding the Office and Calling of the Prophet." *HTR* 61 (1968): 567–81.

Barker, Margaret. *The Gate of Heaven: The History and Symbolism of the Temple in Jerusalem*. London: SPCK, 1991.

Barrick, W. Boyd. "The Straight-Legged Cherubim of Ezekiel's Inaugural Vision." *CBQ* 44 (1982): 543–50.

Barton, John. "Prophecy (Pre-Exilic Hebrew)." In *ABD, Vol. 5*, edited by David Noel Freedman, 482–95. New York: Doubleday, 1992.

Berquist, J.L. "Prophetic Legitimation in Jeremiah." *VT* 39 (1989): 129–39.

Berridge, John. *Prophet, People and the Word of Yahweh: An Examination of Form and Content in the Proclamation of the Prophet Jeremiah*. Zürich: Evz-Verlag, 1970.

Bertholet, Alfred. *Das Buch Hesekiel*. Freiburg: Mohr Siebeck, 1897.

———. *Hesekiel*. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1936.

Biggs, Charles R. *The Book of Ezekiel*. Epworth Commentaries. London: Epworth Press, 1996.

Blenkinsopp, Joseph. *Ezekiel*. Louisville: John Knox Press, 1990.

Block, Daniel I. *"Text and Emotion: A Study in the 'Corruptions' in Ezekiel's Inaugural Vision (Ezekiel 1:4–28)." CBQ* 50 (1988): 418–42.

———. "The Prophet of the Spirit: The Use of *RWH* in the Book of Ezekiel." *JETS* 32 (1989): 27–49.

Block, Daniel I. *The Book of Ezekiel Chapters 1–24*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997.

———. *The Book of Ezekiel Chapters 25–48*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998.

Botterweck, G.Johannes, Helmer Ringgren, and Heinz-Josef Fabry, eds. *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament, Vol. XII*. Translated by Douglas Stott. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003.

Bovati, Pietro. *Re-Establishing Justice: Legal Terms, Concepts and Procedures in the Hebrew Bible*. Translated by Michael J. Smith. Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1994.

Bowen, Nancy R. "The Daughters of Your People: Female Prophets in Ezekiel 13:17–23." *JBL* 118 (1999): 417–33.

Bright, John. *Jeremiah*. Anchor Bible. Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1965.

———. "The Date of the Prose Sermons of Jeremiah." In *A Prophet to the Nations*, edited by Leo G. Perdue and Brian W. Kovacs, 193–211. Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1984.

Broome, Edwin C. "Ezekiel's Abnormal Personality." *JBL* 65 (1946): 277–92.

Brown, Francis, S.R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs. *The New Brown-Driver-Briggs-Gesenius Hebrew and English Lexicon*. Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1979.

Brown, William P. *Seeing the Psalms: A Theology of Metaphor*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2002.

Brownlee, William H. *"Ezekiel's Parable of the Watchman and the Editing of Ezekiel."* *VT* 28, no. 40 (1978): 392–408.

———. *Ezekiel 1 - 19*. WBC. Waco, TX: Word, 1986.

Brueggemann, Walter. *"Jeremiah's Use of Rhetorical Questions."* *JBL* 92 (1973): 358–74.

———. *The Land*. Philadelphia: Fortress, 1977.

———. *The Land*. Overtures to Biblical Theology. London: SPCK, 1978.

———. *Hopeful Imagination: Prophetic Voices in Exile*. Philadelphia: Fortress, 1986.

———. *To Pluck Up, To Tear Down: A Commentary on the Book of Jeremiah 1–25*. ITC. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988.

———. *A Commentary on Jeremiah: Exile and Homecoming*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998.

Buber, Martin. *The Prophetic Faith*. New York: Collier, 1949.

Buss, Martin J. "An Anthropological Perspective Upon Prophetic Call Narratives." *Semeia* 21 (1982): 9–30.

Buss, Martin J. "The Social Psychology of Prophecy." In *Prophecy: Essays Presented to Georg Fohrer on His Sixty-Fifth Birthday 6 Sept 1980*, edited by J.A. Emerton. Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1980, 1-11.

Calvin, John. *Commentaries on the First Twenty Chapters of the Book of the Prophet Ezekiel, Vol. II.* Translated by Thomas Myers. Edinburgh: Calvin Translation Society, 1850.

———. *Ezekiel 1: Chapters 1 - 12.* Translated by D. Foxgrover and D. Martin. Calvin's Old Testament Commentaries. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994.

Cansdale, George. *Animals of Bible Lands*. Exeter: Paternoster, 1970.

Carley, Keith W. *The Book of the Prophet Ezekiel*. The Cambridge Bible Commentary. London: Cambridge University Press, 1974.

———. *Ezekiel Among the Prophets: A Study of Ezekiel's Place in Prophetic Tradition*. SBT. London: SCM, 1975.

Carroll, Robert P. *When Prophecy Failed: Reactions and Responses to Failure in the Old Testament Prophetic Traditions*. London: SCM, 1979.

———. *From Chaos to Covenant: Uses of Prophecy in the Book of Jeremiah*. London: SCM, 1981.

———. *The Book of Jeremiah: A Commentary*. London: SCM Press, 1986.

Childs, Brevard. "Introduction to the Old Testament." In *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture*. London: SCM Press, 1979.

———. "The Canonical Shape of the Prophetic Literature." In *Interpreting the Prophets*, James Luther Mays, Achtemeier. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987, 41-49.

Clements, Ronald E. *Jeremiah*. Interpretation. Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1988.

———. *Ezekiel*. Westminster Bible Companion. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1996.

Conrad, Edgar. *Reading the Latter Prophets: Toward a New Canonical Criticism*. London: T&T Clark, 2003.

Cook, Harriet N. *The Scripture Alphabet of Animals*. New York: American Tract Society, 1842. www.ccel.org/c/cook/animals/h/webdoc8.htm, accessed 23/07/07.

Cooke, G.A. *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Ezekiel*. Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1936, reprinted 1970.

Couturier, Guy P. "Jeremiah." In *The Jerome Biblical Commentary*, edited by Joseph Fitzmyer Raymond E. Brown, and Roland E. Murphy, 300–36. London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1968.

Craigie, Peter C., Page Kelley, and Joel Drinkard. *Jeremiah 1–25*. WBC. Dallas: Word, 1991.

Craigie, Peter. *Ezekiel.* The Daily Study Bible. Edinburgh: The Saint Andrew Press, 1983.

Crenshaw, James L. *Prophetic Conflict: Its Effect Upon Israelite Religion.* Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1971.

Davies, Graham I. "An Archaeological Commentary on Ezekiel 13." In *Scripture and Other Artifacts: Essays on the Bible and Archaeology in Honor of Philip J.King*, edited by Michael D. Coogan, J.Cheryl Exum, and Lawrence E. Stager. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1994, 108-125.

Davies, Philip R. "Potter, Prophet and People: Jeremiah 18 as Parable." *HAR* 11 (1987): 23–33.

———. "Joking in Jeremiah 18." In *On Humour and the Comic in the Hebrew Bible*, edited by Yehuda T. Radday and Athalya Brenner. JSOT Sup 92, 191–201. Sheffield: Almond Press, 1990.

Davis, Ellen F. *Swallowing the Scroll: Textuality and the Dynamics of Discourse in Ezekiel's Prophecy.* Bible and Literature Series. Sheffield: Almond Press, 1989.

———. "Psalm 98." *Interpretation* 46 (1992): 171–75.

de Waard, Jan. *A Handbook on Jeremiah.* Textual Criticism and the Translator. Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2003.

Dohmen, Christoph. "Heisst סֶמֶל Bild, Statue?" *ZAW* 96 (1984): 263–66.

Driver, G.R. "Two Misunderstood Passages of the Old Testament." *JTS* VI (April 1955): 82–87.

———. *Canaanite Myths and Legends from Ugarit.* Old Testament Studies, III. Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1956.

Duguid, Iain M. *Ezekiel and the Leaders of Israel.* Leiden: Brill, 1994.

———. *Ezekiel.* The NIV Application Commentary. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1999.

Duhm, D.B. *Das Buch Jeremia.* Kürzer Hand-Commentar Zum Alten Testament. Tübingen: Mohr, 1901.

Eichrodt, Walther. *Ezekiel: A Commentary.* Coslett Quin. London: SCM Press, 1970.

Eisemann, Rabbi Moshe. *Yechezkel: The Book of Ezekiel, A New Translation with a Commentary Anthologized from Talmudic, Midrashic and Rabbinic Sources.* Artscroll Tanach Series: A Traditional Commentary on the Books of the Bible. Brooklyn, NY: Mesorah Publications, 1980.

Elwell, Walter A., ed. "Animals." In *Encyclopedia of the Bible*, 106. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1988.

Ewald, G. Heinrich von. *Commentary on the Prophets of the Old Testament, Vol. IV.* Translated by J.Frederick Smith. London: Williams & Norgate, 1880.

Field, Fridericus, ed. *Origenis Hexaplorum, Vol. 2*. Oxford: Clarendon, 1875.

Fishbane, Michael. *Biblical Interpretation in Ancient Israel*. Oxford: Clarendon, 1985.

———. "Sin and Judgment in the Prophecies of Ezekiel." In *Interpreting the Prophets*, edited by James Luther Mays, Achtemeier, 170–87. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987.

Fitzpatrick, Paul E. "The Disarmament of God." *CBQ Monograph 37* (2004). Washington D.C.

Fohrer, Georg. *Ezechiel*. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1955.

———. "Prophetie und Magie." *ZAW* 78 (1966): 25–47.

Freedman, H., and Maurice Simon, eds. *Midrash Rabbah*. Translated by S.M. Lehrman. London: Soncino, 1939.

Freehof, Solomon B. *Book of Jeremiah*. Jewish Commentary for Bible Readers. New York: Union of American Hebrew Congregations, 1977.

Fretheim, Terence E. *Jeremiah*. SHBC 15. Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys, 2002.

Friebel, K.G. "Jeremiah's and Ezekiel's Sign-Acts: Their Meaning and Function as Non-Verbal Communication and Rhetoric." Ph.D. diss. Madison: University of Wisconsin, 1989.

Galling, Kurt. "Die Ausrufung des Namens als Rechtsakt in Israel." *Theologische Literaturzeitung* 81 (1956): 66–70.

Garfinkel, S.P. *Studies in Akkadian Influences in the Book of Ezekiel*. Ann Arbor: University Microfilms, 1983.

Gaster, Theodor H. "Ezekiel and the Mysteries." *JBL* 60 (1941): 289–310.

Gilula, M. "An Egyptian Parallel to Jeremia 1:4–5." *Vetus Testamentum* 17, no. 1 (January 1967): 114.

Glazov, Gregory Yuri. *The Bridling of the Tongue and the Opening of the Mouth in Biblical Prophecy*. JSOT Sup 311. Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001.

Goldberg, Louis. "נבל." In *TWOT, Vol. 2*, edited by R. Laird Harris, Gleason L. Archer, and Bruce Waltke. Chicago: Moody, 1980, 547.

———. "פָּתִי." In *TWOT, Vol. 2*, edited by R. Laird Harris, Gleason L. Archer, and Bruce K. Waltke, 742–3. Chicago: Moody Press, 1980.

Goldingay, John. *God's Prophet, God's Servant: A Study in Jeremiah and Isaiah 40-55*. Exeter: Paternoster, 1984.

Gordon, Robert P. "Standing in the Council: When Prophets Encounter God." In *The God of Israel*, edited by Robert P. Gordon, 190–204. Cambridge: CUP, 2007.

Gordon, T.C. "A New Date for Jeremiah." *ExpT* 44 (1932–33): 562–65.

Gowan, Donald. *Theology of the Prophetic Books:The Death and Resurrection of Israel*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1998.

Greenberg, Moshe. "On Ezekiel's Dumbness." *JBL* 77, no. 2 (1958): 101–05.

———. *"The Vision of Jerusalem in Ezekiel 8–11: A Holistic Interpretation." In Divine Helmsman; Studies on God's Control of Human Events*, Lou Silberman Festschrift, 143–64. New York: Ktav Publishing House, 1980.

———. *Ezekiel 1 - 20*. Anchor Bible. Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1983.

———. *Ezekiel 21–37*. The Anchor Bible. New York: Doubleday, 1997.

Grüber, Mayer I. "Hebrew *Da'abon Nepeš* 'Dryness of Throat': From Symptom to Literary Convention." *VT* 37 (1987): 365–69.

Guillaume, Alfred. *Prophecy and Divination Among the Hebrews and Other Semites*. Bampton Lectures. London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1938.

Haag, Ernst. *Das Buch Jeremia Teil 1*. Düsseldorf: Patmos-Verlag, 1973.

Haag, H. "חמס Chamas." In *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament, Vol. IV*, edited by G.J. Botterweck and H. Ringgren, 478–87. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980.

Halperin, David J. "The Exegetical Character of Ezekiel X 9–17." *VT* 26 (1976): 129–41.

———. *Seeking Ezekiel: Text and Psychology*. University Park, PA: Penn State Press, 1993.

Harris, R. Laird, Gleason L. Archer, and Bruce K. Waltke, eds. *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*. Chicago: Moody, 1980.

Harris, Scott. "The Second Vision of Jeremiah: Jer 1:13–15." *JBL* 102 (1983): 281–82.

Harrison, Roland K. "Jackal." In *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia Vol 2*, edited by Geoffrey W. Bromiley, 947. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982.

Hengstenberg, E.W. *The Prophecies of the Prophet Ezekiel*. Translated by A.C. Murphy and J.G. Murphy. Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1869.

Heschel, Abraham J. *The Prophets*. 2 Vols. New York: Harper & Row, 1962.

Holladay, William L. *The Root ŠÛBH in the Old Testament with Particular Reference to Its Usages in Covenantal Contexts*. Leiden: Brill, 1958.

———. "Style, Irony and Authenticity in Jeremiah." *JBL* 81 (1962): 44–54.

———. "A Fresh Look at 'Source B' and 'Source C' in Jeremiah." *VT* 25 (1975): 394–412.

———. *Jeremiah 1: A Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Jeremiah Chapters 1–25*. Hermeneia. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986.

Holt, Else Kragelund. "Jeremiah's Temple Sermon and the Deuteronomists: An Investigation of the Redactional Relationships Between Jeremiah 7 and 26." *JSOT* 36 (1986): 73–87.

Hossfeld, Frank Lothar. "Ez 8–11 methodische Zugänge." In *Ezekiel and His Book: Textual and Literary Criticism and Their Interrelation*, edited by J. Lust, 151–65. Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1986.

Houk, Cornelius B. "The Final Redaction of Ezekiel 10." *JBL* 90 (1971): 42–54.

Hummel, Horace D. *Ezekiel 1–20*. Concordia Commentary. St Louis: Concordia, 2005.

Hutchens, Kenneth D. "Defining the Boundaries: A Cultic Interpretation of Numbers 34.1–12 and Ezekiel 47.13 - 48.1,28." In *History and Interpretation: Essays in Honour of John H. Hayes*, M.Patrick Graham, William P. Brown, and Jeffrey K. Kuan, 215–30. Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1993.

Hutton, Rodney R. "Are the Parents Still Eating Sour Grapes? Jeremiah's Use of the *Māšāl* in Contrast to Ezekiel." *CBQ* 71, no. 2 (April 2009): 275–85.

Hyatt, James Philip. "The Deuteronomic Edition of Jeremiah." In *A Prophet to the Nations*, edited by Leo G. Perdue and Brian W. Kovacs, 247–67. Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1984.

Hyatt, James Philip, and Stanley Romaine Hopper. "The Book of Jeremiah." In *The Interpreter's Bible Vol. V*. New York: Abingdon Press, 1956, 775-1142.

Isbell, Charles D., and Michael Jackson. "Rhetorical Criticism and Jeremiah VII 1 - VIII 3." *VT* 30 (1980): 20–26.

James, William. *The Varieties of Religious Experience: A Study in Human Nature. Gifford Lectures on Natural Religion Delivered at Edinburgh 1901–1902*. New York: The Modern Library, 1902.

Janssen, Enno. *Juda in der Exilzeit*. FRLANT. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1956.

Jenni, Ernst, and Claus Westermann. *Theological Lexicon of the Old Testament*. Translated by Mark Biddle. Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1997.

Jeremias, J. " נָבִיא Nabi' Prophet." *Theologisches Handwörtesbuch zum Alten Testament Vol. 2*. edited by Ernst Jenni and Claus Westermann. Gütersloh: Chr. Kaiser, 1975, Fourth edition 1993:7-26.

Johnstone, Robert H. "The Biblical Potter." *Biblical Archaeologist* 37 (1974), 86-106.

Jones, Douglas Rawlinson. *Jeremiah*. New Century Bible Commentary. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1992.

Joyce, Paul M. *Divine Initiative and Human Response in Ezekiel*. JSOT Sup 51. Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1989.

———. "Review of Ellen F. Davis, *Swallowing the Scroll*." *JTS* 42 (1991): 169–72.

———. "Dislocation and Adaptation in the Exilic Age and After." In *After the Exile*, edited by John Barton and David J. Reimer, 45–58. Macon, Georgia: Mercer University Press, 1996.

———. *Ezekiel: A Commentary*. New York: T&T Clark, 2007.

Kaufmann, Yehezkel. *The Religion of Israel: From Its Beginnings to the Babylonian Exile*. Translated by Moshe Greenberg. London: George Allen & Unwin, 1961.

Keel, Othmar. *The Symbolism of the Bilical World: Ancient Near Eastern Iconography and the Book of Psalms*. Translated by Timothy J. Hallett. London: SPCK, 1978.

Keil, C.F. *The Prophecies of Jeremiah*. Translated by David Patrick. Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1880.

Keller, Martin. "Eine Rede und eine Besinnung: von der Gotteslehre zur Gottesleere." In *Prophetie und Psalmen: Festschrift für Klaus Seybold zum 65. Geburtstag*, 75–78. Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 2001.

King, Philip J. *Jeremiah: An Archaeological Companion*. Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox, 1993.

Klein, Ralph. *Ezekiel: The Prophet and His Message*. Studies on Personalities of the Old Testament. Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1988.

Klostermann, A. "Ezechiel: Ein Beitrag zu besser Würdigung seiner Person und seiner Schrift." *Theologische Studien und Kritiken* 50 (1877): 391–439.

Koch, Klaus. *The Prophets*. Translated by Margaret Kohl. London: SCM, 1983.

Kohn, Risa Levitt. *A New Heart and a New Soul: Ezekiel, the Exile and the Torah*. JSOT Sup 359. London: Sheffield Academic Press, 2002.

Korpel, Marjo C.A. "Avian Spirits in Ugarit and in Ezekiel 13." In *Ugarit, Religion and Culture*, edited by N. Wyatt, W.G.E. Watson, and J.B. Lloyd, 99–113. Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 1996.

Kutsko, John F. *Between Heaven and Earth: Divine Presence and Absence in the Book of Ezekiel*. Biblical and Judaic Studies from the University of California, San Diego. Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2000.

Kuyvenhoven, Rosalie. "Jeremiah 23:1–8: Shepherds in Diachronic Perspective." In *Paratext and Megatext as Channels of Jewish and Christian Traditions: The Textual Markers of Contextualisation*, edited by August den Hollander, Ulrich Schmid, and Willem Smelik, 1–36. Leiden: Brill, 2003.

Laetsch, Theodore. *Jeremiah*. Concordia Classic Commentary Series. St Louis: Concordia, 1952.

Lang, Bernhard. *Ezechiel: Der Prophet und das Buch*. Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1981.

Lange, Armin. *Vom prophetischen Wort zur prophetischen Tradition*. FAT 34. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2002.

Leene, Hendrik. "Ezekiel and Jeremiah: Promises of Inner Renewal in Diachronic Perspective." In *Past, Present, Future: The Deuteronomistic History and the Prophets*, edited by Johannes C. de Moor, van Rooy, 150–75. Leiden: Brill, 2000.

Leene, Hendrik. "Blowing the Same Shofar: An Intertextual Comparison of Representations of the Prophetic Role in Jeremiah and Ezekiel." In *The Elusive Prophet: The Prophet as a Historical Person, Literary Character and Anonymous Artist*, edited by Johannes C. de Moor, 175–98. Leiden: Brill, 2001.

Lemke, Werner. "The Near and the Distant God: A Study of Jer 23:23–24 in Its Biblical Theological Context." *JBL* 100 (1981): 541–55.

Levenson, Jon D. *Sinai and Zion: An Entry Into the Jewish Bible*. ed. by Adela Yarbro Collins and John J. Collins. New Voices in Biblical Studies. Minneapolis: Winston Press, 1985.

Levey, Samson H., trans. The Targum of Ezekiel. In *The Aramaic Bible, Vol. 13.* Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1987.

Levy, Jacob. "חַיִּיץ." In *Neuhebraisches und Chaldäisches Wörterbuch über die Talmudim und Midraschim*, Vol 2:45. Leipzig: Brockhaus, 1879.

Lewin, Ellen Davis. "Arguing For Authority: A Rhetorical Study of Jeremiah 1:4–19 and 20:7–18." *JSOT* 32 (1985): 105–19.

Lind, Millard C. *Ezekiel*. Believers Church Bible Commentary. Scottdale, PA: Herald Press, 1996.

Lindblom, J. *Prophecy in Ancient Israel*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1962.

Long, B.O. "Divination." In *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible: An Illustrated Encyclopaedia (Supplementary Volume)*, 241–43. Nashville: Abingdon, 1976.

Long, Burke O. "Reports of Visions Among the Prophets." *JBL* 95 (1976): 353–65.

Longman III, Tremper. *Literary Approaches to Biblical Interpretation*. Grand Rapids: Academie Books, 1987.

Lowery, Jenny Manasco. "Vision." In *Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible*, edited by David Noel Freedman, 1360. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000.

Lundbom, Jack R. "Rhetorical Structures in Jeremiah 1." *ZAW* 103 (1991): 193–210.

———. "Jeremiah 15,15–21 and the Call of Jeremiah." *Scandinavian Journal of the Old Testament* 9 (1995): 143–55.

———. *Jeremiah: A Study in Ancient Hebrew Rhetoric*. Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1997.

———. *Jeremiah 1–20*. Anchor Bible. New York: Doubleday, 1999.

———. *Jeremiah 21–36*. Anchor Bible. New York: Doubleday, 2004.

Matthews, I.G. *Ezekiel.* American Commentary on the Old Testament. Chicago: American Baptist Publication Society, 1939.

McKane, William. *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Jeremiah Vol 1.* ICC. Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1986.

Meyer, Ivo. *Jeremia und die falschen Propheten.* Freiburg: Universitätsverlag, 1977.

Milgrom, Jacob. *Leviticus 1 - 16.* Anchor Bible. New York: Doubleday, 1991.

Mills, Mary E. *Alterity, Pain and Suffering in Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel.* New York: T & T Clark, 2007.

Mize, Roger. "The Patient God." *Lexington Theological Quarterly* 7 (1972): 86–92.

Moberly, R.W.L. "God is Not a Human That He Should Repent (Numbers 23:19 and 1 Samuel 15:29)." In *God in the Fray: A Tribute to Walter Brueggemann*, edited by Tod Linafelt and Timothy K. Beal, 112–23. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1998.

———. *Prophecy and Discernment.* Cambridge: CUP, 2006.

———. "The Mark of Cain - Revealed At Last?" *HTR* 100 (2007): 11–28.

Mosis, R. "פתה *pth*; פתי *peṯî*; פתיות *pᵉṯayyûṯ*" *In Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, Vol. 12, edited by G.Johannes Botterweck, Helmer Ringgren, and Heinz-Josef Fabry. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003, 162-172.

Mowinckel, Sigmund. *Zur Komposition des Buches Jeremia.* Kristiania: J. Dybwad, 1914.

Nicholson, Ernest W. *Preaching to the Exiles: A Study of the Prose Tradition in the Book of Jeremiah.* Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1970.

Niditch, Susan. *The Symbolic Vision in Biblical Tradition.* Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1980.

Odell, Margaret S. *Ezekiel.* SHBC. Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys, 2005.

———. "What Was the Image of Jealousy in Ezekiel 8?" In *The Priests in the Prophets: The Portrayal of Priests, Prophets and Other Religious Specialists in the Latter Prophets*, edited by Lester L. Grabbe and Alice Ogden Bellis. London: T&T Clark, 2004,134-148.

Olyan, Saul M. "To Uproot and to Pull Down, to Build and to Plant: Jer 1:10 and Its Earliest Interpreters." In *Hesed Ve-Emet: Studies in Honor of Ernest S. Frerichs*, edited by Jodi Magress and Seymour Gitin, 63–72. Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1998.

Ong, Walter. *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word.* London: Routledge, 2002.

Orel, Vladimir. "Textological Notes." *ZAW* 109 (1997): 408–13.

Overholt, Thomas W. *The Threat of Falsehood.* SBT, Second Series. London: SCM, 1970.

———. "Some Reflections on the Date of Jeremiah's Call." *CBQ* 33 (1971): 165–84.

———. *Channels of Prophecy: The Social Dynamics of Prophetic Activity*. Minneapolis: Fortress, 1989.

Parunak, H. Van Dyke. "The Literary Architecture of Ezekiel's Mar'ôt 'Elōhîm." *JBL* 99, no. 1 (March 1980): 61–74.

Patton, Corrine. "Layers of Meaning: Priesthood in Jeremiah MT." In *The Priests in the Prophets: The Portrayal of Priests, Prophets and Other Religious Specialists in the Latter Prophets*, edited by Lester L. Grabbe and Alice Ogden Bellis, 149–76. London: T&T Clark, 2004.

Petersen, David L. *The Prophetic Literature: An Introduction*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2002.

Pohlmann, Karl-Friedrich. *Das Buch des Propheten Hesekiel (Ezechiel) Kapitel 1–19*. Göttingen: Vandenhoek & Ruprecht, 1996.

Polk, Timothy. *The Prophetic Persona: Jeremiah and the Language of the Self*. JSOT Sup 32. Sheffield: University of Sheffield, 1984.

Reiss, Moshe. "Jeremiah, the Suffering Prophet, and Ezekiel, the Visionary." *JBQ* 32, no. 4 (2004): 233–38.

Renz, Thomas. *The Rhetorical Function of the Book of Ezekiel*. Leiden: Brill, 1999.

Ringgren, Helmer. "גָּאַל גְּאֻלָּה ." In *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, vol. 2, edited by G.Johannes Botterweck and Helmer Ringgren, translated by John T. Willis, 350–55. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975.

———. "קדשׁ Qdš." In *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament, Vol. XII*, Douglas W. Stott, G.J Botterweck, Ringgren H, and Fabry H-J, 521–45. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003.

Roberts, J.J.M. "Does God Lie? Divine Deceit as a Theological Problem in Israelite Prophetic Literature." In *Congress Volume: Jerusalem 1986*. VT Sup 40. Leiden: Brill, 1988, 211-220.

Robson, James. *Word and Spirit in Ezekiel*. New York, London: T&T Clark, 2006.

Rochester, Kathleen M. "Israel's Lament and the Discernment of Divine Revelation." Th.M. Dissertation. Vancouver: Regent College, 2000.

Rom-Shiloni, Dalit. "Facing Destruction and Exile: Inner-Biblical Exegesis in Jeremiah and Ezekiel." *ZAW* 117, no. 2 (2005): 189–205.

Rudolph, Wilhelm. *Jeremia*. HAT Series 1. Tübingen: Mohr, 1968.

Ruwe, Andreas. "Die Veränderung tempeltheologischer Konzepte in Ezechiel 8–11." In *Gemeinde ohne Tempel*, edited by Armin Lange, Peter Pilhofer, and Kathrin Ehlers. Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament, 3–18. Tübingen: Mohr, 1999.

Ryken, Leland, James Wilhoit, and Tremper Longman III, eds. "Watch, Watchman." In *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery*, 928–9. Downers Grove: IVP, 1998.

Saebo, M. "'Nabal'." In *Theological Lexicon of the Old Testament*, Vol. 2, edited by Ernst Jenni and Claus Westermann, 710–14. Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1997.

Saggs, H.W.F. "Notes and Studies: The Branch to the Nose." *JTS* XI (1960): 318–29.

———. "'External Souls' in the Old Testament." *Journal of Semitic Studies* 19 (1974): 1–12.

Sarna, Nahum M. "Ezekiel 8:17: A Fresh Examination." *HTR* 57 (1964): 347–52.

Sauer, Georg. "Mandelzweig und Kessel in Jer 1, 11ff." *ZAW* 78 (1966): 56–61.

Sawyer, John F.A. *Prophecy and the Biblical Prophets*. Oxford Bible Series. Oxford: OUP, 1987.

Schökel, Luis Alonso. *A Manual of Hermeneutics*. Translated by Liliana M. Rosa. Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998.

Schöpflin, Karin. "The Composition of Metaphorical Oracles Within The Book of Ezekiel." *VT* 55 (2005): 101–20.

Schwartz, Baruch. "The Concentric Structure of Ezekiel 2:1 - 3:15." In *Proceedings of the Tenth World Congress of Jewish Studies Division A: The Bible and Its World*, 107–14. Jerusalem: World Union of Jewish Studies, 1990.

Scott, R.B.Y. *The Relevance of the Prophets: An Introduction to the Old Testament Prophets and Their Message*. New York: Macmillan, 1968.

Seitz, Christopher R. *Prophecy and Hermeneutics*. Studies in Theological Interpretation. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007.

Sharp, Carolyn J. "The Call of Jeremiah and Diaspora Politics." *JBL* 119 (2000): 421–38.

———. *Prophecy and Ideology in Jeremiah: Struggles for Authority in the Deutero-Jeremianic Prose*. London: T&T Clark, 2003.

Sherlock, Charles. "Ezekiel's Dumbness." *ExpT* 94, no. 10 (1983): 296–8.

Siegman, Edward F. *The False Prophets of the Old Testament*. Washington: Catholic University of America, 1939.

Skinner, John. *The Book of Ezekiel*. Expositor's Bible. London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1910.

———. *Prophecy and Religion: Studies in the Life of Jeremiah*. Cambridge: CUP, 1922.

Smith, Eustace J. "The Decalogue in the Preaching of Jeremias." *CBQ* 4 (1942): 197–209.

Smith, Mark S. "The Near Eastern Background of Solar Language for Yahweh." *JBL* 109 (1990): 29–39.

Soggin, J.Alberto. "Jeremias VI:27–30." *Vetus Testamentum* 9, no. 1 (January 1959): 95–98.

Spence, H.D.M., and Exell J.S., eds. *Jeremiah Vol 1*. The Pulpit Commentary. London & New York: Funk & Wagnalls, 1906.

Stade, Bernhard. "Emendationen." *ZAW* 22 (1902): 328.

Stalker, D.M.G. *Ezekiel*. London: SCM, 1968.

Stulman, Louis. "The Prose Sermons as Hermeneutical Guide to Jeremiah 1 - 25: The Deconstruction of Judah's Symbolic World." In *Troubling Jeremiah*, edited by A.R. Pete Diamond, Kathleen M. O'Connor, and Louis Stulman. JSOT Sup 260, 35–52. Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999.

———. *Jeremiah*. Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 2005.

Talmon, S., and M. Fishbane. "The Structuring of Biblical Books: Studies in the Book of Ezekiel." *Annual of the Swedish Theological Institute* 10 (June 1975): 131–38.

Taylor, John B. *Ezekiel*. Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1969.

Thompson, J.A. *The Book of Jeremiah*. NICOT. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1980.

Tiemeyer, Lena-Sofia. "God's Hidden Compassion." *TB* 57, no. 2 (2006): 191–213.

Tigay, Jeffrey H. *The JPS Torah Commentary: Deuteronomy*. Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1996.

Tkacik, Arnold J. "Ezekiel." In *The Jerome Biblical Commentary*, edited by Raymond E. Brown, Joseph Fitzmyer, and Roland E. Murphy, 344–65. London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1968.

Torczyner, H. "Semel Ha-Qin'ah Ha-Maqneh." *JBL* 65 (1946): 293–302.

Treier, Daniel J. *Introducing Theological Interpretation of Scripture: Recovering a Christian Practice*. Nottingham: Apollos, 2008.

Tsevat, M. "Studies in the Book of Samuel." *Hebrew Union College Annual* 32 (1961): 191–216.

van den Born, Adrianus. *Ezechiel*. De Boeken Van Het Oude Testament. Roermond en Maaseik: J.J.Romen & Zonen - Uitgevers, 1954.

Van der Wal, A.J.O. "Toward a Synchronic Analysis of the Masoretic Text of the Book of Jeremiah." In *The Book of Jeremiah*, edited by Martin Kessler, 13–23. Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2004.

Vawter, Bruce, and Leslie J. Hoppe. *A New Heart: A Commentary on the Book of Ezekiel*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991.

Vieweger, Dieter. "Die Arbeit des Jeremianischen Schülerkreis am Jeremiabuch und deren Rezeption in der literarischen Überlieferung der Prophetenschrift Ezechiels." *BZ* 32, no. 1 (1988): 15–34.

Vischer, Wilhelm. "The Vocation of the Prophet to the Nations." *Interpretation* 9 (1955): 310–17.

Von Rad, Gerhard. *The Message of the Prophets*. Translated by D.M.G. Stalker. London: SCM, 1968.

Von Rad, Gerhard. *Old Testament Theology Vol.2*. Translated by D.M.G. Stalker. Edinburgh: Oliver & Boyd, 1965.

Wanke, Gunther. *Jeremia, 1–25,14*. Zürich: Theologischer Verlag Zürich, 1995.

Weippert, Helga. "Die Prosareden des Jeremiabuches." *BZAW* 132 (1973).

Weiser, Artur. *Das Buch des Propheten Jeremia*. ATD. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1960.

Werblowsky, R.J. Zwi. "Stealing the Word." *VT* VI (1956): 105–06.

Westcott, Malcolm R. *Toward a Contemporary Psychology of Intuition*. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1968.

Westermann, Claus. *Genesis 1–11: A Commentary*. Translated by John J. Scullion. London: SPCK, 1974 [German], 1984 [English].

———. *Prophetic Oracles of Salvation in the Old Testament*. Translated by Keith Crim. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1991.

Wevers, John W. *Ezekiel*. Century Bible, New Series. London: Nelson, 1969.

Whitley, C.F. "A Note on Jeremiah 7,4." *JTS* NS5 (1954): 57–59.

Wilcoxen, Jay A. "The Political Background of Jeremiah's Temple Sermon." In *Scripture in History and Theology: Essays in Honor of J. Coert Rylaarsdam*, edited by Arthur L. and Overholt Merrill, Thomas W. Pittsburgh, PA: Pickwick, 1977, 151-166.

Wilson, Robert R. "An Interpretation of Ezekiel's Dumbness." *VT* 22 (1972): 91–104.

———. "Prophecy and Ecstasy: A Reexamination." *JBL* 98 (1979): 321–37.

———. "Prophecy in Crisis: The Call of Ezekiel." In *Interpreting the Prophets*, edited by James Luther Mays and Paul Achtemeier, 157–68. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987.

Wong, Ka Leung. *The Idea of Retribution in the Book of Ezekiel*. Leiden: Brill, 2001.

———. "A Note on Ezekiel VIII 6." *VT* 51 (2001): 396–400.

Wood, Pearle Stone. "Jeremiah's Figure of the Almond Rod." *JBL* 61 (1942): 99–103.

Wright, Christopher J.H. *The Message of Ezekiel: A New Heart and a New Spirit*. The Bible Speaks Today. Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 2001.

York, Anthony D. "Ezekiel 1: Inaugural and Restoration Visions?" *VT* 27 (1977): 82–98.

Zimmerli, Walther. *A Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Ezekiel, Chapters 1–24*. Translated by Ronald E. Clements. Hermeneia. Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979.

Zimmerli, Walther. *A Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Ezekiel Chapters 25–48*. Translated by James D. Martin. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983.

———. *The Fiery Throne: The Prophets and Old Testament Theology*. Edited by K.C. Hanson. Minneapolis: Fortress, 2003.

Zucker, David J. *Israel's Prophets: An Introduction for Christians and Jews*. New York: Paulist Press, 1994.