ABINGDON OLD TESTAMENT COMMENTARIES



EZEKIEL

NANCY BOWEN

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FOREWORD

T*he Abingdon Old Testament Commentaries* are offered to the reader in hopes that they will aid in the study of Scripture and provoke a deeper understanding of the Bible in all its many facets. The texts of the Old Testament come out of a time, a language, and sociohistorical and religious circumstances far different from the present. Yet Jewish and Christian communities have held to them as a sacred canon, significant for faith and life in each new time. Only as one engages these books in depth and with all the critical and intellectual faculties available to us can the contemporary communities of faith and other interested readers continue to find them meaningful and instructive.

These volumes are designed and written to provide compact, critical commentaries on the books of the Old Testament for the use of theological students and pastors. It is hoped that they may be of service also to upper-level college or university students and to those responsible for teaching in congregational settings. In addition to providing basic information and insights into the Old Testament writings, these commentaries exemplify the tasks and procedures of careful interpretation.

The writers of the commentaries in this series come from a broad range of ecclesiastical affiliations, confessional stances, and educational backgrounds. They have experience as teachers and, in some instances, as pastors and preachers. In most cases, the authors are persons who have done significant research on the book that is their assignment. They take full account of the most important current scholarship and secondary literature, while not attempting to summarize that literature or to engage in technical academic debate. The fundamental concern of each volume is analysis and discussion of the literary, sociohistorical, theological, and ethical dimensions of the biblical texts themselves.

The New Revised Standard Version of the Bible is the principal translation of

reference for the series, though authors may draw upon other interpretations in their discussion. Each writer is attentive to the original Hebrew text in preparing the commentary. But the authors do not presuppose any knowledge of the biblical languages on the part of the reader. When some awareness of a grammatical, syntactical, or philological issue is necessary for an adequate understanding of a particular text, the issue is explained simply and concisely.

Each volume consists of four parts. An *introduction* looks at the book as a whole to identify *key issues* in the book, its *literary genre* and *structure*, the *occasion and situational context* of the book (including both social and historical contexts), and the *theological and ethical* significance of the book.

The *commentary* proper organizes the text by literary units and, insofar as is possible, divides the comment into three parts. The *literary analysis* serves to introduce the passage with particular attention to identification of the genre of speech or literature and the structure or outline of the literary unit under discussion. Here also, the author takes up significant stylistic features to help the reader understand the mode of communication and its impact on comprehension and reception of the text. The largest part of the comment is usually found in the *exegetical analysis*, which considers the leading concepts of the unit, the language of expression, and problematical words, phrases, and ideas in order to get at the aim or intent of the literary unit, as far as that can be uncovered. Attention is given here to particular historical and social situations of the writer(s) and reader(s) where they are discernible and relevant, as well as to wider cultural (including religious) contexts. The analysis does not proceed phrase by phrase or verse by verse but deals with the various particulars in a way that keeps in view the overall structure and central focus of the passage and its relationship to the general line of thought or rhetorical argument of the book as a whole. The final section, *theological and ethical analysis*, seeks to identify and clarify the theological and ethical matters with which the unit deals or to which it points. Though not aimed primarily at contemporary issues of faith and life, this section should provide readers a basis for reflection on them.

Each volume also contains a select bibliography of works cited in the commentary as well as major commentaries and other important works available in English.

The fundamental aim of this series will have been attained if readers are assisted not only to understand more about the origins, character, and meaning of the Old Testament writings but also to enter into their own informed and critical engagement with the texts themselves.

Patrick D. Miller

General Editor

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This commentary is dedicated to the two trauma survivors in my life. My nephew, Sgt. David Gallimore (U.S. Army), who survived three tours of duty in Iraq while I was writing this commentary, and my friend, the Reverend Sandra Olewine, who, as the United Methodist Liaison to Jerusalem for a decade, survived the Second Intifada and more.

ABBREVIATIONS

ABD	*Anchor Bible Dictionary*. Edited by D. N. Freedman. 6 vols. New York, 1992
ANEP	*The Ancient Near East in Pictures Relating to the Old Testament*. Edited by J. B. Pritchard. Princeton, 1954
ANET	*Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament*. Edited by J. B. Pritchard. 3rd ed. Princeton, 1969
ArtScroll	*Yechezkel: A New Translation with a Commentary Anthologized from Talmudic, Midrashic and Rabbinic Sources*. ArtScroll Tanach Series. Translation and Commentary by Rabbi Moseh Eisemann. Brooklyn: Mesorah Publications, 1988
CANE	*Civilizations of the Ancient Near East*. Edited by J. Sasson. 4 vols. New York, 1995
DSM-IV	*Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, 4th ed. American Psychiatric Association. Washington, D.C.: American Psychiatric Press, 1994
HAIJ	Miller, J. Maxwell, and John H. Hayes. *A History of Ancient Israel and Judah*. Philadelphia: Westminster, 1986
HALOT	Koehler, L., W. Baumgartner, and J. J. Stamm. *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*. Translated and edited under the supervision of M. E. J. Richardson. 4 vols. Leiden, 1994–99
Hebr.	Hebrew
IBHS	*An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax*. B. K. Waltke and M. O'Connor. Winona Lake, Ind., 1990
lit.	literally
LXX	Septuagint, Greek translation of the Old Testament

MT	Masoretic Text
NT	New Testament
OAN	Oracles against the (Foreign) Nations
OEANE	*The Oxford Encyclopedia of Archaeology in the Near East*. Edited by E. M. Meyers. New York, 1997
OT	Old Testament
PIR	*Preliminary and Interim Report on the Hebrew Old Testament Text Project*. United Bible Societies, Dominique Barthélemy, Adrian Schenker, and John Alexander Thompson. New York, 1979
PTSD	Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder
TDOT	*Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*. Edited by G. J. Botterweck and H. Ringgren. Translated by J. T. Willis, G. W. Bromiley, and D. E. Green. 15 vols. Grand Rapids, 1974–
YHWH	God's sacred name in the Hebrew Bible (Exod 3:13-15). Since Hebrew was written without vowels in ancient times, the original pronunciation of the four consonants, YHWH, is unknown. They are rendered "Yahweh" in contemporary biblical scholarship. Traditional Judaism does not say God's holy name, substituting instead Adonai ("Lord") or HaShem (lit., "the name"). In the NRSV, YHWH is represented by LORD. In this commentary YHWH is used as a way to refer to God in more egalitarian and gender-inclusive language and replaces "the LORD" in NRSV quotations.

DEFINITIONS OF FORMULAS, GENRES, AND OTHER TERMS

The formulas and genres appear in *italics* in the commentary. The terms and definitions are primarily from Hals 1989. Verses are given if appearing ten times or fewer.

FORMULAS

Call to Attention Formula ("hear the word of the Lord GOD" or "hear the word of YHWH"; 6:3; 13:2; 16:35; 20:47; 25:3; 34:7, 9; 36:1, 4; 37:4). Attracts the attention of the hearer to the speech that follows. See page 154.

Challenge to a Duel Formula ("I am against [you]"; 5:8; 13:8, 20; 26:3; 28:22; 29:3, 10; 30:22; 34:10; 35:3; 38:3; 39:1). May originally have been the cry by which one person would challenge another (Hals 1989, 359; Block 1997, 102). See page 162.

Conclusion Formula for Divine Speech ("I YHWH have spoken"). Primarily marks the end of a divine speech. Often occurs with other formulas. Stresses the power of God's word and intention to act (Hals 1989, 360).

Hand of YHWH Revelatory Formula ("the hand of YHWH came upon me"; 1:3; 3:14, 22; 8:1; 37:1; 40:1). Primarily used in the *vision report*. Designates the "disastrous manifestation of the supernatural power" (Roberts 1971, 246). See page 17.

Hostile Orientation Formula ("set your face" toward or against someone or something; 4:3, 7; 6:2; 13:17; 20:46 [21:2]; 21:2 [21:7]; 25:2; 28:21; 29:2; 35:2; 38:2). Functions to express God's hostility against someone or something with dire consequences following (Hals 1989, 301).

Messenger Formula ("Thus says the Lord GOD"). Normally introduces a speech unit. Emphasizes the role of the prophet as God's messenger to the people. Occurs 122 times in the book (see 2:4; 3:11, 27).

Oath Formula ("as I live"). Begins an oath, a pronouncement that binds the oath taker to a particular course of action, attitude, or stance (Hals 1989, 350).

Prophetic Utterance Formula ("says the Lord GOD"). Labels a speech as the word of God. Primarily used at the end of speech units. Occurs eighty-five times in the book.

Prophetic Word Formula ("the word of YHWH came to me"). Primarily introduces prophetic speech units. Occurs forty-nine times in the book between chapters 3–38. See page 15.

Recognition Formula ("and you/they shall know that I am YHWH"). A component of the *Prophetic Proof Saying*. Follows an assertion of something that YHWH will do by which the people will gain knowledge (Zimmerli 1979, 36–40). See page 30.

GENRES

Allegory (Hebr. *māšāl*). The Hebrew word encompasses a variety of literary genres. Translated in NRSV as "allegory" (17:2; 20:49 [21:5]; 24:3), "proverb" (12:22, 23; 16:44; 18:2-3), "byword" (14:8). See page 63.

Call Narrative. Identified in Ezekiel as 1:1–3:27. An account of the prophet's call by God to a particular task. Functions to authorize the prophet. Generally, two types are identified. In one, the main components include divine encounter, commissioning to task, prophetic objection, and divine reassurance (Exod 2–3; Jer 1:4-10). A second type includes a vision of the heavenly court or council (1 Kgs 22:19-23; Isa 6:1-12). Elements of both are present in Ezekiel. See page 7.

Disputation (speech) (8:12; 9:9; 11:3, 15; 12:22, 27; 18:2, 19, 25, 29; 33:24). A saying of a group in Israel that is quoted and for which a response is given to refute or argue against it (Hals 1989, 65, 349). See page 53.

Extended metaphor. The designation for the lengthy metaphorical recitals of Israel's history in chapters 16 and 23.

Lamentation (Hebr. *qînâ*; 2:10; 19:1, 14; 26:17; 27:2, 32; 28:12; 32:2, 16). A funeral song. Characterized by 3:2 meter and a particle of exclamation such as "alas" or "woe." Displays a characteristic motif of before/after or then/now. See page 108.

Metaphor. A poetic device that features two parts: the "tenor," or underlying subject, and the "vehicle," the figurative language used to describe the "tenor." See pages 81 and 109.

Prophecy of Punishment. The accusations or explanations establishing why the forthcoming punishment must occur, usually followed by the announcement of God's punishment introduced by "therefore" (Hals 1989, 249, 352). See page 28.

Prophecy of Salvation. Parallels the *prophecy of punishment*, except that good news is announced in the form of God's intervention for an individual or group. In contrast to the prophecy of punishment, God's action is not a response to the behavior of the people. In Ezekiel, God's saving acts are primarily formulated as an undoing of or a contrast to a previous evil situation. See page 210.

Prophetic Proof Saying. The two-part prophetic proof saying consists of (1) the announcement of judgment and (2) the *recognition formula*. See page 31. The three-part prophetic proof saying is characterized by the structure of indictment ("because"), sentence ("therefore"), and purpose of judgment (*recognition formula*) (Hals 1989, 354). See page 67.

Sign-Act. An action performed by the prophet that symbolically and visually represents the prophet's message. Exhibits three characteristic parts: (1) YHWH's instruction to perform the action; (2) the report of its execution; and (3) interpretation of the action (Hals 1989, 30, 355; Freibel 1989). Sign-acts occur in chapters 4–5, 12, and 36. See page 20.

Superscription. A brief indication of author, date, and subject at the beginning of a biblical book (e.g., Hos 1:1; Amos 1:1).

Vision Report. An autobiographical form that recounts a prophet's aural or visual, private experience of an encounter with God. It typically contains a form of the verb "to see" in order to state that the prophet "saw" or "was made to see" the vision. The vision sequence itself usually begins with one or more visual images followed by scenes, sounds, voices, dialogues, and movements that help explain the significance of the vision. There are four vision reports in Ezekiel (1:1-28; 8:1–11:25; 37:1-14; 40:1–48:35).

OTHER TERMS

Hapax Legomenon. Latin for a word that only occurs once in the entire Hebrew text.

Inclusio. The repetition of words at the beginning and end of a unit, which creates an envelope, or frame, for the material in between. See page 95.

Merismus. A figure of speech in which totality is indicated by the pairing of two elements, such as "A to Z."

Onomatopoeia. The naming of a thing or action by a vocal imitation of the sound associated with it, for example, *buzz*, *hiss*.

Western Asia. This replaces the traditional designation of "ancient Near East," which situates the territory east of the Mediterranean from a Eurocentric perspective. This situates the territory from the perspective of its continental location.

INTRODUCTION

EZEKIEL AND TRAUMA

In 1946 Edwin C. Broome wrote an article that argued the only way to understand parts of Ezekiel was to see them as symptoms of mental illness. From a psychoanalytic perspective, he concluded that Ezekiel exhibited behavioral abnormalities consistent with paranoid schizophrenia. Another scholar added that Ezekiel showed "symptoms of catatonia, alalia, delusions of persecution and grandeur, narcissistic masochism, sexual regression and gender confusion, and psychotic withdrawal" (Davis 1989, 66). In 1993 David Halperin wrote a book defending Broome's thesis, also arguing that certain features in Ezekiel are understandable when viewed from the perspective of mental illness. Although Halperin shared Broome's psychoanalytic approach, he departed from Broome's diagnosis. Halperin argued that Ezekiel suffered from what would today be described as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). He identified Ezekiel's trauma as sexual victimization by an adult male in childhood. Halperin further argued for Ezekiel's belief that his mother had colluded in this sexual abuse.

For a variety of reasons, most biblical scholars usually dismiss these "psychological" readings of Ezekiel. Yet whatever their deficiencies, Broome's and Halperin's studies reveal a profound truth: there is something deeply disturbing about Ezekiel, both the book and the prophet. Therefore they are correct to claim that psychology might offer some insights for interpreting Ezekiel. Unlike the psychoanalytic approach of Broome and Halperin, contemporary insights from the psychology of trauma will provide the lens for looking at Ezekiel in this commentary. Instead of Halperin's childhood sexual trauma, it is the trauma of adulthood—war and exile—that might explain certain aspects of Ezekiel.

During the Balkan conflicts in the 1990s there were daily images in the media of refugees streaming across one border or another. Whatever they could cram into suitcases and sacks and carry with them was all that remained of their former life. Numerous interviews with health care and refugee specialists revealed concern over the mental health of the refugees, especially the possibility of future development of PTSD. Many studies confirm that refugees are a high-risk group for developing PTSD (Breyer 1988). The same pictures of refugees carrying their remaining worldly possessions are among the most poignant images on the reliefs from Sennacherib's palace that depict the siege of Lachish in 701 B.C.E. (panel nos. 9–10, Room 36, The British Museum). If Ezekiel were such a refugee, might he have suffered from PTSD? This question was the impetus for exploring the connections between Ezekiel and trauma in this commentary. Others are also exploring the connections between trauma and the Bible, including Ezekiel (Smith-Christopher 2002, 75–104). Apparently it is an idea whose time has come.

Trauma can be defined as "extreme stress" or "an injury or wound violently produced" (Allen 1995, 4). While trauma can be physical, the concern here is with lasting psychological wounds. One psychological definition of extreme or traumatic situations identifies two elements:

1. Powerlessness. An individual is unable to influence the occurrence or development of the event.

2. Disruption. The situation crudely disrupts the course of daily existence. One is cut off from a previously secure environment. The world no longer makes sense (Figley and Kleber 1995, 78).

Given Babylonian conquest, corporately and individually Judeans were powerless to influence the course of events. To call the exile a "disruption" is an understatement. The Davidic dynasty was nullified and the king ignobly taken away. The city of Jerusalem and the Temple, the place of YHWH's assured presence, were razed. Citizens were forcibly exiled from the land that was the foundation of their identity. Their world no longer made sense, raising profound questions of faith: (1) was YHWH not powerful? and (2) was YHWH not faithful? The experience of exile meets this definition of a traumatic situation.

The official definition of PTSD by the American Psychiatric Association also includes two components: (1) "direct personal experience of an event that involves actual or threatened death or serious injury, or other threat to one's physical integrity or witnessing an event that involves death, injury, or a threat to the physical integrity of another person or learning about unexpected or violent death, serious harm, or threat of death or injury experienced by a family member or other close associate" and (2) "the person's response involved intense fear,

helplessness, or horror" (*DSM-IV*, 424).

Images from reliefs in antiquity, descriptions in the Bible, and reports of experiences of warfare throughout history are sufficient evidence that Jerusalem's survivors would have witnessed "actual death or serious injury, or threats to physical integrity." The high incidence of PTSD among military veterans shows that even professional soldiers experience fear, helplessness, or horror. One has only to watch the evening news to see these same reactions by "noncombatants." Those reactions are evident in Ezekiel in the language of trembling, shaking, and showing horror (e.g., 7:18, 27; 12:18). By contemporary definitions, those who experienced the siege of Jerusalem, its destruction, and deportation of its citizens experienced trauma and possibly PTSD.

Some common reactions to trauma include the following (Rosenbloom and Williams 1999, 19):

- *Mental reactions*: changes in the way you think about yourself; changes in the way you think about the world; difficulty concentrating; poor attention or memory problems; intrusive images.
- *Emotional reactions*: fear, inability to feel safe; sadness, grief, depression; guilt; anger and irritability; numbness or lack of feeling; loss of trust; loss of self-esteem; feeling helpless; emotional distance from others; intense or extreme feelings.
- *Behavioral reactions*: becoming withdrawn or isolated from others; becoming confrontational and aggressive; change in eating habits; restlessness; increase or decrease in sexual activity.

Not all of these reactions are manifest in any one individual, nor are they all evident in Ezekiel. But there are ample passages in Ezekiel that reflect one or more of these specific reactions. Just as it appears obvious that Ezekiel experienced trauma, it is obvious that Ezekiel reacted in ways consistent with both normal and abnormal reactions to trauma. The Exegetical Analysis and Theological and Ethical Analysis sections of the commentary will provide discussion on specific reactions.

The element of disruption is central to "cognitive processing theories," one psychological approach to trauma. These theories hold that human beings develop mental schemes (or "models of the world") that contain assumptions and expectations about future events. Trauma shatters those, forcing persons "to recognize, objectify, and examine our basic assumptions" (Janoff-Bulman 1985, 18). Although the number and extent of assumptions shattered, or at least seriously challenged, by victimization is dependent upon the person involved,

there appear to be three types of core beliefs that are especially affected (Janoff-Bulman 1992, 6–12).

1. The belief in personal invulnerability, that is, that trauma "can't happen to me."

2. The perception of the world as meaningful and comprehensible, that the world "makes sense." One way persons make sense of their world is to regard it as essentially controllable and benign. The world is controllable insofar as one can prevent misfortune by engaging in sufficiently cautious behaviors. To regard the world as benign is to believe one is protected against misfortune by being good and worthy.

3. A positive view of oneself. This means that people essentially see themselves as "good" and have a high level of self-esteem.

According to these theories, coping with victimization involves coming to terms with shattered assumptions and reestablishing a conceptual system that allows the victim to function properly again. In Ezekiel, Israel's mental schemes are primarily expressed in theological categories: the inviolability of Jerusalem, the assumption that covenant guarantees YHWH's protection, and the honor of God's people. It is possible to view the book as an attempt to come to terms with these shattered assumptions by establishing an alternative conceptual system.

One of the fundamental stages of recovery is "reconstructing the trauma story" (Herman 1997, 3). This is the function of the first half of the book of Ezekiel, the oracles of judgment (chs. 1–24), which recount Israel's "trauma story." Being a survivor is also about making peace with the memories of the catastrophe and its wake (Figley 1985, 399). In the final phase of recovery, victims become survivors by answering, to their satisfaction, five fundamental questions. The answers help place their experiences in perspective, alleviating the trauma and subsequent stress. The fundamental "victim questions" are: (1) what happened? (2) why did it happen? (3) why did I act as I did then? (4) why did I act as I have since then? (5) what if it happens again? (Figley 1985, 404). The book of Ezekiel answers these fundamental "victim questions." The oracles of judgment (chs. 1–24) function to answer the first three questions. What happened? God punished Israel in the form of Jerusalem's destruction and the people's deportation at the hands of the Babylonian king and his army. Why did it happen? Because the people violated the covenant and profaned God's name. Why did they act as they did? Because they had a heart of stone, making them incapable of obedience to the covenant. Ezekiel gives no attention to the fourth question. The fifth question is the concern of the oracles of salvation (chs. 34–48). Instead of considering what to do the next time, Israel is invaded by a foreign army, Ezekiel envisions a future that precludes the trauma's recurrence.

A new heart will ensure Israel's future obedience; therefore they will never again suffer divine punishment. Another key aspect of recovery, establishing safety (Herman 1997, 3), is Ezekiel's primary agenda in the oracles of salvation—creating a safe space for the exiles.

These are the basic views of trauma this commentary will explore. Not all aspects of what is known today about trauma and its aftermath are present in Ezekiel. Nor is this about putting Ezekiel "on the couch," so to speak. Instead, this is an exercise in intertextuality. Where it seems appropriate, the commentary will consider the extent to which Ezekiel reflects issues of trauma and how contemporary knowledge of trauma might help illuminate and interpret Ezekiel. The most pertinent question is how study of trauma might help or hinder considering the significance of Ezekiel in today's context. Ezekiel is a response to national trauma. This commentary was written in the aftermath of the national trauma of September 11. It was also written during the war in Iraq. Trauma, individually and collectively, happens on a daily basis. The interplay of ancient and contemporary traumas will be evident throughout.

A complication in relating trauma theories to the book of Ezekiel is the length of time covered by the book (twenty-two years; 1:2; 29:17) and the temporal distance from the first deportation (twenty-seven years; 29:17). Could the effects of trauma last this long? Another complication is the obvious editorial activity within the book. For example, chapters 38–39 and chapters 40–48 are frequently attributed to later redactors. Are readers to understand that later redactors, even further removed from the trauma, were also experiencing symptoms of trauma?

There are a number of possible responses. First, for refugees "traumatization is not a relatively isolated incident or set of events, but a cumulative ongoing process" (Van der Veer 1995, 152). The term *post*, in post-traumatic stress disorder, suggests the traumatic event was limited to a certain moment in time, which lies in the past. For someone who experiences prolonged exposure to war or sustained human rights violations like torture, there is no single traumatic event. Ezekiel and his fellow exiles were more likely to have experienced cumulative and continuous trauma beginning with the siege of Jerusalem, continuing in the experiences of a forced march of at least five months for nearly a thousand miles, and culminating in the chain of stressful experiences of adjusting to whatever faced them in Babylon. Exiles deported following the fall of Jerusalem a decade or so later would similarly have experienced repeated exposures to death, injury, and threats to physical integrity.

Second, the symptomatology of trauma can occur years, even decades, later and survivors may experience a relapse of symptoms in response to circumstances or experience persistent symptoms. For example, soldiers taken as

prisoners of war and survivors of Nazi concentration camps found they experienced severely intrusive memories and reactions even forty years after the events (Herman 1997, 87).

Third, while the generational effects of trauma are still little understood, evidence suggests that they exist. Studies document the phenomenon of "secondary traumatic stress," the process by which an individual who observes another person's suffering experiences emotional responses that parallel that person's actual or anticipated emotions (Figley and Kleber 1995, 78). These studies talk about "the ripple effect" of trauma. A similar phenomenon is found in children of concentration camp survivors who "seem to unconsciously repeat their parents' Holocaust experiences in their own lives" (Danieli 1985, 305). We cannot know what specific effects the exile would have had on those who were children at the time or on the second generation. Ripple effects were certainly possible, even probable.

Finally, trauma did not cease to occur once the exiles were in Babylon. There is little biblical or extrabiblical information regarding the Judeans' life in exile. Nothing is known of the natural or human-caused traumas that they may have experienced in the time before Ezekiel reached its final form.

The effects of the Judean refugees' trauma would be far-reaching. Certainly an individual named Ezekiel might have experienced persistent reactions to trauma for the length of time covered by the book. Moreover, the experience and effects of exile were not limited to Ezekiel, nor even to his generation. The book's existence attests that others in the exilic community, and beyond, found their experiences reflected in its words.

HOLINESS FRAMEWORK

The primary conceptual framework of the book is structured around the opposed pairs of holy (*qdš*)/profane (*ḥl*/*ḥll*) and clean (*ṭhr*)/unclean (*ṭm*ʾ). The pairs are distinct from each other, yet overlap in significant, if not always comprehensible, ways. In the NRSV translation of Ezekiel, forms of "holy" are translated "sanctify," "hallow," "holy," and "holiness." Forms of "profane" are translated "profane(d)/profaning," "common," and "defile." Forms of "clean" are translated "clean" and "cleansed." Forms of "unclean" are translated "defile(d)," "defiling," "unclean(ness/es)," "polluted," and "filth(iness)." This vocabulary is most frequent in chapters 20, 22, 36, and 40–48, but the underlying framework is evident throughout, as well as in priestly sections of the

Pentateuch (see Frymer-Kensky 1983, 399–414; Jenson 1992, 40–55, 88-148; Nelson 1993, 17–38).

Clean, the normal state of human existence, was not the same as modern understandings of clean/dirty or sanitary/unsanitary. Persons or objects were "clean" when they existed within the proper boundaries established by God, and whose own external boundaries were whole and intact. Something "unclean" was somehow out of bounds. Some objects, like animals, could not move from one condition to the other. They were permanently clean or unclean. Persons could and did change condition, however. Certain defiling actions moved a person from the condition of clean to unclean. Rituals of purification or cleansing moved a person in the opposite direction. The various "purity laws" in the legal codes delineated the distinctions between clean and unclean in the realms of food, sex, bodily fluids, and, especially, religious activities. Unfortunately, the basis of such distinctions is not always obvious to modern interpreters.

Degrees of uncleanness existed, usually labeled by contemporary scholars as "minor" and "major." Minor defilement was not considered contagious; uncleanness could not be communicated to another person. These defilements were easily cleansed, usually by bathing or washing clothes and a brief lapse of time, such as "until evening." Examples include touching a carcass or a person with a discharge (Lev 11:24-28; 15:7) and intercourse (Lev 15:18). Major defilement was considered contagious; uncleanness could be communicated to another. These were also easily cleansed, although it took longer and might involve a ritual conducted by a priest. Examples include having a discharge (Lev 15:13-15) and childbirth (Lev 12:1-8). Both minor and major defilements were essentially "curable" (Be'er 1994, 155–57).

There was another degree of uncleanness that could not be eradicated by purification rituals, or "incurable impurities" (Be'er 1994, 154–55). The only way to cleanse a person or object so contaminated was through some kind of purging or other catastrophic event (Frymer-Kensky 1983, 399). When the land was so polluted, the catastrophic retribution was to purge the land of the inhabitants who defiled it (Gen 6:11-13; Deut 9:4-5). The catastrophic retribution for individuals who had committed "incurable impurities" was to be "cut off" from the community (Lev 7:20-21; 20:5-6, 17-18).

Whereas clean/unclean pertained to the human world, holiness pertained to the divine world. Only YHWH was inherently holy. To be holy, therefore, was to be in or near the divine world. In YHWH's presence a place became "holy ground" (Exod 3:5). Profane—common, ordinary—referred to the absence of holiness. Objects and persons became holy through ritual actions of

sanctification or consecration, which transferred them from the condition of profane/common to the condition of holy. The actions of desecration or profanation moved something in the opposite direction. One can think of sanctification as the addition of some intangible but real quality called holiness, and profaning as draining a holy thing of its holy character (Nelson 1993, 21).

There were also grades of holiness. That gradation is most evident in the structures of the tabernacle and Temple. The holiest, "the holy of holies," was in closest proximity to YHWH. The nearby area for the altar and sacrifices was the next most holy. The outer areas were common or profane, containing no holiness. There was also a gradation of holiness among persons, resulting in a religious social hierarchy. The high priest was holiest, then the priests, then Levites. The people of Israel contained some general holiness since they belonged to God (Exod 19:5-6; Lev 11:44-45; 20:26). Non-Israelites were profane. Holiness was also contagious and could be transmitted through touch or proximity (2 Sam 6:6-7; Ezek 44:19; 46:20).

The pairs were opposites; one participated in only one condition at a time. One could be holy *or* profane, clean *or* unclean. The normal state for persons was profane and clean. One could also be profane and unclean or holy and clean. The only condition not possible was holy and unclean. This was the dangerous encounter. Contact between the unclean and holy profaned the holy. The contact was viewed as similar to a "fusion reaction" that could kill individuals or endanger the welfare of all (Nelson 1993, 34). The sacred, therefore, had to be protected from profanation through measures that prevented contact between the holy and the unclean.

Distinguishing and maintaining the boundaries between these categories was critical to Israel's continued relationship with YHWH (Lev 10:10; Ezek 22:26; 42:20; 44:23). As long as minor and major uncleannesses were cleansed and the holy was protected from the unclean, the relationship was protected. The danger was either contamination of the holy or the accumulation of uncleanness "beyond the level of tolerance, when a cataclysm becomes inevitable" (Frymer-Kensky 1983, 408).

Ezekiel used this basic framework to explain the exile, but with his own variations. Sometimes there are connections between definitions of what constituted defiling in Ezekiel and in legal codes, but not always. Ultimately, for Ezekiel, what was clean (in bounds) was covenant obedience. Any act that could be construed as violating the covenant was unclean. Ezekiel defined as unclean sins not normally identified as such. Ezekiel argued that *all* the people were unclean, even the priests, rendering everything holy profane: YHWH's sanctuary, YHWH's name, and YHWH's land. YHWH's holy presence could not remain among

unclean people. The departure of YHWH's glory from the Temple, the city, and the land in chapters 8–11 metaphorically depicts that they have been emptied of holiness. Israel's pollution had reached the point "beyond the level of tolerance, when a cataclysm becomes inevitable." The exile was that cataclysm.

In order that YHWH's glory might again dwell in their midst, the people had to be entirely cleansed (36:25-27) and to observe carefully the new boundaries of holy and profane, clean and unclean (chs. 40–48). When the necessary condition of clean was attained, then YHWH would again approach and dwell within the Temple. The name of the city would forever be "YHWH is there," because "they shall never again defile themselves" (37:23).

HISTORY AND DATING

The book is set in the context of the Babylonian exile. Babylon replaced Assyria as the world's great superpower in the last two decades of the seventh century B.C.E. After Nebuchadnezzar became king in 605 B.C.E., he quickly consolidated his power over Western Asia. Within a couple of years Judah surrendered its sovereignty to Babylon, becoming a dependent territory. At some point, Judah's King Jehoiakim rebelled against Nebuchadnezzar (2 Kgs 24:1). What instigated this rebellion is a matter of speculation, but Nebuchadnezzar sent his army against Jerusalem in response. The Babylonian Chronicle records that in Nebuchadnezzar's seventh year, "he besieged the city Judah and in the month of Adar on the second day, he seized the city. He took the king captive. He appointed there a king after his own heart. He imposed heavy tribute and took [it] to Babylon" (*ANET*, 564; compare 2 Kgs 24:10-16).

This event is commonly designated the First Deportation. Babylonian policy was to form docile, compliant colonies by systematically deporting the leading citizens from their home territories in order to inhibit rebellion. Ezekiel was among those "carried away" with King Jehoiachin (the king after Jehoiakim; 2 Kgs 24:14-16), and this group was his primary audience.

Nebuchadnezzar placed Jehoiachin's uncle, Zedekiah, on the throne (2 Kgs 24:17). Judah's history in the following decade is turbulent and complex. There are hints in the Bible of resistance to Babylonian hegemony, including Zedekiah's rebellion (2 Kgs 24:20). In response, during Zedekiah's ninth year, Nebuchadnezzar again laid siege to Jerusalem (2 Kgs 25:1-3; Ezek 24:1-2). Eventually, the city was burned, the Temple was destroyed, and more of the city's inhabitants were carried away (2 Kgs 25:8-21). "So Judah went into exile

out of its land" (2 Kgs 25:21).

Ezekiel contains more dates than any other prophetic book, grounding the oracles firmly in the days of Nebuchadnezzar, Jerusalem's destruction, and the Judeans' deportation to Babylon. This precise dating may reflect priestly influences. The priestly traditions overall prefer exactness, especially in the chronology of important festival days. Similarly, Ezekiel notes the chronology of the exile.

Unfortunately, these dates are often more problematic than insightful; difficulties in confirming them abound. Old Testament dates reflect several calendars, which differ in following lunar or solar cycles and beginning the new year in fall or spring, and use different methods of calculating regnal years. Correlation of the dates in Ezekiel with intrabiblical and extrabiblical sources is often uncertain or contradictory, or both. Key data from Babylonian sources are lost or destroyed. Moreover, the dates in Ezekiel and elsewhere in the OT may be later redactions and therefore historically unreliable. There is no consensus among scholars on these issues and readers will discover differences in dating in commentaries. One can accept Ezekiel's chronological scheme as it stands or consider the various proposals that seek to resolve the problems.

What is indisputable is that the dates in Ezekiel are counted from the exile of King Jehoiachin (1:2; 33:21; 40:1; compare 2 Kgs 24:15), a moment that defined time for Ezekiel, just as Christians divide time with the birth of Christ or as Americans might divide time "before 9/11" and "after 9/11." Ezekiel's chronology begins the first day of the first month of the first year of exile (1/1/01; there is no year zero).

That Ezekiel began his chronological counting in the spring of 597 BCE is mostly supported by data. There is relative agreement among scholars that the date recorded in the Babylonian Chronicle when Nebuchadnezzar seized the city, correlated to the contemporary Western calendar, is March 16, 597 B.C.E. What is uncertain is whether 1/1/01 is therefore March 17, 597 B.C.E., or some other date —when Jehoiachin surrendered, when Nebuchadnezzar "carried away" Jehoiachin, or when Jehoiachin arrived in Babylon.

The following discussion considers each date's possible significance. Readers who wish to investigate chronology issues in greater depth, in addition to commentaries, should consult *HAIJ*, Seitz 1989, Albertz 2003, and Galil 1996.

Ezekiel 1:1-2 is the first and earliest date, beginning the book and introducing Ezekiel's inaugural vision. The date in verse 1, "in the thirtieth year," does not make much sense. Thirtieth year since when? There is no definitive solution. The date in verse 2 is problematic since MT has no month. Its significance is the correlation to the fifth year of King Jehoiachin's exile, probably the spring of

593 B.C.E. Even when not explicitly stated, years are understood to be "of the exile."

Ezekiel 8:1 introduces the vision complex of chapters 8–11. There does not appear to be any particular historical significance for this date. The elapsed time from 1:1-2 is approximately the time allotted to complete the sign-acts in 4:5-6.

Ezekiel 20:1 is not quite one year after the previous date. The historical significance of this date is unknown, though hypotheses, centering on possible Egyptian intervention and hope of return, have been proposed (compare Jer 28:1-11; 37:5-11; see Block 1997, 618–19).

Ezekiel 24:1 introduces Ezekiel's final judgment oracle. The identical form and wording of this date with 2 Kgs 25:1 and Jer 52:4 marks it as the beginning of Nebuchadnezzar's siege of Jerusalem. There are problems reconciling this date with 33:21 (see below).

Ezekiel 26:1 introduces the complex of judgment oracles against Tyre (chs. 26–28) and breaks the so-far-chronological order of the dates. The month is absent in the MT. The LXX supplies "the first month." The correlation of this date to the beginning of Nebuchadnezzar's thirteen-year siege against Tyre is doubtful. Evidence is, at best, sketchy (Corral 2002, 58–60). It is reasonable to assume that this date falls sometime during Nebuchadnezzar's siege against Jerusalem, when Jerusalem would need assistance from Tyre to keep it supplied with resources (see p. 160).

Ezekiel 29:1, 17; 30:20; 31:1; 32:1, 17, half of the dates in Ezekiel, appear in the complex of judgment oracles against Egypt (chs. 29–32). Why so many dates are associated with Egypt is largely an unanswerable question. Their significance is also indeterminate since generally there are insufficient data to correlate with each date (see p. 178). A general clustering around the time of Jerusalem's destruction suggests it is the main concern of these oracles. As Jerusalem faced its demise, Ezekiel prophesied Egypt's demise.

Ezekiel 33:21 is the date Ezekiel and the exiles hear, "The city has fallen." As they stand in the MT, the dates of 24:1; 33:21; and 40:1 cannot be reconciled. Correlation leaves illogical gaps between dates or results in discrepancies in dating the first deportation and Jerusalem's destruction. One solution is to argue that the date of 24:1 was supplied by a later editor on the basis of 2 Kgs 25:1 and Jer 52:4 (see 24:1 above). Another solution is complex scholarly arguments involving all the debated issues. A third solution emends the date to read "eleventh year" based on some Greek and Syriac manuscripts.

Ezekiel 40:1 is the only date in the oracles of salvation (chs. 34–48) and begins the vision of the restored Temple (chs. 40–48). "At the beginning of the year" suggests the date is 1/10/25 on the exilic calendar, more than twelve years

after Ezekiel heard the news of Jerusalem's destruction (33:21). The date is traditionally associated with the Jubilee cycle (Lev 25:1-55), suggesting restored property as the vision's key theme. There are two directions of interpretation: that the date marks the middle of a Jubilee cycle or the beginning of the Jubilee cycle. Contemporary scholars favor correlation with the Babylonian New Year festival of *akitu*, suggesting polemic against the Babylonians and their deity, Marduk, as the vision's key theme (Block 1998, 496, 513; Darr 2002, 1537–38; Stevenson 1996, 52–53, 139).

This date is correlated with "the fourteenth year after the city was struck down." The significance of this correlation is unknown and frequently ignored. Perhaps this vision is correlated with the destruction of "the city" because "a structure *like a city*" stands at its heart (40:2, emphasis added). The city restored stands in contrast to the city struck down.

COMMENTARY

A PROPHET AMONG THE EXILES (1:1–3:27)

Many years ago, in a land far away, lived a man named Ezekiel. He and his people had suffered terribly. After a fierce battle, Ezekiel's home had been conquered. He was among the social elite who were taken captive to their conqueror's country. A few years later, sitting by a river in this foreign land, Ezekiel experienced something almost as terrifying: an encounter with God. The description of this encounter opens the book of Ezekiel. After orienting readers to Ezekiel's time and place (1:1-3), three distinct events are narrated. First, Ezekiel recounts his vision of standing in God's presence (1:4-28). Next, in a series of speeches, God calls Ezekiel to a new role: a prophet who is to bring God's message of "lamentation and . . . woe" to the people (2:1–3:15). Finally, Ezekiel undergoes a process that prepares him for this role (3:16-27).

Just as the ordination service of a priest served as an initiation rite into that role (compare Lev 8–9), prophets also experienced an initiation process. Ezekiel's experience both resembles and differs from the experiences of prophets before him (compare Isa 6; Jer 1). The report is longer and more complex than that of any other biblical prophet. Perhaps Ezekiel had more need than other prophets did to prove that YHWH sent him, since his message is so unbelievably disturbing. Each main section of the opening chapters is one more argument to persuade Ezekiel's audience that he is YHWH's true messenger. The purpose of these events was to prepare Ezekiel for his role and to make his claim for legitimacy. Considering how aspects of trauma might illuminate Ezekiel's experience reveals the experience of divine encounter as highly disturbing.

Ezek'el Saw "de Wheel Way Up in de Middle o' de Air" (1:1-28)

Ezekiel claims prophetic authority precisely because he saw "de wheel way up in de middle o' de air." Standing in God's presence is a standard claim for true prophecy. The way Ezekiel saw God is also important. The deity of Ezekiel's vision is creator of the universe, mighty warrior, and almighty king, a God who can kill and make alive. Ezekiel faced the God his people faced—the God who both killed Judah and will make them alive again.

Literary Analysis

The book of Ezekiel begins as do other prophetic books, with a *superscription* (1:1-3), a brief indication of author, date, and subject (e.g., Hos 1:1; Amos 1:1). This superscription is more elaborate than the usual terse provision of basic data. The elaboration takes the form of repetition and expansion. Twice a time frame is given (vv. 1, 2). The location "by the river Chebar" is mentioned twice and each time is modified by another descriptor, "among the exiles" (v. 1) and "in the land of the Chaldeans" (v. 3). Three times reference is made to Ezekiel's relationship to God: "I saw visions of God" (v. 1); "the word of YHWH came . . . and the hand of YHWH was on him there" (v. 3). Repetition is a standard literary device throughout the book of Ezekiel, providing emphasis or elaborating upon something. Here the repetition emphasizes when the prophet spoke, where Ezekiel prophesied, and who authorized this prophet.

The main body of the chapter (vv. 4-28) is an extended *vision report*, a characteristic prophetic genre. Significantly, the book of Ezekiel begins with a vision portraying the prophet having an audience with God in the heavenly realm. Throughout the OT one of the tests of the "true" prophet is whether the prophet could claim to have stood in YHWH's presence (1 Kgs 22:19-23; Isa 6:1-3; Jer 23:21-22). The prophet who made this claim was trustworthy. Of all the prophets, Ezekiel is the only one *to begin* with such a vision. Ezekiel does not wait for his message to be questioned to present his credentials, but starts by authenticating his prophecy. Because Ezekiel's message is in many ways unbelievable, the readers of this message need to know from the very beginning that they can believe it.

Exegetical Analysis

The superscription (vv. 1-3) provides two dates. The "thirtieth year" may (or may not) refer to the minimum age one could assume priestly duties (Num 4:30). The second date locates Ezekiel during the time of the exile. Jehoiachin was king when Nebuchadnezzar first attacked Jerusalem and deported some of its population (2 Kgs 24:1-16). To date, his oracles from that moment imply that they define time for Ezekiel, just as contemporary time might be divided "before 9/11" and "after 9/11." There was life "before" Jehoiachin's exile and then there was life "after." Ezekiel's concern is with life "after."

The three identifications of location also firmly anchor Ezekiel in the exile. "Among the exiles" establishes Ezekiel as among the first group of deportees from Jerusalem. According to Babylonian sources "the river Chebar" was a canal that looped off the Euphrates around the city of Nippur in the plains of southern Babylon. "Chaldea" is the biblical name for southern Mesopotamia, the area associated with Babylon (contemporary southern Iraq). Both the time and place accentuate that Ezekiel's life and prophetic work occurred in the context of the Judean exile, and deal with its concerns.

Like many Hebrew names, "Ezekiel" is a compound name. Two elements are combined to form a descriptive phrase or a complete sentence. The first element in the name (Ezeki-) is a verbal form and the second element (-el) is derived from a divine name. The verb generally means "to be or grow strong." In another form it means "to make strong, strengthen." The same verb is used in Exodus to describe the hardening, or strengthening, of Pharaoh's heart. The second element, "El," is the generic Hebrew word for "god" as well as the proper name of Canaan's chief deity. Thus, Ezekiel means "May God (El) make strong" or "God strengthens (or hardens)" or "God will be strong." Several interpretations are possible: God will strengthen Ezekiel in his prophetic mission; or since God is strong, God is someone on whom Ezekiel can rely for support; or God will be strong and firm in carrying out the divine intention of punishing the people.

Ezekiel (and/or his father) is identified as a priest. According to the grammar of the sentence, the identification, "priest," can refer either to Ezekiel or to his father, making Ezekiel's priestly status ambiguous. Nonetheless, the priestly orientation of the book is clear from the attention to such typical priestly concerns as dating, purity/impurity, the layout of the Temple, worship practices, God's holiness, as well as specific connections with the priestly Holiness Code in Lev 17–26. Whether or not Ezekiel was himself a priest, he used the priestly worldview to explain to the exiles how and why they suffered deportation and what their future might be.

For good reasons, there are few artistic representations of Ezekiel's vision; attempting to draw it results in frustration. There are several reasons why it is so

difficult to grasp its content and meaning.

First, the vision itself claims to represent only vaguely what Ezekiel saw, using words "something like," "appearance," "like," "looked like," and "likeness." The closer one gets to the center of the vision, the vaguer the description:

> And above the dome over their heads there was *something like* a throne, in *appearance like* sapphire; and seated above the *likeness* of a throne was *something* that *seemed like* a human form. Upward from what *appeared like* the loins I saw *something like* gleaming amber, *something* that *looked like* fire enclosed all around; and downward from what *looked like* the loins I saw *something* that *looked like* fire. (vv. 26-27, emphasis added)

Second, the convoluted syntax or even lack of syntax in the Hebrew, obscured in translation, is problematic. Some verses simply lack verbs. Verse 8 is literally, "and the hands of a human beneath their wings by their four sides and their faces and their wings to four of them." Then there is the notoriously inconsistent use of masculine and feminine endings. Hebrew is a gendered language and pronouns are to agree with their antecedent in both gender (masculine or feminine) and number (singular or plural). But not here. Verse 10 offers an example of this. "As for the likeness of their [masc.] faces, the face of a human [designating either or both sexes] and the face of a lion to the right to the four of them [masc.] and the face of an ox from the left side of the four of them [fem.] and the face of an eagle to the four of them [fem.]" (author's translation).

A third problem is the use of obscure vocabulary. This vision employs words such as "amber," which only occurs here in the entire OT. Moreover, words are defined differently from traditional usage. For example, the word translated as "gleaming, sparkled, shining" (*ʿên*) (vv. 4, 7, 16, 22, 27) everywhere else in the OT means "eye" (e.g., Deut 19:21; Ps 94:9; Ezek 1:18; 7:4). Numerous other words used in the passage occur less than ten times in the entire OT. It is as if Ezekiel had to make up language for this vision.

Finally, what Ezekiel sees is bizarre. Perhaps the reason the rabbis forbade making any representation of and were reluctant to interpret the vision may simply be that they could not figure it out. There are four living creatures that look sort of human, but each has four faces and four wings and their wings are somehow touching one another. Each walks straight, and there is some kind of glowing fire in/around/among them, with a wheel beside the living creatures (or are the living creatures *on* the wheel?). There is also a wheel within the wheel (is this the same wheel?) and its rim is full of eyes (are there four wheels or only one?). When the creatures go, so do the wheels. There is a firmament above them, and the appearance of a likeness of another humanlike being also gleams

brightly.

As difficult as it might be to envision this, a number of images from Israel's traditions help in understanding it. The "stormy wind" (v. 4), the "sound of tumult like . . . an army" (v. 24), the images of fire and lightning (vv. 13-14, 27), the image of a chariot evoked by the wheels, and the bow (an instrument of war) in the cloud (v. 28) are associated with various traditions of YHWH as warrior (Eichrodt 1970, 56; Lind 1996, 29–31).

The wings of the living creatures that spread out, touch one another, and cover their bodies evoke both the seraphim of Isaiah's vision (Isa 6:2) and the winged cherubim associated with the ark of the covenant (Exod 25:18-22), YHWH's throne (1 Sam 4:4; 2 Sam 6:2), YHWH's chariot (Ps 18:10), and the guardian of the garden of Eden (Gen 3:24). Yet only in 10:1 does the word *cherubim* appear. It is not used here, not even to say that Ezekiel saw "something like" cherubim. Still, the associations evoke a royal court or royal throne and thus YHWH as a royal figure.

The "dome" in verses 22, 23, 25, 26 is the same "dome" of the creation account in Gen 1. But the emphasis is not on God creating the dome but rather on God as present or residing above the dome. In an imprecise, confusing, and ambiguous manner the language evokes Israel's main imagery for God as Warrior, King, and Creator. The images of God described here are encountered throughout the book. Readers should consider their significance for understanding Ezekiel's message.

In addition to these inexact uses of various traditions, there are unique elements to the vision. The image of the heavens being opened (v. 1) is unique in the OT as is the wheel within a wheel with its rim full of eyes. The part human, part animal image of a creature will emerge later in the apocalyptic visions of Daniel, but the four faces (human, lion, ox, eagle) are a unique occurrence in the OT (though they appear later in Rev 4:6-8). The uniqueness of these images means that their precise meaning in the vision can only be guessed at. The most important of these unique images are the wheels. While in the opening vision they do little except add a level of complexity, in another vision they will serve an important theological function (see p. 57).

Although aspects of the image may be unclear, it is clear that Ezekiel claimed to see the "glory of YHWH," an important concept in the priestly traditions, which Ezekiel adapted. In priestly traditions, the "glory" occurs in connection with God's appearance in the tabernacle (Exod 40:34-35; Num 14:10; 16:42 [17:7]; 20:6). The "glory" also takes the form of a consuming fire and cloud (Exod 16:10; 24:16-17; Num 16:42 [17:7]). Instead of the tabernacle, Ezekiel locates the "glory" in Jerusalem's Temple (compare 1 Kgs 8:11). Ezekiel also

describes the "glory" as blazing fire and cloud (1:4, 13; 8:2; 10:4). In both the priestly traditions and Ezekiel, the "glory" was the visible, constant presence of God. God's "glory" dwelled perpetually, first in the tabernacle, then in the Temple, and so was associated with God's dwelling place. The "glory" is also a theological attempt to speak about God as both present and transcendent. The transcendent God can be present and known to the people through the "glory." Perhaps this is why the "glory" is associated with both fire and cloud. The fire signifies divine otherness and majesty. People must keep their distance lest they be burned. The cloud offers protection by preventing the people from getting too close to the fire. As a sign of divine presence, the "glory" underscores that Ezekiel saw God.

In summary, Ezekiel's vision is not nearly as clear as English translations would have readers believe. The echoes that resound of God as Creator, Warrior, and King, however, as well as the identification of the likeness of the glory of YHWH, emphasize the fact that Ezekiel claimed to stand in the presence of the God of Israel and no other. Ezekiel's audience can know, beyond all doubt, that "the word of YHWH" came to Ezekiel. Even if it is not possible to draw a precise picture, Ezekiel offers the proper response to the vision. "When I saw it, I fell on my face" (v. 28).

Theological and Ethical Analysis

(1) Although the vision is difficult, later traditions will find meaning in parts of it. In Judaism the wheel imagery became a chariot (Merkavah) that bears the Throne of Glory. Because the Merkavah is connected with God, the study of the Merkavah became equated with the study of the Divine and thus played a significant role in sectarian Jewish mysticism. In Christianity, the four faces of the living creatures became the basis of the iconography of the four Gospel evangelists; Matthew was identified with the human face, Mark with the lion, Luke with the bull, and John with the eagle. For Irenaeus the four faces in Ezekiel's and John's revelations explained why there are four Gospels and neither five nor three. African American slaves sang about Ezekiel's wheel as a metaphor of human faith and divine grace. Just as Ezekiel borrowed aspects of his tradition in creating the vision, later communities borrowed aspects of Ezekiel's vision.

Finding meaning in this vision for today is difficult. This is evident in the popular belief that Ezekiel saw a UFO. The classic exposition of this is by Erich von Däniken (1968, 55–57). A Google search of "Ezekiel and UFO" yields thousands of Web sites making the same claim. As outlandish as this view

sounds, it suggests viewing this vision as something "alien." Ezekiel claims he experienced a direct encounter with God, but how does one describe such an experience? He is trying to describe something that is essentially indescribable. Language itself breaks down. While other commentators see the fractured language of this chapter as evidence of multiple and inept redactors, it is possible to consider the fractured language as evidence that human language cannot convey the experience of God's presence. Divine encounter is something alien to normal human discourse. It should not be surprising that there are obscure words, no verbs, wrong endings, and convoluted syntax. Translations obscure the fractured nature of the language of the vision by "smoothing" out the language so it makes "sense," but part of the point is that it is impossible to make "sense" of God. If one is so (un)fortunate as Ezekiel as to have a direct experience of God, how does one convey that in mere language? The vision report demonstrates the limits of language for such a task. It is the primary way humans communicate with one another, and yet it is an inadequate vehicle.

(2) The language may also convey more than the inability to describe God in human terms. Ezekiel may have experienced this divine encounter as a traumatic experience. Studies show that the overwhelming emotions of trauma can wreak havoc on memory.

> Traumatic memories are likely to be stored in a form that works against meaningful recall. Memories may be stored . . . in bits and pieces. . . . Memories of such fragmented experience may take the form of isolated images. . . . These images, feelings, and memory fragments do not occur in sequence, *and they do not add up to a coherent event*. (Allen 1995, 104, emphasis added)

Often those who experience trauma are "unable to tell a coherent narrative, with a beginning, middle and end" (van der Kolk and Fisler 1995, 517). In other words, simply narrating what has happened is sometimes impossible for a trauma victim. Ezekiel's language sounds like someone who, although he recalls isolated images, is not yet able to give a coherent account of a traumatic experience.

It is perhaps a surprising, unfamiliar, and uncomfortable notion to consider a divine encounter as "traumatic." There is a tendency in American society to "tame the text," or perhaps to "tame" experiences of God to make them seem friendly and centering. Ezekiel pushes readers to consider how an encounter with the divine can be terrifying, traumatic, and decentering.

In this opening scene God overwhelms Ezekiel. Yet the prophet survives to tell of his experience—however disjointed it may be. Perhaps this hints at the exiles' future. They too will be overwhelmed—by God and by the Babylonian

army. Ezekiel's experience may give them hope that though they are driven to their knees, they too will survive to tell the tale.

A Bitter and Traumatizing Call (2:1–3:15)

In a scene from the movie *The Blues Brothers*, Jake Blues enters a church. A bright light from the sky shines on him as a choir sings hallelujahs, while a minister shouts, "Do you see the light? Have you seen the light?" Jake Blues sees the light as he is "called" to reassemble his band. What this nonbiblical *call narrative* shares with its biblical counterpart is a person's sense of being compelled to a particular act of service. Candidates for ordination in Christian denominations will be asked to recount their "call to ministry." Behind the question is the issue of authority. Only those who experience a sense of divine compulsion should be authorized to take up the task of full-time ministry. The question of authorization for divine service is the focus of this unit (2:1–3:15). The literary genre *call narrative* provides further evidence that Ezekiel was a true prophet.

Literary Analysis

Following the vision of chapter 1, the next events of call and commissioning reinforce Ezekiel's authority by providing additional proofs of Ezekiel's legitimacy. The *call narrative*, like the vision of standing in God's presence (1:4-28), is a form of prophetic authorization. Comparing Ezekiel's call with other call narratives (e.g., Exod 3–4; Isa 6; see Habel 1965) leaves two impressions. First, this passage makes use of *all* the elements of *all* the call narratives in Israel's history. Since one of the most serious forms of opposition to a prophet was to say, "YHWH has not sent you" (compare Jer 28:15; Ezek 13:6), there is almost a sense of desperation in the narrative to prove that Ezekiel has indeed been "sent" by YHWH. If Ezekiel takes all the call elements and makes them bigger and grander and repeats them often enough, perhaps he can persuade his audience that he is truly God's prophet. Perhaps the extreme circumstances of exile call for an extreme call narrative.

Second, beyond merging, combining, or expanding upon the elements of a call narrative, at times this text stretches or distorts them almost beyond recognition. This is typical of Ezekiel's rhetoric throughout the book. It is as if what has come before cannot quite fit the circumstances of exile. Just as exile

has distorted the life of a refugee out of all recognition, the traditions that have shaped Israel must also be radically altered.

Despite the chaotic and desperate quality of this unit, it is characterized by a number of carefully crafted literary features (Greenberg 1983, 74–75). First, there are double expressions, such as "to the people of Israel/to a nation of rebels"; "impudent/stubborn"; "obscure speech/difficult language"; "hard forehead/stubborn heart." Second, there are double expressions augmented into triplets, such as "briers/thorns + scorpions." Third, there are unique expressions, such as "hard forehead," "difficult language," and "receive in your heart." Fourth, a number of threefold patterns abound. The simplest pattern repeats the same thing three times, such as "whether they hear or refuse to hear" (2:5, 7; 3:11). Three times in 2:6, Ezekiel is told not to be afraid. Three times he is commanded to eat (2:8; 3:1, 3). The word "hard" is repeated three times in 3:8-9. These repetitions add emphasis. It is the equivalent of using italics, bold, caps, and exclamation points—***DO NOT BE AFRAID! EAT!*** Another pattern modifies the content with each repetition, such as the different characterizations of those to whom Ezekiel is sent. The audience is first characterized as rebellious (2:3-7), then second as unresponsive (3:5-7), and third, their identity as exiles is emphasized (3:11).

Another literary feature is that the final verses of this unit (3:12-15) return to images, themes, and vocabulary from Ezekiel's opening vision. This creates an *inclusio*, or an envelope, for Ezekiel's entire call account (1:1–3:15). References to YHWH's glory (1:28; 3:12), the sounds of wings (1:24; 3:13), the presence of wheels (1:15-19; 3:13), and the hand of YHWH (1:3; 3:14) enhance the impression of unity and coherence (Darr 2002, 1128).

Overall there is a great deal of structure to this unit. Whether from the trauma of divine encounter or the trauma of exile, or both, throughout the book Ezekiel will come across as on the edge of disintegration. That edginess is evident in the way Ezekiel contorts traditions, genres, and language. At the same time, the attention to detail and highly structured and stylized features suggest someone trying to create order out of chaos. Without the stylistic features one has a sense that the narrative would be incomprehensible, that Ezekiel would sound like what many consider him to be: crazy.

Exegetical Analysis

For the first of ninety-three times throughout the book, Ezekiel is identified as "mortal" (2:1). Previous English translations employed the more literal translation, "son of man." Because of Jesus' self-identification as "Son of Man"

in the Gospels (eighty-eight times throughout, e.g., Matt 8:20; Mark 10:33; Luke 19:10; John 6:53), the significance of this phrase is hotly debated. Readers should consult the Abingdon New Testament Commentaries on the Gospels for its meaning there. Here it is a fairly straightforward Hebrew construction where the phrase "son(s) of X" refers to a specific member of the set X (*IBHS*, §9.5.3.b). The most common example is "sons of Israel," which specifies members of the group Israel. The set *ʾādām* in biblical Hebrew is that of humanity (compare Gen 6:1; 1 Sam 15:29; Jer 7:20), so a member of that set is a "mortal" or human being (compare Deut 32:8; Ps 11:4; Job 16:21). This may signify a contrast to an "immortal" or divine being; Ezekiel is human and no god (Zimmerli 1979, 131; Greenberg 1983, 61–62). Alternatively, this impersonal address, instead of addressing Ezekiel by name, may represent the separation between God and the people (see p. 21). Either way, "the epithet is capable of bearing (and the reader of perceiving) more than one nuance, even within a single verse" (Darr 2002, 1122).

At the end of the previous chapter, Ezekiel responds to his vision by falling on his face. One way to interpret that physical action is as a response to the overwhelming and traumatic nature of his encounter with God. Falling on one's face is also an example of court etiquette, what a vassal does in the presence of a sovereign, human (1 Sam 25:23; 2 Sam 9:6; 14:4) or divine (Gen 17:3; 2 Chr 20:18). Whether Ezekiel falls from a sense of propriety or terror, when commanded to stand, he seems unable, or unwilling, to do so (2:1). Instead, a "spirit" enters him and sets him on his feet (2:2; compare 3:22-24). This "spirit" will be with Ezekiel throughout the book, leading him to speak (11:5), lifting him up, and transporting him to another place (3:12, 14; 8:3; 11:1, 24; 37:1). The Hebrew word, *rûaḥ*, can be translated "wind, spirit, breath." There is widespread debate about the nature of this "spirit." Is it the Holy Spirit? The Spirit of God? A human energy? A powerful wind? Ezekiel does not specify. Again, the word is capable of bearing (and readers of perceiving) more than one nuance.

Once Ezekiel is on his feet, God commissions him as a divine messenger ("I am sending you," 2:3). Ezekiel is to deliver God's message to "the people of Israel" (lit., "sons of Israel"; see above). Those in Ezekiel's audience would identify themselves as descendants of Jacob/Israel. They would also identify themselves as being in covenant relationship with YHWH. But the next description defines them as the antithesis of the covenant community. Throughout the generations ("ancestors") they have "rebelled" and "transgressed" (2:3). In the political realm, "to rebel" "denotes the attempt to escape from political dependency with the goal of achieving or regaining political independence. . . . A vassal refuses to acknowledge vassal status"

(*TDOT*, 9.2). Its antonym is "serve, be subject to" (*TDOT*, 9.2; Greenberg 1983, 63). "To transgress" can have similar political connotations, namely, seceding from a political alliance (*TDOT*, 9.3). The pairing of "rebel" and "transgress" occurs in the OT only here and in Ezek 20:38. Since the people have rebelled and transgressed against YHWH, the political is transferred into the theological realm. The covenant relationship requires that Israel "serve" YHWH alone (e.g., Deut 6:13; 10:12; 1 Sam 7:3). Instead, Israel attempts to escape from and break with this relationship. This is the first hint of Ezekiel's explanation for the exile: the covenant relationship has been severed because of the people's failure to be loyal subjects of the divine sovereign.

Not only is Ezekiel's audience rebellious, they have "stiff faces" and a "hard heart" (2:4; author's translation). Instead of the more common expression "a stiff necked people" (see Exod 32:9; Deut 9:6), "stiff faces" is an Ezekielian creation. A "hard heart" characterized Pharaoh (e.g., Exod 7:3; 8:15). The NRSV translation "impudent and stubborn" brings to mind the expression and attitude of toddlers or teenagers bent on having their way. But the problem is more serious than petulance. Moshe Greenberg translates "impudent" as "brazen/hard faced," an impassive face that shows no emotion or disconcertion when it should (compare Isa 50:7; Greenberg 1983, 63). A "stiff face" reveals a person's complete indifference or insensitivity to others. Ezekiel characterizes his audience as callous and indifferent to the impact of their behavior. In 2:6 and 3:9, Ezekiel is told not to be dismayed "at their looks," literally, "at their faces." No wonder!

If this were not discouraging enough, the audience is also called a "rebellious house," a phrase unique to Ezekiel. It occurs four times in this unit and eleven times in chapters 2–24. "Rebellious" connotes a willful, deliberate decision to disobey, like the stubborn and "rebellious" son in Deut 21:18-21 (*TDOT*, 9.7). As a grammatical parallel to "house of Israel," "rebellious house" is practically a synonym (compare 12:9). "House," in Hebrew, also carries the meaning of "dynasty" or "lineage," like the establishment of David's "house" (2 Sam 7:11-16). Rebelliousness is the inheritance that gets handed down to the next generation in this dynasty.

Finally, the audience is described as "briers and thorns" and "scorpions," terms that share the common element of sharp, stinging things. Talk about your tough crowd! This audience will be quite "prickly" and dangerous. No wonder God had to keep commanding Ezekiel "do not be afraid" (2:6).

In contrast to his audience, Ezekiel is commanded not to be rebellious (2:8). His obedience is immediately tested. "Open your mouth and eat what I give you." Readers may wonder if Ezekiel was tempted to clamp his lips tightly

together and vigorously shake his head, “No!” If God is sending Ezekiel to such a prickly crowd, who knows what kind of noxious substance God will give him. But before Ezekiel has an opportunity to protest, he sees before him “a written scroll” (2:9). When the scroll is unrolled, Ezekiel finds written on both sides “lamentation and mourning and woe” (2:10).

The fact that the scroll is covered in writing is significant. It is a text, and thus has a sense of permanence. Unlike in today’s computer age where texts are easily alterable, once inscribed with ink a papyrus is not easily changed. The only way King Jehoiakim knew to alter a written scroll was to cut it into strips and burn it (Jer 36:23). The fixity of written words is featured in the later stories of Esther and Daniel, where once a decree is “written” it may not be altered or revoked (Esth 8:8; Dan 6:8). The scroll’s fixity means that Ezekiel’s audience could be certain that whatever Ezekiel spoke would be nothing but the words of God; Ezekiel could not alter them. The written scroll functions as another piece in Ezekiel’s prophetic résumé. With other prophets offering conflicting messages (compare 12:21–14:11), the factor determining true from false was that Ezekiel’s words were written on a scroll that he received from God.

The words on it are also significant. “Lamentation” is a fairly common word in the OT and originated in funeral rituals (compare 2 Sam 1:17; 2 Chr 35:25). “Mourning” describes various inarticulate sounds like the growl of a lion (Isa 31:4), one’s inarticulate mutterings while meditating on God’s word (Josh 1:8; Ps 1:2), or the “sigh” uttered when life ends (Ps 90:9; *HALOT*, 237). “Woe” is a *hapax legomenon* and its translation is a guess. Many scholars connect it with other Hebrew words denoting wailing or mourning. Others suggest that it is an *onomatopoeic* expression echoing a cry of pain, *heee* (Block 1997, 125; Brownlee 1986, 30).

The scroll’s words express the feelings and experience of the exiles. They would have seen many, perhaps even close family members, die during Nebuchadnezzar’s siege of Jerusalem. Who knows how many others died or what hardships and horrors they faced on the forced march to Babylon. Furthermore, they have suffered the loss of their social, political, and economic prestige and have had their assumptions about themselves, their country, their faith, and their God shattered. Undoubtedly, in their sighing and moaning the exiles are asking “victim questions” (see p. xx). Insofar as the scroll represents Ezekiel’s message, it is possible to view that message as answering the victim questions and reestablishing a conceptual system that will allow the exiles to recover from trauma. The scroll is neither a “message of doom” nor even a “message of judgment.” It is a message of *explanation*. What follows in the rest of Ezekiel, the message of the scroll, explains why there is lamentation,

mourning, and woe.

When Ezekiel is commanded to eat the scroll, he eats. Ingestion signifies that he embodies the divine word. This too will reassure his audience that Ezekiel's words are, in fact, God's own. Readers might expect the taste of this scroll to be bitter and to give Ezekiel indigestion. Instead the taste is "sweet as honey." The medieval Jewish interpreter Kimḥi said that something so distasteful was easily swallowed (Greenberg 1983, 68), a Mary Poppins' "spoonful-of-sugar-helps-the-medicine-go-down" approach to scroll swallowing.

YHWH's speech in 3:4-9 provides another angle on Ezekiel's audience besides their rebelliousness: their unresponsiveness. "The house of Israel" is not an incomprehensible people of "obscure speech and difficult language" (3:6), yet no communication is possible between them and Ezekiel. Indeed, communication would be more likely if Ezekiel were to go to a people who spoke a foreign language! Readers who know what it is like to try to communicate with those whose language they do not speak can understand how cutting this indictment is.

Although Ezekiel will speak YHWH's words to them, they are not willing to listen to him or to YHWH because they have "hard foreheads" and "a stiff heart" (3:7; author's translation). This is similar but not identical to the language of 2:4 (see p. 9). "Forehead" is substituted for "face" and the adjectives "stiff" and "hard" are reversed. Greenberg relates the "hard forehead" to the English word *effrontery*, which comes from the Latin *ex* (out) + *front-*, *frons* (forehead). There is a bold, shameless quality to their refusal to listen (Greenberg 1983, 69; compare Jer 3:3).

If the suggestion is plausible that Ezekiel's task is to rebuild shattered assumptions (see p. xix), then it is possible to understand the people's resistance to God's words (2:5, 7; 3:11). Their resistance is not to the future possibility of God's judgment against them, but to the explanation for *why* God has judged them. It is the difference between someone saying on September 10, 2001, "Because you have done x, y, and z, America, prepare for God's judgment," and someone saying on September 12, 2001, "America, this has happened and it is God's judgment because you have done x, y, and z."

Trauma victims are more open to hearing some explanations than others. Anyone who has worked with such survivors knows that reactions to unwanted "explanations" can be visceral and intense. They can turn a deaf ear to such explanations or violently reject them. Israel's inclination is to reject violently God's proffered explanation. In the face of this rejection, the word *hard* is repeated three times in 3:8-9. "I have made your face *hard* . . . and your forehead *hard*. . . . Like the *hardest* stone" (emphasis added). Ezekiel will live up to his name, "God hardens" (see p. 3). No wonder Ezekiel must labor to establish the

divine authorization of his message.

The third reference to Ezekiel's audience is in 3:11. Rather than focusing on the character of the audience (rebellious, unresponsive), here, the focus is on their identity. They are "the exiles" and "your people" (lit., "sons of your people"; see p. 8). This divine message is specifically addressed to those in exile. The identification links Ezekiel and the people; he is one of them. He too must accept God's explanation for exile.

After Ezekiel is told for the third time, "go" (3:1, 4, 11), he is returned to the scene of the vision as the spirit lifts him and bears him away (3:12-14). He leaves YHWH's presence and finds himself back among the exiles at Tel-abib (pronounced like the modern city Tel Aviv) by the river Chebar. Throughout the book, readers learn very little about Ezekiel's own response to the events he has experienced, so it is significant that the call narrative's epilogue provides information about his emotional state.

"I went in bitterness in the heat of my spirit" (3:14). "Bitterness" is an antonym to the sweetness of the scroll (compare Isa 5:20). Bitter(ness) is used to describe human emotion in situations of extreme stress, usually associated with dramatic losses (*TDOT*, 9.16–18). Naomi was bitter because of the deaths of her husband and sons (Ruth 1:13, 20). Slavery in Egypt was bitter because of the loss of freedom (Exod 1:14). The "heat," which here describes Ezekiel's spirit, everywhere else in the book describes God's "fury" (5:13, 15, passim), a smoke-coming-from-the-ears kind of rage. Ezekiel returns a bitter, furious prophet.

Bitterness and anger are two common emotions following trauma (Allen 1995, 53–59). The exact trauma that leaves Ezekiel emotionally wrecked is ambiguous. It could be his experiences of war and exile or his encounter with the divine (see p. 6). It is also plausible that the commissioning itself gives rise to his bitter wrath.

If the latter, Ezekiel's emotions may arise as a response to a unique aspect of Ezekiel's call narrative—the absence of any protest by the prophet. An objection is a standard component of *call narratives* (Exod 3:11; Isa 6:5; Jer 1:6). Modern commentators assume an implied protest or interpret Ezekiel's silence as a sign of his total submission to God's call. The silence can also be interpreted as the prophet being bullied by God; he is never given an opportunity to voice his protest. Divine coercion may have been one stressor too many. No wonder Ezekiel is bitter and furious and sits "stunned" among the exiles (3:15). "Stunned" is an understatement. Elsewhere in Ezekiel the NRSV translates the same verb as "horrify" (20:26), "desolation" (30:12, 14), and "appalled" (32:10). In its noun form it is used throughout Ezekiel to describe the "desolated" land (compare 6:14; 12:20; 14:15-16; 15:8). A more appropriate translation than

"stunned" might be "traumatized." Ezekiel remains by the river for seven days, a bitter, furious, and traumatized divine messenger.

Theological and Ethical Analysis

Amid competing prophetic voices, Israel faced the problem of determining who spoke the "true" voice of God. Over centuries a type of job description emerged. "Wanted: Prophet. The successful candidate must be called by God and have stood in the heavenly council. Must be willing to speak only YHWH's words. Candidates who resemble Moses, Isaiah, and Jeremiah are especially encouraged to apply." Not just anyone could stand shouting in the street and be considered a prophet. Cross-cultural studies have demonstrated that in every society where prophets, shamans, wise persons, and other intermediaries exist, cultural expectations always determine how an intermediary is chosen, such as through descent from a particular family or participation in a certain set of initiation rites.

People today may disagree on whether to call a person "prophet" or to speak instead of one having "a prophetic voice." But to the extent that anyone claims to speak "the word of YHWH" in his or her preaching and teaching, the question arises of how communities decide who speaks with the "true" voice of God. Readers may have considered these criteria:

an evident spiritual connection with God
a message compatible with Scripture
successful completion of ordination requirements
a particular theological stance
spiritual maturity
an unpopular message
appeals to "the spirit of prophecy"
a message not for financial gain or personal fame

Even with agreed-upon criteria, there might be no consensus as to whether Martin Luther King, Jr. or Jerry Falwell spoke truly. Whose voice does a faith community listen to? How does the community decide? It is crucial that a decision be made. In many ways, the debates taking place within faith communities today over difficult and controversial issues are precisely over the issue of who truly speaks God's word. Ezekiel had to speak in a time of trauma about the meaning of that trauma. There is perhaps no more difficult time in

which to be called to be a divine messenger. As faith communities respond to the traumas of today's world and wonder where they encounter God in that trauma, there will be competing voices and it will be necessary that each community determine who authentically speaks "the word of YHWH" this day. (See also p. 19.)

Watching and Explaining (3:16-27)

The beginning of this unit, "at the end of seven days," picks up where the previous unit left off. It is like tuning into a favorite TV show and hearing, "Previously, on '*Ezekiel in Exile'* . . ." Viewers catch up on the action and then the new show begins. What follows serves as a continuation of what has preceded.

Except for the words of lamentation, mourning, and woe inscribed upon the scroll, readers do not yet know what message Ezekiel will deliver. In the final event of Ezekiel's encounter with God, God makes him a "sentinel" (v. 17) and provides the theoretical framework needed to interpret the exile (vv. 18-21). Then Ezekiel undergoes an ordeal (vv. 22-27), which concludes his transformation into a prophet. This is the first of a series of ordeals Ezekiel endures that symbolize the exiles' present experience (4:1–5:4). The words that Ezekiel ate (2:8–3:3) transform his body into a representation of God's message, providing further evidence he is God's prophet.

Literary Analysis

In addition to the reference to "seven days," there are many literary connections between this unit and those that precede, which strengthen reading this unit as another component of the larger call narrative (Block 1997, 152; Hals 1989, 26):

3:17, 25 "mortal" (2:1, 3, 6, 8; 3:1, 3, 4, 10)
3:17 "house of Israel" (3:1, 4, 5, 7)
3:22 "the hand of YHWH was upon me" (1:3; 3:14)
3:23 "the glory of YHWH" (1:28; 3:12)
3:23 "river Chebar" (1:1, 3; 3:15)
3:23 "I fell on my face" (1:28)
3:24 "The spirit entered into me, and set me on my feet" (2:2)

3:26, 27 “rebellious house” (2:5, 6, 8, 9; 3:9)
3:27 “say to them, ‘Thus says the Lord GOD’ ” (2:4; 3:11)
3:27 “hear . . . refuse to hear” (2:5, 7; 3:11)

Two subunits within 3:16-27 can be identified (vv. 16-21 and 22-27). They are marked off by content (the sentinel vs. the ordeal) and by different divine actions (the word of YHWH came; the hand of YHWH was upon).

The first subunit employs elements from the law courts. Ezekiel’s (re)use of the tradition will show both similarities and differences. The bulk of the speech is couched in the literary language and style of case law (vv. 18-21). This type of law frequently begins with the Hebrew *kî* (“if”) and sets out the details of a case followed by its legal consequences (e.g., Exod 21:33-34; Deut 22:22). The declaration whether someone “shall surely die” or “shall surely live” is the form of a judge’s verdict. The former appears most commonly in the passive declaration “X shall surely be put to death” (e.g., Exod 21:17; Num 35:16). The latter occurs only in Ezekiel, here and in chapters 18 and 33, but echoes similar pronouncements in the OT (e.g., Lev 18:5; Deut 30:16). These legal elements serve a dual function. First, they render God’s verdict regarding the exile, providing God’s explanation for the exile. Second, they provide a means of measuring Ezekiel’s effectiveness as a prophet since the consequences of each case will be evident. Perhaps this explains why the role of sentinel reappears at the end of Ezekiel’s explanation for the exile when those consequences can be determined (33:1-9).

The opening of the second subunit (vv. 22-24) bears some elements of a *vision report* (Eichrodt 1970, 76; Hals 1989, 25). Nearly verbatim literary connections with the opening vision suggest a correspondence in purpose; both passages authenticate Ezekiel and his message. The remaining verses (vv. 25-27) resemble a report of a *sign-act* (see p. 20). These two genres emphasize seeing.

As a continuation of the call narrative these subunits further authorize Ezekiel as God’s prophet. Only the prophet has stood in God’s presence and been called by YHWH. The role of sentinel and the ordeal are visible to the community and provide the means for the exiles to verify that “there has been a prophet among them” (2:5).

Exegetical Analysis

“At the end of seven days. . . .” Even a brief examination of verses found in a concordance search of “seven days” or “seventh day” shows that the number

seven is auspicious in Hebrew numerology. God rests from the acts of creation on the seventh day. Many rituals take place over seven days. It is often the length of time of uncleanness. But another association with seven days illuminates this text. Job's three friends "sat with him on the ground seven days and seven nights" in sympathy for his great suffering (Job 2:13; see also Gen 50:10; 1 Sam 31:13). Seven days appears to be a fixed time for mourning a tragedy. For seven days Ezekiel sits grieving his trauma, including, or perhaps especially, that associated with this divine call.

At the end of that momentous time, "the word of YHWH came to me." The *prophetic word formula* occurs more frequently in Ezekiel than anywhere else in prophetic literature. Usually the formula introduces a new speech section, but its use is more significant than merely marking a speech division. The phrase follows the Western Asian formula, "word of the king," representing a royal command or message (2 Kgs 18:28; Eccl 8:4; Greenberg 1983, 83). The frequency of its usage emphasizes Ezekiel's role as the divine king's messenger.

What commands readers' attention is God's announcement, "I have made you a sentinel for the house of Israel; whenever you hear a word from my mouth, you shall give them warning from me" (3:17). The usual interpretation is as follows: The sentinel's duty is to sound an alarm (with a trumpet) when danger threatens the community. Therefore, the prophet's task is to warn the people that their wicked behavior will lead to divine punishment (e.g., Isa 56:10; Jer 6:17; Hos 9:8). The four hypothetical scenarios that follow allegedly support this interpretation. Ezekiel's prophetic responsibility is to warn the people of their behavior and its potential consequences so that they may take appropriate action, namely, heed the warning, repent, and be saved.

Though common, this interpretation is not persuasive. For the exiles, the punishment has already occurred, so a warning is moot. Also, the previous charge that Ezekiel should speak God's words "whether they hear or refuse to hear" (2:5, 7; 3:11) implies that changing the people's behavior is not the prophet's principal task (Lapsley 2000, 112). Therefore, God's announcement must have another meaning.

Absent the parallel, but not identical, unit in 33:1-9, there would be no compelling reason to interpret "sentinel" as a military image whose primary function is "to warn" of danger. The root for "sentinel" also means "keep a lookout, keep watch" (compare Gen 31:49; 1 Sam 4:13; Ps 66:7; Prov 15:3; *HALOT*, 1044). Thus, in military contexts the "watcher" becomes the "sentinel." Only in Ezekiel are "sentinel" and "give warning" paired. The underlying meaning of "to warn" is actually "to make clear, obvious" (compare Exod 18:20; Eccl 4:13; *HALOT*, 265). Indeed, it is "reasonable to conjecture that the prophet

has in mind the office of a [sacral] instructor of the law" (*TDOT*, 4.46). The presence of so many legal elements in this subunit supports this conjecture. It appears that the verb is translated "warning" because of its proximity to "sentinel." The two verbs are better translated as God's command to Ezekiel to "carefully scrutinize" the house of Israel and then "make obvious" to them God's instruction.

The people understand that God punishes sinners. The problem is that they do not believe *they* are sinners. The exiles firmly hold the basic assumptions that Ronnie Janoff-Bulman identifies, including the belief that they are "good, capable, and moral individuals" (1992, 6–12; see p. xix). Ezekiel's audience were not the drug dealers, prostitutes, terrorists, or corrupt CEOs of Jerusalem who might identify themselves as "wicked." They were the equivalent of political leaders, denominational leaders, your pastor, and you! Are you a bad person? Of course not. This is Ezekiel's whole point. The exiles are willing to blame their situation on others, such as their ancestors (18:2) or God (18:25, 29), because they are desperately seeking *a reason* the disaster has befallen them that maintains their sense of righteousness. Ezekiel's task as a watcher is to teach them YHWH's explanation of the disaster, which challenges their assumption of their own righteousness.

Therefore, instead of interpreting Ezekiel's role as attempting *to prevent* catastrophe, readers should consider his role as attempting *to interpret* catastrophe. The four hypothetical scenarios provide the book's interpretation. The significance of each scenario lies in the pronouncement "they shall surely die" or "they shall surely live." Life and death are an important pair of terms in Ezekiel and carry multiple meanings. One meaning is metaphorical: life is a metaphor for covenant life with God in the land, and death is a metaphor for exile.

Scenarios 1 (v. 18) and 3 (v. 20) are essentially identical and interpret the exile in accord with the rest of the book of Ezekiel, namely, that the people are in exile either (a) because they are wicked (v. 18) or (b) because they were righteous but have sinned (v. 20). But because of the people's basic assumptions, this is not the interpretation they would likely consider. Therefore, if Ezekiel fails to make this obvious, the people will not know this to be YHWH's interpretation of the disaster. Without this knowledge the audience will consider other, incorrect explanations for the exile.

In the other two scenarios Ezekiel does his job as instructor. Scenario 2 (v. 19) interprets the exile identically as scenario 1: the people are wicked and did not turn from wickedness. They will still die (be in exile), but they will know YHWH's interpretation of the disaster. The only question is whether they will

accept it. Exiles hearing scenario 4 (v. 21) would have to accept that it does not apply to them: if they were righteous, they would not be in exile, since God punishes the wicked, not the righteous! Ezekiel's prophetic task is, as Ellen Davis correctly interprets, "to make known to Israel the author of judgment and the just grounds for its execution" (1989, 56). Ezekiel 3:16-21 and the parallel passage in Ezek 33:1-9 form an *inclusio*, or envelope, around all of Ezekiel's "oracles of judgment." Chapter 33 provides readers the opportunity to assess Ezekiel's performance. Did he, in fact, "instruct" the people in answering the survivor question, "Why did this happen—to us?"

Although the action in the final subunit in Ezekiel's call narrative is fairly straightforward, there is nothing straightforward about interpreting its significance. The basic plot is: The hand of YHWH was upon Ezekiel. YHWH commands Ezekiel to go out to the plain for a conversation and Ezekiel obeys. He again sees YHWH's glory and experiences the same reaction and same response by the spirit. Then YHWH commands Ezekiel to go do one thing (shut himself in his house) and informs him of two things that will be done to him, one presumably by the exiles (they will place cords on him and bind him) and one by YHWH (who will make him speechless). Then YHWH gives Ezekiel a final exhortation (vv. 22-27).

Part of the difficulty of interpreting the unit is the many contradictions it raises. Ezekiel is told to go out into the valley and then to return immediately and shut himself in his house. Being a watcher would seem to be impossible if one is under house arrest. Moreover, God repeatedly tells Ezekiel to say and speak God's very words to the exiles. How is it that God will then render him speechless? Then, immediately after rendering Ezekiel speechless, God says, "When I speak with you, I will open your mouth." How can Ezekiel give warning if he is unable to reprove? According to the text, Ezekiel remains speechless until the fall of Jerusalem (33:21-22). Then how does one explain the interim thirty chapters of discourse? Understanding the meaning of the tortuous actions is also challenging. The variety of interpretations of this section attests to its difficulty. The interpretation here involves three pieces of information.

First, this section begins, "The hand of YHWH had been upon me." In examining this phrase, J. J. M. Roberts gives particular attention to nonbiblical parallels. The Akkadian equivalent is "hand of *X*," where *X* represents a divine name or the generic word *god*. This phrase occurs frequently in Akkadian "diagnostic" texts dealing with illness. When the "hand of *X*"—including deities, demons, and sorcerers—falls upon a person it designates the "disastrous manifestation of the supernatural power," the result is often sickness and plague (Roberts 1971, 246).

One important example of the many that Roberts gives is from "The Poem of the Righteous Sufferer." After a long description of various ailments brought about by the deity, Marduk, the sufferer says, "Heavy was his hand upon me, I could not bear it!" (Foster 1996, I.316). Roberts argues that the idiom has the same meaning in the biblical material—plague and illness are often the result of YHWH's hand upon someone or something (compare Exod 9:3, 15; 1 Sam 5:6; Job 2:5; Roberts 1971, 248–49).

Second, the acts Ezekiel is subjected to can be viewed as manifestations of *illness*. Examples of confinement and speechlessness abound in Akkadian texts. In "The Poem of the Righteous Sufferer," the sufferer describes how the results of his illness confined him to his house. "I took to bed, confined, going out was exhaustion" (Foster 1996, I.315). The metaphor of binding appears in prayers and incantations against illness. "[Illness] flattens me like a net, shrouds me like a mesh" (Foster 1996, II.589). In one incantation witches said, "To cord me like cordage" (Foster 1996, II.866). The one who "releases the bound and revives the moribund" is a favorite expression of praise for a deity. The symptom of speechlessness is metaphorically described as having a snare on the mouth and lips bolted shut (Foster 1996, I.314).

There are few descriptions of illness in the OT, but among them are some echoes of the Akkadian texts. Lamentations describes exile with various images of confinement, being walled up or bound with chains or a yoke (1:14; 3:7; see also Job 36:8-9; Luke 13:16). The psalmist describes his distress as "my tongue sticks to my jaws," language similar to what will happen to Ezekiel (Ps 22:15 [16]; see also Isa 53:7). The evidence indicates that the "hand of X/YHWH" and the imagery of sickness as isolation, binding, and speechlessness were part of the lexical stock known to Ezekiel.

Third, what God commands of Ezekiel is identified today with symptoms often associated with trauma. Refugees not only experience physical separation and isolation from the homeland, family, and community, but in their new location they are often both socially isolated and emotionally withdrawn from their family and community (Herman 1997, 56, 63; Allen 1995, 162–63; Breyer 1988, 89, 93; Mattson 1993, 160–61; see also Halperin 1993, 211; Block 1997, 154; Smith-Christopher 2002, 90, 95). Depression is one of the most common symptoms associated with trauma, often manifested in passivity and inertia.

Various physical symptoms also occur among trauma victims, including refugees and torture victims. For example, there are groups of women from Cambodia who, over the course of several years, became blind. Even though physical examinations revealed at least one normal eye, their vision loss ranged from legal blindness to no light perception (Mattson 1993, 160; Rozée and Van

Boemel, 1989). They literally became unable to see the horrors they endured. Similarly, trauma victims are often mute when it comes to their horrific experiences. Holocaust victims and other torture victims may be both unwilling and unable to speak of the atrocities that happened to them. In general, trauma victims have difficulty expressing their anxieties in words.

When the three pieces—"the hand of YHWH," metaphors for illness, and trauma responses—are joined, one possible interpretation of 3:24*b*-26*a* is as a type of *sign-act* where Ezekiel enacts in his body the symptomatology of trauma. Unfortunately, the text gives no indication as to how readers should understand this sign-act. Insofar as what happens to Ezekiel happens by God's command ("Go, shut yourself inside"), by God's own action ("I will make your tongue cling"), or with God's consent ("cords shall be placed on you"), one can say that what happens to him is of God. Somehow, in all of what is happening, God is involved.

In addition to a traumatized body, Ezekiel is told that he will be "unable to reprove" the people. The relationship between this clause and what precedes it is unclear. The NRSV translation suggests that speechlessness leads to the inability to reprove. The difficulty is discerning the connection. In Hebrew Ezekiel is literally "not a man who reproves." In legal contexts the one who reproves is the person who assures a fair hearing in a trial for both the accuser and the accused (Job 9:33; Isa 29:21; Amos 5:10). As a trauma symptom, speechlessness means Ezekiel is unable to express his anxieties and fears. Ezekiel's speechlessness thus renders him unable to bring what the people might have to say to God. How can he speak on the people's behalf to God when he cannot even speak on his own?

The last verse is one of the many contradictions. If Ezekiel is to be speechless, then what does it mean that God says, "But when I speak with you, I will open your mouth, and you shall say to them, 'Thus says the Lord GOD' "? (v. 27). There are limits on Ezekiel's speech. He is unable to say certain things. He cannot protest his call nor speak of the horrors he has endured. YHWH opens Ezekiel's mouth only to speak YHWH's words. The people do not hear Ezekiel, they hear only YHWH.

Theological and Ethical Analysis

(1) Today the embodiment of trauma is seen in the raped woman who is afraid to leave her house, in sexually abused children who cut themselves as teens, and in war veterans abusing drugs to escape the horrors that continue to revisit them. One of the questions Ezekiel raises is how to interpret these symptoms. Modern psychology offers a diagnosis of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) to

explain the physical manifestations of trauma. But Ezekiel takes it another step and raises the theological question: What does God have to do with it? How is God involved in the trauma manifested in so many bodies? How is that question answered today?

(2) When all of the call narratives in the Bible are collected together—Moses, Gideon, Micaiah, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Jesus, Paul—it becomes evident that the determination of the genre is based upon the experiences of *men*. This raises the question as to whether this is a gendered experience. There is no way to know whether this was the case in antiquity, but it is clear that gender differences exist today regarding how men and women understand their call to ministry.

Studies done on women entering Protestant ministry indicate that women's narratives of their call to ministry differ significantly from those of their male counterparts. Traditionally, the narrative of God's call to ministry idealizes costly self-sacrifice and the rugged individualism of setting oneself apart from one's relationships and community. In contrast, women are socialized to idealize empathy with others and to maintain relationships. Such cultural and theological expectations can impede not only a woman's own sense of internal call but also having that call authorized by external church agencies. Faith communities often fail to recognize how women's discernment narratives for ministry might differ, and might seem ambiguous if they are measured against men's articulations of divine calling (McDougall 2003, 149–65).

Transforming the understanding of "call narrative" is necessary to assure women's safe passage into public ministry. One way to cross this gap in expectations is for faith communities to reimagine the images and narratives of God's call to public ministry by listening to women's accounts of their own calls to ministry. In addition to gender, faith communities will need to address the distinct inculturation of call in African American, Hispanic, Asian, and other ethnic-minority communities.

MAD AS HELL AND NOT GOING TO TAKE IT ANYMORE (4:1–5:17)

A crowd burns an effigy of their enemy; a couple brings together their separate candles to light one candle at their wedding. These are contemporary versions of the prophetic *sign-act*. Ahijah tore his garment into twelve pieces (1 Kgs 11:29-32). Hosea was told to marry "a wife of whoredom" (Hos 1:2-3; see also Isa 20:1-5; Jer 27:2-11; 28:1-11). Ezekiel's sign-acts in chapters 4–5

dramatize Jerusalem's siege and the people's deportation. The Literary Analysis considers the function of these sign-acts. The Exegetical Analysis gives attention to interpreting specific aspects of Ezekiel's behavior. The Theological and Ethical Analysis interprets the sign-acts in the context of trauma.

Literary Analysis

"Sign-acts are best interpreted as dramatic performances designed to visualize a message and in the process to enhance its persuasive force so that the observers' perceptions of a given situation might be changed and their beliefs and behavior modified" (Block 1997, 166). The key elements in a *sign-act* are visualization, communication, and modification. These acts are to be seen. The visual aspect has an impact that speech does not. Thus, burning an effigy communicates the desire to see an enemy destroyed. The couple lighting candles communicates the union of individuals. Ezekiel's sign-acts communicate the message of divine judgment upon the people as a consequence of their sin. As with other forms of rhetoric, sign-acts are intended to persuade. They are performed with the hope that the message will change the views or behavior of the observer. The crowd uses their act to foment rebellion; the couple wants others to view them as married. Ezekiel hoped to change the exiles' understanding of their and God's role in Jerusalem's destruction and exile.

Typically, prophetic sign-acts include three main parts: (1) YHWH's instruction to perform the action, (2) the report of its execution, and (3) a word of interpretation (Hals 1989, 30, 355). Ezekiel modifies this structure. The report of the execution is absent. Moreover, the interpretation is only loosely tied to the sign-acts themselves and is in the form of another genre altogether, *prophecy of punishment*. Still, the two chapters exhibit general conformity to the typical "command/interpretation" structure of the sign-act genre (Freibel 1989, 494).

Overall the chapters can be divided as follows:

I. Sign (Nonverbal) Actions (4:1–5:4)

II. Interpretation (Verbal prophecies) (5:5-17)

The division of the separate sign-acts is based on a repeating literary device—the imperative "and you . . . take." The physical act of taking an object marks the beginning of each sign-act (4:1, 3, 9; 5:1).

As elsewhere, Ezekiel makes use of whatever traditions serve his purposes. In these chapters Ezekiel appeals to two formulations of covenant curses to interpret Israel's disaster, Lev 26 and Deut 28, as if one was insufficient. In both Leviticus and Ezekiel, YHWH sets his face against the people (Lev 26:17; Ezek 4:3, 7), brings the sword against them (Lev 26:25; Ezek 5:17), unsheathes the

sword after them (Lev 26:33; Ezek 5:2, 12), and breaks the staff of bread (Lev 26:26; Ezek 4:16). In both Deuteronomy and Ezekiel, events are "signs" (Deut 28:46; Ezek 4:3), and the noun "siege(works)" appears, along with themes of starvation, repulsive food, and cannibalism (Deut 28:52-57; Ezek 4:2, 7, 8, 10-12; 5:2, 10). These connections with the covenant curses suggest that the sign-acts should be interpreted within the context of covenant.

Exegetical Analysis

4:1-2 "War Games"

Interpreting the first sign-act does not appear difficult. Ezekiel is commanded to take a brick, probably of the sun-dried variety common to Western Asia, and to carve onto the still-wet clay a picture of Jerusalem. Archaeologists have uncovered sketches of city plans on clay bricks (Freibel 1989, 511; *ANEP*, no. 260; Keel 1978, fig. 4). Then Ezekiel is commanded to play war games. He is to "put siegeworks against" his brick model. The items listed—siege wall, ramp, camp, and battering rams—are all well-known from Assyrian and Babylonian warfare (*ANEP*, nos. 372–73). The actual mechanics of the building of Ezekiel's "siegeworks" are not detailed, but the intent is clear. Like a child playing at war with toy soldiers, Ezekiel is to represent Jerusalem's fate. Why does Ezekiel play war games? Although not explicitly stated here, the later interpretation of 5:5-11 suggests that Ezekiel acts out the role of YHWH. Human enemy and deity are conflated. It was not just Nebuchadnezzar who besieged Jerusalem in 597 B.C.E. (and again in 587 B.C.E.); it was YHWH. Ezekiel represents to his audience that YHWH wages war against them.

4:3-8 "Out of the Frying Pan . . ."

Next, Ezekiel is to "take an iron plate" and "place it as an iron wall" between him and "the city," that is, the picture drawn on the brick (v. 3). Two words for "wall" are used throughout Ezekiel. The "wall" (*qîr*) used here describes the wall of a building (e.g., 8:7; 41:5-6; 43:8). The other "wall" (*ḥômâ*) describes the defensive wall around a city (e.g., 26:9; 38:11; 40:5; 42:20). Thus, Ezekiel is commanded to take some iron object and place it like the wall of a building between him and the model city.

The text provides no interpretation of the meaning of this act. One way to fill the gap is to see the wall as a boundary. As a wall separates one room from another, this wall separates God and the people from each other. An iron

boundary cannot be breached or crossed by either party. It becomes a kind of "iron curtain" barring access from one side to the other.

In addition, Ezekiel is to set his face "toward it, and let it be in a state of siege, and press the siege against it" (4:3). The antecedent to "it" in this command appears to be "the city." The expression "set your face" toward or against someone or something occurs elsewhere in Ezekiel (e.g., 6:2; 13:17; 21:2) and throughout the OT. With God as the subject, it expresses divine hostility against the people (e.g., Lev 26:17; Jer 21:10). Here and in 4:7 a different verb for "set" is used. Kelvin Freibel argues that the different verb marks the difference between a verbal expression and a nonverbal action (Freibel 1989, 519). Ezekiel would have exhibited some kind of facial expression to indicate God's hostile determination to besiege Jerusalem (Freibel 1989, 521). As in 4:1-2, Ezekiel represents to his audience that YHWH besieges Jerusalem.

This is to be a "sign for the house of Israel" (v. 3). There are many signs in Israel's history. The rainbow is a sign of God's covenant never again to destroy the earth by flood (Gen 9:12-17). Circumcision is a sign of God's covenant with Abraham (Gen 17:11; see also Exod 4:30; 10:1; Isa 7:14). The concept of "sign" makes "visible and recognizable to the senses [what] is not at first immediately intelligible" (Zimmerli 1979, 156). Thus, Ezekiel is to make visible what had not at first been immediately intelligible to the exiles—that YHWH, not Nebuchadnezzar, was besieging Jerusalem.

The repetition of "you shall set your face" (4:7; compare 4:3) and the references to siege (4:7-8; compare 4:2-3) textually link the first two sign-acts. The next actions function to explain why God has turned violently against Jerusalem. Ezekiel is commanded to lie upon his left side and "place the punishment of the house of Israel upon it" for three hundred ninety days. Then, he is to turn over on his right side and "bear the punishment of the house of Judah" for forty days (vv. 4-6). In addition, he is to set his face toward his model of besieged Jerusalem and prophesy against it with a bare arm. Finally, God will put cords on Ezekiel to keep him from turning over until the appropriate time. Readers may have many questions about the mechanics of this performance, but there are insufficient data to speculate on answers.

The text itself does not interpret the numbers; that depends upon how one interprets other elements in the text. The number "three hundred ninety" (4:5) occurs only here in the OT and so has no significance outside of Ezekiel. Perhaps three hundred ninety is a round number signifying the number of years between YHWH's glory entering the Temple at its dedication (1 Kgs 8:10-11) and the glory's departure prior to the Temple's destruction (10:18-19; 11:22-23; Block 1997, 178).

The number of days is correlated with "bearing their punishment." This phrase has several possible meanings, including "culpability for sin," or "guilt" (compare Lev 5:1, 17; 7:18; 22:16; Zimmerli 1979, 164; Freibel 1989, 539). The three hundred ninety days would then represent to the people *the length of their sinning*; for the entire existence of the Temple, Israel has been accruing the guilt that has led to this punishment. Elsewhere, Ezekiel will claim that Israel has been accruing guilt even longer (compare chs. 16, 20, 23). Here Ezekiel claims that the Temple, far from being the place of covenantal relationship with YHWH, was instead the place of Israel's sin. Thus, the lying on the left side communicates the *reason for their punishment*—three hundred ninety years of disobedience against the covenant.

The phrase "forty days . . . , one day for each year" quotes Num 14:34, which sentences the former slaves to wander in the wilderness forty years for failing to enter the land. This hints that the forty years in Ezekiel refers to punishment for sin. Therefore, lying on the right side should be viewed as representing the *length of punishment* "the house of Judah" (a synonym for "house of Israel") must bear for their sin. Their punishment, exile, will last for forty years, or a generation.

The phrase "prophesy against" also indicates God's hostility to Jerusalem, as does Ezekiel's bared arm. The expression for YHWH's warring activity is usually "outstretched arm" or "mighty hand" (e.g., Exod 6:6; Deut 26:8). The only other biblical occurrence of the expression is Isa 52:10, where it represents divine power and perhaps hostility toward the nations. The actions combined emphatically communicate divine displeasure with Jerusalem.

Finally, God says, "I am putting cords on you." Kelvin Freibel suggests God's binding represents divine enablement; God will do this so that Ezekiel cannot turn over before it is time (1989, 546). Ezekiel must fully represent both Israel's culpability for what has happened to them and the consequences of their wrongdoing.

4:9-17 ". . . and into the Fire"

This subunit centers on the themes of eating and drinking. Here, instead of enacting an enemy army besieging a city, Ezekiel depicts the results of the siege. He assumes the role of the besieged and exiled. Readers discover what it was like to be on the receiving end of God's hostility.

For the third time Ezekiel is commanded to take an object (v. 9). This time he is to take four types of grains and two types of legumes, put them into one pot, and make bread. Four grains, two legumes, and a pot are among the supplies

brought to fortify David and his troops against Absalom's rebellion (2 Sam 17:28). This intertextual connection suggests that Ezekiel's "bread" represents normal troop rations.

Instead of the sufficient quantity David and his troops received, Ezekiel only gets eight ounces of food and less than a liter of water per day (vv. 10-11). The rationing suggests that even troops, who would be given the highest priority, would experience severe scarcity of food during this siege. Consuming this quantity for three hundred ninety days would bring Ezekiel to the brink of starvation. If it was this bad for the troops, imagine the conditions ordinary citizens faced.

It is unclear if verses 12-15 constitute a separate activity (Greenberg 1983, 118; Darr 2002, 1149). One ambiguity is whether the "barley-cake" is the same as the multigrain and legume bread in verse 9. Another ambiguity is the apparent shift in focus from siege to exile in verse 13. Whether a separate act or not, Ezekiel is to eat a barley-cake publicly baked on human dung (v. 12). The interpretation provided is, "Thus shall the people of Israel eat their bread, unclean, among the nations . . ." (v. 13).

Even with the interpretation, the meaning of this sign-act is difficult. There are three main difficulties. First, why would cooking the barley-cake over human dung render it "unclean"? Despite commentators' claims, nowhere in the Bible's legal materials are human feces declared "unclean." Using human dung as fuel might be distasteful, but it is not unclean.

Second, strikingly, Ezekiel's objection that he has not defiled himself refers to various forms of defiled meat. Animals are unclean when they are not properly butchered, when for example, they have died of old age or disease or have been killed by another animal (Exod 22:31; Lev 7:24; Deut 14:21). "Carrion flesh" is meat offered for a sacrifice that after three days has not been eaten (Lev 7:18; 19:7). What is the connection between these meats and a vegetable product cooked on human dung?

Third, God's compromise, that Ezekiel may use cow's dung instead of human dung as fuel, just begs the question. There is no legislation that declares cooking over cow's dung to be unclean. Cow chips have been used from time immemorial throughout the world, including in Israel, for cooking fuel; how does their use render food unclean?

One answer to these questions is that the use of human dung as fuel indicates the extremes to which people resort to survive in life-threatening circumstances. Holocaust survivors and other trauma victims recount doing repugnant or unnatural things that they would never have done otherwise. Like parents eating their children and a mother eating her newborn's placenta (Deut 28:55-57),

cooking over human feces is repugnant. Perhaps this sign-act represents the people's assessment of exile as something repugnant, unnatural, and wrong.

In Hebrew the antecedent to "unclean" is ambiguous. Is it the bread or the people? This is the first reference in the book to "unclean," one of Ezekiel's defining categories (see p. xxii). Everywhere else in Ezekiel, it is Israel and its behavior that is "unclean." In fact, the word *unclean* is most frequently associated with sexual immorality and idols (compare 22:3-4, 10-11). Therefore, "unclean" probably refers to the people. If the people must use human feces as fuel, it is because *they* are unclean. It is YHWH's punishment that leads to this unnatural situation.

Ezekiel's protest thus represents the people's reaction to this explanation. Ezekiel insists that he is, in fact, not unclean, the people's claim. What makes the exile as wrong as cooking on human dung is Israel's view that such divine punishment is unwarranted. YHWH's response challenges this view by asserting that just as there is nothing repulsive or wrong about using animal dung as cooking fuel, there is nothing repulsive or wrong about the people's exile. It is the right and natural consequence of their uncleanness. The people cannot claim that it is unjustified or "unnatural." Nonetheless, whether justified or not, symbolically exile is still dung.

It is worth noting that the Hebrew for human "dung" (*gĕlālîm*) is etymologically related to Ezekiel's favorite word for "idols" (*gillûlîm*; see p. 32). Is this Ezekiel's way of showing that the punishment (eating dung) fits the crime (worshiping dung-idols)?

In the final verses YHWH speaks again. YHWH will break the staff of bread in Jerusalem and they will eat bread by weight, and drink water by measure (v. 16). The language is nearly identical to Lev 26:26. Both refer to divine punishment. And it is far worse than the people ever imagined. Not only will the measure of bread and water not satisfy them, they will eat with the kind of fear that turns bones to rubber and drink with the hand-trembling dismay that comes from viewing appalling devastation (compare 12:19). Even if there were an adequate "measure," the language of "fear" and "dismay" suggests that they may be too traumatized to eat or drink at all.

Hunger and horror will be so severe the people will look at one another in dismay and "waste away" (v. 17). This last phrase literally means "melt, dissolve" and can refer to the decomposition of flesh (compare Lev 26:39; Ps 38:5 [6]; Zech 14:12; Block 1997, 189). The situation becomes so severe their flesh will literally and figuratively melt off their bones.

Ordinarily, this would be unthinkable. Flesh should not melt off bones. But "under their punishment," it will. The action again emphasizes the connection

between the people's circumstances and their behavior. Ezekiel's audience has already experienced near-starvation and horror (see 2 Kgs 25:1-3). They now learn that their experiences result from divine action. Ezekiel's sign-act shows that siege and exile were divine punishment of Israel's uncleanness. This perhaps explains why Ezekiel is to eat siege rations for three hundred ninety days. Insufficient bread and water are eaten on the days that represent Israel's age of sinning, clearly linking guilt (number of days) with punishment (near-starvation).

5:1-4 "Sword Play"

In the last sign-act, Ezekiel once again acts in the role of YHWH. This time Ezekiel is to take a sword, as sharp as a barber's razor, and use this lethal weapon to shave his head and beard. Ezekiel's shaving would have evoked for his audience another prophet. "On that day YHWH will shave with a razor . . . the head and the hair of the feet, and it will take off the beard as well" (Isa 7:20). Ezekiel not only literally enacts Isaiah's metaphorical shaving but heightens the war imagery by using a sword instead of a razor. By evoking Isaiah, the sign-act shows that *God* wields this sword, by giving an enemy army victory over Israel. The male population would be forcibly shaved as a sign of defeat and humiliation (compare 2 Sam 10:4; *TDOT*, 3.9–10).

That defeat is reinforced by Ezekiel's next action. As carefully as the rations were weighed, the shaved hair will be weighed and equally divided into thirds. One-third Ezekiel is to "burn in the fire inside the city, when the days of the siege are completed" (v. 2). The references to "city" and "days of siege" recall the siege of the brick city (see 4:1-2). Then and now, conquerors frequently burned cities to the ground. Moreover, burning hair is a sensory experience; it crackles and stinks (Darr 2002, 1151). Ezekiel graphically represents the death of one-third of the inhabitants by fire.

Ezekiel is to take another third and "strike [it] with the sword all around the city." Although villagers usually took refuge inside the city, instead the city's inhabitants would flee the city straight into the waiting swords of the Babylonian army. Thus, by fire and sword two-thirds of those in Jerusalem will be killed outright.

The final third will not be killed but scattered to the wind, a metaphor for exile. That God "will unsheathe the sword after them" implies that exile may not be the worst of the refugees' fate.

The next verses focus on the fate of these refugees. Ezekiel is to take some of the scattered hair and bind it in his robe (v. 3). These rescued hairs refer to the

Babylonian refugees. But they are not a sign of God's "gracious protective care over the exiles" (Block 1997, 195). The point of this entire sign-act is to represent to the people that God's judgment encompasses everyone, including the exiles. Scattering is only one form that punishment takes. The scattered people will also be burnt, perhaps a metaphor for dangers, even death, in exile (compare Dan 3). The twin devastation for the people is their forced deportation from Jerusalem and their forced, precarious existence in a foreign land (compare 5:10, 12; 12:14-15).

5:5-17 Interpretation

These verses offer an "interpretation" of the sign-acts (see p. 20). This interpretation will confirm what the sign-acts portray: God's punishment of the people for their covenant disobedience by means of siege against Jerusalem, its destruction, and the people's deportation and exile.

The *messenger formula* begins the interpretation. "This is Jerusalem." The brief statement signals that Ezekiel's sign-acts communicate the fate of Jerusalem and thus of the house of Israel. The close association between Jerusalem and the people is evident in the constant switching of endings in these verses between masculine (people) and feminine (city).

One way to observe the force of this subunit is to focus on specific questions. What has Jerusalem/Israel done?

- rebelled against God's ordinances and statutes
- become more wicked than the nations
- rejected/not kept God's ordinances
- not followed God's statutes
- been more turbulent than the nations
- acted according to the ordinances of the nations
- committed abominations
- defiled the sanctuary with detestable things and abominations

What is God's response? God will:

- come against them
- execute judgments
- scatter to every wind
- cut them down
- not spare

- have no pity
- vent fury
- speak in jealousy
- spend anger/fury
- execute judgments in anger and fury and with furious punishments
- bring the sword upon them

What will happen to Israel?

- parents shall eat their children
- children shall eat their parents
- survivors will scatter to every wind
- one-third will die of pestilence or be consumed by famine
- one-third shall fall by the sword
- one-third will be scattered to every wind
- they will become a desolation and an object of mocking, a mockery and a taunt, and a warning and a horror
- have loosed against them deadly arrows of famine, arrows for destruction
- be destroyed
- have the staff of bread broken
- have more and more famine
- wild animals will rob them of children
- have pestilence and bloodshed pass through them
- have the sword brought upon them

The litany relentlessly hammers at the readers.

The message is clear. The covenant curses in Lev 26 and Deut 28 state that if Israel fails to follow God's statutes and ordinances, these consequences will follow. God declares through Ezekiel that Israel has failed and the consequences have followed.

Throughout this interpretation readers are introduced to a number of words, phrases, and themes that are repeated throughout the book of Ezekiel. Primary among them are Israel's failing to follow God's statutes and ordinances and defiling God's sanctuary with detestable things and abominations. It is important throughout that YHWH executes divine judgments in the sight of the nations. God's jealousy, fury, anger, and wrath rampage through the book. Divine contempt curls through the imagery of Israel as desolate, a mockery, a taunt, a warning, and a horror. Famine, sword, wild animals, and pestilence will devour the people as the means of God's punishment.

Ezekiel needs more than just stock expressions to convey his message. Israel is again compared unfavorably to the nations (compare 3:6). It is both "more wicked" (5:6) and "more turbulent" (5:7) than all other countries. The NRSV harmonizes the end of 5:7 and 11:12, you "have acted according to the ordinances of the nations that are all around you," instead of acting according to God's ordinances. The Hebrew of 5:7 is actually, "You have *not* acted in accordance with the ordinances of the nations." The laws of foreign nations are not as rigorous or as moral as YHWH's for Israel, yet Israel failed even by these lesser standards.

Because of Israel's wicked and turbulent ways, God is coming against them (5:8). "I am against you" stands in stark contrast to "I am with you" (e.g., Gen 28:15; Exod 3:12). The emphasis in what follows is on the divine "I." "*I* am coming." "*I* will execute." "*I* will do." "*I* will scatter." "*I* will cut down." "*I* will vent." "When *I* spend." "*I* will make." "*I* will let loose." "When *I* bring." "*I* will send." There should be no confusion among the refugees about *who* has attacked them. It is not Nebuchadnezzar.

The effects on Israel are expressed in the most horrifying of images: cannibalism (v. 10). This motif figures in most treaty curses (Block 1997, 204; *ANET*, 533, 538–41), including Israel's own (Lev 26:29; Deut 28:53-57). Other prophets speak of it (Isa 49:26; Jer 19:9; Zech 11:9). Ezekiel's sign-acts (4:9-17) suggest readers should consider that this was actually the exiles' experience (Lam 4:10).

Israel learns that bad things come in threes. In verse 11*b* YHWH's disposition is threefold. (1) "I will cut you down [or withdraw]"; (2) "My eye will not spare"; and (3) "I will have no pity." This final phrase characterizes a person as merciless (Hab 1:17). Points (2) and (3) are paired in Deut 13:8 to ban any leniency in punishment. In verse 12 the population will be divided into thirds. One-third shall die of pestilence or be consumed by fire, one-third shall fall by the sword, and one-third shall be scattered to every wind with the sword unsheathed after them. There are three expressions for God's spent rage in verse 13: God's anger will be spent, God's fury vented, and God's satisfaction achieved.

Triplets are common to Ezekiel (see p. 7). Here they function to convey a sense of totality. God will be *totally* merciless. Israel will be *totally* destroyed. God will *totally* vent every last ounce of fury.

The basic components of a *prophecy of punishment* are (1) the accusations or explanations establishing why the forthcoming punishment must occur and (2) the announcement of punishment proper. It is therefore appropriate that the interpretation of Ezekiel's sign-acts takes this form. The meaning of Ezekiel's

bizarre behavior is clear: all this results from Israel's disobedience and YHWH's wrath.

Theological and Ethical Analysis

(1) Because Ezekiel's behavior in these sign-acts is so bizarre, psychological interpretations have focused on them. Recent interpreters argue that Ezekiel "acts out" the trauma he lived through (Halperin 1993, 172–76; Smith-Christopher 2002, 95–96). Readers may be aware of how counselors help traumatized children, who may be too young to have the necessary verbal skills to describe what happened to them, to "speak" about what happened through the use of therapeutic play, often using drawing, dolls, and other toys. In a way, Ezekiel never "speaks" his trauma. He never directly says what happened to him or to others. But in "playing" the trauma he "describes" what happened and evokes the horror of the events for him and his audience. These sign-acts are the way Ezekiel is "heard into speech."

Ezekiel's reenactments of the trauma of the fall of Jerusalem also resemble the acts of victims who continue to live out the trauma through various forms of deliberate self-harm. The acts of starvation and eating repulsive food bear a striking resemblance to various eating disorders, especially anorexia (weight loss associated with self-starvation). The act of shaving with a sharp sword is indicative of a high-risk behavior. Lying on the sides also reflects harmful behavior toward one's body.

Such self-destructive behaviors can be understood as *symbolic or literal reenactments of the initial abuse*. Judith Herman discusses two motives for such behavior. They may be an attempt to integrate the traumatic event to allow the mind to process a life-shattering event. Or they may allow the victim to reproduce "what the person needs to feel in order to repair the injury" (Herman 1997, 41–42). Another perspective suggests that individuals who have been mistreated are prone to take on the characteristics of those who abused them; in effect, they imitate their abusers by abusing themselves. This can manifest itself in a virtually infinite range of self-destructive behavior, including substance abuse, eating disorders, neglecting one's health, and establishing destructive relationships with abusive persons (Allen 1995, 138). Although not a diagnosis of what lies behind Ezekiel's behavior, it is noteworthy that such self-destructive behaviors are frequently present among trauma victims.

Commanded by God to reenact the trauma that God has already inflicted, Ezekiel ends up retraumatized. The central characteristics of traumatic stress are the experiences of helplessness, powerlessness, and the threat to one's life and

self-control (see p. xviii). Insofar as the sign-acts reflect this definition, Ezekiel reexperiences trauma. Studies indicate that factors such as the intensity of exposure to trauma and past traumatic experiences indicate whether a person is more likely to develop subsequent PTSD (McFarlane 1995, 33–50). However necessary such acts may be from a prophetic standpoint, one wonders at their psychological effect on Ezekiel and his community.

(2) The interpretation of the sign-acts in 5:5-17 summarizes Ezekiel's central theology and his answer to the "victim questions" (see p. xx). What happened? God punished us. Why did it happen? Because we rebelled against God and violated the covenant. Why did we act as we did then? Because we had hard foreheads and stubborn hearts.

The interpretation in 5:5-17 also ascribes the trauma to divine anger. Anyone who has experienced betrayal can relate to God's rage and God's desire to inflict damage on Israel. "Anger is an emotion of self-protection. It may involve an effort to prevent injury or specify a boundary. It is also a common response to having been threatened, hurt, or scared, or to the person who caused it" (Rothschild 2000, 61). In psychological terms, anger and the "fight" response are inherently adaptive reactions to aversive situations. In simpler terms, anger is an emotional clue that an injury has occurred. Adaptive anger provides the fuel for actively coping, confronting, resolving controversy, and defending oneself. However, anger and aggression, while adaptive, can turn destructive.

The key to understanding YHWH's response is "jealousy" (5:13). God's anger arises out of God's hurt. At one level, God's anger is appropriate, an indication that something is not right. As is evident in chapters 16, 20, and 23, Israel's repeated spurning of God's assertions of "don't" and "stop" results in God's anger escalating beyond a momentary emotional reaction and becoming rage. It reaches an unmanageable level, leading to destructive aggression. Common examples of uncontrolled aggression are vengefulness, sadism, and cruelty. God's response to Judah may be characterized in these terms. Furthermore, aggression can become a kind of passion, sought out for the "pleasure" it provides (Allen 1995, 55). This finds echoes in God's claim that "I will vent my fury and satisfy myself." Ezekiel depicts God in out-of-control rage. The fall of Jerusalem and exile were experiences so destructive and devastating that the only possible explanation was God's blind rage.

What to do with this theological perspective is another issue. Since Ezekiel argues that the destructiveness was "justified," so do commentators. This must be resisted. Since God's anger rises to the level of destructive aggression, it is inappropriate to speak about how "the punishment fits the crime" or that "the intensity of his wrath at the defilement of his sanctuary and the repudiation of his

will arises out of the profundity of his covenant love" (Block 1997, 211). Today, persons who behave this way are arrested and tried for war crimes. In particular, we must resist connecting violence with love or destructive aggression with justice. God's fury is neither an indication of love nor an appropriate response to injustice, any more than a husband's claim that beating his wife severely enough to put her in the hospital is a sign of his "love." When initially writing this section, I stopped and burst into tears. My reaction was perhaps a sign-act that communicates my own anger at Ezekiel's message. To view violence against someone as a sign of love or justice injures us. It is time to acknowledge that while Ezekiel's theology may be understandable, it is hardly ethically defensible. The question then becomes how to respond to victims of trauma who feel they are on the receiving end of God's wrath.

GIVE ME THAT OLD-TIME RELIGION (6:1-14)

After establishing Ezekiel's credentials as a prophet (chs. 1–3) and establishing Ezekiel's overall message (chs. 4–5), readers finally arrive at the particulars of that message. From here through chapter 24, Ezekiel's focus is on demonstrating Judah's responsibility for the exile. Although he dresses it up in various guises, Ezekiel's overall message never wavers: God is punishing Israel for its sin. What sets this chapter apart, along with chapters 8–11, is the attention Ezekiel gives to cultic issues.

Literary Analysis

The use of various formulas sets this unit apart and determines its structure. The *prophetic word formula* in 6:1 marks the unit's beginning and it ends with the *recognition formula*. The repetition of the recognition formula binds chapters 6–7 (6:7, 10, 13, 14; 7:4, 9, 27).

This is the first occurrence of the *recognition formula*. A key characteristic of this formula is that it follows a precise sequence: (1) YHWH acts followed by (2) human recognition (Zimmerli 1979, 36–40). At issue is Israel's (or the nations') existential knowledge of YHWH. One can gain some understanding of a person by reading their autobiography, but one will not really know that person apart from a personal relationship. The frequency of the formula in Ezekiel (seventy-two times) suggests Ezekiel is arguing with his audience that they lack such existential knowledge of YHWH. If the people truly knew YHWH, they would

have obeyed and YHWH would not have punished them. The goal, therefore, is for the people to acquire this knowledge, which will change the core of their identity, leading to changed behavior, namely, obedience. In this chapter, the people gain knowledge through the disasters that befall them.

This unit is divided into two subunits by the repetition of the *messenger formula* (6:3, 11). The subunits are also marked by *sign-acts* (vv. 2, 7), which connect this unit to the preceding chapters. Each subunit takes the form of a *prophetic proof saying*. The theme of judgment against Israel also connects this unit with what precedes. No specific indictments are leveled against the people in this unit, however. One must infer why Israel is being punished from what is being destroyed.

In chapters 4–5, Ezekiel appealed to the covenant curses in both Leviticus and Deuteronomy in order to make his case (see pp. 20–21). Something similar occurs here. The judgments upon the mountains of Israel in verses 4, 6 are modeled on Lev 26:30. The judgments against the house of Israel in verse 13 are modeled on Deut 12:2. Once again Ezekiel employs two traditions to argue his case, which emphasizes that Ezekiel's message is grounded in Israel's primary covenant tradition.

There is a great deal of literary artistry present in the Hebrew that is lost in translation, including numerous uses of synonyms, parallelism, repetitiveness, alliteration, and wordplay. In particular, repetition occurs not only within the unit but also between the unit and the rest of the book. Sign-acts, the theme of judgment, the beginning of the address, which recalls the divine address of 5:5-17, and the exact repetition of key words link this unit to previous chapters. This chapter is also echoed in later chapters. The issue of improper worship is raised again in chapter 20, using this chapter's specific language for worship sites in 20:28. An oracle of salvation to the mountains and house of Israel in chapter 36 will counter the judgment of this chapter. Of particular interest is the near-verbatim repetition of 6:9 in 20:43 and 36:31. Three times Israel will be told that self-loathing will arise from remembering their past actions. This repetition suggests that this issue matters to Ezekiel.

Exegetical Analysis

The opening *hostile orientation formula* employs a different but more common verb for "to set" than in 4:3, 7 (see pp. 21–22). The gesture of "setting the face" always appears with some expression of punishment (e.g., Lev 26:17; Jer 21:10; Ezek 15:7), resulting in dire consequences for its object. The expression indicates, "I (YHWH) shall turn my attention to that person"

(Brownlee 1986, 203). In this case, gaining God's attention is unwelcome.

God's hostility is directed toward "the mountains of Israel." This expression, unique to Ezekiel, occurs sixteen times within the book. Generally it refers to the actual physical territory of Israel (19:9; 33:28; 34:13; 38:8). However, here the distinction between topography and inhabitants becomes blurred. People, not mountains, have bones (v. 5). Surely the people are to know YHWH, not the mountains (v. 7). Moreover, beginning with verse 8, the rest of the unit is addressed to the inhabitants of the mountains.

This blurring is not surprising. The phrase focuses on the geographical identification of the people. Imagine God saying to Ezekiel, "Prophesy to the Rocky Mountains, to the Appalachians, and the Sierras." Although the address is directed toward physical entities, Americans would accurately interpret this as addressing them, the inhabitants of that territory. The command to Ezekiel to set his face against the mountains of Israel and to prophesy against them is a command to address the people who so strongly identify themselves with that land—Ezekiel's exilic audience.

The language of "I, I myself," and "I will bring a sword upon you" (v. 3; see also 5:5-17) leads readers to expect a judgment speech, and they are not disappointed. God will destroy, make desolate, break, throw down, ruin, lay waste, and cut down. Most of these words occurred in chapter 5. It is the objects of these verbs in chapter 6 that are unexpected.

Verses 3-6 mention high places, altars, incense stands, and idols. The items listed are similar to those listed in Lev 26:30. "High places," *bāmôt*, are mentioned more than one hundred times in the OT. Their nature, appearance, and architecture are disputed, and scholars disagree about the term's definition and translation. More important, the evaluation of *bāmôt* varies among the biblical authors. Some view *bāmôt* as legitimate sites of Israelite worship (1 Sam 9:11-14; 1 Kgs 3:2-4; 1 Chr 16:39); others condemn them (Ps 78:58; Jer 19:5; Mic 1:5; LaRocca-Pitts 2001, 135–39). In Leviticus, YHWH will destroy Israel's *bāmôt* as punishment for unfaithfulness. However, it is not clear that their mere existence constituted covenant breaking, since in the same passage divine anger is targeted at otherwise acceptable forms of Yahwistic worship (Lev 26:31; LaRocca-Pitts 2001, 39).

"Altars" are even more common than high places. The word itself occurs over four hundred times in the OT. The noun is derived from the verb "to slaughter;" thus altars are places where animal offerings were slain. In addition, liquids could be poured out and grains burned on an altar. Significantly, the biblical witness varies in its evaluation of whether an altar was legitimate or illegitimate (LaRocca-Pitts 2001, 229–49). In Leviticus altars are always legitimate.

The use of incense in Israelite worship is well attested by both the biblical and the archaeological record. However, it is not clear what *ḥammānîm*, usually translated "incense altars," really are. The term is neither of the usual Hebrew words for "incense" or "incense altar." It is paired elsewhere with other cultic items, either "high places" (Lev 26:30; 2 Chr 14:5) or "sacred poles" (2 Chr 34:4, 7; Isa 17:8; 27:9). Archaeologists have found many "incense altars" (King and Stager 2001, 344–46), but it's not clear whether any of these items should be identified as *ḥammānîm*. Although Israelite use of incense was legitimate, *ḥammānîm* are always considered illegitimate (LaRocca-Pitts 2001, 240–41).

This is the first occurrence of "idols" in Ezekiel, which is nearly exclusive to the vocabulary of the book. Out of forty-eight occurrences, thirty-nine are found in Ezekiel. "Idols" (*gillûlîm*) were apparently some form of cultic statuary, perhaps used in popular religious practice (LaRocca-Pitts, 42–43). As with the other items in Lev 26:30, the "idols" are associated with Israelite worship. The term's derivation is uncertain. Walther Zimmerli connects it with the word for "dung" (*gĕlālîm*) in 4:12, 15 (1979, 187). Others also make this association and offer the translation, "shit or dung gods," emphasizing their uncleanness (*TDOT*, 3.2; Block 1997, 226).

This examination of the cultic items demonstrates that although it is tempting to identify these objects in Ezekiel with pagan or non-Yahwistic worship, there is no clear reason for doing so. Their use in Leviticus is ambiguous. The approval of some items like high places and altars elsewhere in the OT, along with the suggestion that Lev 26:30 includes features of popular religious practices, suggests that at least some Israelites consider them as acceptable ways to worship YHWH.

This possibility also exists regarding the items in 6:13. This verse mentions high hill, "mountain tops," green tree, and leafy oak, which are similar to cultic sites condemned in Deut 12:2. "Mountain top(s)" occur frequently in the biblical material. When not strictly a geographical designation, they are often the place of theophany, an appearance of YHWH (Exod 19:20; 24:17; Isa 2:2). By contrast, "high hills" are only spoken of pejoratively (1 Kgs 14:23; 2 Kgs 17:10; Jer 2:20; 3:6). In fact, the combination of "high hill" and "green tree" seems characteristic of Deuteronomic literature (Deuteronomy, Kings, and Jeremiah). Although ancestral traditions associate worship with landmark trees (Gen 12:6; 13:18; 21:33; 35:8), once the Temple is built, such references disappear in Deuteronomic literature. The "green tree" instead becomes associated with the worship of the former inhabitants of the land (Deut 12:2 [NRSV "leafy tree"]; LaRocca-Pitts 2001, 180–83). The expression "leafy oak" occurs only here.

It is not clear what kind of worship practices would be associated with these

sites. Readers should discount suggestions that they are associated with "fertility cults" and "ritualized sex." It is highly doubtful that sexual intercourse was a religious practice in any Western Asian religion (LaRocca-Pitts 2001, 7–12). Regardless, the text itself hints that some considered them sites of legitimate Yahwistic worship. This is indicated in Ezekiel by the association of the sites with an "offered pleasing odor," which is a standard metaphor for an acceptable sacrifice to YHWH (e.g., Exod 29:18; Lev 1:9; Num 15:3). Now, though, the sacrifice's smoke is described as offered to their "idols."

Nowhere in this unit does Ezekiel condemn the practices or sites as foreign or non-Yahwistic. In fact, these sites are consistently referred to as "yours" or "theirs." These are Israel's worship places where Israel worshiped. What was so wrong with high places, altars, incense stands, cult statuary, mountaintops, high hills, green trees, and leafy oaks?

All the items and places in this unit reference Yahwistic practices that took place outside of the Temple city of Jerusalem. Ezekiel's condemnation may reflect the deuteronomic view that YHWH worship outside of Jerusalem was illegitimate (e.g., Deut 12:2-7; 2 Kgs 23:5, 8, 15). The root of Ezekiel's condemnation may also be that these were forms of worship that existed prior to the exile. Regardless of whether the people viewed their worship as acceptable to YHWH, Ezekiel views all worship before the exile as idolatrous. This view is defensible in light of later chapters where Israel is condemned for everything they have ever done (compare esp. 20:24-26). Therefore God will destroy the worship places outside the city walls (see below on v. 12). In chapter 8, Ezekiel will condemn worship practices within Jerusalem.

Not only the worship sites will be destroyed but also the worshipers. The "slain" (lit., "pierced ones") are those killed by sword in battle. "Corpses" can signify death by natural causes. There will be a lot of dead bodies. In the priestly system of clean and unclean, the most unclean and defiling object is a dead body (Num 19:14-21). The presence of so many dead bodies on these cultic sites would render them unclean and therefore unfit for God's holy presence. Moreover, these bodies will be unburied, a sign of disgrace and judgment (compare Deut 21:22-23; 1 Sam 31:8-13; Ezek 39:4-5). The sites are both physically and theologically destroyed.

In the midst of all this death, destruction, and general mayhem, verse 8 might seem a very small sign of relief: "But I will spare some." This relief is even smaller than readers think, however. The phrase is absent from the LXX, giving no relief. The MT is literally, "But I will cause [some] to be left over [from all the destruction] who are still alive" (compare 12:16). That is, a few will not end up slain corpses. This does not mean that they have escaped the punishment.

Those who remain alive will be scattered among the nations, not by choice, but "carried captive," forcibly removed from the mountains of Israel.

These survivors are to "remember" YHWH. To "remember" is not simply to recall something temporarily forgotten. Remembering involves intellectual activity with reference to the past. More significantly, it is associated with some activity, a consequence that the memory entails (*TDOT*, 4.66–67). God remembers Noah, and stops the flood (Gen 8:1). God remembers Rachel, and opens her womb (Gen 30:22; see also Exod 2:24). In Deuteronomy, the people are to remember what God had done for them in Egypt and keep all of God's commandments (e.g., Deut 16:12). Thus, when these survivors are commanded to "remember," readers expect this remembering to be followed by action. (For more on remembering, see pp. 122–23.)

They are to remember that YHWH was "crushed" by their "wanton heart" (v. 9). The verb for "crushed" is the same verb for "broken" incense stands and "broken" idols (vv. 4, 6). The "wanton heart" of the people has broken God's heart. The word *wanton* (*zônâ*), literally means "prostitute" or "whore." The sexual promiscuity of a "whore" will be used later in Ezekiel as a metaphor for Israel's alleged unfaithfulness to YHWH (chs. 16 and 23). The people are to remember that, although they believed themselves to be faithful, their wanton heart had, in fact, turned away from God in their worship.

Remembering is to lead these survivors to loathe themselves. Like the English words *puke* and *gag*, the sound of the word for "loathsome" (*qût*) resembles the act. Something you "loathe" literally makes you gag (Zimmerli 1979, 190). This word is also used to describe God's feelings toward faithless Israel in the wilderness (Ps 95:10) and Job's feeling about his life (Job 10:1). But only in Ezekiel will remembering YHWH make someone want to vomit (Greenberg 1983, 134).

In the destruction of former places of worship, in the death of many, in forced exile, and in the remembering of their turning away from God, the exiles will know YHWH. YHWH's statement to "not threaten in vain" to bring this disaster upon the people/mountains suggests that the events were intended as a "teaching moment" (v. 10; compare 14:23). One lesson, from Ezekiel's perspective, is that God viewed these preexilic worship practices as illegitimate, regardless of whether the worshipers themselves considered them to be legitimate. Therefore, the worshipers cannot claim to be innocent sufferers. Not until chapters 40–48 will readers discover how the people's behavior will be modified by this new knowledge.

The next subunit (vv. 11-14) follows the same pattern as verses 1-10. It is introduced by the *messenger formula* and a *sign-act*, followed by an

announcement of destruction, and ending with the *recognition formula*. In the sign-act Ezekiel is to clap his hands, stamp his foot, and cry "alas!" Although hand clapping can be joyful (Pss 47:1 [2]; 98:8; Isa 55:12), it can also be an expression of derision (Lam 2:15; Nah 3:19). Foot stamping appears only in Ezekiel (v. 11; 25:6), as does the cry of "alas" (*ʾāḥ*; v. 11; 21:15 [20]). A similar Hebrew interjection ("aha!" [*heʾāḥ*]) is an expression of distress or contempt (Pss 35:21; 70:3 [4]; Ezek 25:3; 26:2; 36:2). Combined, these acts demonstrate hostility or indignation (Freibel 1989, 611–12).

The threefold destruction by pestilence, sword, and famine of 5:12 is echoed by verse 12. This triad may reflect realism about military invasion. The wake of a devastating army ("sword") brings "famine," as food supplies are either confiscated or destroyed. Disease ("pestilence") breaks out as social infrastructure collapses. It is not clear what the spatial reference is to—near and far off from where? If Jerusalem, then the far-off, nearby, and leftovers are, respectively, "the scattered population, those outside the city walls, and those inside the city" (Block 1997, 236). The end result, as in verses 3-7, is a mass of dead bodies polluting the worship places (v. 13).

Against these defiled sites YHWH will "stretch out his hand" (v. 14). This is not an image of a helping hand stretched out to offer succor. Instead the phrase implies destruction (compare Exod 7:5; Isa 31:3; Jer 6:12). Just as YHWH threatens that the towns will fall into decline and become a dump (v. 6), YHWH threatens to make the land itself "desolate and waste" from its southernmost point (wilderness) to its northernmost point (Riblah, in Syria; v. 14).

Theological and Ethical Analysis

(1) The concept of self-loathing is interesting (v. 9). The focus on self-loathing in Ezekiel is not about repentance. Although 6:3-6 has many connections with Lev 26:30, it has no connections with Lev 26:40-42, which mentions confession, a humble heart, and making amends.

There has been research recently on the neuroscience of disgust. Disgust is apparently an emotion crucial to human survival. The apparently universal response of disgust (or loathing) to various bodily fluids (feces, vomit, etc.) and creatures (rats, maggots, etc.) may be encoded in human genes as protection from disease, since many bacteria, viruses, and other pathogens are carried in these fluids and by these creatures. Disgust is centered in an area of the brain separate from that used to process fear; damaging this area can eliminate disgust altogether (Glausiusz 2002, 32–34).

Unfortunately, little work has been done on moral disgust—the repugnance

that people feel toward child abuse, say, or corporate malfeasance. Some scientists think that moral disgust evolved as a means of policing social parasites —those who have power and use it to prey upon the poor or the vulnerable.

Ezekiel seems to say that the people had either never had or had somehow lost their sense of moral disgust. Religious practices that should have initiated their moral gag reflex failed to do so. Although the cure seems worse than the disease, Ezekiel believes the exile will restore the people's sense of moral disgust. The indication of this will be their sense of loathing and disgust at their own actions. This is similar to the ways in which many Christians have looked back at various past practices—the Inquisition, the slaughter of native peoples, and slavery, to name a few—and have felt a sense of loathing.

Ezekiel's focus in this chapter is on worship practices. In a later chapter the focus extends more broadly to God's statutes and ordinances (20:1-44). All of Israel's behavior, not just in matters of worship, reflected their failure to observe God's torah. Israel must learn through punishment and exile to loathe itself for all its ways and deeds (20:43; 36:31).

Readers might consider those today whom they might argue feel no sense of self-disgust at their actions. During the writing of this commentary, the greed and criminal actions of various corporations and their executives were in the news. They failed to gag at filling their own wallets at the expense of their workers. Readers can fill in their own blanks at those in church and society who seem to lack a moral gag reflex or have a damaged moral gag reflex. It would be right to hope that they might be judged, and in doing so learn to feel self-loathing.

It is much more difficult to look at one's own life and community. What is one's own sense of moral disgust? Persons might agree that they should be disgusted by something, yet are disgusted by different things. For what actions do you feel self-loathing? Are you puzzled by what others choke over? How will we respond to those who lack a reflex or have a damaged reflex? These questions should be an area of exploration for all communities of faith.

(2) The desire to justify God's behavior may trigger some readers' moral gag reflex. Poor God has a broken heart and it is all Israel's fault. Readers may grind their teeth when they read how God being "crushed" is "one of the few places where Ezekiel depicts *the compassion* of God" (Lind 1996, 64, emphasis added). The results of that broken heart are corpses and exiles. What makes that a sign of compassion? Another justification of God's behavior focuses on YHWH's "protectiveness." YHWH's protection of the divine-Israel relationship would tolerate no interference from would-be competitors (Block 1997, 231). But again the results of that protectiveness are corpses and exiles. Which should initiate

one's moral gag reflex, Israel's behavior or God's? Or both? Why?

THE END-TIME (7:1-27)

"The text of ch. 7 is so difficult that every analysis must confess to extreme hesitancy. The problem encompasses untranslatable words, bewildering repetition, obscure allusion, and confusing organization" (Hals 1989, 41). Hals accurately names the difficulties inherent in understanding this chapter. Not since chapter 1 has the text been so fractured. Despite these difficulties the overall message of the chapter is clear. The "end," the impending day of YHWH, has arrived, resulting in the meltdown of every facet of Israel's social order.

Literary Analysis

Despite textual difficulties, the chapter can clearly be construed as a unit. It begins with the *prophetic word formula* and concludes with the *recognition formula*. Along with the break in content between this chapter and the large vision complex of chapters 8–11, these formal elements mark this chapter as a separate unit. At the same time, the chapter shares several formal and thematic elements with chapter 6. These include the introductory formulas, the repetition of the recognition formula, a geographical audience, divine speech in the form of a *prophetic proof saying*, and the theme of judgment. Although this chapter could have been placed anywhere within the book of Ezekiel, literary elements encourage readers to interpret it as a conclusion to chapters 4–6. They began with the sign-acts "playing out" siege, destruction, and judgment (4:1–5:4). Now the reality that lies behind the play appears.

The repetition of the recognition formula as an apparent ending in verses 4, 9, and 27 divides the unit into three separate prophetic proof sayings. The first two (vv. 2-4 and vv. 5-9) are nearly identical in nature. The effect of the repetition is the equivalent of underline, bold, italics, caps, and exclamation point: ***THE END!*** The third prophetic proof saying (vv. 10-27) is especially difficult. Words and phrases are obscure and there is no clear structure. Yet there are clear connections among many of the verses and there is a great deal of literary artistry (see Exegetical Analysis, below).

One aspect of that artistry is the repetition in verses 2-9. Here repetition functions to bring to the foreground the main theme of this unit. The passage pulses with the "end" (vv. 2, 3, 6), which "comes" (see vv. 2, 5, 6, 7, 10, 12).

These verses resemble an invocation, where what is invoked is "end" and "day," which recall the theme of the day of YHWH. There are three intertextual links to this theme. The first is to Amos 8. The language of "the end has come" (v. 6) echoes Amos 8:2. Ezekiel's description of the people on this day as donning sackcloth and having baldness on all their heads (v. 18) echoes Amos 8:10. The people's failure to find a word of YHWH on that day (Amos 8:11-12) finds fruition in the failure of prophet, priest, and elders in verse 26.

The second link is to Isa 13, an oracle where the day of YHWH draws near to Babylon. Connections that are apparent in the NRSV include:

tumult on the mountains (v. 7; Isa 13:4)
“the day is near” (v. 7; Isa 13:6)
“all hands . . . feeble” (v. 17; Isa 13:7)
wrath, anger (vv. 3, 8, 12, 14; Isa 13:9)
iniquity (vv. 13, 16, 19; Isa 13:11)
“put an end to the arrogance” (v. 24; Isa 13:11)
houses plundered (vv. 21, 24; Isa 13:16)
silver . . . gold (v. 19; Isa 13:17)
eye will not pity/spare (vv. 4, 9; Isa 13:18)

The third link is to Zeph 1. Verse 19 includes a direct citation of Zeph 1:18. Both here and in Zephaniah, the day of YHWH is near; both describe the terrible devastation this day will bring (vv. 14-27; Zeph 1:2-18).

Although Ezekiel clearly echoes these “end”/“day of YHWH” traditions, he does not cite any one of them exactly. It is as if one tradition cannot describe the extent of the disaster and the horror of “the end.” Besides chapter 21, this chapter is as close as Ezekiel gets to describing the people’s actual experience of disaster.

Exegetical Analysis

This oracle is addressed to “the land of Israel,” continuing the “geographical” form of address to the exiles (6:2). The end has come upon “the four corners of the land,” which parallels “upon you” in the next verse. The end has come upon the entire land, and therefore upon all of the land’s people—north, south, east, and west, no part and no one is spared.

Some of the language in verses 2-9 reaches back to recall the language of God’s destructive wrath in chapter 5. In 5:16 God promised to let “loose” deadly arrows of famine. Now God will let “loose” divine anger (v. 3) and spend it on the people (v. 8; 5:13). Nor will God spare or have pity (vv. 4, 9; 5:11). In a Deuteronomic version (Deut 13:8 [9]), “the Israelite is enjoined to suppress his tender feeling toward an apostate relative and deliver him up to death” (Greenberg 1983, 115). This is perhaps the worst part of “the end.” God will not offer refuge (compare Jer 17:17), nor will God’s steadfast love be evident. Instead God will be merciless and as hard as that iron wall (4:3). O that God were absent or powerless! This would be a better God for Judah.

Verses 2-4 parallel verses 5-9. The “end” will be a “disaster” (Hebr. “evil”). It

is an evil time when "doom" comes to the people. (The meaning of "doom" is uncertain.) Whatever has come to the inhabitants, dismayed shouts of "tumult" instead of joyful shouts of "reveling" will be heard on the mountain. The day of YHWH will be a terrible, horrible, no good, very bad day for Israel (compare Amos 5:18-20; Zeph 1:14-18).

The statement that "I will judge/punish you according to your ways," that is, for their abominations (see vv. 3, 4, 8, 9) is Ezekiel's attempt at theodicy, or defense of divine justice. The claim is that God's punishment fits Israel's crime. To make sense of the disastrous "end," Ezekiel argues that the people get what they deserve. In this disaster the people will acknowledge that YHWH is the one "who strike[s]" (v. 9). This is more than just hitting hard. A "strike" can kill. As the KJV translates, YHWH is the one "that smiteth."

The language of verses 2-9 echoes that of the flood narrative. Both here and in Genesis God's announcement of the end precedes the eventual destruction (vv. 2, 6; Gen 6:13). The reason for destruction is the "violence" that fills the earth (v. 11; Gen 6:11, 13). After the flood, God instituted a disarmament treaty, hanging God's weapon (the "bow," as in bow and arrows) in the clouds, promising never again to destroy the earth (Gen 9:13-15). Now, God revokes that treaty and once again takes up arms, this time against Israel alone. Just as God had punished all humanity for its "ways," God now punishes Israel for their "ways" (vv. 3, 4, 8, 9; Gen 6:12). With this language Ezekiel describes the end of Israel as equal to the disaster of the flood, but without Noah to rescue some from the devastation (compare 14:14, 20).

In a convoluted fashion, verses 10-29 describe life at "the end," beginning with another announcement that the end has come (vv. 10*b*-11*a*): "Your doom has gone out. The rod has blossomed, pride has budded. Violence has grown into a rod of wickedness." "The verse is pervaded with ambiguity" (Greenberg 1983, 149). Do doom, rod, pride, and violence refer to Israel's abominations? Read this way, these verses express that Israel's sinfulness is now "ripe." Or are they epithets for the enemy forces that have come against Israel? In this case, these verses express that the "rod" of God's wrath will fulfill its purpose (compare Isa 10:5).

Verse 11*b* is generally agreed to be untranslatable. What is clear in Hebrew in this half of the verse is the repetition of the sounds of the letters *h*, *m*, and *n*. The consonants are: *mhm . . . mhmwnm . . . mhm . . . nh bhm*, perhaps an instance of onomatopoeia (the sound expresses the sense). These *h*, *m*, *n* sounds also appear in "tumult" (*měhûmâ*; v. 7) and in the moaning (*homôt*) doves (v. 16). Maybe the end of verse 11 is intended to evoke sounds of distress evoked by "the day." These are not the sounds of screams of terror but panicked whimpering.

Verses 12*b*-13 describe the economic meltdown brought about by "the time." Buyers will not enjoy the pleasure of new acquisitions nor will sellers grieve their relinquished property. There is no economic satisfaction when the economy crashes or the buyer and seller end up dead. That a seller shall not return to what has been sold (v. 13) is borrowed from Jubilee laws (Lev 25:28). Sellers will never again see their property, even if they and the buyers survive. Exile separates property and owner. Verse 14 reminds readers that the meltdown comes about because of war, which is not going well for Israel. A "troop surge" is called for, but the troops are AWOL. These verses create a connection between economics and war. Neither economic transactions nor military efforts function normally.

The repetition of "for wrath/vision is upon/concerns all their multitude" links verses 12-14 together. The word *multitude* (Hebr. *hāmôn*) has a range of meanings: "noise, murmur, uproar," but also "multitude, horde, troops, wealth," and in a metaphorical sense, "pomp, pride, hubris" (Block 1998, 158; *HALOT*, 250). Is "multitude" the better translation? "Wrath" is clear enough. Only one consonant separates the spelling in Hebrew of "wrath" (*ḥārôn*) and "vision" (*ḥāzôn*), suggesting they are not too distant from each other. The "vision" that "shall not be revoked" recalls the opening of Amos. Amos has a vision (*ḥāzâ*) of the divine word (Amos 1:1), that YHWH "will not revoke" the punishment (Amos 1:3, 6, 9, 11, 13; 2:1, 4, 6). Divine wrath and prophetic vision are inescapable.

Verse 15 recalls the earlier threefold attack upon Jerusalem—sword, pestilence, and famine (compare 5:12, 17; 6:11, 12). Outside and inside, in field and in city, no place escapes the effects of this day (compare v. 2).

Any who survive the onslaught will escape to the mountains, though the denunciation of those mountains in 6:2-7 makes their destination sound precarious! Seeking refuge in the caves and crevices of the rocky terrain of Western Asia is a common biblical theme (e.g., Gen 19:17; 1 Sam 13:6; Mark 13:14). Instead of shouting "hallelujah!" at their escape, the survivors will mourn with dove-like moans (compare Isa 38:14; 59:11; Nah 2:7). Instead of feeling relief, they will pant in agony over their iniquity. This might be something akin to "survivor's guilt." There is no relief in surviving "the end" if you think that you might have prevented its coming in the first place.

The idioms of verse 17 describe the body's response to devastation. "Hands," often an idiom of power, "grow feeble," or slack. Courage fails as their joints turn to jelly. "All knees turn to water" may be an idiom for losing control of one's bladder (Greenberg 1983, 152).

Verse 18 continues to describe the physical impact. These expressions are arranged in chiastic fashion (ABB'A'). The AA' expressions are external and

voluntary ritualized expressions of grief. The wearing of sackcloth is a common expression of mourning (e.g., Gen 37:34; 2 Sam 3:31; Esth 4:1; Lam 2:10). Although less common, shaving is also a bodily expression of grief (Isa 3:24; 15:2; Jer 7:29; 16:6; Mic 1:16). Though "sackcloth" is normally paired with "ashes," sackcloth and shaving are paired as expressions of mourning (Isa 3:24; 22:12; Jer 48:37; Ezek 27:31; Amos 8:10). The people mourn the death of loved ones, their land, and their assumptions about the world and God. These expressions remind readers that the response to an "end" is grief and mourning.

BB' are the body's own response to the devastation. Modern research shows that emotions are integrally an experience of the body.

> Every emotion is characterized by a discrete pattern of skeletal muscle contractions visible on the face and in the body posture. . . . Each emotion also *feels* different on the inside of the body. Different patterns of visceral muscle contractions are discernible as body sensations . . . each emotion is the result of interplay between the sensory, autonomic, and somatic nervous systems interpreted within the brain's cortex. (Rothschild 2000, 56)

The NRSV's "horror" can also be rendered as "shuddering," a physical sensation and behavior associated with fear (Rothschild 2000, 57). The fear will be so great that it will feel like another garment worn with the sackcloth. "Shame on all their faces" expresses how shame is experienced as rising heat, manifested in blushing (Rothschild 2000, 57–58). These physical sensations communicate to the exiles and to modern readers two common emotions associated with trauma: fear and shame. Fear arises from the sense of threat. Shame arises from a wound to the self.

> Shame is the opposite of pride. A feeling of pride goes with healthy striving and a sense of success and accomplishment. Shame is the opposite, a fall from grace. . . . Anything that leads to a negative self-image can trigger the feeling of shame. Since trauma entails being out of control, helpless, and powerless, trauma wounds the self and the sense of competence and mastery. (Allen 1995, 59–60)

In their behaviors and in their bodies the people witness that the end is truly a fall from grace.

Verses 19-20 return to the theme of economic instability. Precious metals, silver and gold, are flung into the streets and treated as "unclean." The word for "unclean" literally designates a menstruating woman (compare Lev 15:19, 24-26; Ezek 36:17). What does it mean that money has become like a menstruant? One suggestion is that money, like menses, is a source of extreme contamination, separating the people from God. A contemporary meaning is that just as menstrual blood functions to discard an egg that has failed to be fertilized, so

money will be discarded as having failed its purpose of purchasing power. Both silver and gold are worth nothing so they might as well be discarded.

Money becomes worthless at the end because it will be useless as a bribe. No offering, no matter how large or costly, can buy the people's way out of the disaster, nor can money enable them to survive the disaster. As the sign-acts in chapter 4 make clear, siege warfare results in supplies being exhausted. What good are gold and silver when basic staples are unavailable? To think that in the end money will somehow save them theologically or physically suggests that the people fail to look to what might actually save them: YHWH. Thus, money becomes "a stumbling block of their iniquity."

The identification of the "beautiful ornament" (v. 20) is elusive. The NRSV's translation suggests that silver and gold ornaments have been melted down to create various idolatrous cultic images similar to the golden calf (Exod 32:2-4). Therefore, God will also make these items "unclean" (lit., "menstruant"; compare v. 19). This may be a metaphor for that which contaminates and therefore separates from God. But it may also convey the sense of something to be trashed or discarded, instead of cherished.

Verses 21-22 are traditionally interpreted as a reference to the Temple. The Hebrew word for "treasured place" is derived from the root for "to hide, store," but it is also the root for "north," a traditional location for God's dwelling place, and thus the Temple. It will also, in a sense, be discarded and defiled, handed over to "strangers as booty." The Temple is no longer a "safe" space when the "violent" enter it, nor a "sacred" space when they "profane it."

All of verses 12-22 say essentially the same thing—what was once fixed is no longer sure. Verses 21-22 are the superlative expression of that. Previously, the people believed that there may be lean times, the army may occasionally fail, and events might terrify or shame them, but God's presence would endure. But at the end, there is not even that as God turns away in anger.

The final, reasonably straightforward verses pile up more images of disaster and disintegration. The command to "make a chain" probably refers to being led into exile (v. 23). Mesopotamian reliefs portray restraining devices used to control prisoners. The parallelism of land and city expresses the entirety of Israel (compare vv. 2, 15). Everyone will be a chained prisoner. The parallelism of bloody crimes and violence makes clear that violent crimes deserve capital punishment. The language of indictment suggests that violence leads to social breakdown, but the verses are also descriptive of the violence that accompanies social breakdown, as is evident in war today.

Verse 24 mirrors the theme of verse 22. YHWH will bring the worst of nations to possess houses they have not built in a grim parody of Israel's possession of

houses they had not built (compare Deut 6:10; Josh 24:13). Judah's fall from grace means that what was strong becomes vulnerable (compare v. 17) and the holy is profaned (compare vv. 20-22). American readers might paraphrase this verse to appreciate its devastating force: "I will bring Iran to take possession of their houses; I will put an end to their billionaires and Congress; and all their places of worship shall be polluted."

Of course "anguish" comes! Yet in the face of anguish, shame, despair, disaster, and mourning, the people (desperately?) seek peace, shalom, well-being. "And there is none," which could also be translated "It does not exist." It does not exist because "the end" is a time when disaster is piled upon disaster. Since the first casualty of war is truth, "rumor follows rumor." For those seeking peace, one place to look is among one's leaders. But the people will not find it there. The prophet offers no vision of future peace. The priest offers no instruction (or *torah*) on how to live in these times, nor do the elders give helpful counsel. Even if they did, it would be useless. The king, prince, and people of the land, who might implement such instruction, are too demoralized to act. Not only has the whole world of business with its familiar structure of buying and selling collapsed, all the trusted leaders, whose tradition and charisma had given security for centuries, are now united in their ineffectiveness (Hals 1989, 45).

The repetition in verses 3 and 27 that God will judge them according to their ways creates an *inclusio*, or envelope, for the entire chapter. God will bring the people's ways to an "end." In this "end," this "day," this "time" that has come, all of the inhabitants of the land of Israel will know YHWH. The end of the world as they know it is an act of God.

Theological and Ethical Analysis

(1) Sometimes only poetry can capture an event or feeling. Poetry is thus the appropriate medium for this chapter. The numbing repetitiveness, the need to create words where none exist, and the rambling, fractured thoughts capture what it is like to try to speak the unspeakable, the terrible reality of war. Pick any country (Afghanistan, Angola, Bosnia, Burundi, Cambodia, Germany, Iraq, Japan, Poland, Russia, Rwanda, Somalia, Sudan) or people—(Croats, Gypsies, homosexuals, Hutus, Jews, Kurds, Muslims, Palestinians, Serbs, Tutsis) in the last century that has experienced the unspeakable and they may, or may not, be able to tell you what it was like.

They might tell of the chaos of leadership where no one could speak sensibly. Perhaps they could tell of ruthless, corrupt, or incompetent leaders who were unable to do anything about the situation, or who led the country in the wrong

direction. They might relate conspiracy theories that abounded during the chaos. In other words, no one, including those who should, talked sense. The picture Ezekiel paints accurately reflects the economic, social, and political meltdown that accompanies war. All that supports a society is destroyed. This leads to the question of why any country would then choose to go to war. Can countries choose instead to live responsibly to prevent such disintegration?

(2) The book of Ezekiel interprets events with 20/20 hindsight. Both prior to the first deportation and the years following it, the leaders of Jerusalem probably thought they were faithful. Whether advocating submission to Babylon, resistance to Babylon, or an alliance with Egypt, the leaders believed they were doing the right thing, but in the end their policies failed. It is easy looking back to say a different course of action should have been taken. It is much more difficult to anticipate what the best action might be. It is difficult to resist drawing analogies with the U.S. military actions of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, including Vietnam, Iran-Contra, the Gulf War, and the Iraq War. Did rumor follow rumor? Where was the prophet's vision? The instruction from religious leaders? Counsel from members of Congress? Did the hands of the people of the land tremble? The reason for suggesting such parallels is that often in our comfort, and twenty-five hundred years later, it is easy to say, "Jerusalem's leaders should have done this." But in the moment the vision is not always as clear. This is not to say that today people should not vigorously advocate for their positions. However, it might mean that even the best policies, in the "end," will fail.

FOR ALL HAVE SINNED AND FALLEN SHORT OF THE GLORY OF GOD (8:1–11:25)

Chapter 7 closes with the ominous words "they shall keep seeking *a vision* from the prophet; instruction shall perish from the priest, and counsel from *the elders*" (7:26, emphasis added). Chapter 8 opens with the elders coming to visit Ezekiel, who has a vision. The plot of Ezekiel suggests reading chapters 8–11 as a response to this crisis in leadership.

The response takes four chapters. The beginning (8:1-2) and the end (11:22-25) of the vision are clearly identified. Between these points the vision consists of an indictment against cultic abuses (8:3-18), judgment against the city (9:1–10:8), the departure of YHWH's glory (10:9-22), an indictment and judgment against political abuses (11:1-13), and a vision of future hope (11:14-21).

Various literary elements suggest examining each chapter as a distinct literary unit (see below). What binds these chapters together is YHWH's glory, which appears at key points (8:4; 9:3; 10:4, 18, 19; 11:22, 23).

The literary integrity of these chapters has consumed copious amounts of scholarly ink. Even scholars who advocate a "sequential" or "synchronic" reading of Ezekiel acknowledge that these chapters have a complex redactional history (Greenberg 1983, 199–200; Darr 2002, 1172). One solution to many of the jarring tensions and gaps is to take seriously that these chapters are presented as a vision. A dream world is not the same as the waking world. Even if this does not explain all of the alleged discrepancies in the text, it makes more sense of some of them.

Great Abominations! (8:1-18)

Literary Analysis

The chapter begins with information about the date, place, audience, and commencement of the vision (vv. 1-2), followed by four scenes in which YHWH plays tour guide and shows Ezekiel four "abominations" in the vicinity of the Jerusalem Temple (vv. 3-17). The chapter is unified and structured by the repetition of "he brought me" (vv. 3, 7, 14, 16) and great "abominations" (vv. 6, 9, 13, 15, 17).

Scholarly debate rages around whether the worship practices described in this chapter were really happening in Jerusalem in the early years of the sixth century B.C.E., whether Josiah's reforms were effective in the years following 622 B.C.E. (2 Kgs 22–23), and why no other contemporary prophet, such as Jeremiah, mentions them. Historical veracity is further complicated by the problem of trying to identify Ezekiel's location in the Temple area; the visions do not conform to other descriptions of the Temple layout.

A possible solution to the problems of historicity is to remember that this is a *vision report*. Since a vision is only a stylized presentation of reality, tensions and anachronisms are perfectly possible (Duguid 1994, 67), like in a dream. Dreamers do things they have never done and that would be impossible to do in "the real world." In a dream, familiar places do not necessarily correspond to a map of the real place. It is helpful in interpreting these chapters to consider dream interpretation and what meaning Ezekiel gave to these disturbing events, instead of questioning the "reality" of what was envisioned. Ezekiel is clear about where he is—in and around the vicinity of the Temple—even if his "map"

does not correspond exactly to the Temple Mount. What matters is the symbolic meaning Ezekiel's vision reveals.

Exegetical Analysis

The setting is Ezekiel's house and the occasion is a visit by "the elders of Judah," who come and sit before the prophet (v. 1; compare 14:1; 20:1; 33:31). The elders were "representatives of the people in political and religious matters and held . . . authority to govern and to judge" (Duguid 1994, 111). As influential members of the upper stratum of Jerusalem society who had held significant power, they were leaders the exiles would turn to as they struggled to reestablish community after deportation. Although the text does not mention why the elders visit, other intertextual clues suggest they came to seek a word from the prophet. Ezekiel 20:1 states specifically that the elders came "to inquire of YHWH." This is implied in the other cases in Ezekiel (compare 2 Kgs 6:32–7:2).

One gap in the text is the particular question(s) they might have put to Ezekiel. Perhaps they came seeking answers to the questions of trauma, such as, "Why did this happen *to us*?" (see p. xx). In response to the elders, "the hand of the Lord GOD" falls upon Ezekiel (see p. 17), who sees a figure "like the vision that [he] had seen in the valley" (v. 4). This is confirmed by the similarity in language with 1:26-27. Thus, Ezekiel has another vision of YHWH's glory.

He again experiences being transported by the spirit (compare 3:14) who lifts him up and brings him to Jerusalem. The text explains how this happens: a hand grabs him by a lock of hair. This spiritual transportation is also physical and probably hurt like heck! Once there, God shows Ezekiel four "abominations."

Verses 3, 5-6: The Image of Jealousy

The word for "image" only occurs twice elsewhere. Based upon West Semitic evidence, it was probably a statue. Here, it is "seated." Imagine it being in a niche by the gate. Ezekiel does not relate what it depicts. Most interpret it as a statue of the goddess Asherah. Second Chronicles 33:7, where the word *image* also occurs, recounts that King Manasseh set "the carved image of the idol" in the Temple. The parallel text of 2 Kgs 21:7 claims that this "carved image" was of Asherah. Other texts represent Asherah as a freestanding statue (compare 1 Kgs 15:13; 2 Kgs 23:6; LaRocca-Pitts 2001, 197–200). Whether Asherah or some other deity, its significance is its location north of "the altar gate." Proximity to an altar suggests it was worshiped. Perhaps in their distress

Jerusalemites sacrificed to this statue in hope that the deity it represented might relieve their distress or avert the disaster.

The image evokes YHWH's "jealousy." The tradition of YHWH's jealousy (also translated "passion," "zeal," and "fury" in the NRSV) is long-standing in Israel (e.g., Deut 29:20; Isa 9:7; Zech 1:14). Divine jealousy and its subsequent fury arise from God's demand of an exclusive relationship with Israel. Ezekiel was a strict monotheist. No matter what other Jerusalemites might consider orthodox, Ezekiel insists YHWH had no "consort." No other deity could be worshiped alongside YHWH. The result of provoking YHWH's jealousy is "to drive me far from my sanctuary." Ezekiel accuses "the house of Israel" of pushing YHWH away from the one place where they might expect to find YHWH: the Temple.

Verses 7-13: Engraved Images

Next in his vision, Ezekiel digs through a wall near the Temple and creates an opening into what may be a chamber and he sees "seventy of the elders of the house of Israel." There is something secretive and clandestine about their activity behind this wall where they are not accessible. They do what they do "in the dark," claiming God "does not see" them.

What is this activity that they must hide? The NRSV's "portrayed" translates two Hebrew words. One word appears elsewhere as the "pattern" of the tabernacle (Exod 25:9, 40) and the "likeness" of figures the people are prohibited from making into idols (Deut 4:16-18). The second word relates to "relief work" or "carvings" (1 Kgs 6:35; Ezek 23:14). This suggests a room where the walls are carved or inlaid with images. The carvings are of "creeping things," "loathsome animals," and all of Israel's "idols" (or "cultic statuary," see p. 32). "Creeping things" and "animals" are part of creation (Gen 1:24-25), as well as some of the "form[s] of any figure" that are prohibited from being made into idols (Deut 4:16). The "censer" that each of the elders has in his hand and "the fragrant cloud of incense . . . ascending" are clearly liturgical. The elders were worshiping nature gods. The use of "loathsome" and "idols" indicates this is an "abomination."

"Seventy of the elders of the house of Israel" are worshiping the images (on "elders," see above). Seventy elders of Israel received the unique privilege of seeing God (Exod 24:1-11). Seventy elders were given the spirit of Moses to prophesy (Num 11:16-25). Without explicitly saying so, Ezekiel declares that a group particularly blessed was now hopelessly corrupt (Greenberg 1983, 170). Among this group Ezekiel identifies one in particular, "Jaazaniah son of Shaphan." Jaazaniah, which means "YHWH gives ear," is not attested in the OT

prior to the end of the seventh century B.C.E. (2 Kgs 25:23; Jer 35:3; 40:8). The emergence and popularity of the name during Jerusalem's last years may reflect a general longing in Judah that God would hear their pleas (Block 1997, 290). The family of Shaphan was an important family in Jerusalem, with connections to Josiah and Jeremiah (e.g., 2 Kgs 22:3-14; 25:22; Jer 26:24; 29:3; 36:10-12; 40:5-11). The seventy elders and Jaazaniah represent the cream of Jerusalem society. These are not marginal members of society envisioned as worshiping the carvings but the equivalent of religious or community leaders.

Clearly Ezekiel, with his monotheistic beliefs, considers their behavior illicit. The text does not say what the elders themselves believe about their activity. It does report that they say, "YHWH does not see us, YHWH has forsaken the land" (Ezek 8:12). Perhaps they spoke with a tone of extreme bitterness overlaying thinly veiled anger. Surely if YHWH saw the dire distress they were in, YHWH would help them (compare Exod 2:25; Ps 10:14). Since there is no salvation, YHWH must have forsaken them (compare Deut 31:6, 8). Why not worship these images? What has YHWH done for them lately? Unlike YHWH, these images are tangible. The elders' statement reflects not only their cynicism about YHWH's efficacy but also the depth of their despair. Is there no god to hear and help them?

Verses 14-15: Weeping for Tammuz

The depiction of women weeping for Tammuz is straightforward. The myth of the dying and rising deity of vegetation is common throughout Western Asia. In Canaanite religion the myth centered on the fertility deity Baal. In Mesopotamia, Tammuz (and later Marduk) was the god associated with fertility and agricultural concerns. The cult of Tammuz centered on his courtship and marriage with the goddess Ishtar, also associated with fertility. Their sexual union ensured fertility for the land. But the fruitfulness yielded by the marriage came to an abrupt end when Tammuz died, which Ishtar and Tammuz's family bitterly mourned. Women wept over Tammuz in the cultic manifestation of this mythic mourning (Ackerman 1992, 79–92).

Whether in its Western or Eastern Semitic forms, the myth reflected the weather patterns in that region: a rainy season from approximately October through March and a dry season the rest of the year, characterized by zero precipitation and searing temperatures. The present Jewish New Year (Rosh Hashanah) in September coincides with the beginning of the rainy season. Anyone who has visited this area in July or August can comprehend the view that in the dry season "God is dead."

The date of this oracle is mid-September, precisely the time when the god's "death" would be most keenly felt. Accompanying the usual weather pattern, Jeremiah reported persistent drought in Judah's final years (Jer 5:24-25; 14:1-6), which was compounded by siege. No wonder the women wept. Whether mourning for Tammuz, Baal, or even YHWH, all the signs indicated "God is dead."

Verses 16-17: Sun Worshipers

The final "abomination" occurs directly in front of the Temple. Between the porch and the altar about twenty-five men prostrate themselves in worship of the sun. There is limited evidence of a solar cult in Israel. The Hebrew word for "sun" (*šemeš*) is attested in place names, En-shemesh (Josh 15:7; 18:17) and Beth-shemesh (lit., "house of the sun"; 1 Sam 6:9-20). Manasseh supposedly worshiped the "host of heaven" (2 Kgs 21:5) and Josiah, in his reforms, is said to have removed priests who worshiped the sun, and horses dedicated to the sun (2 Kgs 23:5, 11). Legislation prohibiting the making of any image of the sun (Deut 4:19) might suggest such a practice existed.

One of the main deities in the Mesopotamian pantheon was the sun god, Shamash, the patron deity of justice. Shamash was frequently invoked to judge the case of petitioners and determine whether they deserved their suffering (Bowen 1999, 421). From Ezekiel's perspective this makes the men's activity all the more ironic. They are petitioning the patron deity of justice to decide on their innocence and to destroy the evil Babylonians (compare Pss 10:15; 34:16 [7]; 64:2 [3]; 92:9 [10]), when they are not innocent and are themselves evildoers who "fill the land with violence."

They further provoke YHWH's anger by "putting the branch to their nose." What does this odd expression mean? Unfortunately, there is no definitive answer. A notation in the MT indicates "*their* nose" is a scribal correction from an original "*my* (i.e., YHWH's) nose." Later Jewish readings render the meaning of "branch" as an evil smell. Thus, the elders, with their backsides to YHWH, "break wind" in God's nose. Other modern interpreters interpret the act as an insulting physical, even sexual, gesture (e.g., Halperin 1993, 133). This is supported by the LXX, which translates the phrase as "sneering, turning up their noses." Since "branch" elsewhere means "grapevine," Eliezer of Beugancy, reading "their nose," interprets the grapevine metaphorically. "They allow the [evil] branches of their vineyard to grow with abandon in their presence" (ArtScroll, 168). Reading "branch" and "their nose" more literally, the branch may be a fragrant wood, such as cedar, possibly a symbol associated with

Tammuz and Ishtar. Inhaling the scent of the cedar would be an effort to inhale either deity's life-giving powers (Greenberg 1983, 137).

Any of these solutions is possible, if not definitive. It could also be some gesture of entreaty to the deity that is no longer recognizable today. Whether the branch is put to God's nose or the men's nose, it is an act of rejection, an act of disrespect toward YHWH or of respect toward another deity.

In summary, from Ezekiel's perspective, these "abominations" all reflect non-Yahwistic worship. From the worshipers' perspective, these practices can be seen as alternative forms of intermediation. The "image of jealousy" represents a generalized appeal to God. Those in the "room of images" pray for God to see and hear them, to be Immanuel, God with them. The women weep for Tammuz and pray for God to restore fertility, crops, and life. The men bow to the sun and pray for divine justice. If chapter 7 exposes the terrible realities of war, then chapter 8 exposes the lengths to which people will go to restore hope and a sense of normalcy in the face of those realities. From the worshipers' perspective their acts reflect despair, not apostasy. The acts reflect belief that YHWH is absent, deaf, impotent, or unjust. These alternative worship practices all reflect the assumption that YHWH should have prevented the disaster. How could God allow this to happen to God's people? After all, why pursue a path outside the norm unless the norm has catastrophically failed? Before readers rush to judgment against these worshipers, let them consider the lengths they would go to save the life of a loved one or to end a war. Truth be told, who among us would not have broken any law or any covenant, or even made a deal with the devil, if it would have prevented the Holocaust, Hiroshima, 9/11, or, more mundanely, if it would have prevented our spouse's cancer, our parent's Alzheimer's, or our child's death by a drunk driver?

Even if readers can view these worshipers sympathetically, in Ezekiel's view they have committed "abominations," and thus deserve divine punishment. YHWH's response is familiar: divine wrath that neither spares nor shows pity (8:18; compare 5:11; 7:4, 9). In a perverse play on the name Jaazaniah (YHWH gives ear), YHWH decrees that no matter how loudly the people "cry in my ears with a loud voice," YHWH will "not give ear" (author's translation). The real tragedy is the cessation of the tradition that when the people cry out, YHWH hears and acts on their behalf (Exod 2:23; 3:7, 9; Deut 26:7; Judg 3:9, 15; 2 Sam 22:7; Ps 22:4-5 [5-6]). What hope is there for a people in distress if God does not hear their cries?

Passover (9:1-11)

Literary Analysis

The brief word of judgment announced in 8:18 is fully developed in chapter 9. This thematic link between the chapters is reinforced by the near-exact repetition of 8:18 in 9:1. There are other literary links between the two chapters, including the repetition of the "no pity" formula (8:18; 9:5, 10) and the presence of "elders" (8:7-13; 9:6). The expression "the land is full of bloodshed" (9:9) echoes the charge that the land is full of violence (see 8:17). YHWH's quotation of the people in 9:9 is an adaptation of 8:12.

These literary connections create the form of a *prophecy of punishment*. Chapter 8 constitutes the accusations and chapter 9 the punishment. Although the twenty-five men in 8:16 invoke the judge and executioner Shamash (see p. 47), instead they are judged by YHWH who summons executioners.

Exegetical Analysis

Chapter 8 provides an answer to the (hypothetical) victim question (see p. xx) asked by the elders, "Why did this happen to us?" The exile happened because in seeking other means of intermediation, the people violated the covenant. God now decrees the sentence: all will be destroyed. Although the NRSV translates YHWH's speech as a command, "draw near," the Hebrew is "the executioners of the city have arrived" (author's translation). Instead of a summons, YHWH describes to Ezekiel an action already in motion. Six men approach, each of whom carries "his destroying weapon in his hand" (9:1). These executioners are similar to the supernatural agent of destruction in the Passover story (Exod 12:23). The weapons are described as "weapon(s) of slaughter" (9:2). Like Jeremiah's anonymous "foe from the north" (see Jer 1:13-15; 4:6; 6:1, 22; 10:22), the executioners also arrive from the north.

With these six men is a seventh man (v. 2) dressed in linen, traditionally the fabric worn by priests (Exod 28:39-42) and angels (Dan 10:5; 12:6-7). Instead of a weapon, he carries scribal implements—probably a palette with a slot for the pen and hollowed-out containers for ink (*ANEP*, nos. 233, 234). The seven men enter the Temple area and stand "beside the bronze altar," that is, in front of the Temple (see 2 Kgs 16:14; 2 Chr 1:5).

Imagine Ezekiel back in his house in Babylon with a holographic projector, watching the action at the Temple unfold, and God, arm thrown around Ezekiel's shoulder, whispering explanations in his ear. This is the sense of verse 3*a*. What Ezekiel sees on his "screen" is from the point of view of the seven men standing in front of the Temple. "The glory of the God of Israel" (compare 1:28) arose

from the cherub on which it rested and moved to the threshold of the house. According to Exod 25:18-22 and 37:7-9, two golden cherubim (pl. of cherub), facing each other, formed an integral part of the cover of the ark of the covenant. Today a cherub is depicted as an innocent-looking, chubby, rosy-cheeked child. In Western Asian iconography cherubim were fierce-looking creatures (*ANEP*, nos. 645–47, 649, 653, 687), often depicted as bearers of a throne for earthly kings (Keel 1978, 168–71). The ark was placed beneath two large cherubim inside the holy of holies in the Jerusalem Temple (1 Kgs 6:23-28; 8:6-7). Thus, YHWH was considered to be enthroned (lit., "sitting") above the cherubim (2 Kgs 19:15; Pss 80:1 [2]; 99:1; Isa 37:16).

Now YHWH's glory *moves* from the holy of holies to the threshold of the Temple (v. 3). This small movement of "the glory" across the Temple does not seem so ominous. Here the point is simply to identify YHWH as the speaker to the seven men. The elders' complaint that "YHWH has forsaken the land" (8:12) supposes that YHWH *moves*. Thus, this small movement anticipates the much more significant movement of the glory in chapters 10–11.

From the entrance of the Temple, YHWH commands the priestly scribe to go through the city of Jerusalem and, literally, "tav a tav" on the foreheads of those "who sigh and groan" over the city's abominations (v. 4). *Tav* is the last letter in the Hebrew alphabet. In the square Aramaic script in common use by the second century B.C.E. and used for biblical Hebrew to this day, the letter *tav* looks like this: ת. In older forms of Hebrew it looked more like a cross or X. Some commentators even refer to this mark as "the sign of the cross." The shape is preserved today in Roman script as "t."

The words *sigh* and *groan* describe verbal expressions of mourning or grief (see also 21:6-7 [11-12]; 24:17). The scribe is to mark those who express grief over the abominations described in chapter 8.

At this point there is a huge gap in the narrative; most of the action of the priestly scribe and executioners takes place "offscreen." All that the text recounts is the priestly scribe's report that "I have done as you commanded me" (9:11). It does not relate how many sighers and groaners he found. Readers who expect God not to destroy the righteous with the wicked, and who assume there must be some who were righteous, will fill the gap *positively*—some were spared. But readers can also fill the gap *negatively*—none were spared, for the scribe found *no one* upon whom to inscribe a *tav*.

The text hints at this latter possibility. The action may be a grim parody of the Passover in Exodus. Numerous links between 9:5-6 and Exod 12, which recounts the events of the Passover in Egypt, invite readers to compare the two passages. The same Hebrew noun conveys God's intent for destruction (*mašḥît*;

v. 6; Exod 12:13). The verb "to pass over/through" in both places describes the course of the destroyer (v. 5; Exod 12:23). A mark is used to distinguish those to be saved (*tav*; blood on the doorposts). Whereas in Exodus, *all* the Hebrews receive the mark and are saved, in Ezekiel *all* the house of Israel are *un*marked and are killed.

Another hint is that the executioners are told to "cut down old men, young men and young women, little children and women, but touch no one who has the mark" (v. 6). God then commands the executioners, "Fill the courts with the slain" (v. 7). Then the executioners "went out and killed in the city." When Ezekiel cries out, "Ah Lord GOD! will you destroy all who remain of Israel. . .?" (v. 8), God does not answer, "No, of course not. Don't be silly, Ezekiel." God instead responds, "The guilt of the house of Israel and Judah is exceedingly great . . . I will bring down their deeds upon their heads" (vv. 9-10). Ezekiel directly appeals to divine mercy with his query, but God's response is merciless (v. 10). Therefore, when the scribe returns and reports, "I have done as you commanded me" (v. 11), readers can believe he found no foreheads to mark. Were Ezekiel to take his holographic focus off of the Temple area and sweep across Jerusalem, he would see the city filled with the slain. No "righteous" remnant is preserved because there were no righteous. Young, old, men, women, children—none escape. The executioners truly carry weapons of mass destruction. Elsewhere the exile is likened to the disaster of the flood (Gen 6–9; see pp. 38–39 and 136). Like the flood, God saw the abominations of Israel and determined to blot out Israel. The guilt was so great, the land so full of bloodshed, that God's only option was to wipe the city and Temple clean.

Chariot of Fire (10:1-22)

Literary Analysis

The coherence of Ezekiel's vision breaks down here. In this chapter's twenty-two verses only two actions take place: the priestly scribe takes burning coals (or fire) from the cherubim to scatter over the city and YHWH's glory moves from the threshold of the Temple to its east gate. Beyond that, this chapter is characterized by a convoluted description of the cherubim and another appearance of YHWH's glory that is similar, but not identical, to the description in chapter 1. The destruction of the city, albeit by different means (fire), provides a thematic link with chapter 9. The movement of the divine glory also links chapters 9 and 10, but the sequence of events does not follow coherently.

There are other difficulties interpreting this chapter. Tracing the glory's movement is as problematic as tracing Ezekiel's movements in chapter 8. The action develops neither smoothly nor logically. The man in linen becomes a destroyer instead of a preservationist and the other six men disappear. Material describing the glory and cherubim breaks the continuity of action (v. 1 intrudes between 9:11 and 10:2, and vv. 3-5 interrupt vv. 2 and 6; Hals 1989, 60). The repetition of "I looked" divides the chapter into two subunits (vv. 1-8 and 9-22). This suggests some shift in the action, but what exactly remains unclear. Moreover, there are numerous differences between the descriptions of the glory here and in chapter 1. There is no explaining some of the differences.

The abundance of statements such as "I looked" (vv. 1, 9), "I looked on" (v. 2), "in my sight" (v. 19), and "appearance" (vv. 9, 10, 22) reminds readers this chapter is part of the *vision report*. The repetition of "I saw/had seen," in verses 15, 20, and 22 clarify that this vision is akin to the vision previously experienced. The dreamlike quality of the events may offer solutions to some of the many difficulties.

Exegetical Analysis

Verse 1 evokes Ezekiel's initial vision, but with differences. The "living creatures" of chapter 1 are now "cherubim" and the description is not as elaborate. The apparent disjuncture of this verse with chapter 9, especially 9:3, leads some scholars to raise questions of the text's stages of growth. One way to understand this disjuncture is to speculate that Ezekiel now knows fully what he had initially seen only dimly. The "living creatures" are not static sculptures in the holy of holies but living heavenly realities (Block 1997, 319–20). Their presence and purpose will become clear shortly.

God now gives the man in linen a new commission. He is to go within the wheel-work underneath the cherubim and fill his hands with burning coals and scatter them over the city (v. 2; compare 1:13). One purpose for this command might to be to torch the city and burn it to the ground, a common act of warfare in antiquity (and to this day). After the apparent total destruction in the previous chapter, this seems redundant. But this redundancy is nonetheless significant. "Coals of fire" are part of the ritual for the Day of Atonement (Lev 16:12), which suggests the action is purifying (compare Isa 6:6-7). In addition, the language of verses 2-4 echoes David's victory song that describes how YHWH heard David's voice from the Temple when David called to YHWH in distress (2 Sam 22:7). In response, God rode to the rescue "on a cherub" (2 Sam 22:11) and destroyed David's enemies with "coals of fire" (2 Sam 22:13). In contrast to

David, the cries of the Jerusalemites never reach God's ears (8:18; see pp. 46, 48). Instead of riding to their rescue on a cherub and heaping burning coals upon the Babylonians, God will ride the cherubim out of town and coals of fire will destroy Jerusalem.

Verses 3-5 detail more of the glory's movement. In verse 3 the cherubim are on the south side, perhaps to avoid the north side, where the abominations were committed, and "a cloud filled the inner court." Elsewhere the divine glory is manifested as cloud (Exod 16:10; 24:15-16), especially in the presence of the tabernacle (Exod 40:34-35) and in the Temple (1 Kgs 8:10-11). Verses 3-4 juxtapose the earthly throne (cherub, singular) within the holy of holies and the heavenly throne-chariot (cherubim, pl.) that sits waiting outside. YHWH's presence in cloud and brightness is displayed inside the Temple and outside in the court. Verse 5 introduces another aspect of Ezekiel's initial vision, the sound of the wings of the cherubim (1:24), which is loud enough to be heard in the outer court, "like the voice of God Almighty."

This expression is unique to Ezekiel. One way to illuminate it is by noting an association in Ps 91:1-2, 4 between the Almighty and wings, emphasizing how those who love YHWH will find shelter under the divine wings. Perhaps Ezekiel again distorts Israel's traditions. The sound of the cherubim's wings evokes, not the Almighty's protective presence, but the Almighty's terror (compare Ruth 1:20-21; Job 6:4; 23:16).

Verses 7-8 reprise the command to the man in linen with some variation. Instead of the man taking the fire from the wheelwork under the cherubim, one of the cherubim gathers the fire and hands it to the man, who takes it and goes out. This is the last appearance of the mysterious man dressed in linen. Unlike the previous chapter (9:11), his obedience is not reported. And the success of the mission remains a gap.

Meanwhile back at the Temple, Ezekiel sees that "the cherubim appeared to have the form of a human hand under their wings" (v. 8), which prompts a description of YHWH's glory (vv. 9-22). There are several differences with chapter 1. The term "wheel-work" (v. 13) does not occur in chapter 1. The throne-bearing creatures are "cherubim" instead of "living creatures." The identification of the four "faces" differs (1:10; 10:14). Instead of covering only the rims of the wheels (1:18), the "eyes" entirely cover the wheels and the cherubim's bodies (v. 12). Lest the discrepancies lead readers to incorrectly assume that this was not YHWH's glory, three times Ezekiel reassures "they were the same" (v. 22; see also vv. 15, 20).

One way to explain these discrepancies is with the analogy to dreams. Those who have repeat dreams know that no two are alike. In retelling the dreams, like

Ezekiel, they would be forced to say, "This is the same dream that I dreamed before." Another explanation is to compare the visions to looking through a kaleidoscope. With a slight turn of the wheel, the picture changes. Discrepancies might be viewed as typical of visions. If God always appeared the same and Ezekiel described it exactly, then anyone could make an "image" (what an abomination!) of YHWH.

Ezekiel's focus on the wheelworks is prelude to its movement. The cherubim rise up (v. 15). Then YHWH's glory, which has been hovering on the Temple's threshold, goes out and stops above the cherubim. Then the cherubim lift up their wings, and, carrying the glory, go out and stop at the entrance of the east gate of the Temple. YHWH has left the Temple.

Open Heart Surgery (11:1-25)

Literary Analysis

Literarily, readers are intended to read the actions of this chapter as taking place after the action of chapters 8–10. The spirit again moves Ezekiel (8:3*b*; 11:1). His transport to the east gate matches the glory's movement (10:19). The twenty-five men at the gateway's entrance recall the sun worshipers (8:16). The filling of the streets with victims in verse 6 echoes 9:7. The people's protest in verse 13*b* resonates with other protests in these chapters (8:12; 9:8).

But reading sequentially presents a problem. Readers should be astonished that there "were twenty-five men" (v. 1). Twenty-five men! How have they survived YHWH's scorched-earth policies in chapters 9–10? Given the narrative flow and YHWH's judgment upon these "officials of the people" (v. 2), it strains credulity to imagine they had been marked with a *tav* (9:4). This might be another example of dream distortion, since dreams contain illogical sequences of events.

The chapter as a whole can be divided into two subunits (vv. 1-13 and vv. 14-21). The first subunit focuses on the spirit's role and the figure of Pelatiah. The second subunit is marked off by the introductory *prophetic word formula* and the concluding *prophetic utterance formula* and focuses on life after exile. Each subunit is presented as a *disputation*. The disputed sayings occur in verses 3 and 15. There is no standard pattern for the shape of the response in a disputation. The vision as a whole was a response to (unstated) questions the elders brought to Ezekiel (see p. 45). Whether intentional or not, they entered into a dispute with YHWH. Ezekiel's vision functions as a counterargument to the implied

arguments of his audience. The vision concludes with their arguments explicitly stated.

Exegetical Analysis

The whole vision can be seen as a midrash on 7:26. In answer to the need for a prophet's vision, Ezekiel receives a vision (though perhaps not the vision hoped for). The perishing of the priest's instruction is illustrated by the abominations of chapter 8. The perishing of the elders' counsel is illustrated in the "wicked counsel" of Jerusalem's officials. These present two aspects of Ezekiel's indictment against Israel: religious and political apostasy.

Among a group of twenty-five men at the east gate Ezekiel sees two he can identify—Jaazaniah son of Azzur (a different Jaazaniah from 8:11) and Pelatiah son of Benaniah, who are "officials of the city." Their relationship with the various groups of "elders" in 7:26; 8:1, 11-12; 9:6 is unclear (Duguid 1994, 110–11), but they would clearly have been in a position to offer "counsel" regarding the administration of the city, which they did, though it was wrong (v. 2).

The word for "devise" (*ḥšb*) occurs in many narrative contexts, with unfortunate results. Judah sees Tamar and "thought" (*ḥšb*) that she was a prostitute (Gen 38:15). Saul "planned" (*ḥšb*) to have David fall to the Philistines (1 Sam 18:25). It is not surprising that the officials devise "iniquity," with unfortunate results. "Counsel" refers to political advice given by respected individuals (1 Kgs 12:13; Ezra 10:3; Prov 1:25; 12:15; Jer 18:18). But the officials' counsel is "wicked."

What was this horrible advice? The quotation is, unfortunately, obscure (v. 3). The NRSV translation is plausible. The end of the quotation accuses the officials of saying they are meat cooked in the pot of Jerusalem. The rare image of meat being cooked in a pot is a metaphor of crisis, not safety (Jer 1:13; Mic 3:3; cp. Ezek 24:3-14). More recently, Palestinians could attest that following September 2000, as the Israeli army reoccupied towns and the populace was confined to their houses, they felt like meat in a pot, slowly cooked to death. In Ezekiel, the image may reflect Jerusalem's siege. Recent experiences in Afghanistan and Iraq make clear that building houses during economic and military crises is extraordinarily difficult. The entire quotation, then, reflects a situation of crisis. Perhaps the officials were devising a response to the crisis.

Ezekiel is commanded to prophesy against them because YHWH knows "the ascendings of [their] spirit" (author's translation). The indictment notes the result of the officials' devising and counsel—"you have killed many in this city, and have filled its streets with the slain" (compare 9:7-8). God declares that the

destruction visited upon the city is the consequence of the officials' iniquitous devising. Although the executioners caused the deaths, the officials might as well have been wielding the weapon. Unfortunately, the text does not provide a detailed recounting of their plans. Perhaps they included an alliance with Egypt against Babylon (compare 2 Kgs 23:34; Jer 2:18; 37:5; Ezek 17:5; Blenkinsopp 1990, 61), a political inclination similar to the religious inclination to worship other gods to avert disaster. If chapter 8 portrays the religious response to the threat of a dominant and overwhelming power, what might the political response to that same threat be? Perhaps plans within Jerusalem to rebel against Nebuchadnezzar lie behind this scene. The officials' devising reflects fear and insecurity. They know they must do *something*. But according to YHWH, they do the *wrong* something.

From that perspective YHWH resignifies the saying of being meat in the pot. Those who offer wicked counsel will not be cooked (destroyed) in the pot of Jerusalem. Instead the victims of their plotting will be cooked while they will be brought out and given into the hands of foreigners. And at the border of Israel they will fall by the sword.

In verses 9-12, five times the Hebrew root špṭ ("to judge") is invoked: "judgments" (*šĕpāṭîm*; v. 9), "I will judge" (*ʾešpôṭ*; vv. 10, 11), "ordinances" (*mišpāṭîm*; v. 12), "ordinances (*mišpĕṭê*) of the nations" (v. 12). For YHWH, this is a "justice" issue. The officials are punished because their bad planning and advice reflect the ways of the nations and not the ways of YHWH (compare 5:6-7).

Then Pelatiah drops dead from unknown causes. Perhaps one of the executioners passed by at that moment. From the meaning of his name, "YHWH rescues a remnant," it is tempting to infer that Pelatiah's death implies the rejection of hope for survival of a remnant (Hals 1989, 67). This seems to be how Ezekiel interprets it. From Solomon's mighty nation Israel has been reduced to nothing more than a pesky backwater in some other nation's empire, and soon even that will be gone. Faced with destruction, Ezekiel questioned whether God's intent was to destroy all remaining Israelites (9:8). Now there is no longer a question. The Hebrew of 12:13 is a declarative statement. "Ah Lord GOD! You are making a full end of the remnant of Israel!" (author's translation).

The concluding oracle in this great vision appears to be prompted by Ezekiel's outcry. In response, the word of YHWH came to Ezekiel. This word is not to Ezekiel alone but to "your kinsfolk, your own kin," "your fellow exiles," "the whole house of Israel," indeed "all of them." Although YHWH has made a full end of Israel in the sense of Israel as land or nation, YHWH has not quite made a full end to the people. There remain those who live through the

holocausts in the vision, namely, the exiles. God then informs Ezekiel of a quotation uttered by "the inhabitants of Jerusalem" concerning the exiles (v. 15). (The existence of inhabitants in Jerusalem at this point in the vision may be another example of dream distortion; see p. 44.) The Hebrew is an imperative. "Go far from YHWH! To us this land is given for a possession" (author's translation).

The meaning of this quotation is uncertain. Perhaps the command to "go far" is analogous to Mrs. Job's response to Job's travails, "Curse God, and die" (Job 2:9). That is, the exiles should distance themselves from YHWH and end their misery. It also echoes God's complaint that Israel's abominations are intended "to drive me far from my sanctuary" (8:6). Strangely, the exiles are exhorted to go far from God (or claimed that they were far from God) when *their* actions have driven God away.

That the land is given "as a possession" has significant theological overtones. Throughout Deuteronomy, an important refrain is that the people are about to enter the land that YHWH is giving them "as a possession" (compare Deut 4:38; 15:4; 32:49). The implication is that just as YHWH dispossessed the previous inhabitants of the land in order to give it to the Hebrews, God has now dispossessed some of the Judahites and given the land to others.

Thus, the citation makes the claim that the exiles are both godless and landless. Perhaps the true irony in this citation is that "all of them" were not too long ago "inhabitants of Jerusalem." If this entire vision is about the exiles, then this citation reflects their views—that God has made a full end to Israel and they are a godforsaken people in a godforsaken land.

Although God has scattered them among the countries, that is not quite the "end." They are not quite godforsaken, for YHWH is for them "a sanctuary . . . for a little while." Other possible translations are "a sanctuary in small measure" or "a small sanctuary." The phrase generates many possible meanings. Since, for Ezekiel, exile was not a permanent condition for God's people, one possible meaning is that this phrase redefines the concept of "sacred space." Sacred space, where God is present, is not limited to Jerusalem's Temple, nor to Jerusalem, nor even to the territory of Israel. Exile itself can be a sacred space when God is there.

But the more pressing concern in what follows is with the future, which involves a series of divine and human actions (vv. 17-20). God will gather the exiles from the peoples and assemble them from the countries and give them the land of Israel. The people will remove from the land all detestable things and abominations (as identified in chs. 6–8). Moreover, God will give them one heart and put a new spirit within them. Indeed, God will remove their heart of stone

and give them a heart of flesh.

These themes will be developed fully in chapters 34–48, especially chapter 36, so commentary here will preview what is to come. The first agenda item is return to the land (v. 17). But the land must first be cleansed and purified of the abominations that Ezekiel saw in these chapters (v. 18). Then, in contrast to their wanton heart (compare 6:9), God will give the people "one" heart (v. 19; or with the LXX, "another" heart). In contrast to the wicked things that enter their "spirit" (compare v. 5), God will put a new spirit within them and replace their heart of stone with a heart of flesh. A heart that goes after abominations (v. 21), that fails to follow after God's statutes, is indeed lifeless and stone-like (compare 1 Sam 25:37). "Heart of flesh" is an expression unique to Ezekiel. Thus, its meaning can only be considered in relationship to the heart of stone. One suspects that as an antithesis of the stony heart, a fleshy heart will lead to obedience. This suspicion is confirmed by the following verse. YHWH does all this so that Israel, who has failed so miserably, will now be totally compliant (compare v. 20 with v. 12). The use of the covenant formula shows that the broken relationship will be restored.

The final verse of the vision proper (v. 21) repeats YHWH's earlier statement that the people will reap what they sow (9:10). Ezekiel 9:10 serves as a summary statement of the vision of chapters 8–9: God, without pity, delivers the punishment the people so clearly deserve. Ezekiel 11:21 is a summary of chapters 10–11, and for the vision as a whole. Those whose hearts go after "detestable things and abominations" are in violation of the covenant and will be punished accordingly.

Verses 22-25 conclude the vision narrative. At the end of chapter 10 the cherubim moved to the Temple's east gate (10:19). Now they continue to move away from the city, stopping on a mountain east of the city, today called the Mount of Olives. YHWH has now completely abandoned Jerusalem. The glory's movement provides a theological explanation for Jerusalem's destruction. The common belief throughout Western Asia was that a city's or nation's patron deity protected it from all enemies. This belief was manifested in Israel in the view of the inviolability of Jerusalem (compare Isa 38:6; Ps 132:11, 13, 18). If the people sinned, however, the angered deity could abandon the city or nation, leaving it vulnerable to attack and destruction. YHWH's abandonment of Jerusalem left it vulnerable to Nebuchadnezzar's army since YHWH was not there to defend it.

Where YHWH's glory went is unknown. Commentators traditionally believe God goes with the people to Babylon as a comforting presence. This view is problematic, however. There is little indication in Ezekiel that the glory goes to be with the exiles. The movement leads to abandonment, not accompaniment.

Perhaps God also goes into exile, not to Babylon, but away from the covenant community. This is not God who is Immanuel (God with us) but God to whom the psalmist cries, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken [abandoned] me?" (Ps 22:1 [2]).

As the glory exits, the spirit returns Ezekiel to the real world of Babylon and the exiles. This vision opens with the elders coming to Ezekiel seeking a vision, a word, an answer from YHWH. It closes with the divine answer—Ezekiel's report of what he has seen.

Theological and Ethical Analysis

(1) The closing note of renewed life in 11:16-20 portrays the theological tension of a God who kills and makes alive, who wounds and heals (Deut 32:39). Most people, when traumatized, pray that God stops the pain. This is possibly what the worshipers in chapter 8 were doing—in any way they knew possible. Ezekiel claims that their prayers were misplaced. No matter how loudly the people cried to God, God did not listen; indeed, God caused their pain to begin with. This may be the worst trauma, in that the One the people trusted to protect and save them is the One who caused their suffering.

The tension of these verses with the rest of chapters 8–11 is at the heart of Ezekiel's theology—there is hope for renewed life, but first Israel must die. It is easy for Christians to overlook this Good Friday aspect to Ezekiel's theology. For Jews, an overly positive assessment is like celebrating the state of Israel while ignoring the Holocaust.

Rabbi Harold Kushner writes (1981, 133–34):

> I am a more sensitive person, a more effective pastor, a more sympathetic counselor because of Aaron's life and death than I would have been without it. And I would give up all those gains in a second if I could have my son back. If I could choose, I would forego all the spiritual growth and depth which has come my way because of our experience, and be what I was fifteen years ago, an average rabbi, an indifferent counselor, helping some people and unable to help others, and the father of a bright, happy boy. But I cannot choose.

The point is that the joys of rebirth should not be celebrated before having plumbed the depths of the despair. No matter how joyful resurrection is, most would be happy to forgo it to have back all that was lost. Was the promise of restored life comforting to the exiles? "Yeah. That's great, YHWH. But I'd rather have back my home, and my family." But they cannot choose.

(2) The mark of the *tav* (9:4) is one of many marks in the biblical tradition. Cain's mark indicates he is not to be killed (Gen 4:15). The blood on the doorpost distinguishes between Hebrews and Egyptians (Exod 12:23). The

community of Qumran claimed that God would use a mark to distinguish the righteous from the wicked. Angels come to mark the 144,000 with a seal to identify the servants of God (Rev 7:2-3), while 666 identifies the followers of the beast (Rev 13:16-18). The theological implication of all this marking is that God makes distinctions.

This creates theological tension between divine universality and divine particularity. Universality focuses on God as creator of all humans who are each created in God's image. Here God is inclusive, inviting *all* to find life in God's spirit (Prov 8:35). Particularity focuses on God's attention to a specific group of people. Here God is exclusive, saving some, but not others. A good monotheist, like Ezekiel, believes that *both* are true of God.

(3) Ezekiel's answer to the elders' implied question of why they suffered the disaster of exile was that they had violated the covenant and therefore were justly punished by God. This rhetoric is alive and well in today's world. These chapters were drafted as the United States debated going to war against Iraq. Ezekiel's argument was echoed in that debate.

"And behold, we saw that Saddam Hussein had violated United Nations resolutions for eleven years. Come, and you shall see still greater abominations! And we saw that they were withholding information about the extent of their capabilities for weapons of mass destruction. Come, and you shall see still greater abominations! Therefore we will act in wrath, our eye will not spare, nor will we have pity; though they deny this in our hearing with a loud voice, we will not hear them."

The enemies' "abominations" served as the ethical justification for the use of "overwhelming force" in response. But is such a response ethical? This way of thinking leads to genocide, ethnic cleansing, and official adoption of a policy to use nuclear weapons if the threat is sufficient. If the only way to respond to "abominations" is to commit another abomination, what has been gained? Is it more justifiable if the claim is made that the enemy's abominations are offensive to God?

(4) Daniel Smith-Christopher suggests that in light of PTSD, these chapters reflect episodes of dissociation (2002, 92), a type of "out of body" experience that is a means of coping with the immediacy of trauma. Since fantasies imbued with vivid imagery and feeling of reality are liable to be interwoven with dissociation (Allen 1995, 105), such a possibility has merit. A further refinement of Smith Christopher's suggestion is to consider these visions as flashbacks, a term describing extremely vivid, intrusive memories, which are experienced as reliving the trauma (Allen 1995, 91). A variety of stimuli can trigger a flashback. The visit of the elders may have been such a stimulus. The result was

"memories" of 597 crashing down upon Ezekiel. At the end of chapter 11 Ezekiel was able to become grounded again in current reality. "The overall challenge of flashbacks is to distinguish past from present. . . . In the long run, you need to master the traumatic experience by remembering it more clearly, putting it into words, and coming to terms with its implications for your life" (Allen 1995, 93). Perhaps it is a positive sign of "coming to terms" that no other visit of the elders (14:1; 20:1; 33:31) triggered another such flashback.

(5) Idolatry is a central concern of chapter 8. An obvious approach is to consider the meaning of idolatry in the contemporary world. A less obvious approach is to consider the underlying cause of idolatry. What turned these worshipers away from YHWH? The argument in the Exegetical Analysis is that they worshiped other gods because YHWH seemed deaf, blind, impotent, absent, and unjust. If the worshipers' expectations that YHWH will hear, see, and save were apparently unfulfilled, then where do they turn? If YHWH would not provide relief and deliverance, then perhaps it would arise from another quarter (Esth 4:14). Ezekiel did not approach them therapeutically. Rather, he challenged their assumptions and condemned their actions.

Many have turned away from YHWH today. Some survivors of the Holocaust, childhood sexual abuse, rape, domestic violence, and war have turned away from YHWH with the cry, "Why didn't you protect me? Where were you? Why didn't you answer me?" Their basic assumptions of God are shattered. Some turn away from YHWH because of the depictions of YHWH in the Bible, such as in Ezekiel, as being jealous, angry, bent upon revenge, and bringing annihilation. Who would worship such a God? Some might seek relief and deliverance in other quarters—such as mental illness or drug and alcohol abuse. Others turn to neopaganism, atheism, secular humanism, AA, or Buddhism. How should we respond to such worshipers? Surely not with condemnation or threats of hellfire. Communities of faith must develop more compassionate and effective ways to minister to trauma survivors and their shattered views of God.

KEEP HOPE ALIVE (12:1–14:23)

"Keep hope alive! Keep hope alive!" Through several decades, the Reverend Jesse Jackson has led audiences in chanting this refrain. One psychologist defines hope as "a belief that there is *some benevolent disposition toward oneself somewhere in the universe*" (Allen 1995, 309). In the context of race relations, Jackson encourages African Americans to believe in the possibility of a

"benevolent disposition" of one race toward another. It is not surprising that hopelessness is often a by-product of trauma, especially trauma inflicted by other persons. Victims may see only the malevolent disposition of the perpetrator.

Many exiles probably succumbed to feelings of hopelessness. But in the midst of trauma, beyond the usual responses of fight or flight, another coping response is possible: hope (Allen 1995, 309–10). Survival comes by meeting adverse circumstances with patient courage and determination. It also means that people are able to believe that there is someone (God) benevolently disposed toward them.

This sense of hope unites the diverse oracles in chapters 12–14. Each oracle expresses some exiles' belief in God's benevolent disposition toward Israel. In each instance, Ezekiel destroys that hope. Ezekiel argues that the exiles' only real hope lies in abandoning Israel's foundational assumptions about God and God's relationship with them. Recovery, for Israel, will not happen if they continue to cling to the "assumptive world" that existed prior to the trauma. In other words, Ezekiel claims that the hope they cling to is a maladaptive coping strategy and must be abandoned. Chapters 8–11 graphically portray the total and complete annihilation of Judah and Jerusalem. Perhaps in the gap between 11:25 and 12:1 Ezekiel heard the cry, "Keep hope alive!" and was compelled to respond that these hopes were annihilated along with the city.

The Hope of God's Eternal Promises (12:1-20)

Literary Analysis

Ezekiel's first response consists of two *sign-acts* (vv. 1-16, 17-20), which begin with the *prophetic word formula* and conclude with the *recognition formula*. Each sign-act describes the action the prophet is to perform (vv. 3-6, 18) and the interpretation of the action (vv. 8-16, 19-20; Freibel 1989, 494). For the first time there is also a report of Ezekiel's performance (v. 7). Each *sign-act* graphically represents the hope the exiles are keeping alive—and its destruction.

Exegetical Analysis

God addresses Ezekiel as one who lives in the midst of "a rebellious house" (vv. 2-3; (see p. 9). Ezekiel must prepare an "exile's baggage." After digging a hole in some wall, he is to bring the baggage out through the hole, heft it on his

shoulder, and walk off carrying his burden (vv. 3-6). This is a vivid portrayal of Jerusalemites being forced into exile as prisoners of war (Smith-Christopher 2002, 96). Whether ancient illustrations of captives (see *ANEP* nos. 311, 366, 373) or the latest wave of refugees on the evening news, the image of persons trudging down the road carrying their bundled possessions is indelible. The exiles watching Ezekiel perform this action would relive their own experience of trudging along a dusty road carrying their few possessions. (See pp. 28–29 for consideration of the dynamics of reliving trauma.)

Ezekiel's movements progress from "day" (v. 4) to "evening" (v. 4) to "dark" (v. 6). "Day" is the equivalent of broad daylight. "Evening," along with "morning," marks the divisions of the ending and beginning of a day (Gen 1:8; Exod 18:13; Ps 55:17 [18]). "Dark" refers to "twilight," or "dusk," the time of day just after the sun has set (Gen 15:17). Thus, Ezekiel's actions take place in increasing darkness. His journey functions as a metaphor for the people's journey into the darkness of exile.

Ezekiel's portrayal includes covering his face. Exiles are not portrayed in reliefs with covered faces. "Covering the face" is sometimes associated with shame, so here the covering might represent a red flush (Job 23:17; Pss 44:15 [16]; 69:7 [8]; Jer 51:51; see p. 40). Since the stated purpose is so that Ezekiel "may not see the land," a physical covering might be implied (v. 6).

In performing these actions Ezekiel will be a "sign" (*môpēt*) for the house of Israel. This differs from the word used in 4:3 to designate the iron plate as a "sign" (*'ôt*). Generally, *môpēt* indicates an observable event that can clearly be attributed to YHWH, such as the "signs" and "wonders" done in Egypt (Exod 7:3; Deut 4:34; see also 1 Kgs 13:3-5; Isa 20:3). Therefore, what the people observe will lead them to understand that the events portrayed by Ezekiel are divine actions.

In order to understand, the people must first "see." Seeing and knowing are at the heart of this sign-act. Ezekiel is to perform his actions "in their sight" (vv. 3 [2x], 4 [2x], 5, 6, 7). Then "perhaps they will see" (v. 3, author's translation). Ezekiel may "not see" the land when he departs (v. 6), and the prince will "not see the land with his eyes" (v. 12). Yet these rebellious people "have eyes to see but do not see" (v. 2). Their inability "to see" the significance of Ezekiel's actions is underscored by their question, "What are you doing?" (v. 9). Apparently, the significance of his actions was not intuitively obvious.

Verses 10-12 explain what the people failed to see. These verses are notoriously difficult to translate. The NRSV offers one possibility. It follows the LXX and Syriac at verse 12 in reading the singular form of the verb "to dig" instead of MT's plural, which makes the prince the one digging, instead of the

Babylonians as others argue.

The sign-act "concerns the prince in Jerusalem and all the house of Israel in it" (v. 10). There is no consensus about the significance of Ezekiel's preference for the title "prince" instead of "king" for the ruling monarch of Judah (see Duguid 1994, 10–57). Still, the title makes it clear that the sign-act concerns the Davidic king of Jerusalem.

What happens to this prince has already happened to the exiles. *He* will carry *his* exile's baggage on *his* shoulder and *his* face will be covered so that *he* cannot see *his* land as *he* leaves (v. 12). Ezekiel makes metaphorical use of the lion hunt to describe the prince's exile and death (v. 13). The Judean ruler is a lion hunted by YHWH (Strawn 2005, 55). Not only the prince suffers. "His helpers and all his troops" will suffer exile and the terrible triad of "sword, famine, and pestilence" (vv. 14-16; compare 5:12, 17; 6:11, 12; 7:15). The few survivors will witness what happened to them and *why* it happened (v. 16; cp. 6:8-10).

The aim of this sign-act is for the exiles to "see" that God's judgment includes the end of Davidic rule and military might. The identity of the nameless prince is unimportant. The issue is not what happens to a specific king but what happens to the Davidic monarchy. Ezekiel's focus on "the prince" challenges the hope that David's line would rule "forever" (2 Sam 7). As long as a Davidic king reigned in Jerusalem, the people might see exile as "punishment" (2 Sam 7:14; Ps 89:30-34 [31-35]) but would believe that the Davidic covenant continued (2 Sam 7:15-16; compare Ps 89:36-37 [37-38]; Isa 11:1; Jer 33:17). This "sign" forces the exiles to "see" that exile meant not only Jerusalem's demise (chs. 8–11) but also the monarchy's. Undoubtedly, the people hoped that the prince and his troops would protect the security of Judah as God had promised (e.g., Ps 132:11, 13-18; Isa 37:35; 38:6). Ezekiel's sign-act shatters hope in that promise. The king will die an exile. The army is defeated. Ezekiel takes the core of Israel's hope—that God has chosen David forever—and walks off with it into the darkness.

The second sign-act (12:18-20) consists of Ezekiel eating and drinking. Ezekiel is to eat his bread "with quaking." The word for "quaking" is usually associated with earthquakes (Judg 5:4; Ps 68:8; Ezek 27:28; Amos 1:1). In Ezekiel it also describes the movement and sound of chariot wheels (3:12-13) and bones coming together (37:7). The term creates an image of Ezekiel eating with jerking limbs and chattering teeth. Imagine Ezekiel pantomiming having a seizure, where he bites the inside of his cheek and stabs his hand with the fork instead of the meat!

Ezekiel is to drink with "trembling." This trembling displays "fearfulness," the kind of hand-trembling dismay that comes from viewing appalling

devastation, such as the twin towers collapsing (compare 4:16). Imagine Ezekiel shaking so badly that water ends up everywhere but in his mouth! Readers can almost hear the people asking, "What is wrong, Ezekiel? What does this mean?" The response is that Ezekiel's eating disorder and drinking problem represent the condition of the inhabitants of Jerusalem, who shall eat their bread in "fearfulness" and drink their water in "dismay" in response to the land's devastation.

The land is key to this sign-act. The audience is "the people of *the land*" and "the inhabitants of Jerusalem in *the land* of Israel" (v. 19 emphasis added). Their *land* shall be stripped and *the land* shall become a desolation (vv. 19-20). The condition of the land is one of contrast. What was once full has become empty. The land, once garbed in faithfulness (Isa 1:21), beauty and joy (Lam 2:15), precious things (Lam 1:7, 10; 4:1-2), but also "violence" will be "stripped of all it contains" (v. 19). This time it is not the emptiness of their bellies that fills them with dismay (compare 4:16-17) but the emptiness of the land.

The focus of the sign-act's interpretation on the land turns readers' attention to the hope held out by God's eternal promise of the land, part of God's promise to the ancestors (Gen 13:15; 17:8; Deut 1:8; 6:23). Perhaps the exiles were writing their families back in Jerusalem and asking them, like Jeremiah, to purchase fields as a sign-act that, despite the situation, God still upheld this promise (Jer 32:6-25, esp. v. 22).

Ezekiel's sign-act stands in stark contrast to the hope of Jeremiah's sign-act. Just as the promise to David's descendants of the throne is nullified, so is the promise of the land to Abraham's descendants. Surely, the people might think, God did not empty the land of the previous inhabitants to empty it now of its current inhabitants. Surely God's promise endures. Ezekiel responds that what God has promised "forever," God can invalidate. No wonder Ezekiel quakes and shakes. Just as trembling and shaking distort the fundamentals of life, eating and drinking, the destruction of the land and Davidic kingship makes clinging to their hope a distortion of faith.

The Hope of Conventional Wisdom (12:21-28)

Literary Analysis

The other two subunits in this chapter, verses 21-25 and 26-28, are defined by the *prophetic word formula* and the *prophetic utterance formula* at the beginning and end. These subunits have the form of a *disputation speech*. Each saying

reveals some aspect of hope, which links them to the previous unit.

This section includes the first use of a "proverb" (*māšāl*) in Ezekiel (also 14:8; 16:44; 17:2; 18:2-3; 20:43; 24:3). The genre is difficult to define. The NRSV most frequently translates it as "proverb" in Ezekiel, but also translates it as "byword" and "allegory," which are different literary types. Timothy Polk argues for defining *māšāl* in terms of audience response rather than a fixed literary form. The *māšāl* conveys information but it also *does* something to a reader, namely, it stimulates reflection (Polk 1983, 567–68). A *māšāl* presents an imaginatively shaped model of reality to an audience and asks that they recognize it as true in order to lead them to alter their behavior (Polk 1983, 570, 573). The Septuagint consistently translates *māšāl* as "parable." As with Jesus' parables, the *māšāl* in Ezekiel functions to "summon from a reluctant audience a response to the call and claim of God" (Polk 1983, 573).

Exegetical Analysis

"Land" serves as a catchword connecting the first disputation to the previous unit. God considers a "proverb" about the land of Israel that circulated among the exiles (v. 22). The proverb has taken on the force of conventional wisdom. "The days are prolonged, and every vision comes to nothing."

This proverb returns to the theme of the "vision" of the prophet (7:26; 8:4; 11:24). Ezekiel reported in the vision in chapters 8–11 that because of their sins the people shall die, Jerusalem and the Temple shall be destroyed, and the land shall be emptied. But as long as the Temple still stood and there were residents in Jerusalem, the people could, with all sincerity, deny the truth of Ezekiel's vision. The proverb reflects the belief that as long as the vision has not come to pass exactly as Ezekiel has described it, the vision itself is false (see Deut 18:21-22). The people keep hope alive by refusing to be frightened by Ezekiel.

God declares that their belief in the proverb will fall out of use and be replaced by a new proverb. "The days are near, and the fulfillment of every vision." The people cannot hope in the delay of total annihilation. "The days are near" means that they have wrongly judged the prophet's authenticity. "The fulfillment of every vision" means disaster is unavoidable.

In contrast to Ezekiel's vision, the people's hope is nothing more than "flattering divination." "Divination" functions as a synonym for "vision." Both are words for communication between the divine and human realms. The word for "flattering" connotes slickness (compare Ps 55:21 [22]). Thus, the proverb is "flattering" insofar as it accentuates the positive while ignoring the negative. The people's view is no more than false theological "spin."

The saying is "false" and "flattering" because the fulfillment of the "end of days" (compare ch. 7) is not far in the future, but *now*. God's commitment to fulfill God's word surrounds another divine promise in an ABA pattern (v. 25). The act of fulfillment encompasses the when of fulfillment.

A. I . . . will speak the word that I speak, and it will be fulfilled.
B. It will no longer be delayed; but in your days, O rebellious house,
A. I will speak the word and fulfill it . . .

The repetition of "rebellious house" reminds readers that the entire chapter addresses "the rebellious house." The fulfillment will occur during the lifetime of those already in exile. God equates holding on to hope that the prophesied annihilation was false prophecy with rebellion.

The second saying circulates among "the house of Israel," another common designation for Ezekiel's audience (e.g., 3:4-5; 11:15). This saying is not designated a "proverb." Perhaps it is not as common as the first one, that is, a kind of minority report held by other exiles. "The vision that he sees is for many years ahead; he prophesies for distant times." Perhaps the exiles are holding out hope that a successful rebellion against Babylon will force a delay in the destruction (compare Jer 27). Or perhaps they are holding out hope that other circumstances might intervene and delay the destruction to future generations (compare 1 Kgs 21:29; 2 Kgs 22:19-20; Isa 39:6-8; Darr 2002, 1199).

God's brief response to this slim thread of hope effectively cuts the thread. "None of my words will be delayed any longer, but the word that I speak will be fulfilled."

Neither the failure of Ezekiel's prophecy nor its postponement can keep hope alive.

Theological and Ethical Analysis

Interpreters tend to dismiss the views of those Ezekiel disputes. The word *cynical* frequently describes them as if only someone a little warped would discount Ezekiel's vision. After all, Ezekiel was right! What else would explain this behavior?

In order to appreciate the implications of these sign-acts and disputation speeches, imagine them in your own context. Americans might imagine a prophet who declared they would no longer live in the United States, but be scattered among Iran, Argentina, China, or France. Then imagine that the core of

"American" identity—nation, government, cities, businesses, homes, families—ceases to exist except for Washington, D.C., the president, a few members of Congress, and perhaps a few generals. Now imagine the prophet performing sign-acts, pantomiming that even the little that is left would soon be uninhabited ruins. Would Americans, like Judeans, try to keep hope alive by clinging to the ideals upon which the country was founded?

Protestants might imagine that in addition, the prophet took a hymnal, tore out this hymn, declared it would never be sung again, and threw it away: "On Christ the solid rock I stand, all other ground is sinking sand . . ." Then the prophet tore out this hymn. "Blessed assurance, Jesus is mine!" Imagine that this prophet intends not just to shake the solid foundation of faith but to rip it away entirely. Would Protestants, like Judeans, try to keep hope alive by clinging to that Rock? Perhaps with these imaginative exercises readers might better empathize with the exiles' stubborn, even rebellious, clinging to the hope that *the end* is not really *The End*, and might better comprehend just how devastating Ezekiel's message was/is.

We might also compare Ezekiel's message to contemporary events. The first disputation claims that the prophecy of judgment is a false prophecy. People always scoff at imminent warnings of dire and catastrophic events. For example, the vision of the end-times in the "Left Behind" book series and the vision of earth's devastation due to global warming are regularly decried as visions that "come to nothing." In the 1980s no one believed in a vision that included the fall of the Berlin Wall and the Soviet Union. Many viewed Osama bin Laden's threat of a massive terrorist attack against the United States as remote and unlikely. After the fall of the Berlin Wall and after 9/11 there was a concerted, almost frantic, effort to look for "predictions" of these events. Did they really come without warning? Or was there a refusal to believe the possibility? *The 9/11 Commission Report* points to the intelligence community's "lack of imagination" as the most significant cause of failure to heed the warnings. The same accusation could be leveled at Ezekiel's opponents.

The second disputation points to a view more akin to that of Ecclesiastes. Eat, drink, and be merry today because tomorrow one may die (Eccl 2:24; 5:18; compare Isa 22:13; 1 Cor 15:32). At least that will be tomorrow and not today! That is, it is easy to ignore a postponed vision as irrelevant. Think about warnings of global warming, the depletion of fossil fuels, or the impact of HIV/AIDS upon the global economy. These are very serious problems but may pale when trying to survive today's problems. And so might Ezekiel's audience have thought.

Ronnie Janoff-Bulman says it is part of one's basic assumptions to believe

that the world is essentially benign and benevolent. In addition, even though people might believe that another's world might not be so benevolent, individuals are generally optimistic about their own futures. Even in the face of contrary, even traumatic, evidence, people resist changing their basic assumptions. When change does happen, it tends to occur at narrower levels rather than at the level of fundamental assumptions. Moreover, change tends to be incremental rather than sudden and swift (Janoff-Bulman 1992, 3–45). In these sign-acts and disputations Ezekiel exposes Israel's core assumptions: there will always be a Davidic king, they will always live in the promised land, and threats of destruction will fail or be delayed. The exiles' tenacious clinging to their assumptions is not cynicism. Rather, sudden, swift changes were no easier for them than for contemporary audiences.

Today, many of the theological debates occurring in faith communities concern basic theological assumptions. For example, various liberation movements have all called for the end to assumptions that support sexism, racism, classism, and heterosexism. Contemporary resistance has been as great as the exiles' resistance to Ezekiel. These new visions of the world are dismissed as false, at best, and for some other place and time, at worst. If, psychologically, people fundamentally resist making changes to their basic assumptions, will it take an event as catastrophic as the exile to force the relinquishment of sexist, racist, classist, and heterosexist assumptions?

The first sign-act illustrates the saying "there is none so blind as those who will not see," a theme that runs throughout both Testaments. Since not seeing is closely identified with destruction in the OT (compare Deut 29:4; Isa 6:10; Jer 5:21), one of the postexilic hopes was that the eyes of the blind would be opened (compare Isa 35:5; 42:7; 43:8). The themes of the inability to see leading to judgment and the hope of restored sight leading to salvation are also found in the NT (Matt 13:15-16; Mark 8:18; Luke 4:18-21; Acts 28:27; Rom 11:8).

The inability to "see" connects with the difficulty in changing basic assumptions discussed above. Consider just a few basic assumptions today:

- Homosexuality is a part of God's created order; homosexuality is an abomination against God.
- Nonviolence is the only option; "just war" is the only option.
- The virgin birth is literal; the virgin birth is metaphorical.

This list could be multiplied endlessly. But in each case those convinced of the truth of their position will not see the truth of the position of their opponent. Ezekiel must convince his audience that there is another "truth" that they cannot

"see."

The book of Ezekiel has its own blinders, however. It absolutizes only *one* way of seeing things. Elsewhere in the canon, however, readers will find the viewpoints that Ezekiel declared to be false, declared as truth. The pluralism of the canon relativizes Ezekiel's "absolute truths." This calls us to consider our own blinders, what we have failed "to see."

The Hope of Peace (13:1-16)

Literary Analysis

At issue in this unit and the following two units (13:17-23; 14:1-11) is not a lack of prophetic vision but competing prophetic visions. If prophecy is viewed as the process of communication between the divine and human realms, then it must be acknowledged that it is tricky. Consider how often humans fail to communicate effectively. The Bible recognizes that prophets give conflicting messages regarding the same circumstance (e.g., Jer 28). Although the Bible offers a number of criteria for distinguishing the true prophet (e.g., Deut 13:1-5 [2-6]; 18:15-22), there is no single criterion that is always applicable. Thus, Ezekiel needs to make his case for why the people should not heed these other prophets.

The chapter begins with the *prophetic word formula* (v. 1). The next use of this formula occurs in 14:2, marking that chapter as a separate unit. A change in subject indicates a division within chapter 13. Verses 1-16 concern "prophets of Israel" and verses 17-23 concern "the daughters of your people, who prophesy." Each subunit is similarly structured, consisting of two three-part *prophetic proof sayings* (vv. 3-9, 10-14, 18*b*-21, 22-23). The structure of the units as prophetic proof sayings demonstrates to Ezekiel's audience that acceptance of Ezekiel as the true prophet is another means whereby they will arrive at knowledge of YHWH. Repetition reinforces that message.

Although the prophetic proof saying is the central genre in this chapter, the prophet employs additional forms. Each subunit is introduced by the Hebrew *hôy*, translated by the NRSV as "Alas" in verse 3 and "Woe" in verse 18. Originally a funeral lament, the cry *hôy* marked the transition from life to death (1 Kgs 13:30; Jer 22:18). In the Prophets it became associated specifically with divine judgment (e.g., Isa 5:8; Jer 23:1; Amos 5:18; Zeph 2:5). This prophetic cry of mourning heightens the contrast between a situation deemed (rightly or wrongly) to be desirable and its ending in divine judgment. God's judgment

against Ezekiel's rivals ensures that their activity ends, which is a kind of death. *Hôy* is an appropriate introduction.

Caution is needed in interpreting verses 1-16. What is presented is Ezekiel's view of these prophets and not necessarily the prophets' own self-understanding. This is polemical language. Following Ezekiel's viewpoint, commentators describe these prophets as counterfeits, hypocrites, opportunists, charlatans, or frauds. Name-calling effectively deprives opponents of authority. If asked, these prophets might similarly denounce Ezekiel as a dangerous, paranoid schizophrenic who should not be allowed near women and children. Ezekiel's derogatory language derives from his perception of these prophets as powerful and dangerous. They are the "other" and their practices serve conflicting social goals. Instead of uncritically affirming Ezekiel's rhetoric, consider that his opponents are faithful Israelites offering hope in the midst of the catastrophe of exile.

Exegetical Analysis

Included among the addressees of Jeremiah's letter to the exiles are "the prophets" (Jer 29:1). Clearly, Ezekiel was not the only prophet exiled by Nebuchadnezzar. Given the severity of the crisis, it is not surprising that there were multiple interpretations and explanations. Here Ezekiel directly confronts other prophetic visions. The people's proverbs were false because, like flattery, they concealed and deceived (12:22, 27). The prophets' vision is false because it is an outright lie.

The claim that these prophets have seen a false vision is a way of dismissing their authority. A sense of the urgency to discount their message is evident in repetition of "false(hood)" and "lying/lies" in verses 6-9. Falsehood and lying are two ways of saying that these prophets' words are not true. Ezekiel justifies his claim by criticizing three areas: prophetic authority, sins of omission, and sins of commission.

The claim that these prophets "spoke the word of YHWH from their own heart" (v. 2, author's translation), "follow their own spirit, and have seen nothing" (v. 3), and "say 'Says YHWH' when YHWH has not sent them" (v. 6) are all issues of prophetic authority. Jeremiah makes similar claims against his prophetic opponents (Jer 14:14; 23:16, 26). Both Ezekiel and Jeremiah assert that other prophets' visions are only make-believe. Since today people believe that fantasies occur in the mind, modern translators render the idiom of prophesying "from the heart" with "mind" or "imagination." The expression to "follow their own spirit" has a similar meaning. It contrasts Ezekiel's "visions"

where he encounters God's spirit (e.g., 2:2; 3:24; 8:3; 11:5; 37:1) with prophets who have "seen nothing."

The third expression concurs: the visions of these prophets are made up. Evoking Deut 18:18-22, Ezekiel claims these prophets' words are not given to them by God, nor has YHWH "sent" them. In contrast, YHWH has "sent" Ezekiel (2:3, 4; 3:5-6). A true prophet, who has been given God's word and who has been commissioned as God's messenger, can expect fulfillment of that word (Deut 18:22). But since they have neither been given YHWH's words nor commissioned, Ezekiel might well say of these prophets, "every vision comes to nothing" (12:22).

Clearly Ezekiel does not view these prophets' visions as authoritative, but what is the message of which he disapproves? Unfortunately, Ezekiel is more interested in denouncing than engaging in debate. The description of their actions and words is figurative rather than descriptive, making it difficult to determine their precise message. It is helpful to note that all of the imagery in the accusations pertains to *walls*, perhaps as a metaphor for Israel's "basic assumptions" (Janoff-Bulman 1985, 17–22). This suggests possible reasons for why Ezekiel views these prophets as false and dangerous.

According to Ezekiel, the prophets have committed two sins of omission regarding these "walls." First, they have not "gone up into the breaches" (v. 5). "Breach" can describe a break in a city's defensive walls often caused by battering rams (2 Kgs 14:13; Neh 1:3; Amos 4:3; Smith-Christopher 2002, 87). "Going up" into the breaches conjures the image of a soldier racing to repair or defend a wall in order to prevent the enemy from entering the city. Perhaps the prophets were like incompetent or inattentive soldiers, unaware that the exile breached Jerusalem's defenses, its "basic assumptions," and failing to act accordingly.

The second, parallel sin of omission is that they have not "repaired a wall for the house of Israel" (v. 5). The Hebrew word for "repair" is primarily associated with the stone walls, which required maintenance and, if neglected, quickly deteriorated (Prov 24:30-31). A successful vinedresser would constantly monitor the walls of the vineyard and quickly repair any damage. Elsewhere "vineyard" is a metaphor for Israel (compare Ps 80:8-12 [9-13]; Isa 5:5). Perhaps the prophets neglected to monitor Israel's "basic assumptions" to ensure they were strong enough to withstand disaster.

The prophets' sins of omission result in Israel's inability to "stand in battle on the day of YHWH" (v. 5). This is the day of YHWH's punishment of sinful Israel (see pp. 37–38). That Israel will "not be able to stand" means that the walls of Israel's basic assumptions will be destroyed as surely as the city's walls. Ezekiel

claims that the prophets are to blame for that destruction. Their failure to detect a breach, or their neglect of their maintenance means the walls will fall.

The following analogy may help readers appreciate the nature of these accusations. After 9/11, the FBI, the CIA, President George W. Bush, President Bill Clinton, and a wide range of other political and religious groups were accused of failing to recognize that some of their basic assumptions about the United States's way in the world were faulty or in need of repair. They failed to go up to the breach or repair the wall; that failure was to blame for 9/11.

According to Ezekiel, the prophets' other sin is one of commission. They have misled the people by saying, "Peace," when there is no peace (v. 10). Jeremiah also complained about such prophets (Jer 6:14; 14:13-14; 23:17). The interpretation of this accusation depends upon how one defines "peace."

In terms of basic assumptions, the message of "peace" may be linked with the people's understanding of themselves as decent, righteous, and therefore undeserving of punishment. Elsewhere in the OT, peace is associated with righteousness (Pss 85:8-10 [9-11]; 119:165; Isa 26:3; 32:17). Conversely, there is no peace for the wicked (Ps 125:5; Isa 48:22). The prophets' proclamation of peace voices the people's basic assumption of their righteousness and hope that God therefore will deliver them from exile.

The tradition also attests that peace is granted by God (Lev 26:6; Num 6:26; Ps 29:11). In the liturgy and conventional wisdom of Israel the people are enjoined to seek peace (Ps 34:14 [15]; Prov 12:20) and to pray for Jerusalem's peace (Ps 122:6-8). Those who work with trauma victims say that the first step in recovery is to ensure their safety. "Safety" or "security" fits within the semantic range of the Hebrew word for peace, *shalom*. Perhaps after 597 B.C.E. these prophets were like pastors in the United States following 9/11, trying to reassure a traumatized people that they are still good people who are now safe. However the message of peace is envisioned, Ezekiel's response is that the exiles will wait in vain for its fulfillment (v. 6). The people's basic assumptions are already in ruins.

When all else fails, Ezekiel simply resorts to name-calling in order to demonize his opponents, characterizing prophets who proclaim peace as "senseless" (v. 3). This describes someone who is ungodly and has forsaken YHWH, which damages the covenant community (*TDOT*, 9.163–65; compare Deut 32:6; 1 Sam 25:25; Isa 32:6).

They are "like jackals among ruins" (v. 4). "Ruins" are simply fallen walls. Jackals (*Canis aureus*) seek shelter in rock crevices or caverns dug by other animals. One can imagine jackals taking advantage of hollows created by crumbling, abandoned buildings. In the Bible, jackals are more often depicted

making their home among the ruins of a city destroyed by divine judgment (Isa 34:13; Jer 9:11; 49:33; 51:37; Lam 5:18; Mal 1:3). The simile describes the prophets as opportunistic, exploiting the people's basic assumptions for their own purposes.

They "smear whitewash" over a wall the people build (v. 10). The image is difficult to understand due to the number of *hapax legomena* and wordplays in Hebrew. A reasonable interpretation is of a shoddily constructed wall whose defects are covered up by "whitewash" to make it look sturdy. As readers know, it is not the sin but the cover-up that is problematic! If the "wall" symbolizes the people's "basic assumptions," then the prophets "whitewash" them because they helped build them. They share the same assumptions, which they neither challenged nor critiqued, even in the face of disconfirming evidence (see pp. 64–66; Janoff-Bulman 1992, 26–45). When the wall eventually falls, the people will ask, "Where is the whitewash you smeared on it?" The Berlin Wall is analogous. It symbolized the basic assumptions of Soviet ideology. Any disconfirming evidence was denied or distorted by the Soviet Union in order to maintain its ideology. When the wall was destroyed, East Germans could well have asked, "Where is the whitewash you smeared on it?"

In the end, Ezekiel discredits these other prophets with innuendo rather than fact. Still, God will judge these prophets for their sins. "YHWH's hand" will be against the prophets (v. 9). Like Ezekiel, these prophets will experience the disastrous manifestation of divine power (see p. 17). Instead of visions for the house of Israel, they experience one of God's terrible triads, ending their visionary experiences.

First, they shall not be in the council of God's people. That is, the prophets will be excluded from Israelite religious life. Second, they shall not be enrolled in the register of the house of Israel. This "register" has its parallels with the registers of returnees from exile (Ezra 2:62; Neh 7:64; compare 2 Sam 24:2, 9). Failure to be enrolled excludes them from Judean civic life. Third, they shall not enter the land of Israel. They cannot hope for "return." They are excluded from any identity apart from "exile." Chapters 13–14 focus on "my people" (13:9, 10, 18, 19, 21, 23; 14:8, 9, 11). Excluded from religious life, civic life, and future hope, these prophets are effectively removed from "my people."

God's other form of judgment against these prophets is to destroy the wall they have whitewashed, to shatter their assumptions. Their wall cannot withstand the storm of exile (vv. 11, 13). Storm imagery is a common sign of divine wrath. "Stormy wind" blasts away the wicked (e.g., Ps 107:25; Isa 41:16; Jer 23:19). Though Ezekiel's vocabulary for "deluge of rain" and "hailstones" is unique (compare 38:22), the imagery is not. A flood's overwhelming force destroys

God's enemies (e.g., Gen 7:4; Jer 47:2; Nah 1:6-8). Hailstones are a part of the divine warrior's arsenal (Exod 9:22-23; Josh 10:11; Isa 30:30). Ezekiel's combination creates "the perfect storm" of judgment. When God sends this "perfect storm," it will break down the wall and lay bare its foundations. Like a conquered city, Israel's wall (assumptions) will be nothing but a ruined heap. Neither the wall nor the prophets will survive.

God's wrath is directed not only against the prophets for their cover-up job but also against the wall (assumptions) itself (v. 15). There is no hope in assuming one's righteousness or divine protection. The people must leave their basic assumptions behind as surely as they have left the land behind. The cry of "alas" in verse 3 echoes through the oracle signaling the death of the hope to which they cling.

The Hope of Survival (13:17-23)

Literary Analysis

It is instructive to compare this oracle to one of the primary divination texts from Mesopotamia, the *Maqlû*, which describes a ritual used by professional exorcists to rid patients of ills brought upon them by an alleged "witch." The ritual's purpose is to undo the witches' power by ritualistically killing them and driving them from the human community.

The *Maqlû*'s basic form consists of four sections (Bowen 1999, 421). Section 1 centers on the judgment and execution of the witch for unjustly harming the patient. An appeal is made to appropriate deities to sentence the witch to death and for the witchcraft to rebound upon the witch. Section 2 centers on undoing effects of witchcraft. Wool is tied and untied while the exorcist states that he is unraveling and destroying the tangle of witchcraft. The witch is then symbolically destroyed by fire. Section 3 centers on extinguishing both the fire and the witch's life. The witch's "ghost" is forbidden to approach either the community or the exorcist. Section 4 centers on the disposal of the witch's remains and the permanent exclusion of the witch's ghost. Through a ban imposed by the gods, the witch is separated from the human community and condemned to the realm of the dead.

Ezekiel's oracle follows a similar pattern (Bowen 1999). First, the women (witches) are judged and condemned for their harmful acts against members of the community (vv. 18-19, 22). The appropriate deity, YHWH, announces the death sentence upon the women (vv. 20-21, 23). Second, YHWH removes the

women's bands and veils, symbolically releasing or undoing the effects of their activity. Finally, YHWH bans the women, separating them from the community so they can cause it no further harm (vv. 21, 23).

Despite certain differences, phenomenologically, Ezekiel's "prophecy" looks much like the Mesopotamian ceremony. Significantly, both the *Maqlû* and this unit serve the same function, to undo the power of the "other." Ezekiel, like the exorcist, seeks to undo any damage the "other" allegedly caused the community and to prevent the "other" from doing further damage.

This similarity necessitates a word of caution. Most commentators condemn these women because of an assumed opposition between magic (or divination) and prophecy (or religion). They are described as superstitious practitioners of black magic, witches, or sorceresses. Recent studies argue for abandoning such distinctions since they have no phenomenological basis (Bowen 1999, 419–20). The techniques of the exorcist and the witch are almost mirror images of each other. Societies, including Israel, do make such distinctions, but the distinction is between a socially acceptable form of activity and knowledge (religion, prophecy) and a socially unacceptable form of activity and knowledge (magic, divination, witchcraft). One group's "prophet" is another group's "magician." Readers need to consider what makes the female prophets illegitimate and dangerous in Ezekiel's eyes. How do their goals and concerns conflict with Ezekiel's? Perhaps they too are faithful Israelites offering hope in the midst of the catastrophe of exile. (For additional literary issues, see pp. 66–67.)

Exegetical Analysis

The unit opens with the *hostile orientation formula* (v. 17). Determining what the women have done to arouse divine hostility is both key and difficult. There were female intermediaries in Israel (Exod 15:20; Judg 4:4; 1 Sam 28:7; 2 Kgs 22:14; Neh 6:14; Isa 8:3). However, this is the only text, other than the story of the medium of Endor (1 Sam 28:3-14), that gives extended information about what female intermediaries might have done. The parallel structure of verses 17-23 and verses 1-16 (see p. 66) suggests that these women had parallel authority and status in the community, and consequently have done parallel harm.

Like their male counterparts, Ezekiel charges these women with prophesying "from their heart" (v. 17, author's translation; compare v. 2). The accusation that they "make up" their prophecies, instead of receiving them from YHWH, effectively discredits them. Ezekiel's primary concern is with what the women do rather than what they say. It is difficult to determine what the women do, however, since the language is indeterminate.

The activities ascribed to the female prophets share imagery with various Mesopotamian incantations associated with pregnancy and childbirth (Bowen 1999, 423–24). Societies in antiquity believed that a woman and her fetus or newborn might be imperiled by sorcery or some other evil power. This gave rise to numerous incantations aimed at preventing or revoking that threat. The words *bands* and *veils* (vv. 18, 20, 21) are *hapax legomena*. "Bands" is traditionally understood as derived from the Akkadian "to tie, bind up." This verb appears regularly in pregnancy and birth incantations, in which threads of various colors of wool were twined together, knotted, and bound on the woman's hand or other body part as a fairly obvious symbolic suture to stop profuse vaginal bleeding. Binding rites also appear in incantations designed to prevent sorcery from causing miscarriage. Incantations for untying bands and knots preceded the actual birth, asking the gods to loosen the (sorcerer's) knot that might impede safe delivery. The use of the bands and veils for tying and binding by the female prophets may reflect similar practices.

In addition to binding, the use of grain and bread (v. 19) occurs in rituals and incantations related to childbirth in two ways. First, at the time of delivery the midwife made a circle of flour on the floor, creating a space protected from harmful forces. Second, rituals to ward off hungry demons seeking to devour infants involved offerings of bread and flour to send the demons away full.

The intersection of medicine and theology in antiquity supports the notion that the female prophets engaged in ritual medical activity. The cause and cure of illness were considered in religious terms. A health care specialist was also a religious specialist, who used divination to diagnose and cure the disease. Female medical-religious practitioners were common throughout Western Asia, since they were central figures in the care for women during pregnancy and childbirth. There are glimpses of them in Israel. Rebekah's inquiry regarding her difficult pregnancy (Gen 25:22-23), the act of tying a scarlet thread by the midwives who attended Tamar (Gen 38:28), and other texts referring to midwives (Gen 35:17; Exod 1:15-21; 1 Sam 4:20) hint that Israelite women served in a medical-religious capacity. These prophets' role as medical consultants provides insight into the expression "putting to death persons who should not die and keeping alive persons who should not live" (v. 19). One of the prophet's tasks as a medical professional was to deliver an answer, achieved through divination, to the question, "Shall I live or die?" (compare 1 Kgs 14:1-13; Isa 38:1). Verse 19 charges the women with medical malpractice for giving false prognoses.

It is hard to comprehend why Ezekiel condemns these prophetic activities. The skill offered the exile community would ensure the possibility of a next

generation, which would mean that exile is not really The End (see ch. 7). That would mean God's promises are not null and void (see ch. 12). But Ezekiel's diagnosis is that these hopes are "put to death" as surely as the nation of Israel.

Like the prophets in verses 1–16, Ezekiel discredits these female prophets with more innuendo than fact. For their alleged sins they will face divine judgment. They will be stripped of the means of intermediation, their bands and veils, removing the hope they bring. "Woe" is appropriate (v. 18; see p. 67), signaling the death of their prophesying and the hope that it brings. Thus, the people will be freed ("no longer be prey"; v. 21) and "saved" (see v. 23) from a set of assumptions that, in Ezekiel's view, is no longer viable. The only way the people will eventually have "life" is not by ensuring safe pregnancies and childbirth, but by dying to their old ways (v. 22), which will only happen when they "no longer see false visions or practice divination" (v. 23). For the new to come, the old must pass away (2 Cor 5:17).

Theological and Ethical Analysis

(1) This chapter raises similar questions to chapter 12, namely, how to assess the Ezekielian denunciation of opposing views. For example, Ezekiel claims that the prophets' vision of "peace" is "false" and must be abandoned, but there are also biblical prophets with true visions of peace (Isa 52:7; 57:19; Nah 1:15). It could be argued that by employing the storm imagery Ezekiel was advocating a vision of war. Ezekiel viewed Babylonian aggression as a "true" vision because it was the divine means of Israel's punishment. Drafting this in 2003 as the United States prepared for war against Iraq raises an alternative question. What about those who insist upon saying, "war, when there is no war"? Thinking that war will lead to peace can also be a kind of whitewash. If atrocities are committed to ensure peace, how is that peace? Can readers imagine when a message of "war" should be declared "false" and abandoned? Or when the message of "peace" should be declared "true" and accepted? Reading with Ezekiel produces a simplistic understanding of prophetic conflict. There are God's true prophets, there are fakes, and sufficient criteria exist to distinguish one from the other. Reading against Ezekiel reveals that the issue is more complex and problematic.

Among competing views in the Bible seldom can only one be considered "true" and the others "false," especially when other views are also grounded in the tradition. Ezekiel's definition, or "vision," is that all of the exiles are sinners who are justly punished by God for their sins. His opponents have different visions. The prophets who proclaim peace dispute that they are sinners and

expect God to ensure their *shalom*. The female prophets offer no theological explanation, they look to ensure the survival of the next generation. Other exiles will explain the trauma as divine injustice (33:17, 20) or punishment for their parents' sins (18:2). Jeremiah blamed Manasseh's sins for Jerusalem's punishment (Jer 15:4; 31:29). Job and Ecclesiastes insist that there is no clear cause-and-effect relationship between human behavior and experiences of suffering. There is no single biblical theodicy, and insistence upon such may be as damaging as the initial trauma.

Similarly, interpreting traumatic and catastrophic events theologically is not straightforward. This section was initially drafted during the aftermath of the Southeast Asian tsunami. The Bible's flood narrative interpreted a similar cataclysmic event as a result of God's regret and anger at human corruption and violence (Gen 6:5-6, 11-13). Is this how we should interpret Southeast Asia's cataclysmic event? Some may see truth in this view and others may reject it as false. Perhaps both are correct. There is more than one theological response to the Holocaust and to 9/11. It is not that one is true and the rest are false, but depending upon one's own basic assumptions and theological views, different answers better explain one's experience.

Multiple truth claims complicate the process of discerning the "true" word of God today (see pp. 12–13). Perhaps acknowledging ambiguity and complexity is an important first step in that process.

(2) The attention to female prophets surfaces gender issues. Positively, the text grants the female prophets authority and status in the community equal to that of the male prophets. Moreover, the presence of these female prophets hints of women's significant participation in Israel's religious life. That role is gendered insofar as the exercise of their prophetic ability may primarily have been limited to women. But the language associated with the rituals is generic enough that prophets may have been the equivalent of general practitioners, healing men and women. The patriarchal worldview of the Bible often hides women's activity. Contemporary readers need to make visible what has been hidden.

Because of their authority Ezekiel viewed the female prophets as dangerous, but they are not condemned as women per se. Their activities are not condemned because they are *women's* activities. Nor does the text hint, as in chapters 16 and 23, of "woman" symbolizing the incarnation of moral evil. Yet some male commentators have presumed that women's alleged innate gullibility and susceptibility to the occult and magic explain their being seduced into practicing "witchcraft." This distorts both the text and women's identity.

The Hope of God's Word (14:1-11)

Literary Analysis

The common theme of judgment against rival prophets links this unit with chapter 13, and the theme of destruction of hope connects it with the larger unit of 12:1–14:33. The use of the *prophetic word formula* in verses 2 and 12 and the *prophetic utterance formula* in verse 11 define verses 1-11 and 12-23 as distinct units. A narrative introduction marks the unit's beginning. The "elders of Israel came" and "sat down" before Ezekiel, presumably to seek a divine word (compare 8:1, see p. 45). This is supported by verse 3 when YHWH asks, "Shall I let myself be consulted by them?"

This unit exhibits two characteristic features of Ezekiel: the use of case law (compare 3:16-21; 18:5-18) and repetition. There is the threefold repetition of YHWH being consulted/answering and the indictment against those who "take their idols into their hearts" (vv. 3, 4; see also v. 7). The case law formula, "any of those of the house of Israel," also repeats (vv. 4, 7).

The structure of this passage resembles ripples in a lake where a stone has been tossed. In the first ripple (vv. 2-3), the problem of these "elders" and of YHWH's "response" is merely introduced. Rhetorically, YHWH's question, "Shall I allow myself to be consulted by them?" leaves the reader wondering, "Will YHWH allow it?" In the second ripple (vv. 4-6), the problem is illustrated by a hypothetical case law and YHWH grants an answer, but it is not yet disclosed. In the third ripple (vv. 7-11), the case is expanded and YHWH's answer is finally given. The third ripple also includes a secondary case, the prophet who responds to inquiries.

Repetition, case law, and expansion serve important rhetorical functions. Repetition of the offense, "take their idols into their heart," emphasizes the gravity of the situation. Throughout the building suspense—Will YHWH answer? What is YHWH's answer? *This* is YHWH's answer!—there is no doubt that this crime will be punished.

Exegetical Analysis

The use of case law emphasizes that YHWH is making *legal*, as well as moral, charges against the elders. Key phrases—"anyone of the house of Israel," "or of the aliens who reside in Israel," "cut off," "set my face against"—are taken from Leviticus (17:3, 8-10, 13-14; 20:2-6; 26:17). As usual, Ezekiel adapts the

language of Leviticus for his own purpose. Without citing a specific law, Ezekiel uses legal language to make the case that the elders committed a punishable crime.

Case law also shifts the emphasis away from a specific group, "the elders," to a more general group, "the house of Israel," though both groups denote the exile community. The expansion to include "aliens" (v. 7) may seem ill suited to the exilic situation, but "house of Israel" plus "aliens . . . in Israel" are a fixed pair in Leviticus. It functions here as a *merismus*: all Israel.

This totality is reinforced by verse 11, where the purpose of divine judgment is the reestablishment of the covenant between YHWH and the people. The use of the covenant formula, "they shall be my people, and I will be their God" in Ezekiel (37:23; see also 14:11, 37:27) and elsewhere, (e.g., Lev 26:12; Jer 31:33; 32:38; Zech 8:8) always refers to the entire covenant community. Although the oracle is delivered to the "elders," the audience is actually "anyone" in exile.

The inquirers are accused of taking "idols into their hearts" (vv. 3, 4, 7; see also v. 5) and having "placed their iniquity as a stumbling block before them" (v. 3; see also vv. 4, 7). "Idols" can refer to the many specific ways in which Israel turned away from YHWH (e.g., 6:4-6; 20:8, 31; 23:30). "Idols" can also represent symbolically *the* sin of Israel, covenant disobedience. It tilts toward the symbolic meaning here. At issue is taking idols "into the hearts" (vv. 4, 7). In Hebrew the heart is the locus of will, thought, and commitment. One's being is directed to whatever is in the heart. Thus, the people are described as having a "stubborn heart" (3:7) and a "wanton heart" (6:9), and must be given another heart (11:19). Taking idols into their heart is a variation on Israel's heart problems. Whatever turns them away from God becomes a "stumbling block," an obstacle that causes further separation between Israel and YHWH. Case law language makes clear this crime deserves punishment.

Since bad things in Ezekiel come in threes, YHWH enacts three punishments (v. 8). First, YHWH will "set his face against" these inquirers, with due consequences. (On the *hostile orientation formula*, see p. 31.) Second, YHWH will make them "a sign" (compare 4:3; see p. 22) and a "byword" (Hebr. *māšāl*; see p. 63). As a "sign" the people themselves will make visible what had not been immediately intelligible—Israel's destruction is of divine origin. They will become a proverb something like: "Those who take YHWH into their hearts will live, but those who take idols into their hearts will die."

Third, YHWH will "cut them off from the midst" of the people. To be "cut off" can refer to suffering an early, untimely death (Greenberg 1983, 250) or to exclusion from the cultic community (Zimmerli 1979, 303–4). Both interpretations identify the heart of the punishment—exclusion from divine life.

The inquirers' punishment is the termination of their covenant relationship with YHWH.

This unit also indicts the inquirers for seeking a prophetic word (vv. 3, 7, 10). Why would this merit judgment? YHWH's initial query, "Shall I let myself be consulted by them?" suggests that idolatry made consultation problematic (v. 3). God does not answer those with idols in their hearts. If they would repent (v. 6), then God would answer. The book as a whole, however, makes clear that repentance is improbable. Nor would their repentance change their circumstance of exile. Maybe their idolatry is not the only reason behind YHWH's refusal.

The purpose for inquiring of YHWH was also problematic. Persons consulted YHWH to seek both an explanation for their suffering and relief from it (*TDOT*, 3.299, 303). What the elders hoped YHWH would address is unstated. There are numerous possibilities in light of the trauma of exile. Whatever the question, to ask it assumes that YHWH is willing to answer. This assumption cannot be maintained for two reasons.

First, the book of Ezekiel argues that the covenant relationship has ended. Because the people have rejected YHWH, YHWH has rejected them. Those who cling to idols are "estranged" and "separate[d]" from YHWH (vv. 5, 7). Consulting YHWH presupposes an intact covenant relationship where Israel could expect YHWH to explain or relieve their distress. Only those who refused to believe the covenant was severed would think they could consult YHWH and receive an answer, which is why YHWH's "answer" to the elders was a word of judgment.

Ezekiel's "silence" offers a second explanation for why prophetic inquiry is problematic (see pp. 17–18). The limits upon the prophet also constrained the people (Wilson 1972, 103). Ezekiel's speechlessness implies that the people have no available means of intermediation. YHWH's refusal to be consulted is evidence that the people no longer have a legitimate channel, in the person of Ezekiel, for seeking a word from YHWH.

Clinging to idols, the end of the covenant relationship, and no possibility of prophetic intermediation all explain why the inquirers are condemned. But why is the prophet condemned for responding (v. 9)? There are many reasons why a prophet might still respond that Ezekiel would view as meriting judgment. The prophet could be holding on to the hope that intermediation is possible and YHWH would answer. The prophet might believe the limitations on intermediation applied only to Ezekiel. Or the prophet really is prophesying from his "own imagination" (compare 13:2, 3, 17). Shockingly, the answer Ezekiel gives is that a prophet answers because God deliberately led the prophet astray (vv. 9, 11). The prophet sinned because God made him do it.

The close association of this passage with passages from Exodus that connect knowing YHWH with the hardening of Pharaoh's heart explains Ezekiel's assertion. YHWH's activity in hardening Pharaoh's heart and in deceiving the prophet serves similar functions. In Exodus, hardening Pharaoh's (and the Egyptian's') heart(s) leads to a subsequent event (a plague, the deliverance of Israel, and destruction of Egyptians at sea), which evokes knowledge of YHWH (e.g., Exod 10:1-2; 14:4, 8, 17). In Ezekiel, YHWH's deception of the prophet leads to the prophet's destruction, which evokes knowledge of YHWH.

Ezekiel 14 and Exodus present a view unique among the other occurrences of the *recognition formula* (see p. 30). They claim that YHWH was at work *prior* to the historical event that leads to knowledge. Thus, YHWH was active not only in plagues and Israel's deliverance but also in Pharaoh's continued refusal to let Israel leave. YHWH was at work in the destruction of the prophet and the inquirers, but also in the prophet's ill-advised answer. Pharaoh's refusal and the prophet's word make YHWH known.

The Hope of the Righteous (14:12-23)

Literary Analysis

This subunit is clearly differentiated by the use of the *prophetic word formula* in verse 12 and again in 15:1. A modified *recognition formula* and the *prophetic utterance formula* in verse 23 signal its conclusion. There are various ways to understand the placement of this oracle within its larger literary context. The unit belongs to chapters 12–14 for thematic reasons: Ezekiel argues that the people must abandon another source of hope (see p. 60). The use of a quasi-legal form of construction to convey the message links verses 12-23 to verses 1-11. Verses 1-11 make use of the case law formulation. Verses 12-23 construct a series of hypothetical situations. Ezekiel appears to have constructed the form of hypothetical cases ad hoc (compare 3:16-21). The pattern does not appear elsewhere in the OT.

Exegetical Analysis

YHWH poses to Ezekiel the hypothetical case of "when a land sins against me by acting faithlessly" (v. 13). In Hebrew the expression "acting faithlessly" is a combination of a verb and a noun from the same root (*mʿl*). The idiom is legal

jargon for "betrayal." In legal materials it describes a wife who has allegedly betrayed her husband (Num 5:12, 27). It also is used for betrayal of YHWH (Josh 7:1; 22:20; 1 Chr 10:13). Betrayal is a violation of trust. Covenant disobedience violates the trust between Israel and God (15:8; 17:20; 18:24; 20:27; 39:26; compare Lev 5:15; 6:2).

A land that betrays YHWH suffers the consequences. YHWH will "stretch out my hand against it" (v. 13; compare 6:14; 14:9; etc.). Here YHWH's outstretched hand will break the "staff of bread." The result is famine (compare 4:16; 5:16), which will lead to humans and animals being "cut off" from the land (compare 14:8).

None of the language in this hypothetical sin and the hypothetical punishments that follow is new. That the people will be prey for "wild animals" is a relatively common biblical and Ezekielian metaphor for the exile. "Desolate" is one of Ezekiel's favorite words (22 times), as is "sword" (102 times). Ezekiel employs the legal punishment "cut off" extensively in this chapter (14:8, 13, 17, 19, 21) and throughout the book. There is enough "pestilence" in Ezekiel for multiple plagues and God pours out enough wrath to fill many oceans. All four of these hypothetical judgments have previously been promised as judgment against Israel (5:17), and "pestilence" and "blood" are linked elsewhere (28:23; 38:22).

What is new are the references to "Noah, Daniel, and Job" (vv. 14, 20) or alternatively, "these three men" (vv. 16, 18). If a land has sinned, provoking God's punishment, these three would "save" their own lives, but no one else's. "To save" is used in Exodus to describe the people's deliverance from Egypt (Exod 3:8; 6:6; 18:8-10). The same verb is used of the people's rescue from the final plague (Exod 12:27). It also describes deliverance from the sword (Exod 18:4), from enemies (Deut 23:14 [15]), and from an oppressive overlord (Deut 23:15 [16]). The verb clearly conveys hope for a real, physical deliverance from destruction.

The ability to save their own lives is because of "their righteousness." The exiles may have hoped to be saved by another's righteousness, a hope with solid biblical foundation. Noah's righteousness saves a remnant from the flood (Gen 6:5-22). Tamar's righteousness saves Judah's lineage (Gen 38:26). A later prophet will argue that the suffering of one person could not only heal (a form of salvation) but could make others righteous (Isa 53:1-6, 10-11). The community that arose around Jesus would follow this example (Matt 1:21; 20:28). In contrast, Ezekiel believes that each person lives or dies by his or her own righteousness or sin (compare ch. 18).

It is not entirely clear who Noah, Daniel, and Job are. Scholars identify Noah

with the Noah of the flood story (Gen 6–9; Isa 54:9), but there are reasons both for and against identifying Daniel and Job with the characters appearing in the books bearing these names (Darr 2002, 1213). Presumably, Ezekiel's audience would have correctly identified them as persons whose righteousness might cover the less righteous on the day of YHWH's wrath.

The emphasis on saving "sons and daughters" highlights another kind of salvation by proxy, namely, parents who would give their own lives to save their children (compare Job 1:5). What anguish not to be able to keep one's children safe! This anguish was visible on the faces of parents from Sri Lanka to Indonesia who were unable to hold on as the tsunami ripped their children from their arms. Ezekiel says that even the most righteous will not be able to save their children. On this day of YHWH, another's righteousness offers no hope.

Ezekiel has already argued that there are no righteous either in exile or in Jerusalem (see pp. 50–51). Thus, when God sends the four apocalypses "to cut off humans and animals from it," not only are there none who might save others, there are none who can save themselves! Whereas in verses 14-20 at least three are saved, in verse 21 not even one will be saved; the holocaust is total.

Astonishingly, God then speaks of survivors in the land, even sons and daughters (v. 22). The language in Ezekiel is clear: these survivors were not "delivered," that is, saved by their own righteousness, but were "left" over from the destruction (compare 2 Kgs 25:11; Isa 1:8-9; Amos 3:12; 5:3). They "will be brought out" from the land to the land of exiles. When these "survivors" arrive, the exiles shall see the survivors' "ways and deeds" (a shorthand expression for the totality of all of Israel's sins; compare 20:43-44; 24:14; 36:17, 31) and know that they did not survive because of their righteousness.

More curiously, these survivors will "console" the exiles (see v. 22). The "consolation" is that the exiles may finally come to accept that what YHWH had done in the land is "not without cause" (v. 23; *TDOT*, 9.342, 354). Acceptance comes in recognizing that the survivors are not "righteous" but sinners justly punished and coming to acknowledge that this is also their situation. In accepting the consequences of their acts, there will be "consolation," but not salvation.

Theological and Ethical Analysis

Ezekiel presents some disturbing views of God. Ezekiel 14:1-11 portrays God as Deceiver, tricking a prophet into delivering a false word—and then punishing the prophet for doing so (see also 1 Kgs 22:20-22; Jer 20:7, 10). From a moral perspective, this view raises questions about human free will. Did the prophet

have any "choice" in the matter? From a historical perspective the "deceived" prophet can be seen as a sound orthodox theologian, expressing the faith of his ancestors and of those coming to inquire; God will hear and answer those who call upon him. But Ezekiel does not look at the events from either a moral or a historical viewpoint. Ezekiel looks at events from the radically monotheistic view that divine initiative lies behind all events.

Even so, most people find such a view of God repugnant and tend to "justify" God by arguing that the deception is justified, usually along the lines that "those whom the gods will destroy, they first make mad." The biblical version is 2 Sam 22:26-27 (//Ps 18:26-27 [27-28]): "with the blameless you show yourself blameless . . . and with the crooked you show yourself perverse." Just as the people deserve the punishment of the exile, these prophets sinned and deserve their punishment. While that may be true within the book of Ezekiel, this view assumes that God never does bad things to good people. Even the Bible recognizes that this cannot be consistently sustained.

The notion that God might deliberately deceive is uncomfortable and is in tension with texts that assert that deception is not part of God's character (compare Num 23:19; Pss 19:9; 33:4; 119:160; John 17:17; Titus 1:2). The Bible does not shy away from the notion of tension within God, however (Deut 32:39; Isa 45:7; see p. 58). A God who is both truthful and deceptive is not beyond the Bible's theological limits.

There is a way to understand divine deception. The divine Deceiver bears similarities to trickster figures/deities found in the mythologies of numerous cultures. Within monotheism these characteristics become identified as YHWH's. Like tricksters, YHWH becomes ambiguous and anomalous, crossing the boundary of the moral categories normally associated with YHWH. For tricksters, no boundary is too sacred to cross. YHWH, as trickster, crosses the boundaries of truth and fairness. Deceiving otherwise innocent prophets is well within the realm of trickster-like behavior. YHWH as deceiver embodies a contradiction—YHWH does not lie, but lies. Like tricksters, YHWH as deceiver stands between polar opposites and retains the equivocal character of both. Like tricksters, YHWH as deceiver stands outside of the moral categories of good and evil (see Bowen 1994).

GOOD FOR NOTHIN' (15:1-8)

Through the use of a metaphor, "the wood of the vine," this brief chapter underscores the totality of the destruction in chapter 14 and introduces the theme of inherent worthlessness in chapter 16.

Literary Analysis

There are clear connections with what precedes. The *prophetic word formula* (v. 1) and *prophetic utterance formula* (v. 8) open and close this unit and the previous unit (14:12, 23). Both are linked stylistically by the language of "how much more/less" (*ʾap kî*; see 14:21; 15:5); "act faithlessly" (see 14:13; 15:8); and desolate land (see 14:15, 16; 15:8). The *hostile orientation formula* and the *recognition formula* in verse 7 echo previous units.

This unit functions as a *disputation speech* (Hals 1989, 99). Since the audience is not quoted, their objection is a literary gap. Perhaps they object to depictions of Jerusalem's fate in chapter 14, creating a narrative link to what precedes.

Figurative language connects the unit to what follows (chs. 16–24), where literary genres such as metaphor, allegory, parable, fable, and proverb dominate. Recent commentators debate whether this chapter should be read as poetry or "elevated prose" (Darr 2002, 1216; Block 1997, 455). Either way, central to this unit is the use of *metaphor*. *Metaphor* features two parts: the "tenor," the underlying subject, and the "vehicle," the figurative language used to describe the "tenor" (Galambush 1992, 4). The vehicle of this chapter is "the wood of the vine." The tenor is the "inhabitants of Jerusalem."

Exegetical Analysis

If this unit disputes a hypothetical audience response to the end of chapter 14, then Ezekiel's metaphorical answer poses its own question to the audience (v. 2). The "vine" refers to grapevine. The root of "vine branch" means "to prune," suggesting a pruned piece of grapevine (Num 13:23). The parallelism seems to be synonymous. Despite the NRSV translation, the initial question (Hebr. *mah-yihyeh*) elsewhere in the OT concerns the fate or outcome of a circumstance (compare Gen 37:20; Exod 32:1; 1 Kgs 14:3; Jer 48:19; Lam 5:1; Jonah 4:5).

The question is: “What will become of the (pruned) branch among the trees of the forest?” (author’s translation).

Verse 3 emphasizes the fate of the vine (branch) with follow-up questions. “Is wood taken from [the vine] to make anything?” “Anything” refers to something crafted and useful. The importance of this question is evident when the vine is compared to the woods of other forest trees. For example, cedar was used to build the Temple and palace in Jerusalem (1 Kgs 6–7). But what of the vine’s wood? “Does one take a peg from it on which to hang any object?” In contrast to the lofty use of woods such as cedar, not even the most trivial object, a clothespin, comes from the vine (branch).

The answer to the first question, “What will become of the wood of the vine,” is “Nothing.” Pruned vine branches were often used as fuel for fires, however (*OEANE*, 5.305). So the audience might respond, “You cannot make anything useful out of vine wood, but it is good for firewood!”

Ezekiel admits that vine wood can be used as fuel (v. 4) but then asks another question. Once “the fire has consumed both ends of it and the middle of it is charred,” then, “is it useful for anything”? Clearly the answer is, “No!” If the fate of the vine (branch) was nothing before it was burned, then how much less than nothing is its fate once burned. What is worth less than burned wood? Compared to all other woods, the vine is both useless and worthless.

Shockingly, Ezekiel then compares this useless, worthless vine with “the inhabitants of Jerusalem.” As YHWH “has given” the wood for fuel, so YHWH “will give up” the Jerusalemites to fire (v. 6). “Fire” is both a means of divine destruction (Gen 19:24; Ezek 5:2, 4; 10:6-7) and a metaphor for exile (Isa 43:2; Dan 3). The repeated *hostile orientation formula* in verse 7 forms an *inclusio*. Like the survivors of 14:22 and the prince in 12:12, the inhabitants of Jerusalem will “escape” (lit., “go/come out of”) the fire, but that escape is surrounded by God’s hostility. Any good news is short-lived, as the escapees are ultimately destroyed. The “fire shall still consume them.” In nonmetaphorical language, Ezekiel’s opening question would be: “What will become of the inhabitants of Jerusalem out of all the cities?” It might also be: “What is their value?” The answers are that they will become fuel for a fire, worth no more than charred wood.

Ezekiel’s use of this metaphor echoes Ps 80, a prayer for deliverance from national enemies. If it did not originate as a response to the exile, it can clearly function as such. The psalmist compares Israel to a vine God rescued from Egypt and planted in its own land (Ps 80:8 [9]). No ordinary vine, this was a Jack and the Beanstalk kind of vine. Once planted, its shade covered the mountains and its branches surpassed the cedars; its roots spread from the Mediterranean Sea to the

Euphrates (Ps 80:9-11 [10-12]). Now the walls protecting this vine have been breached, exposing its fruit for scavengers (Ps 80:12-13 [13-14]). The psalmist petitions YHWH to "have regard for this vine" that God planted and which has been "burned . . . with fire" (Ps 80:14-16 [15-17]). The psalm closes with a petition for God's face to shine upon Israel that it may be saved (Ps 80:19 [20]; compare Num 6:24-26).

The psalm reminds God of past divine actions on Israel's behalf, hoping that God will again turn and save. The psalmist assumes that God's anger has brought about the distress but hopes that God will now restore them because Israel is the vine planted by God. The psalmist believes God will ultimately look with favor upon Israel even if, for the moment, God has "fed them with the bread of tears, and given them tears to drink in full measure" (Ps 80:5 [6]; compare Ezek 12:18).

Perhaps the dispute voiced at the end of chapter 14 was a prayer like Ps 80. Ezekiel metamorphoses the psalm. There is no hint that this vine ever received a vinedresser's tender care. Worth less than a clothespin, its value is a far cry from a vine that covers the land with shade. Nor is there hope that God will transform the circumstances. The only transformation is that the branch becomes even more worthless. God's face will not shine upon Israel, it will be set against it. Instead of saving Israel from the fire, God will turn away and let it burn. Why save burned firewood? Ezekiel's counter-"psalm" makes two affirmations: Israel is worthless and God's intention is to destroy.

This chapter emphasizes Jerusalem's fate in 14:21-23. The inhabitants are worthless and fit only for destruction. This suggests that God rejects the people not only because they have sinned but because they are inherently worthless, a notion that will be expressed clearly in the next chapter.

Theological and Ethical Analysis

(1) The vine or vineyard as an image of the people recurs throughout Scripture. In the OT the vine is a symbol of Israel's abundance (Num 13:17-27; Deut 8:8; 1 Kgs 4:25; Ps 80:9-11 [10-12]; Hos 10:1), that is destroyed in judgment (Ps 105:33; Isa 5:5-7; Jer 8:13; Hos 2:12), and then later restored (Hos 10:1; 14:7; Mic 4:4; Zech 3:10; 8:12). Jesus' discourse in John 15 clearly echoes this image. Here Jesus (not Israel) is the vine and Christian disciples its branches. In clear dependence upon Ezek 15, Jesus declares that worthless branches, those bearing no fruit, will be pruned and burned in the fire (John 15:5-6). The question for people of faith is whether they are like the well-tended, fruit-bearing vine or a worthless branch fit only to be burned.

(2) Here and elsewhere, Ezekiel exhibits a frequent response by trauma victims who insist that they "are no good." The sense of self-esteem and well-being is largely formed in relationships. People see themselves reflected in how others see and treat them. A positive sense of self is damaged by traumatic experiences. Victims often conclude that they are fundamentally bad and must somehow deserve the trauma (Allen 1995, 143–47). Ezekiel's experience of trauma would have damaged his self-esteem. He may have concluded that he, and Israel, was bad, and deserving of punishment, a conclusion reinforced by the oracle's message that Ezekiel and the exiles were no good.

One issue in recovery is changing that negative view of self, to be able to say, "There is more right with you than wrong with you" (Allen 1995, 144). Ezekiel and the exiles will need to develop secure relationships with their self and others, including God, to become survivors instead of victims. Readers will need to consult chapters 34–48 to consider if they meet this challenge.

ACCORDING TO THEIR DEEDS (16:1–24:27)

Although Ezekiel has claimed that exile is God's just punishment of Israel, few specific sins have been identified. Chapter 16 begins to remedy that lack. The remainder of the section set before Jerusalem's destruction (chs. 16–24) details the exiles' sins from different angles and all the evidence supports Ezekiel's claim.

Girls Gone Wild (16:1-63)

According to Ezekiel, the exile is a crisis of relationship. The book tries to understand why the relationship failed and how to repair it. Relationship takes center stage here and in chapter 23. Using marriage as a means for exploring the dynamics of Israel's covenant with YHWH, Ezekiel recounts that relationship's history to make known to Jerusalem why the city has been destroyed and its residents exiled.

Literary Analysis

The dominant genre of this chapter is *metaphor*. The tenor is the covenant relationship between YHWH and Israel; the vehicle is the marriage relationship.

Because of the length of this chapter, it might appropriately be described as an *extended* or *narrative metaphor* (Galambush 1992, 10–11).

The metaphor's tenor exploits the biblical convention of personifying cities as female. This is in part grammatical—the Hebrew nouns for "city" are of feminine gender. It is also a part of a larger Western Asian motif. In the West Semitic arena (Ugarit, Canaan, Philistia, Phoenicia), cities were deified as goddesses, the consorts of the male gods whose temples the city contained (Galambush 1992, 20–23; Darr 2002, 1221–22). Although Israel never deified the city, it too claimed a special relationship existed between YHWH and Jerusalem, the city containing YHWH's Temple.

The metaphor's vehicle, human marriage, participates in the general biblical view of marriage. Within this view, a husband has exclusive rights to his wife's sexuality. Her sexual faithfulness is the primary sign of a woman's loyalty to her husband. The relationship is hierarchically structured—the wife submits to the husband's control. Deviation from that norm dishonors the husband. The norm and honor are maintained by commanding women's sexual abstinence before marriage and fidelity within it.

Alongside this human matrix of ideals for marriage, there exists a "theological marriage matrix." "Many theological streams in Israel included God in this sexual system. . . . The believing community is depicted as the female spouse of the male god—called on to love God with the exclusive love of a wife and punished for failure to do so" (Carr 2000, 238–39). "Exclusive love" is the focus of the marriage metaphor within prophetic literature (Jer 2–3; Hos 1–3). The absolute sexual fidelity required of a married woman becomes the trope by which the theological (in)fidelity of the covenant people is judged.

This unit consists of three sections. Verses 1-43 tell the history of YHWH and his "bride," Jerusalem. Verses 44-58 focus on the character of the "bride" in relation to her "sisters," Samaria and Sodom. Verses 59-63 suggest that this marriage can be saved. The use of the marriage metaphor for the relationship between YHWH and Jerusalem brings a number of challenges, including the portrayal of YHWH's judgment against Jerusalem in violent images of sexual assault (see p. 88). Readers, especially those who are survivors of sexual assault, should be aware that this chapter contains disturbingly violent material.

Exegetical Analysis

Verses 1-43

The opening line reveals that this relationship will not end happily ever after:

“Make known to Jerusalem her abominations” (v. 2). “Abominations” is akin to movie ratings, a warning that what follows will be offensive (compare 8:6, 9, 13, 15, 17).

Verse 3 makes the shocking claim that Jerusalem’s birth parents were an Amorite and a Hittite, not the ancestors with whom God had made covenantal promises (compare Gen 12:1-3). This birth announcement hints at the “problem” at the center of this relationship. The native inhabitants of the land that Israel occupied—including the Amorites and Hittites (Exod 3:8; Deut 7:1; Judg 3:5)—were expelled from the land because of their immoral practices (Lev 18:3, 24-25; Deut 9:4-5). YHWH warned Israel against adopting any of their “abominable” religious practices (Deut 12:2, 30; 18:9-13). The identification of the parents as the land’s native inhabitants suggests that Jerusalem was “genetically predisposed” to worship gods other than YHWH.

Jerusalem’s birth narrative follows the birth announcement (vv. 4-7). This birth narrative differs from those of heroes; there are no wonders and miracles that accompany it (Exod 1–2; Judg 13; 1 Sam 1; Luke 1–2), but the events around her birth do portend her future. The newborn is denied even basic postnatal care. Her umbilical cord was not tied off, nor was she cleansed or swaddled, all actions necessary for survival. Just as God will show no pity on Israel and Jerusalem (5:11; 7:4, 9; 8:18; 9:10), “no eye pitied” this baby enough to attend to even her most minimal needs. Like newborn babies today who are found abandoned in Dumpsters, this baby was thrown out into the open field, vulnerable to exposure. Surely no infant should have to suffer so much for her parents’ sins. Abandoned and neglected, she faced certain death.

Then God passed by and saw her “flailing about in your blood” (v. 8). What a baby, who, despite such odds, still struggled so mightily! God’s will supported her will to live. Just as God’s word brought an entire world into being (Gen 1), the divine word “Live!” brought Jerusalem into being by ensuring her survival.

God then commanded that she “grow up like a plant of the field” (v. 7). This overlays agricultural imagery on the basic metaphor. Applied to the tenor, the emphasis is on Jerusalem’s increasing population. Applied to the vehicle, the emphasis is on the girl growing into maturity. The baby girl arrived “at full womanhood,” that is, sexual maturity, as her “breasts developed” and her “(pubic) hair had sprouted” (author’s translation). She was “ripe” for marriage. Between birth and puberty there is no mention of further divine care. She grows up like a wild animal—alone, naked, and bare. Where would she learn values like commitment and fidelity?

Verses 4-7 provide a metaphorical retelling of the exodus and wandering in the wilderness. Other prophets view the exodus as betrothal and marriage and

the wilderness as the honeymoon, where Israel relied totally upon God (Jer 2:2; Hos 2:14). In contrast, Ezekiel depicts the exodus as Israel's birth and the wilderness as a period of maturing. Entry into the land and becoming a nation represent betrothal, marriage, and honeymoon (vv. 8-14).

Verse 8 depicts the moment of bonding. God passed by and saw that Jerusalem was now at the age "for love," an expression indicating sexual maturity (compare Ezek 23:17; Prov 7:18; Song 4:10). At that moment God "spread the edge of [his] cloak over [her]" (compare Ruth 3:9). This image exploits the ambiguity of the Hebrew, *kānāp*, which means both "the edge of the cloak" and "wing." Being under the shelter of God's "wing(s)" is an expression of divine safety and refuge (Deut 32:11-12; Ruth 2:12; Pss 17:8; 57:1 [2]; 61:4 [5]; 91:4). Just as a husband protected his wife, so YHWH will protect Jerusalem. In addition, God pledged to enter into "covenant" with Jerusalem, and "you became mine." The language of "becoming" another's is central to both the Sinai covenant (Exod 6:7; Lev 26:12; Deut 27:9; Jer 7:23; 11:4; 30:22) and the marriage covenant (Gen 20:12; 24:67; Ruth 4:13; Song 2:16; 6:3).

Verses 9-14 describe the lavish attention YHWH bestows on Jerusalem at the nuptials. Lexical connections between these verses and Ps 45 suggest that this scene depicts a royal bride who has come to the groom's home where the marriage will be consummated (Bowen 2003, 64–65). Bride Jerusalem was washed, anointed, and dressed in fine clothes (Ruth 3:3; Esth 2:12-14).

The description of the bride's garments is lexically connected to the textiles used to construct the tabernacle (and by extension, Jerusalem's Temple) and the priests' vestments (see Darr 2002, 1228; ArtScroll, 251). The Jerusalem Temple physically represented the "marriage" between YHWH and Jerusalem. The worship of YHWH made Jerusalem "fit to be a queen" so that its "fame spread among the nations" (vv. 13*b*-14*a*).

Fidelity was expected of the bride, but her lineage and upbringing made that unlikely (see above). Verses 15-34 are devoted to describing Jerusalem's infidelities. Without restraint she repeatedly "played the whore" (*zānâ*; vv. 15, 16, 17, 26, 28, 34) and engaged in "whorings" (*taznût*; vv. 15, 20, 25, 29, 33, 34). *Taznût* is unique to Ezekiel, appearing only here and in chapter 23. The related noun, "whore" (*zônâ*), is the usual Hebrew word for prostitute (vv. 30, 31, 35; compare Gen 38:15; Josh 2:1; Judg 11:1; 16:1).

The bride's "whorings" are described with sexually explicit language. She "opened wide her legs" (v. 25, author's translation). She could not be "satisfied" in her desire for multiple sexual partners (vv. 28-29). God's question in verse 30 is, literally, "How hot with fever is your heart?" Readers can practically hear her panting. Jerusalem (and its inhabitants), a place (and people) with no theological

control, is compared to a woman with no sexual restraint.

The nature of Jerusalem's theological infidelity began with cultic issues (vv. 15-22). Jerusalem broke the commandment to have no other gods besides YHWH (Exod 20:3-6) by giving to other gods all that YHWH gave to her. First, she built "colorful shrines" (*bāmôt*, see p. 32). Second, the construction materials (clothes) and all the paraphernalia associated with worship (oil, incense, foods for offerings) were lavished, not on YHWH, but on "male images" created from the Temple's precious metals (vv. 16-19).

Then, like an abused child who becomes an abuser, Jerusalem, a child left to die by her mother, became a mother who killed her own children, sacrificing "sons and . . . daughters" to the "male images" (vv. 17, 20). The parallel expression, they were "slaughtered" (v. 21), uses the word usually reserved for sacrificial slaughter (Exod 29:11; Lev 1:11; 3:2; etc.). "Sacrifice" and "slaughter" clearly denote bloodshed, creating the perverse image of a child whose own body was covered in blood, covering the bodies of other children in blood and delivering them up as offerings. The language evokes other biblical expressions of child sacrifice (e.g., Lev 18:21; 2 Kgs 16:3; Jer 7:31; Ezek 20:31). The offering is even more horrifying since the text is ambiguous as to whether the abomination is child sacrifice itself or that the children were sacrificed to a deity other than YHWH (implying that they should have been sacrificed to YHWH).

The allegations turn from cultic to political infidelity. Jerusalem built "a platform" and "a lofty place" (vv. 24, 25). These differ from the constructed cultic items in verses 16-22 and in chapter 6, indicating a different focus. What these items represent is unclear. Elsewhere, "platform" ranges in meaning from something built up (like a ridge, back, or rim) to something dug down (like a ditch or pool). The word for "lofty place" is usually a place name, Ramah, but can also indicate a place high in elevation (1 Sam 22:6). Perhaps the issue is not *what* is built, but *where*. "Square" and "street" (vv. 24, 25, 31) were places of public commerce and politics like Wall Street or Pennsylvania Avenue (compare Prov 1:20-21; 8:2-3). In the public arena where political alliances were made, Jerusalem consorted with Egypt (v. 26), Assyria (v. 28), and Babylon (v. 29).

Jerusalem had complex relationships with all three of its more powerful neighbors. Perhaps political alliances are condemned because of the introduction of foreign cults (compare 1 Kgs 11:1-8) or because they indicate a lack of faith in YHWH (compare Isa 7:4-9) or both. Both idolatry and foreign alliances abrogate the covenant, which had political as well as religious dimensions. Ezekiel considered the alliances "abominations" against YHWH. Ezekiel's disgust permeates his description of the Egyptians as "lustful" (v. 26; lit., "of the great

flesh," i.e., "penis"; compare Gen 17:11; Exod 28:42; Lev 15:2-3; Ezek 23:20).

Verse 27 foreshadows the consequences of the bride's behavior. The vehicle of the metaphor fades briefly as reality intrudes. Responding to Jerusalem's association with Egypt, YHWH stretched out a hand and gave the Philistines control over Jerusalem, perhaps a reference to the Assyrian king, Sennacherib, handing over Judean cities to Philistine kings (ca. 701 B.C.E.; *ANET*, 288).

Verses 30-34, through repetition, pound home the theme that Jerusalem was a hussy whose brazenness is highlighted in the contrast between the "adulterous wife" and the "whore." The "whore," a businesswoman, received payment for her services. The "adulterous wife," on the other hand, not only scorned receiving payment (v. 31), she was willing to resort to bribing her lovers. She certainly was "different" from what was expected of a good Israelite woman (v. 34).

Difference is not a positive attribute for Ezekiel. The appearance of "therefore" signals the transition to an announcement of punishment (v. 35). There are consequences to the wife's/Jerusalem's behavior; she will not get away with being "different." The husband/God is about to reassert his control.

The announcement of punishment is delayed as the charges are summarized in increasingly graphic imagery (v. 36). Ezekiel crassly depicts Jerusalem's political liaisons as the lubricating fluid of a sexually aroused woman ("your lust was poured out"; Darr 2002, 1234; Block 1997, 500; Greenberg 1983, 285–86) and exposed genitalia ("your nakedness uncovered"). Jerusalem's cultic dalliances are imaged as the bloodied bodies of sacrificed children.

With the repetition of "therefore," the punishment is finally announced (v. 37). All of Jerusalem's "lovers" will be gathered and, instead of Jerusalem's voluntary exposure, YHWH will forcibly uncover her genitals to her lovers. What follows essentially amounts to gang rape. Thus, Jerusalem will be left just as YHWH found her—bloody, naked, and bare (vv. 38-39; compare vv. 6-7) and then subjected to further violence. A "mob" will stone her, cut her to pieces with their swords, and burn her houses (vv. 40-41). This should "stop" her from "playing the whore."

The vehicle and tenor of the metaphor blur in the judgment. The city, Jerusalem, is said to be judged "as women who commit adultery and shed blood are judged" (v. 38). Some commentators suggest that the actions against the "wife" were legitimate responses to adultery. However, in legal and narrative texts in the Bible, stripping naked is never a punishment for adultery. Instead, genital exposure is used metaphorically for conquest in prophetic literature (compare Jer 13:22, 26; Hos 2:9-10 [10-11]; Nah 3:5). The punishment of the metaphorical adulteress describes the realities of war. When specifically visited

upon the city, the actions represent siege warfare. The same actions visited upon the wife become gang rape, torture, and murder.

The ideology of the text presumes that a husband, human or divine, is justified in punishing his "wife" for her alleged infidelity. Only this excessive violence will assuage the jealous husband's anger. "I will satisfy my fury . . . my jealousy shall turn away . . . I will be calm, and . . . angry no longer" (v. 42; compare 5:13).

Finally, another insight into Jerusalem's behavior is given. Besides genetics, she has been unfaithful to her spouse because she has not "remembered" the days of her youth (v. 43). "Remembering" is a key covenant term in Deuteronomy, where the people were to "remember" all that YHWH had done for them (e.g., Deut 5:15; 7:18; 8:18). Not remembering—forgetting—leads to catastrophe. Forgetting YHWH, the people would make idols (Deut 4:23), fail to keep YHWH's commandments, and worship other gods (Deut 8:11, 19), provoking YHWH's anger and their sure destruction (Deut 4:23-26; 8:19-20). Such is Jerusalem's fate.

Verses 44-58

At this point the narrative shifts focus. Ezekiel quotes a proverb (*māšāl*; see p. 63): "like mother, like daughter," similar to "the apple does not fall far from the tree" or "a chip off the old block." These proverbs attest that inspecting the family tree gives insight into one's nature and behavior. As with most proverbs, context is everything. Depending upon the mother and daughter, this could be a positive affirmation. Here the proverb functions to show how badly Jerusalem has behaved.

Jerusalem's birth narrative is reprised with a twist. "You are the daughter of your mother" (v. 45). Ezekiel affirms the proverb's truth, but this mother "loathed her husband and her children." In the personification of cities, the "husband" was the city's patron deity and "daughters" were the smaller villages surrounding the larger, fortified city. Given the allegation against the mother, the proverb insults Jerusalem. Then we discover this daughter had sisters who, like their mother, "loathed their husbands and their children." Clearly, all three sisters had a Hittite mother and an Amorite father. (The "your" at the end of v. 45 is plural.)

Like Jerusalem, these sisters are also personified cities. The "elder" sister was Jerusalem's northern neighbor, Samaria, the capital of the former Northern Kingdom, Israel. The "younger" sister was Jerusalem's southern neighbor, Sodom. Samaria was continually derided for its apostasy (compare 2 Kgs 17:5-

18; Hosea; Amos) and Sodom was a cliché for sin and destruction (Gen 19). Clearly, both cities were "corrupt." Still, Ezekiel enumerates their sins. Sodom's sins were not sexual licentiousness and moral depravity but pride in its prosperity while failing to "aid the poor and needy" (v. 49). The "poor and needy" were landowning members of the community caught in a spiral of debt (e.g., Deut 15:11; 24:14; Bird 1997, 76). This makes Sodom's "abomination" a failure to redistribute wealth in order to break that spiral. Samaria's sins are not similarly enumerated, but Amos and Hosea provide denunciations of Samaria's religious and economic "abominations." Of these bad sisters, Jerusalem was the baddest (see v. 47). Following her sisters' ways she made them look "righteous" in comparison (v. 51).

Ironically, although the righteous cannot save anyone (14:12-23), apparently the really wicked can have a positive effect. The result of Jerusalem's extreme abominations was a more "favorable" judgment on the sisters because "they are more in the right than you" (v. 52). This phrase is grammatically equivalent to Judah's statement about Tamar (Gen 38:26). The phrase invites consideration of the parallels between the contrasting behaviors: Judah versus Tamar//Jerusalem versus Samaria and Sodom. Even morally reprehensible behavior can appear "righteous" in contrast to that of someone whose sins are yet worse. Sodom, in particular, was a "byword" for God's total destruction (v. 56; compare Deut 29:23; Isa 1:9; Jer 49:18; Lam 4:6). By Ezekiel's day, Samaria had not existed for 125 years. But the fortunes of both of these cities will be restored—thanks to Jerusalem. It is bitterly ironic that Philistine women are depicted as being ashamed of Jerusalem's behavior. Philistia now mocks Jerusalem, depicted as worse than the place that has always been the butt of its jokes (v. 57).

The goal of punishment in verses 35-43 was to stop Jerusalem's abominable behavior. The comparison with Samaria and Sodom, including their restoration, is "in order that" Jerusalem may "bear [her] disgrace" and "be ashamed" (vv. 52, 54). It should be clear that everything done to Jerusalem in this narrative is intended to bring shameless Jerusalem to an awareness of shame. Jacqueline E. Lapsley deals extensively with the issue of shame in Ezekiel. From a psychological perspective she distinguishes between discretion-shame and disgrace-shame (Lapsley 2000, 150–51). Discretion-shame resembles modesty, preventing someone from engaging in activities that are deemed shameful. Disgrace-shame is experienced after the act, feeling the need to hide, disappear, or even die because one believes one's behavior was wrong.

Lapsley claims that Ezekiel argues, especially in chapters 16 and 23, that Jerusalem lacked both discrection-shame and disgrace-shame. Lack of discretion-shame meant Jerusalem had no mechanism to prevent it from

behaving badly. Lack of disgrace-shame meant that Jerusalem failed to see its actions as wrong. God's punishment for this shamelessness is paradoxically to expose Israel to further shame, including exposure, stripping, and contempt. All this shaming is an attempt to force Israel to acknowledge its shameful conduct (Lapsley 2000, 145–48). Israel would never understand that God's judgment was justified until they recognized that their past actions deserved judgment. This would only happen when they were able to see themselves as YHWH saw them and feel ashamed (Lapsley 2000, 149). Perhaps the essence of Jerusalem's penalty is to experience the mortification of its actions as more humiliating than the destruction itself (v. 58).

Verses 59-63

The closing verses anticipate the eventual restoration of this relationship (compare 11:14-21). But first the break in the relationship is acknowledged (v. 59). The terms "oath" and "covenant" recall entering into covenant, swearing an oath, and the consequences of breaking that covenant (Deut 29:9-29). Again Ezekiel claims that God's treatment of Jerusalem is justified. It is *her* fault.

Restoration is possible not because of Israel's actions but because of God's unilateral behavior. In contrast to Jerusalem, who forgot the days of her youth (vv. 22, 43), YHWH will remember that initial covenant and act on that memory (compare Gen 8:1; 19:29; 30:22; Exod 2:24), establishing an "everlasting covenant" (v. 60). The nature of this covenant is not spelled out, but its establishment will restore the relationship (compare 37:26). Furthermore, God will restore Jerusalem. This is more than a return to the previous situation, for Jerusalem will be even more exalted. Her "sisters," Samaria and Sodom, will be her subordinates, her "daughters." *Then* Jerusalem will remember her "ways" and "be ashamed" (v. 61). God's previous destructive actions toward Jerusalem failed to reach this goal. Only the subsequent act of restoration will result in Jerusalem finally acknowledging its shameful past.

This is emphasized in the final verses. YHWH repeats, "I will establish my covenant" (v. 62). Jerusalem will "remember" and "be confounded," also meaning "to be ashamed" (compare Gen 2:25; Ezek 36:32). Covenant restoration, not the prior punishment, results in knowledge of YHWH, which leads to Jerusalem's new self-knowledge. And they will "never open [their] mouth again because of [their] shame" (v. 63). When Job opened his mouth, it was to protest his innocence (Job 3:1). Perhaps the exiles too were inclined to complain that their situation was unjustified. They did not see their actions for what they were—abominations against YHWH. Their silence is eloquent testimony to the

shame that results from finally knowing different (Lapsley 2000, 152).

In addition, God "will forgive" all that Jerusalem has done. The Hebrew word for "forgive" is associated with "atonement" (as in the Day of Atonement, Yom Kippur; Lev 16:30). Its primary meaning is "to cover" (*HALOT*, 494). God will cover Jerusalem's sins; it will be as if they never happened. Awareness of disgrace-shame brings hope that Jerusalem has acquired a sense of discretion-shame, which will prevent her from behaving badly in the future.

Sadly, the vehicle of the metaphor—marriage—disappears in this brief glimpse of restoration. Except for the mention of "youth," the language of these final verses is the language of the tenor—the covenant relationship between YHWH and Jerusalem. The realm of human marriage appears to offer no vision for the restoration of this failed relationship (compare Hos 2:16-20). Perhaps the pain is too sharp, the despair too deep, and the lack of trust too high for either partner to imagine the restored relationship in the context of marriage.

Theological and Ethical Analysis (see also pp. 144-45)

No portion of this chapter appears in any Christian lectionary. Jewish tradition also forbids the liturgical use of this chapter. Ignoring this chapter is one possible way to "deal with it." In this instance, however, ignorance is not bliss; readers ignore this text, and others like it, to their peril. "Forgetting" this chapter results in failure to learn from it. People build memorials to past horrors in the hope that the memory will ensure a different future. The Lincoln Memorial. Yad Vashem. Hiroshima. The twin towers. Individuals cling to personal mementos to remember the significant events of their past and how they have shaped their present. The reflections here are memorials for this chapter.

(1) Ezekiel represents the relationship between God and Jerusalem with "bonded love"—that most intimate, intense, and vulnerable human tie. The intimacy associated with bonded love as an expression of the divine/human relationship travels far beyond prophetic metaphor. In Judaism, the Song of Songs, allegorized as the love between God and Israel, is read at Passover, the festival celebrating the exodus. What greater love has God shown Israel than bringing them out of slavery? The Christian church considers itself to be the bride of Christ (1 Cor 11:3; 2 Cor 11:2; Eph 5:23; Rev 21:2, 9). Mystics throughout the ages have compared mystical union with God/Christ with the physical union of husband and wife.

Like Ezekiel, all of these portray the relationship as between unequal partners. God/husband is dominant and Israel/church/wife is subordinate. Within this unequal relationship the role of the subordinate partner is obedience and

submission. The dominant partner is considered justified in using whatever means necessary, including violence, to enforce that obedience.

Society spent a great deal of time and energy in the twentieth century rethinking the gender dynamics of bonded love. One issue critiqued in this rethinking is the notion that punishment, in the form of violence, can ever be a sign of "love." If infidelity is contrary to covenantal relationship, so also is violence antithetical to committed relationship. This insight requires rethinking the hierarchical nature of relationships. In relationships of unequal power, violence is often present as the dominant partner seeks to maintain his/her power. The biblical marriage metaphor must therefore be resisted. One way to resist is "to sever the ties within the metaphor between the erotic and violence, between love and aggression" (Weems 1995, 112). Only then it is appropriate to use the human experience of bonded love as a metaphor of the experience of divine love. In doing so readers should consider the impact of contemporary expressions of bonded love. Today many view their marriage partner as an equal partner in the relationship. What would it be like to express the intimate relationship with God in terms of equality?

One consequence of equality would be to acknowledge that not only do we hurt God, but that in turn *God can also hurt us* (Blumenthal 1993, 237–67, 284–99). Both partners can cause hurt and pain in a relationship. Thus, a theological possibility is that trauma might be God's fault—God may have broken trust with us. Perhaps restoring relationship is not just a matter of our repentance but also of God's repentance. Not only must God forgive us, we must forgive God. "[This metaphor] insists that forgiveness and mercy are as natural to bonded love as are anger and hurt. Those whom we love we forgive; and those who love us forgive us. It is a mystery. That we risk loving again those who have wounded us, and that others trust us to try again despite the fact that we have broken their hearts—this is grace" (Weems 1995, 115). This is the power of reimagining the metaphor.

(2) The extensive corpus of feminist literature dealing with the prophetic use of the marriage metaphor offers critiques on the ways the biblical portrayal of God's behavior mirrors what is known about the behavior of human batterers (see especially Day 2000). That is, God is portrayed as an abusive husband. A perception of difficult, even traumatic experiences as "divine punishment" leads inexorably to a view of God as abuser.

We must avoid anti-Judaism here. Some argue that God is abusive in the OT, but in the NT, God is Love. This distorts both Testaments. The God who violently punishes "abominations" persists in the NT, where divine punishment is called "hell." In the book of Revelation the "whore," clothed similarly to the

"bride" of Ezek 16, is punished for her "fornication[s]" (Rev 17:1-4) by being made "desolate and naked" and then burned up with fire (Rev 17:16). The verses announcing the arrival of the "bride" (the church) in Rev 21 warn that "the cowardly, the faithless, the polluted, the murderers, the fornicators, the sorcerers, the idolaters, and all liars, their place will be in the lake that burns with fire and sulfur" (Rev 21:8). Will this bride be any more immune to the jealousies of her husband (1 Cor 10:22; 2 Cor 11:2)?

The theological challenge is how a just God responds to injustice. Just as humans have considered ways to oppose injustice through nonviolent means, surely God has other options than total annihilation.

(3) The ideology underlying violence against even metaphorical women functions to support violence against real women today. A recent Google search of "honor killing" found over 50,000 websites. Hundreds, if not thousands (some estimates are of up to 5,000 per year) of women are murdered each year across the globe in the name of family "honor." Most honor killings occur where the concept of women as a vessel of the family reputation predominates. Should the woman's virtue come into question, for whatever reason, or if she refuses to obey her father, husband, or brother, her family's "honor" is jeopardized and must be restored by the woman's death. Sometimes she is killed on the mere suspicion of "dishonorable" behavior. In many cases the women are buried in unmarked graves and all records of their existence wiped out.

The issue of God's "honor," that is, God's "name," will be a central concern in chapter 20. Although in this chapter it is not said that God's actions against Jerusalem are for "the sake of my name," it is not difficult to make that association. The behaviors of the city/wife are perceived as impugning God's "honor." The only way to restore YHWH's "honor" is to "kill" the dishonorable city/wife.

The dynamics of "honor killing" are the same when considering the relations of nations. Consider the United States's response to 9/11. The "vessel" of U.S. reputation is its economic and military dominance, including an understanding that this dominance is beneficial for others. Attacking the World Trade Center and the Pentagon impugned America's "honor" by bringing that dominance, and its beneficence, into question. Many Americans believed that "honor" could only be restored when al-Qaeda and Osama bin Laden, whose behavior brought dishonor, were destroyed. It is time to question the issue of "honor and shame" and whether killing is really honorable.

(4) An aspect of trauma that this chapter reflects is that of abandonment (Halperin 1993, 172–76). The experience of early rejection is a traumatic experience with significant psychological implications. According to Jon G.

Allen (1995, 35–48, 149–66), an infant is biologically disposed to form a secure attachment. The essence of attachment is proximity—the tendency of a youngster to stay close to mother. Mental health depends on the child's experiencing a warm, intimate, and continuous relationship with a caregiver, which gradually evolves into a wider range of attachments. Early attachments establish the patterns for later relationships.

Ezekiel depicts Jerusalem as an infant abandoned by the primary caregivers whose absence disrupts the development of a secure formation. When an early relationship is missing or damaged by trusted persons, a common relationship pattern is that persons form overly close relationships, then reject them, then feel lost because they feel abandoned—even though they brought about the disruption. Both Jerusalem's rejection of YHWH and the persistent seeking after other "lovers" seem to image this sort of push-me-pull-you type of relating. Furthermore, persons who do not feel treasured tend to connect with others whom they feel are all they deserve. The disparaging description of Jerusalem's "lovers" images a young woman who constantly chooses inappropriate relationships because she does not feel that she "deserves" a better relationship (with YHWH).

Attachment theory provides a psychological understanding of Jerusalem's disordered relationships. Abandoned Jerusalem in turn abandons YHWH. It is unknowable whether Ezekiel was projecting his own attachment disorders onto Jerusalem (Halperin 1993, 164–66). Regardless, relationship models do not disappear. Problematic patterns will forever remain possible. Treatment involves adding new possibilities. New models can be learned. Old models can become unemployed. Jerusalem's hope lies in its potential to learn a new model of relationship. God's new everlasting covenant means Jerusalem will never again be abandoned. With God's forgiveness, Jerusalem comes to know it deserves this relationship.

Live Free or Die! (17:1-24)

What is black and white and red (read) all over? Every five-year-old knows that the answer to this riddle is either a sunburned zebra or a newspaper. *Merriam-Webster's Eleventh Collegiate Dictionary* defines a *riddle* as "a mystifying, misleading, or puzzling question posed as a problem to be solved or guessed." A secondary definition is "something or someone difficult to understand." Part of what makes the above riddle mystifying for children is the

wordplay of red/read. Chapter 17 poses a riddle to the exiles. Its solution will demystify and solve for them problems of covenant fidelity, royal leadership, and divine punishment.

Literary Analysis

At the beginning of this unit, after the opening *prophetic word formula*, YHWH commands Ezekiel to "propound a riddle." In the ancient world, a riddle posed "to its hearers a succinctly formulated question or problem that conceals its own answer in such a fashion as to reflect the fundamentally paradoxical structure of reality" (Polk 1983, 578). Concealment makes riddles a test or challenge, as is the riddle Samson posed to the Philistines (Judg 14:12-18) and the "hard questions" (lit., "riddles") with which the queen of Sheba tested Solomon (1 Kgs 10:1). YHWH also commands Ezekiel to "speak an allegory" (*māšāl*; see p. 63). Juxtaposing "riddle" and "allegory" emphasizes that readers face difficult interpretive work.

Ezekiel's "riddle allegory" in verses 3-10 is cast in the form of a fable, a narrative in which plants and animals function as characters (Hals 1989, 115, 349). This is the genre of Aesop's Fables and some Christian cartoons. The extensive interpretation of the fable in verses 11-21 and the obvious symbolic character of the plants, animals, and their actions suggest that it has considerable allegorizing tendencies (hence the NRSV's translation of *māśāl* as "allegory"). The intrusion of the real world in verses 12*b*-28 suggests that actual historical events will help answer the riddle. Verses 22-24 return to the imagery of the riddle while proclaiming a future historical event.

The placement of the "riddle allegory" may be due to catchwords linking it to chapter 16. The word for the eagle's "plumage of many colors" (v. 3) is the same word describing the "rich fabric" with which the bride is clothed (16:10, 13, 18). The repetition of "despised the oath, breaking the covenant" (16:59; see also 17:16, 18, 19) and themes of submission, fidelity/infidelity, and consequences also link these two chapters. This chapter's focus is on royal leadership. If chapter 16 is about the fidelity of the covenant community to God, this chapter considers the fidelity of the community's ruler.

The Hebrew of verses 3-10 exhibits several poetic devices (Greenberg 1983, 318). The inherent ambiguity of poetry makes the riddle all the more puzzling. The repetition of a number of words, especially throughout the interpretation (vv. 11-21), functions to illuminate the central issue(s) of the riddle ("noble," vv. 8, 23; "prosper, thrive, succeed," see vv. 10, 15; "oath," vv. 13, 16, 18, 19; "covenant," vv. 13, 14, 15, 16, 18, 19; "despised," vv. 16, 18, 19; "broke," vv.

16, 18, 19 [see also v. 15]; "escape," vv. 15, 18). The return to the imagery of the "cedar" in the final verses (vv. 22-24) forms an *inclusio* with the opening verses (vv. 3-4), effectively defining not only the limits of the unit but its unity.

Exegetical Analysis

The first character introduced in the riddle is "a great eagle (lit., 'an eagle of eagles'), with great wings and long pinions, rich in plumage of many colors" (v. 3). Although YHWH's care for Israel was compared to an eagle's care for her young (Exod 19:4; Deut 32:11), the biblical portrayal of eagles is primarily as strong, high-flying, and fearsome creatures (Ps 103:5; Prov 23:5; Isa 40:31; Jer 49:16; Obad 1:4). It primarily symbolized a foreign army swooping down upon its prey (Deut 28:49; Job 9:26; Jer 48:40; 49:22; Lam 4:19; Hab 1:8). Might this be a clue to the riddle's answer?

The eagle "came to the Lebanon" where it "took the top of the cedar, broke off its topmost shoot" (vv. 3-4). The modern country of Lebanon corresponds closely to what Ezekiel's audience would identify as Lebanon, the territory on the eastern Mediterranean, north of Mount Hermon. Biblical Lebanon was renowned for its cedars (e.g., 1 Kgs 5:6; Pss 29:5; 92:12 [13]; Song 5:15), which in turn were known for their height (2 Kgs 19:23; Isa 2:13; Ezek 31:3; Amos 2:9). Perhaps the equation of a lofty cypress with a lofty nation is another clue (compare ch. 31).

The eagle carries this topshoot "to a land of trade, set it in a city of merchants" (v. 4). The name and location of this Commerce City are left unidentified. However, the "land of trade" is literally "the land of Canaan" and in 16:29 the same phrase, "land of Canaan" (NRSV, "land of merchants"), is identified as "Chaldea," or Babylon. Here is yet another clue to the riddle's answer. The rest of the cedar is apparently abandoned.

The riddle then switches images, from tree to vine. The eagle "took a seed from the land, placed it in fertile soil; a plant by abundant waters, he set it like a willow twig" (v. 5). Being planted by water is an image of ideal growing conditions (compare Ps 1:3; Jer 17:7-8). In the next verse this "seed" becomes a "vine." Vines grown from seeds were vastly inferior in fruit and bulk to vines grown from shoots. To counter this, domesticated vines were propagated through shoots instead of seeds (Walsh 2000, 101). Thus, planting a seed to produce a vine would be an economically fruitless technique. Is this vine a contrast to the cedar top?

Indeed, in contrast to the lofty cedar, the seeds produce a vine "spreading out, but low" (v. 6). The vine was left to grow freestanding versus being propped up

by a spike or trained up poles. This is advantageous in semiarid climates. By growing low along the ground the foliage would shade the soil, lessening moisture evaporation (Walsh 2000, 115). Does this reveal the location of the planting?

Then the vine exhibits some non-vinelike behavior. It turned its branches toward the eagle and "its roots were beneath it [i.e., the eagle]" (author's translation). The vine seems to entreat the eagle with arms outstretched and on bent knee. The vine seemingly thrives, but there is no mention of fruit, the sign of successful viticulture.

In verse 7 another eagle comes along. This eagle, while majestic, is not quite as great as the first eagle; it has no "long pinions" and its plumage is plain. Moreover, despite the first eagle's care, the vine entreats this second eagle. This second eagle takes the vine planted by the first eagle and "from the bed where it was planted it was transplanted" (vv. 7*b*-8). The transplanting takes place under prime conditions. It is moved "to good soil by abundant waters," on the hopes that the vine "might produce branches" and "bear fruit." The second eagle plants the vine correctly, by planting a shoot instead of a seed, but "a vine first grown from seed would never produce consistent fruit yields and transplanting would do nothing to help that fact. The second eagle has the right practice, but the wrong plant" (Walsh 2000, 105n78).

Instead of concluding with the outcome for this vine, or a moral to the tale, a series of rhetorical questions ends the fable (vv. 9-10). "Will it prosper?" No. Being grown from a seed, any prospering will only be marginal. "Will he not pull up its roots, / cause its fruit to rot and wither, / its fresh sprouting leaves to fade?" Yes, if we assume that the "he" referred to is the first eagle. If it is pulled up, its fruit will wither along with any new growth. "No strong arm or mighty army will be needed / to pull it from its roots." In a tale of birds and plants readers might wonder at the intrusion of human images (arm and army). Given the association of eagles with invading armies (see above) perhaps this is not surprising. This statement implies that the vine is not securely rooted, nor perhaps is its growth as extensive as implied; it is easily uprooted. "When it is transplanted, will it thrive?" No. Although the conditions seem suitable and transplanting is the correct practice for growing vines, even asking this question raises doubt about the outcome. "When the east wind strikes it, / will it not utterly wither, / wither on the bed where it grew?" Yes. The reference is to the hot, dry east wind that blows in from the desert, desiccating everything, becoming a symbol of destruction (e.g., Gen 41:27; Isa 27:8; Jer 18:17; Hos 13:15). The vine will no more be able to withstand the furnace blast of the east wind than did Jonah (Jonah 4:8). It will neither, in the end, "bear fruit" nor be "a

noble vine."

Ezekiel has indeed posed a riddle. The verses following the fable are addressed to "the rebellious house," which neither hears (2:2-5, 7) nor sees (12:2). This bodes ill for their ability either to decipher this puzzle or heed its message.

The interpretation is that the king of Babylon (the first eagle) came to Jerusalem (Lebanon), took only the elite of the population (the top of the cedar), and brought them to Babylon (land of trade, city of merchants) (v. 12//v. 3). The reference is to Nebuchadnezzar's deportation of King Jehoiachin and many of Jerusalem's prominent citizens, including Ezekiel, to Babylon (2 Kgs 24:8-16).

Next Nebuchadnezzar takes one of the royal offspring (lit., "seed of the king-ship"; compare "a seed from the land" in v. 5) and puts him under oath (v. 13). The historical reference is to Nebuchadnezzar's forced "regime change," replacing Jehoiachin with his uncle, Zedekiah (2 Kgs 24:17). The oath constitutes the ideal conditions in which the seed, Zedekiah, is planted. The exact nature of the oath is not described. It may have been like other Western Asian treaties, where the vassal king pledged his loyalty to the overlord king, with penalties if the oath was broken (compare Deut 28:12-20). Such treaties protected the overlord against potential conspiracies and uprisings and ensured a prosperous, thriving, and submissive vassal-state.

A humble, obedient vassal-state would survive, even thrive, as would a properly planted and tended vine (v. 14//v. 6). The vassal-state is inferior to an independent state, like a vine that bears no fruit. A fruitful vine is the image of Judean independent statehood (e.g., Ps 80:8-12; Hos 10:1). No wonder the vine (Zedekiah) stretches out toward another eagle (Egypt; v. 15//v. 7). From the vine's perspective, being transplanted to good soil by abundant waters would be a good thing. Maybe now it would produce fruit and become a noble vine (v. 8). Ezekiel interprets the vine's turning to another eagle as Zedekiah rebelling against Nebuchadnezzar by seeking to acquire horses and a large army from Egypt (v. 15*a*). The precise historical circumstances of this alleged reliance upon Egypt remain murky (see p. 178). What is critical is the claim of Judean rebellion against Nebuchadnezzar (compare 2 Kgs 24:20*b*).

Just as the fate of the vine in the fable is questioned, so is Zedekiah's planning (v. 15*b*). "Will he succeed?" The same verb that referred to the vine's "prospering" (see v. 9) is used here. Will Zedekiah (and Judah) prosper under his plan? No more than a vine planted from seed. "Can he break (lit., 'foil, make useless') the covenant and yet escape?" The exiles who had already felt Nebuchadnezzar's wrath in 597 B.C.E. could tell Zedekiah he could no more stand against Nebuchadnezzar than a plucked-up vine against an east wind.

As in chapters 12–14, the fable exposes another source of hope that the exiles must abandon. Following Jehoiachin's deportation, a formal treaty between Zedekiah and Nebuchadnezzar officially marked the end of Judah's existence as an independent, sovereign nation. Judah became merely another Babylonian province, subject to a foreign king. Independence is not only their hope but also God's promise to them. Could they regain it? Citizens of the United States—a country that fought its own war of independence and counts among its states' mottoes "Live free or die"—cannot denigrate that hope. This motto could have been Zedekiah's rallying cry for the people. Many readers today would have been willing to die in that cause. Little Judah needed an alliance with Egypt to challenge the "great superpower" of Babylon. Contemplating rebellion against Nebuchadnezzar would offer hope if it ultimately led to Jerusalem's freedom, where the noble vine of David's branch would once again bear fruit. Ezekiel's rhetorical questions dash this hope. The rhetorical questions argue against success. There will be no new Independence Day.

So far YHWH's only role in this fable has been to relay to Ezekiel the fable and its underlying reality. Now YHWH speaks. Historical discourse gives way to theological discourse. Verse 16 opens with an *oath formula*, followed by the *prophetic utterance formula* and the strong affirmation, "surely." YHWH *really* means what follows.

YHWH first asserts (v. 16) that the king (Zedekiah) who despised the oath and broke the covenant of another king (Nebuchadnezzar) will die in that king's land (Babylon). The aside, "who made him king," emphasizes that Zedekiah is Nebuchadnezzar's vassal, which required Zedekiah to keep the oath. Second Kings 25:7 records Zedekiah's fate. After being forced to watch the slaughter of his sons, Zedekiah was blinded and dragged into captivity, where he died.

YHWH next asserts (v. 17) that even Pharaoh's mighty army cannot help Zedekiah to regain Judah's independence. Egypt's failure means nothing will hinder Nebuchadnezzar as he builds ramps and siege walls, destroying Jerusalem as easily as someone plucks up a poorly planted vine.

Neither Zedekiah nor his hope of regained independence will "escape" Nebuchadnezzar's destruction because Zedekiah "gave his hand," yet "despised the oath and broke the covenant" (v. 18). The expression "gave the hand" may reference a handshake as a formal part of oath/treaty making (Keel 1978, 96; compare 2 Kgs 10:15; Ezra 10:19; Ps 144:8, 11; Prov 17:18). For this rebellion, Zedekiah will not live free, but die.

"Therefore" in verse 19 signals another judgment against Zedekiah. The compound structure of the messenger formula, followed by the oath formula, and concluding with the strong affirmation "surely" again indicates that YHWH

really means what follows.

Verse 19 reiterates the king's (Zedekiah) infidelity, but now the reference is not to "his," but to "my" (YHWH's) oath and covenant. This shift from Nebuchadnezzar to YHWH is startling. How did a treaty with Nebuchadnezzar become a covenant with YHWH? "For once the prophet had gotten off his theocentric hobbyhorse and had dealt with human events!" (Greenberg 1983, 321). But Ezekiel never dismounts from that hobbyhorse for long. Historical analogy gives way to theological analogy. Now YHWH is the eagle, rebellion is apostasy, Zedekiah represents all of Israel, and Babylon is exile (Polk 1983, 581).

YHWH returns Zedekiah's own deeds upon his head (compare 9:10; 11:21; 16:43; 22:31). Because of his infidelity, like a hunter capturing prey, YHWH will snare Zedekiah and bring him to Babylon (v. 20). Nebuchadnezzar (the eagle) may have thought he was acting of his own volition, but by theological analogy a human army becomes a divine net. In Babylon, God will judge Zedekiah for his betrayal (see p. 0000). That judgment consists of his troops falling by the sword and any survivors being scattered to the wind (v. 21). The rebellious house will know that YHWH has spoken this. Any hopes for throwing off the yoke of Babylon are shattered.

How did the exiles respond to this? Did they hear it and feel suicidal despair? Jerusalem's king is dead. Long live the king of Babylon! Then from this black hole of despair some photons of hope escape. "I myself will take a sprig . . ." (v. 22). A glimpse of life after death is seen (compare 11:17-20; 16:59-63; 20:40-44). At present the exiles cannot hope that life will return to normal, the restoration of king and kingdom. But sometime in the future, Ezekiel does not specify when, something will change.

For this word of future hope, Ezekiel returns to the imagery of the fable that began this unit. Now YHWH appears in the role of the eagle. The language is nearly identical to verses 3-4. Like the eagle, YHWH will break off the topmost shoot. But instead of carrying it to an unknown land, YHWH will plant it "on a high and lofty mountain" (v. 22), the "mountain height of Israel" (v. 23). YHWH's planting will take place back home.

Originally the goal of transplanting the vine was to "produce branches and bear fruit and become a noble vine" (v. 8). So YHWH's goal in planting this cedar shoot is "in order that it may produce boughs and bear fruit, and become a noble cedar" (v. 23). YHWH's tree will be so grand that its numerous, lush branches will provide shelter for every kind of bird (v. 23). All the trees of the field shall come to know YHWH when they see this magnificent cedar, language nearly identical to that describing a mighty nation in 31:5-6. Now Israel will be that mighty

nation.

This new event comes about not through political alliances but at God's initiative. There is none of the language of the vine or seed here, only the language of the cedar. In place of a "low" vine, there is a "lofty" cedar. Unlike with the vine, the conditions of this initial planting are perfect, ensuring success. Indeed, the transplanted shoot is greater than the tree from which it came.

The "riddle" closes with the language of reversal, the high is brought low, and the low is made high (v. 24; compare 31:10-18). Ezekiel affirms that all situations, high and low, are from YHWH, who can reverse those situations as YHWH chooses (1 Sam 2:7; 2 Sam 22:28; Pss 75:7 [8]; 147:6; Isa 26:5; Luke 1:52-53). Herein is the answer to the new "riddle." Only in this theological affirmation can Israel hope to live free.

Theological and Ethical Analysis

(1) This chapter invites reflections on covenant fidelity. Zedekiah saw his action as legitimate resistance against illegitimate domination. Ezekiel saw it as failure to submit to both human and divine covenants. When is it necessary to submit and when is it necessary to resist? Women were told ordination was impossible because it would violate both human (church law) and divine covenants (1 Cor 11:2-16; Eph 5:22-24; 1 Tim 2:8-14). Yet women continue to refuse to accept that their proper attitude should be submission, arguing passionately and eloquently for the full inclusion of women in all aspects of church life. Similarly, slave owners argued that God's covenant decreed that slaves should always be obedient toward their masters. Those engaged in emancipation in the nineteenth century did not abandon the goal of liberation, nor have civil rights activists today. "Can they break the covenant and yet escape?" Many today would claim that though they may not escape, it is nonetheless necessary to break certain covenants.

Ezekiel 17 considers covenant fidelity in the context of international politics. How should others in the world community respond today to countries that violate treaties? The war against Iraq was justified in part by its "material breach" of a number of U.N. Security Council resolutions, including 1441. There was uncertainty about how to respond to North Korea's failure to abide by the 1994 Agreed Framework forbidding the manufacture of nuclear weapons, as well as its threat to abandon its commitment to the 1953 Armistice Agreement, which ended fighting in the Korean conflict. What of the United States's withdrawal from the Kyoto Protocol regarding climate change or the allegation that the use of "enhanced interrogation techniques" violates articles of the

Geneva Convention? These are not idle questions. Each of these broken covenants has the potential for deadly conflict. Can one break covenant and yet escape?

(2) The final verse in this chapter is a stunning theological affirmation—God can raise up the lowly and bring down the mighty. But there is tension in this affirmation. The reversal from low to high, from dry to green is a message of hope to those who are low and dry. To those who are already high and flourishing, the message is threatening.

The tension with reversal is that the goal is *not* equality. It is not that the low will be raised high, while the high get to remain there. Nor is it that the lowly and the exalted will meet somewhere in the middle. No, the top becomes the bottom and the bottom becomes the top. What, then, does it mean to affirm that God will "bring low the high tree" and "make high the low tree"?

It's Not My Fault! (18:1-32)

Ezekiel has previously argued that there are no righteous in Jerusalem (ch. 9), indeed the whole of Israel is incapable of righteousness (ch. 16). Yet in this chapter Ezekiel suggests not only that righteousness is possible but that the people are capable of changing their behavior. The fundamental assumptions about human nature in this chapter stand in tension with assumptions elsewhere in the book (see Matties 1990 and Lapsley 2000). Ezekiel nonetheless presses them into the same service, namely, to establish Israel's culpability for the exile. Ezekiel sings the same song, just a different verse.

Literary Analysis

The unit is introduced by the *prophetic word formula*. A change in genre (*lamentation*) and topic (princes of Israel) beginning in 19:1 marks the end of the unit. In this chapter Ezekiel combines two of his favorite forms, the *disputation speech* and case law (compare 3:18-21; 14:4-8). He uses case law to dispute popular sayings. The chapter can be divided at verses 2, 19, and 25. These verses contain quotations that serve to preface a lengthy prophetic speech (Block 1997, 554). The reasons for the placement of this chapter are not evident. It may be due to various catchwords such as *māšāl* (v. 2-3; compare 17:2) and the *oath formula* (v. 3; compare 17:16, 19). It also continues the focus on individual responsibility from chapter 17.

Exegetical Analysis

Ezekiel immediately addresses the issue at hand, a "proverb" (*māšāl*) that enjoys popularity among the people (v. 2). The meaning of *māšāl* here is similar to that in 12:22-23, a short, pithy saying. "The parents have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge" (v. 2). The proverb reflects the belief that children suffer for their parents' sins (Exod 20:5-6; 34:7; Num 14:18; Deut 5:9-10). In the context of exile, this belief helped preserve the exiles' basic assumptions: there is a relationship between a person and what happens to him or her, and one's essential self is good, decent, and moral (Janoff-Bulman 1992, 6–12). In other words, bad things do not happen to good people. If disaster happens, to preserve one's sense of self-worth, there must be other explanations besides one's own culpability, such as being unfairly punished for another's sins. The proverb exposes the exiles' belief that they were "innocent" sufferers.

Others shared this belief. Lamentations 5:7 bluntly states: "Our ancestors sinned; they are no more, and we bear their iniquities." Jeremiah quoted the same proverb (Jer 31:29-30), accepting its explanation that the exile resulted from Manasseh's sins (Jer 15:4; compare 2 Kgs 17:21-23; 24:3-4). Only in the future would the proverb lose its currency.

This proverb was rooted in tradition and grounded in experience. Yet none other than God challenges it. "What do you mean by repeating this proverb?" "As I live, says the Lord GOD, this proverb shall no more be used by you in Israel" (v. 3). In contrast to Jeremiah, Ezekiel claims that the proverb has already lost currency. That claim is supported with a theological affirmation: "Know that all lives are mine; the life of the parent as well as the life of the child is mine: it is only the person who sins that shall die" (v. 4).

"Lives," "life," and "person" all translate the Hebrew word *nepeš*, which is often translated "soul" (Gen 34:3; Deut 6:5; 1 Sam 18:1; Ps 23:3). Although difficult to define exactly, *nepeš* seems to refer to a "person" or "living being" (see Gen 2:7; Exod 1:5). The relationship between the clauses is not perfectly clear. One possibility is that if all lives belong to God, then each *nepeš* is judged separately by God. This theological assertion challenges the proverb.

Death and life are the key issues in this chapter. Life and death function in Ezekiel on both literal and metaphorical levels. On a literal level, the physical ending of a life, a *nepeš*, is at stake. On a metaphorical level, death indicates punishment, such as exclusion from cultic life. Both these levels operate throughout this chapter. Whether literal or metaphorical, the stakes in this dispute are very high.

Just as the proverb has support in the tradition, so does Ezekiel's

counterproposition. “Only for their own crimes may persons be put to death” (Deut 24:16).

In case the people are not persuaded by his theological assertion, Ezekiel illustrates the truth of his saying with three hypothetical law cases: a righteous man, his wicked son, and his righteous grandson. The cases are presented in casuistic, if . . . then form: “If this is the situation, then this is the penalty.”

The argument begins, “If a man is righteous” and “does what is lawful (*mīšpāṭ*) and right (*ṣĕdāqâ*)” (v. 5). The pair *mīšpāṭ* and *ṣĕdāqâ*, usually translated “justice and righteousness,” are theologically significant. This is how YHWH acts and what YHWH desires (Ps 33:5; Jer 9:24 [23]). Both past (2 Sam 8:15; 1 Kgs 10:9) and future (Isa 9:7 [6]; Jer 23:5; 33:15) kings must embody this ideal. The establishment of justice and righteousness is a constant hope (Isa 56:1; Amos 5:24). These words are also central to this chapter (vv. 5, 19, 21, 27; see also 33:14, 16, 19).

Ezekiel enumerates a list of behaviors that define *mīšpāṭ* and *ṣĕdāqâ*. Some of the behaviors are unique to Ezekiel, others are well-known from Israel’s legal traditions. The first, “he does not eat upon the mountains,” is Ezekiel’s creation (v. 6; see also vv. 11, 15). Elsewhere there is an approved tradition of eating upon mountains with God (Gen 31:54; Exod 24:11; 1 Kgs 18:41-42). Ezekiel’s usage may indicate refraining from idolatrous worship upon the high places (Deut 12:2; Ezek 6:13; Hos 4:13). Alternatively, perhaps Ezekiel sees not eating as a practice of fasting, which draws one closer to God. When Moses went up the “mountain” to receive the stone tablets, he neither ate nor drank (Deut 9:9).

To lift up one’s eyes to idols is also unique to Ezekiel (vv. 6, 12, 15). “Idols” is Ezekiel’s favorite term for illicit worship (see p. 32). “To lift up eyes,” usually the equivalent of “to see” (e.g., Gen 24:64; Isa 49:18; Ezek 8:5), also means “to seek aid.” The righteous turn their eyes to YHWH (Pss 121:1-2; 123:1).

The next two actions resemble actions prohibited in the legal materials. Ezekiel does not specify how a man defiles his neighbor’s wife, but Lev 18:20 suggests defilement results from sexual relations with a kinsman’s wife. Ezekiel’s language against approaching a menstruating woman is similar to that of Lev 18:19 (compare Lev 15:24). The righteous man shuns improper “sexual relations.”

The next grouping conflates several laws that are concerned with economic justice. The economic overtone of “to oppress” (see vv. 7, 12; compare Exod 22:21 [20]; Lev 19:33; Deut 23:15-16 [16-17]; Jer 22:3) is underscored by the negative formulation (v. 12); the wicked oppress “the poor and needy” who are on the economic margins (e.g., Deut 15:7-11; 24:12-15; Bird 1997, 76). To “[restore] to the debtor his pledge” (see vv. 7, 12, 16) recalls the legislation that a

cloak, taken as collateral for a loan, should be returned to the owner before sundown (Exod 22:26-27 [25-26]; Deut 24:10-13; compare Amos 2:8). Robbery (vv. 7, 12, 16, 18) is theft by force (Lev 6:2 [5:21]; 19:13). Giving bread to the hungry and clothing the naked (vv. 7, 16) are not reflected in the legal codes but clearly carry economic importance (see Job 22:6-7; 24:9-10; Isa 58:6-7). To collect interest in advance or to collect excessive interest (vv. 8, 13, 17) would unduly burden the debtor and is legally prohibited (Exod 22:25 [24]; Lev 25:36-37; Deut 23:19-20 [20-21]). The righteous man also withholds his hand from iniquity (vv. 8, 17). Texts dealing with accuracy of weights and measures (Lev 19:35; Deut 25:13-16) suggest that "iniquity" is about dishonest trade. In sum, the righteous man does not cause economic distress and provides economic relief where needed.

This is what it means to do *mīšpāt* and *ṣĕdāqâ*, to "[execute] true justice between contending parties" (v. 8). This phrase parallels "does what is lawful and right" in verse 5*b*. The behaviors that define "lawful and right" and "true justice" are inserted between these two phrases; they constitute following YHWH's statutes and carefully observing YHWH's ordinances (v. 9). The phrase "follow YHWH's statutes" is found in Leviticus (18:4; 26:3) and the language of carefully observing YHWH's ordinances is common to Deuteronomy (5:1; 7:11-12; 11:32; 12:1; 26:16). Ezekiel uses terms from across the legal traditions, and even creates some of his own, to argue that the righteous person is one who observes the whole of Torah.

The "if" of Ezekiel's case was "if a man is righteous." Finally he arrives at the "then." The verdict: "he shall surely live" (v. 9).

Ezekiel then presents the second hypothetical situation: "If [the righteous man] has a son who is violent (*pārîṣ*), a shedder of blood" (v. 10). Elsewhere *pārîṣ* refers to a ravenous beast (Isa 35:9), robbers (Jer 7:11), and violent men in general (Ps 17:4; Ezek 7:22; Dan 11:14). "To shed blood" is alternative language for murder (see Gen 9:6; 2 Sam 3:27; Ezek 22). The fundamental difference between father and son is that all the father's actions show regard for the sanctity of human life, while the son's show disdain. His actions are all opposites of the actions of his righteous father. The verdict delivered against the violent son is that "he shall surely die" (v. 13). As elsewhere in Ezekiel, one bad deed deserves another (9:10; 11:21; 16:43). What is critical is that the verdict on his father's behavior is nontransferable. The son is judged for *his own* behavior.

Ezekiel then presents a third hypothetical case: If the violent man's son "sees all the sins that his father has done, considers, and does not do likewise" (v. 14). This man behaves like his grandfather. He demonstrates his regard for the sanctity of life and observes YHWH's ordinances. The verdict: he shall surely

live. This case is crucial for Ezekiel because the proverb is about the ill effects of a wicked father upon his righteous children. Ezekiel argues that righteous children suffer no ill effects from their father's wickedness. "He shall not die for his father's iniquity" (v. 17). The wicked father's behavior results in *his* death and his death alone.

Overall, Ezekiel's disputation makes two points. First, one can discern an individual's righteousness or wickedness by observing his or her actions. Second, each individual is judged and sentenced according to that behavior. The implication for Ezekiel's audience is this: if they are in exile, it is for their own sins. They cannot blame any kings or their own fathers. It is *their* behavior that has led to death.

The next disputation involves a question instead of a proverb. "Why should not the son suffer for the iniquity of the father?" (v. 19). There are various ways to understand the relationship between this question and the previous proverb. One could read the question as an audience response to Ezekiel's argument against the proverb. Someone asks whether the proverb might, in theory, hold true in some circumstances—such as the situation of the exile. Another way to view this question is as a separate, but related issue. The proverb expresses the view of some; the question expresses the view of others.

However the relationship is construed, the question reveals the exiles' belief that they are innocent sufferers. If the exiles are to preserve their sense of self-worth, there must be explanations besides their own culpability, such as being unfairly punished for another's sins.

In response to this question, Ezekiel summarizes his previous discourse. The one who does what is lawful (*mīšpāt*) and right (*ṣĕdāqâ*) and observes God's statutes shall live (v. 19; compare vv. 5, 9, 17). Children and parents do not suffer for the other's iniquity. Righteousness and wickedness are nontransferable.

Ezekiel offers further hypothetical situations that are also shaped as case law. What if the wicked turn away from their sins? And what if the righteous turn away from their righteousness? "To turn" is the Hebrew idiom for "repent." Repentance means turning from one way to another. Thus, the wicked who turn from sin to keeping God's statutes shall live and not die. In God's calculus, a penitent person's prior sinful acts are subtracted from the equation. Conversely, when the righteous "turn" from righteousness to iniquity, then they shall die. In God's calculus, a sinner's prior righteous actions are subtracted from the equation.

God is an indeterminate variable in the midst of this calculus. "Have I any pleasure in the death of the wicked . . . and not rather that they should turn from

their ways and live?" (v. 23). The word *pleasure* has a wide range of meaning (*TDOT*, 5.95–106). Here it expresses God's desire, or will, whether for good or ill (e.g., Judg 13:23; Isa 53:10; 55:11). Divine pleasure functions as a caution against any automatic calculation of action and consequence. Just as the theological assertion that all lives belong to God is the foundation upon which Ezekiel builds his first argument, this theological assertion is the foundation for Ezekiel's second argument. It too is grounded in the tradition (Ps 5:4 [5]; Jonah 3:6-10; Mic 7:18).

The final quotation may express the view of yet another group of exiles. They accept that their suffering does not result from the sins of a previous generation but still believe they are innocent sufferers. If they are to preserve their sense of self-worth, there must be an explanation besides one's own culpability, such as someone else is to blame. "The way of YHWH is unfair" (v. 25). This could also be translated, "The way of YHWH is not equal" (KJV). If exile is not their parents' fault, then perhaps it is YHWH's fault. YHWH needs to redo the math; their behavior should be calculated as "righteous," not "wicked."

The response negates this assertion. It is the house of Israel whose ways are unfair. Israel, not YHWH, must redo the math. The statement and counterstatement repeat nearly verbatim in verse 29, forming an *inclusio*. Within this frame Ezekiel explains the new math. When the righteous turn to iniquity, they shall die (v. 26). And when the wicked turn to righteousness, they shall live (vv. 27-28).

"Therefore" (v. 30) signals the conclusion to Ezekiel's argument. "Therefore I will judge you, O house of Israel, all of you according to your ways." The people are judged neither for someone else's ways nor are YHWH's ways unfair. They are justly punished for their own sins. Ezekiel's message is that the trauma of exile is their fault alone.

The conclusion to this discourse would make a great altar call. First, God tells the house of Israel to "repent and turn." Otherwise their transgressions will constitute an unbearable burden that causes then to stumble and fall (v. 30; see 14:3-4, 7). Second, they are to "cast away" their transgressions (v. 31). Though unique to Ezekiel (also 20:7), the language echoes Ps 55:22, "Cast your burden on YHWH." Third, they are to "do/make for yourselves a new heart and spirit" (v. 31, author's translation). The language of heart and spirit indicates the root problem (see pp. 55, 222–23). Those with a right heart and spirit turn to do righteousness.

In the final sentences readers might imagine God weeping in frustration and pleading, "Why will you die?" The death of the house of Israel is a tragedy because it was preventable. God's final words are a last, despairing plea, "Turn,

then, and live."

Commentators argue over the meaning of verses 30-32. Is Israel really expected to repent? Would that make any difference in the exiles' situation? Was this really a preventable tragedy? Sadly, these questions are moot. Exile happened. Perhaps if these verses anticipated the judgment, God's passionate plea might have resulted in Israel's turning to life. After 597 B.C.E. God's pathos-filled plea only underscores the tragedy of Israel's death.

The focus of this chapter turns away from the form of punishment to the reasons for it. Despite their differences, both the prophet and his audience regard the crisis as YHWH's punishment; the contested issue is *whose* sins are being punished. For Ezekiel, it is the exiles who failed to walk after God's statutes. This is one of a few places where Ezekiel focuses on social injustice rather than idolatry or foreign alliances. It provides further evidence for God's case against Israel. In addition to failing in their relationship with YHWH, they have fundamentally failed in their relationships with each other.

Theological and Ethical Analysis

(1) For most of Ezekiel God is the angry, vengeful God that many people find objectionable. But in this chapter Ezekiel makes two astonishing theological statements. "All lives are mine" and "I have no pleasure in the death of anyone." These two thoughts are actually connected. If all life belongs to God, then each life is a part of God. When anyone dies, God loses a part of Godself. Anyone who has experienced the death of a loved one knows the feeling that a part of one's own self has died as well. The trauma is not just Israel's, it is also God's.

(2) Since Hebrew is a gendered language, translators must determine if the Hebrew "man" or "men" actually includes both genders. The NRSV makes such a determination when the Hebrew "father" and "son" are translated "parent" and "child" (vv. 2, 4, 20). References to defiling a neighbor's wife and approaching a woman during her menstrual period assume that the audience is male, raising interesting gender issues.

First, in Ezekiel, "righteous" behavior is gendered. Chapter 16 depicts a woman's righteousness in terms of sexual fidelity and obedience to male authority. Chapter 18 similarly depicts a man's righteousness in terms of sexual fidelity and obedience to male authority. The difference is that sexual fidelity to one's spouse is central for women's righteousness and only incidental to men's righteousness. A woman's obedience is to her husband; a man's obedience is to YHWH, characterized in terms of just economic relationships.

These differences indicate ancient Israel's gender ideals. Should modern

readers continue to perpetuate these notions? How can justice and righteousness be defined in gender-inclusive ways?

A second gender issue is to imagine how female exiles might have heard Ezekiel's discourse. Would they have been able to see themselves as included in the assertion that each "person" dies for his or her own sins? Would they have dismissed Ezekiel as irrelevant to their experience? Since both covenant and political alliances were primarily male activities, perhaps the women also said, "The way of YHWH is unfair." (The "you" of v. 25 is masculine plural, which can include both genders.)

Class issues are also evident in this chapter. Whether righteous or wicked, the "man" in this chapter is clearly not in debt, poor, needy, hungry, or naked. The audience is male and wealthy, or at least wealthy enough. How would the "poor and needy," whether in antiquity or today, respond to this discourse? Would it address their victim questions (see p. xx)? Would they believe they suffer for their own sins or would they argue, "The wealthy have eaten sour grapes, and the teeth of the poor are set on edge"? While there is insufficient evidence to answer these questions of gender and class, they suggest that the meaning attached to suffering may not be universal.

(3) One critique of Ezekiel's argument is the reality that people suffer every day for the sins of others. The woman beaten by her husband, the child abused by a parent, and the family killed by a drunk driver do not suffer for their own sins. Palestinians rightly protest the "collective punishment" of closures and other restrictions in response to suicide bombings. And, unfortunately, sins of the parents do live on in their children. Nor is sin the exclusive provenance of individuals. How many generations will it take before children no longer suffer for the systemic sins of racism and sexism? The effects of trauma may also be passed on. Statistically, one-third of abused children will themselves become abusers. Those who study trauma debate the effects of secondary traumatic stress and the possible ways the trauma of one generation might affect subsequent generations (see Danieli 1985, 295–313; Figley and Kleber 1995, 78–93).

Most contemporary commentators applaud this chapter as challenging what they see as the sin of contemporary society—people's unwillingness to take responsibility for their own actions. There is much truth in this. An extreme example is the so-called "Twinkie® Defense," where a criminal defendant claimed that at the time of a crime he was of diminished mental capacity due to the intake of too much sugar from eating Twinkies®. There is a tendency to want to blame others instead of critically examining one's own actions.

Yet there are limits to the concept of "personal responsibility." Jodie English, a defense attorney who works with death penalty cases, wrote this in response to

Ezek 18:

It is a common prosecutorial strategy in capital cases to portray the violent aggression without any context or sense of how or where it came from. The defendant is labeled a bad man–a sinner–only worthy of being put to death. This, of course, is not the law of the death penalty. Mandatory death sentences were deemed unconstitutional over twenty-five years ago, as justice was felt to require consideration of far more than the particular bad acts by which the capital crime was committed. Capital sentencing must be individualized, and mitigation proffered by the defense in support of a sentence less than death must be reckoned with. Simply put, modern day capital sentencing schemes would repudiate most of Ezekiel. (personal correspondence, March 1, 2003)

Life is much more complex than chapter 18 suggests. One's actions in life are not a case of being either an individual's entire fault or entirely someone else's fault. Indeed, the canon as a whole shows the limits of personal responsibility. Job does not suffer for his sins, but because of a wager between God and Satan. The Teacher observes that the righteous perish in their righteousness and the wicked prolong their life in their evildoing (Eccl 7:15). The postexilic Isaian prophet will speak of one who, though himself innocent, suffers for the sins of others (Isa 52:14–53:12). Jesus will also challenge Ezekiel's viewpoint (Luke 13:1-5). Individual responsibility can never be the whole answer, and may even be the wrong answer.

(4) Ezekiel's view that one can freely choose to turn one direction or another (vv. 21-24) is similarly overly simplistic. Contemporary neurological research documents that murderers suffer from many conditions that are rooted in fetal problems where the concept of free choice does not exist. The number one cause of mental retardation in this country is Fetal Alcohol Syndrome, which results in poor impulse control due to problems in the temporal lobes. Neurological research also shows that pregnant women who are beaten give birth to babies who are hardwired for fast production of cortisol, which triggers the fight-or-flight response. This results in a child, and later an adult, whose brain is hardwired for lashing out when the person is angered. What can such persons freely choose? Of course, Ezekiel was not aware of modern-day brain research. Still, Ezekiel's legacy continues in the many legislators, jurors, and judges who argue, "He chose to kill, he chose his fate." The black-and-white concept of free choice in Ezekiel's thinking and its present-day counterparts does not fairly portray what these offenders' limitations allow.

(5) In Matt 25:31-46 Jesus delivers a discourse on the coming judgment where the people will be separated as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. Some even describe this discourse as a "parable" (the Greek translation of *māšāl*, "proverb" [Ezek 18:2]). Just as in Ezek 18, what separates the two groups

is their behavior, such as whether they saw someone who was hungry and gave them food, or thirsty and gave them drink, or naked and gave them clothing. Whether intended or not, the references to feeding the hungry and clothing the naked create an intertextual link between Matthew and Ezekiel. Both texts also share the language of life and death. In Matthew the "wicked" will go away into eternal punishment, that is, death, and the "righteous" into eternal "life." These two texts agree that the degree to which persons have shared their resources with the needy is the determinative factor for God's judgment. Although an individual's actions are never totally determinative of their future (see above), what is significant is that both Ezekiel and Matthew remind readers of what God requires (compare Deut 10:12; Mic 6:8). Whether a life is lived in response to *torah* or in response to Christ, a righteous life seeks transformative actions on behalf of those who are exploited by the ruling elite (Carter 2000, 491–97).

Lion King (19:1-14)

For good or ill, those in urban environments no longer have up close and personal encounters with lions, which are now team mascots and seen only in plays, on TV, or in zoos. Israel's experience of lions was much more direct. The lion is the wild animal most frequently mentioned in the Bible and the animal to which YHWH is most frequently likened (Strawn 2005, 26). They are primarily characterized as fearsome. Roaring, killing, rending, and devouring compose the main elements belonging to the metaphorical vehicle "lion" and must be considered for the tenor of the metaphor "princes of Israel" (Strawn 2005, 45).

Literary Analysis

This chapter conveys its message in both *metaphor* (vv. 2-9) and simile (vv. 10-14), which are employed within the genre of *lamentation* (Hebr. *qînâ*). In the call narrative, Ezekiel was commanded to eat a scroll, which had written on it "words of lamentation (*qînâ*)" (2:10). This is the first encounter with lamentation in the book, but it will not be the last. Of the eighteen occurrences of *qînâ* in the Hebrew text, ten of them occur in Ezekiel.

Lamentations were originally sung when an individual died (2 Sam 1:17; 2 Chr 35:25). In Ezekiel, lamentation is reserved exclusively for rulers and nations (19:1, 14; 26:17; 27:2, 32; 28:12; 32:2, 16). The frequency and focus of lamentation in Ezekiel are clues to a theme of the book, as well as to this chapter

—the death of kings and kingdoms.

A 3:2 metrical pattern is lamentation's distinguishing poetic characteristic. The meter is determined by the stressed syllables in Hebrew, which is nearly impossible to render into English. Here is verse 3 rendered in the 3:2 meter and following the Hebrew word order. The hyphenated English represents one Hebrew word; the accented letters represent stressed syllables.

She-raised-úp óne of-her-cúbs;
a-young-lión he-becáme,
and-he-learnéd to-cátch prév,
humáns he-devouréd.

A break in the meter at verse 9 signals a division within the chapter (vv. 2-9, 10-14). The first subunit employs leonine imagery. The second returns to the vine imagery of chapter 17. These dual images may (or may not) allude to the blessing of Judah, the royal tribe, which also combines leonine and vine imagery (Gen 49:9-12).

Reasons for the placement of this chapter are obscure. Following immediately after the pathos-filled ending of chapter 18, "Why will you die? . . . Turn, then, and live," YHWH commands Ezekiel to "raise up a lamentation." This sequencing suggests the failure of YHWH's plea in 18:31-32; lamentation signals a death. Given Ezekiel's focus on the nation's fate, readers might expect a lamentation over "the house of Israel," but "princes of Israel" continues the "individual" focus of chapter 18. The word *violent*, (*pārîṣ*) used of the wicked son (18:10), is paired in Isa 35:9 with "lion" (NRSV "ravenous") The wicked son is a "shedder of blood" and "blood" appears in the opening line of the second subunit (v. 10). These connections prompt consideration of how vicious lions and princes of Israel are reflections of the violent son.

Exegetical Analysis

YHWH directs Ezekiel to "raise up a lamentation for the princes of Israel." The significance of designating the Davidic ruler as "king" versus "prince" is often unclear. Ian Duguid argues that Ezekiel used "king" exclusively for Jehoiachin (compare 1:2; 17:12) and "prince" for other royals, especially Zedekiah (12:10, 12; 21:12, 25), which may impact identification of the second cub (1994, 18–19, 21, 24). The phrase "princes of Israel" indicates that what follows is political commentary on the monarchy. The lamentation mourns the death of "the house of David."

It begins, “What a lioness was your mother among lions!” (v. 2). The lament is rendered in metaphorical language, though the lioness and her cubs are portrayed in a “naturalistic” way. As real female lions do, she teaches her cubs to catch prey, singling out one of the cubs that became “a young lion,” an accomplished predator (v. 3). But then the hunter became the hunted. Being “caught in their pit” or “brought . . . with hooks” is hunting language (v. 4; see Keel 1978, 89–94). The lion hunt had particular significance in antiquity, where it was the sport of kings, symbolizing royal power. Ancient iconography and literature make clear that to conquer the lion in a hunt was equivalent to conquering the enemy in war (*ANEP*, no. 184; Strawn 2005, 161–74). Thus, this lion hunt is also war.

The hunt was on and the fearsome young lion was captured and brought “to the land of Egypt” (v. 4). The mother lion saw that “her hope was lost” (v. 5). Like Sisera’s mother, her son would not return to her (Judg 5:28-30). So she took another of her cubs, which is portrayed in language identical to that of the first lion (vv. 3, 6). This young lion was also a fearsome, accomplished predator.

In verse 7 the metaphor slips. It emphasizes savagery—“ravaged,” “laid waste.” Lions ravage other animals, but princes and kings lay waste to “strongholds” and “towns.” (See Darr 2002, 1269 on interpreting the MT’s “his widows” as continuing the leonine imagery.) This lion’s ferocity is further emphasized by the sound of its roaring, at which “the land was appalled, and all in it.” The Hebrew is identical to 12:19, which the NRSV renders “their land shall be stripped of all it contains.” The voice (roar) of this lion is like the voice of YHWH, which “causes the oaks to whirl, and strips the forest bare” (Ps 29:9).

Yet this savage lion became the hunted. The nations again gather for a hunt, capture the second lion, and bring it to the king of Babylon. Its roar would no longer be heard “on the mountains of Israel” (v. 9).

This ends the lion part of the lamentation. Unfortunately, there is no interpretation of the metaphor. That the lion hunts refer to deportations seems obvious. Moreover, the lamentation seems to describe, especially in the case of the first lion, the specific deportations of Judean kings in the last years of Judah’s existence. But identifying the two “cubs” with historical kings poses problems.

The first lion is almost certainly Jehoahaz, whom Pharaoh Neco took to Egypt (2 Kgs 23:31-34). As for the second lion, supporting and opposing data can be presented for each of the remaining kings of Judah—Jehoiakim, Jehoiachin, and Zedekiah. The identification depends partly upon the identification of the “lioness.” The most straightforward identification is with a real mother, Hamutal, the mother of both Jehoahaz and Zedekiah (2 Kgs 23:31; 24:18). If one

thinks the second cub is *not* Zedekiah, the lioness may represent the royal line of Judah, elsewhere associated with leonine imagery (Gen 49:9-10), or Jerusalem, the royal city (Strawn 2005, 56, 249).

Two other significant issues are evident. First, this is the only text in the OT where lion imagery is used metaphorically of Israelite kings (and perhaps the royal mother) in the highly developed way found elsewhere in Western Asia (Strawn 2005, 56). Leonine imagery was used extensively as a metaphor for royal dominance by the kings of Egypt and Mesopotamia, where it is used to praise the king's fierceness. Egypt's Thutmose II is "the wild-looking lion, who kills his enemies" (*TDOT*, 1.378). The Kadesh inscription describes Egypt's Ramesses the Great as being "like a fierce lion in a valley . . . who goes out in valor and returns when he has triumphed" (cited in Strawn 2005, 176). Assyria's Sargon II is described as stalking the lands of his enemies "like a raging lion" (*TDOT*, 1.380; see Strawn 2005, 174–81). The monarch-as-lion metaphor appears most often in contexts of military victory and demonstrates the king's power and ferocity. If the verses describing nations capturing the lions were removed, readers would evaluate these lions as powerful monarchs able to defeat their enemies in battle.

What is most striking about this imagery, in contrast to Western Asian royal inscriptions, is the overall negative impression of the lions. The emphasis is not on their power but on their powerlessness. These lion-kings failed miserably and were captured. If Davidic kings saw themselves as powerful, the nations around were more powerful still, easily defeating Jerusalem's kings (Strawn 2005, 248–50). No wonder Ezekiel laments how the mighty have fallen (compare 2 Sam 1:17, 19)!

Second, as in 12:1-16 and 17:1-21, this chapter makes clear that this pride of lions has been destroyed. Lamentation is appropriate only in the context of death. The hunting language of pits and nets speaks of judgment (12:13; 17:20). There will be no more lion-kings from this line. Israel's "king of kings" has become Nebuchadnezzar (26:7). Thus, Ezekiel mourns the end of David's dynasty (see p. 62).

The imagery now shifts to that of the vine (compare 17:1-10). "Your mother was like a vine in a vineyard" (v. 10). The reference to "your mother" recalls the first subunit. The last part of the verse, "in a vineyard," presents interpretive difficulties. The Hebrew is literally, "in your blood," perhaps a slip in the metaphor (like lions ravaging strongholds) and thus a reference to bloodshed, echoing the wicked son in 18:10. Or perhaps it is a reference to the "bloodred" color of red grapes (Gen 49:11; Walsh 2000, 107). The translation "vineyard," based upon presumed confusion in some Hebrew consonants, makes the "stem"

of verse 11 a grapevine.

Significantly, this vine is "transplanted by the water" where it grew "fruitful and full of branches." Unlike the transplanting in 17:8, this has all the signs of success—a proper cultivation method under ideal conditions (see pp. 95–96). With abundant water, this vine does not grow close to the ground to preserve moisture (Walsh 2000, 115). The phrases "towered aloft" and "stood out in its height" (v. 11) depict a vine that has been trained up a trellis (Walsh 2000, 116). From this ideal vine, "its strongest stem became a ruler's scepter" (compare Gen 49:10).

Alas, the poor vine and stem. Just as the great hunter became the hunted, this luxuriant vine and towering stem are uprooted, plucked up, and withered by an east wind (v. 12; compare 17:9-10). The destruction of the stem by fire shares the language of 15:4-5. This overly stressed vine, in gross parody of its initial transplanting, is now replanted in "the wilderness . . . a dry and thirsty land" (v. 13). Even a healthy vine could not survive these conditions, much less one already injured. If by some miracle the vine survives, it will not thrive (compare 17:9-10). Its reality resembles escapees whose survival is short-lived (15:7). The stem then seemingly spontaneously combusts, which destroys not only the stem but also branches and fruit, leaving it useless (v. 14; compare 15:4-5). There is no vision of a future stem or scepter for ruling (compare 17:22-24).

As with the first subunit, the imagery remains uninterpreted and thus ambiguous. Does the vine imagery refer to the same family as the lion imagery? Does the mother vine refer metaphorically to Israel (compare 15:6) or to a literal mother, perhaps Hamutal? Does the imagery refer to two kings or only one? And if two, which two? (The NRSV interprets this subunit as referring to one king, probably Zedekiah.)

Beyond identification, other issues are evident. Verse 10 refers to both a "stem" (*maṭṭēh*) and a "scepter" (*šēbeṭ*). Šēbeṭ means "staff" (Lev 27:32; Ps 23:4; Mic 7:14). Perhaps because royal ideology viewed the king as shepherd, the *šēbeṭ* came to identify royal insignia (e.g., Gen 49:10; Ps 45:6 [7]; Amos 1:8). "Stem" (*maṭṭēh*) occurs in the idiom "staff (*maṭṭēh*) of bread" (4:16; 5:16; 14:13), but here it is a symbol of authority (compare Num 17:1-11). *Maṭṭēh* can also be translated as "scepter" (Ps 89:44 [45]; 110:2; Jer 48:17 [16-26]). Used in parallel, *šēbeṭ* and *maṭṭēh* symbolize royal authority (Isa 10:5; 14:5).

The vine simile's meaning resembles the lion metaphor. It contrasts an ideal image with the less-ideal reality: a vibrant vine (successful king) with a withered one (defeated king). No doubt Jerusalem's kings thought of themselves as righteous, "like trees planted by streams of water, which yield their fruit in its season" (Ps 1:3). Instead, they were ungodly, "like chaff that the wind drives

away" (Ps 1:4). What seemed positive ended up negative. The simile also emphasizes the termination of the Jerusalem monarchy. The stem, branches, and fruit are "consumed." Nothing is left, much less anything fit "for ruling." The last line emphasizes the theme of both subunits: death. "This is a lamentation, and it is used as a lamentation" (v. 14).

Theological and Ethical Analysis

(1) Surprisingly, apart from the initial command in v. 1, YHWH is conspicuously absent in this chapter. There is no first-person address, nor formulas invoking YHWH, nor expressions of God's condemnation, rage, and destruction. This absence normally commands little attention. Perhaps because God's presence elsewhere is so dominant, one simply assumes God's presence instead of noting its absence. Ezekiel's audience is challenged to recognize their kings in this tale of fauna and flora and to judge them accordingly, as David must recognize himself in Nathan's parable and render judgment (2 Sam 12:1-13; Darr 2002, 1274).

Alternatively, perhaps God's absence indicates Israel's separation from God, as represented by the Davidic kings. They thought they were mighty—a fierce lion, a luxuriant vine—but apart from God they are nothing. In that case, the chapter is less an indictment against the kings' action (violence, pride) than against their belief (God's promise of an eternal royal line), a belief that must be challenged. God's departure from Jerusalem (chs. 8–11) leaves David's throne unprotected. How could they live? Apart from God, the fiercest lion may be captured and the most verdant vine will wither.

(2) Since goddesses are especially portrayed in the company of lions in antiquity and since the lion is the most common animal with which YHWH is identified (Strawn 2005, 258–68), it is tempting to suggest that Ezekiel's lioness provides a female image of God. God-as-lioness is the mother of Davidic kings, and by extension the mother of Israel, who nurtures and protects her young, training them to grow into mighty lions. But in the end, although powerful, God-as-lioness is not all-powerful. Unable to defend her offspring against more powerful enemies, she laments their defeat and death.

(3) Unlike Ezek 17, Ezek 19 sees no future hope for the monarchy. Like Ps 88, it ends in despair, reminding readers that the proper song is lamentation. While there is a time for songs of joy, singing them prematurely means failing to measure the heights and depths of sorrow. After the trauma of exile, the end of the Davidic empire, and the rupture of divine promises, hope would be misplaced and artificial. Similarly, after traumatic national events such as the

Oklahoma City bombing or the attacks of 9/11, the nation needed to mourn before there could be any anticipation of joy. There is little public lamentation in American society today. Can communities of faith become places that nurture the capacity to lament?

History Repeats Itself (20:1-44)

Biblical scholars have often compared Israel's linear view of history to its neighbors' cyclical view of history, sometimes as grounds for positing the superiority of ancient Israelite religion over its neighbors'. Whatever the merits or demerits of a linear view of history, this chapter does not subscribe to it. Instead of a progression of events, it describes an endless repetition. Israel's history is recycled, over and over again.

Literary Analysis

Lexical and thematic repetition underline the cyclical nature of Israel's history. The repetition makes determining the structure of the chapter as a whole elusive. Commentators' proposals vary widely, as different authors focus on a particular repeated word or theme. Instead of arguing the merits of a particular structure, the Exegetical Analysis will simply follow the narrative flow.

Its genre also eludes categorization. The unit consists of a series of catalogs of "abominations," cast as an extended recital of Israel's history. Such recitals are part of Israel's traditions (e.g., Deut 6:21-23; Josh 24:2-13; Ps 136). These recitals recall YHWH's wonderful actions on Israel's behalf. Ezekiel recalls God's gracious acts but also enumerates Israel's persistent rebellion against God (compare Ps 106). This chapter renders the same judgment as chapters 16 and 23, without the metaphor. Moreover, the chapter chronicles God's response to Israelite rebellion throughout its history, not just at Jerusalem's destruction.

This chapter reflects Ezekiel's penchant for combining, rearranging, and distorting Israel's traditions. In the historical recital, Ezekiel employs vocabulary from various traditions to express his view of Israel's history. The result ends up resembling no known tradition.

The placement of this chapter may be due to the oracle's concerns with intergenerational issues, which are also present in chapters 18 and 19 (Block 1997, 617). This chapter adds another dimension to Ezekiel's discussion about generations and divine justice.

Exegetical Analysis

This is the first dated oracle since 8:1 (see p. xxv). Eleven months have passed when "certain elders of Israel" again come to visit Ezekiel in order "to consult YHWH." (On elders and consulting YHWH, see pp. 44–45.) The text does not specify the situation the elders hoped YHWH would address. Their coming at all shows extraordinary chutzpah. Have they learned nothing from the previous encounters? In chapter 8 their visit led to the extended vision of the Temple abominations and its subsequent annihilation. In chapter 14 their visit resulted in the destruction of inquirers and answering prophet alike. The covenant relationship has ended; God refuses to be consulted. Yet, here they are—*again*. "Déjà vu all over again" is a major theme in this chapter, beginning with the elders' visit. Does their visit indicate "rebelliousness"? Are they gluttons for punishment? Are they just desperate? Even God seems flabbergasted by their visit. "Why are you coming? To consult me?" (v. 3). Whatever the elders' hopes, they are quickly dashed. "I will not be consulted by you" (v. 3). God will respond, but not to their concerns.

The language of judging and abominations in verse 4 echoes similar moments in Ezekiel (7:3, 8; compare 11:10-11; 16:38; 18:30; 22:2). In letting the elders "know the abominations of their ancestors," God's response places the exiles' current history in the context of Israel's larger history that began "on the day when [YHWH] chose Israel" (v. 5). Ezekiel chooses language from Deuteronomy: "YHWH your God has chosen you" (Deut 7:6-7; see also Deut 10:15; 14:2).

In the next breath Ezekiel uses the language of Exodus, which is emphasized with repetition and parallelism.

I swore to the offspring of the house of Jacob—
making myself known to them in the land of Egypt—
I swore to them, saying,
I am YHWH your God. (v. 5, emphasis added)

"To swear" is literally "to raise the hand." Just as today people raise their right hand and swear to tell the truth in a court of law, the raising of the hand is associated with making an oath, including God's oath to bring Israel into the promised land (Exod 6:8). This is Ezekiel's only reference to "the house of Jacob," a phrase associated with Egypt (Gen 46:27; Exod 19:3; Ps 114:1). "Making myself known to them in the land of Egypt" and saying "I am YHWH your God" paraphrase the revelation of the divine name to Moses (Exod 3:13-14; 6:2-3, 6-8).

The focus on Israel's foundational event, the exodus, is confirmed in verse 6. "To bring out" is a standard idiom for exodus (e.g., Exod 3:10-12; 7:4-5; 12:17). It is in the book of Exodus that the promised land is described as "flowing with milk and honey" (Exod 3:8, 17; 13:5; 33:3). Ezekiel adds other flourishes to the exodus story. The land, which YHWH had "searched out" (compare Num 13), is "the most glorious of all lands" (compare Jer 3:19). Despite the linguistic connections with the exodus story, nowhere in the story does YHWH swear an oath exactly like this one.

Ezekiel omits significant parts of the tradition, however. Nothing is said of slavery, Moses, or the Passover event. Instead these two verses emphasize (1) Israel's knowledge of YHWH, and (2) YHWH's generous gift of land. These two emphases are a nonmetaphorical version of Israel's beginnings found in chapter 16—a special relationship initiated by YHWH and consummated with lavish gifts.

Just as in Exodus, God's actions toward Israel demand a response in the form of a commandment (v. 7), a paraphrase of the first two commandments of the Decalogue (Exod 20:3-4). This is to be an exclusive relationship. Israel must "cast away the detestable things" (5:11; 7:20; 11:18, 21) and "not defile" themselves with "idols of Egypt." From YHWH's perspective, Israel should act in accordance with its knowledge of YHWH. Apparently, Israel does not "know" YHWH well enough, for even in Egypt they "rebelled" (v. 8).

It is not surprising to read that Israel failed in fidelity. The surprise is Ezekiel's accusation that Israel was unfaithful in Egypt by worshiping Egyptian gods. Readers search in vain for confirming evidence in Exodus. Even Ps 106 does not make this claim in recounting Israel's history of rebellion. The only other hint of this in the canon is Josh 24:14. Nonetheless because of this failure, YHWH determines to destroy them "in the midst of . . . Egypt." This is another surprise. The tradition knows of YHWH's threats against Israel once they are out of Egypt (Exod 32:1-10; Num 14:11-12, 26-35), but not while they are still in Egypt.

The key to this whole chapter is YHWH's decision not to destroy them "for the sake of my name." God gives Israel another chance. God's decision is not predicated upon a love willing to take risks, however (Weems 1995, 115; see p. 92), but out of divine self-interest. God's "name" is in danger of being "profaned" before the nations.

Israel's obedience sanctifies God's name (Lev 22:31-32). The nations could observe this by the attendant blessings God bestows (Lev 25:18-19; 26:3-13; Deut 6:3). Israel's disobedience profanes God's name, which the nations could observe through its subsequent destruction (compare Lev 18:21, 24-30; 26:14-39). The Lord's Prayer upholds this logic (Matt 6:9-10; Blenkinsopp 1990, 166).

God's name is hallowed (sanctified) when God's will is done (obedience). When God's will is not done (disobedience), God's name is profaned.

Despite commentators' protest that God is doing more than merely defending God's reputation, this seems, in fact, to be the issue. YHWH cares about Israel's obedience because its behavior reflects upon YHWH's character, just as the behavior of Christians reflects upon Jesus or the behavior of Muslims reflects upon Mohammed. Punishing Israel would make clear to the "nations" Israel's disobedience. God gives Israel a second chance, not out of love, but to avoid being "dissed" by the other nations.

Having narrowly escaped "death by deity" (*ABD*, 3.246), Israel's second chance comes when God leads them "out of the land of Egypt . . . into the wilderness" (vv. 9-10), and gives them divine "statutes," by whose "observance everyone shall live" (v. 11). This language Ezekiel borrows from Lev 26. Ezekiel reiterates that observance of "statutes" and "ordinances" leads to life (11:20; 18:9, 17, 19, 21; compare Lev 26:3-13), but omits that failure to observe the statutes and ordinances leads to death (5:6-8; 11:10-12; compare Lev 26:14-39). In addition, God gives Israel "my sabbaths" as a "sign" (*ʾôt*; v. 12; see p. 22). Sabbath observance makes visible that YHWH has sanctified Israel (Exod 31:13). Ezekiel fails to mention the consequences of profaning the Sabbath: death (Exod 31:14; on "sanctify" and "profane," see pp. xxi–xxiii).

The language of wilderness and law giving clearly evokes Israel at Sinai. This second chance changes nothing for Israel or YHWH. Israel continues to rebel by failing to observe God's ordinances. They "greatly profaned" God's Sabbaths (v. 13*a*). Israel's continued disobedience means God again determines to destroy them (v. 13*b*). Yet because the nations are watching, YHWH again desists in order to save face (v. 14).

This time Israel does not get off free. Perhaps God prefers having a slightly tarnished reputation to simply repeating the cycle. Israel does not suffer "death by deity," but it is punished a little. God resolves not to bring that generation into the promised land (v. 15; compare Num 14:26-35). The charges against Israel are repeated and clarified (v. 16). Israel failed to fulfill their covenant obligations because "their heart went after their idols" (compare vv. 7-8; 14:3, 4, 7), which is sufficient justification for YHWH "to make an end of them." They cannot complain that condemning the exodus generation to die in the wilderness was unfair. Indeed, this was an act of grace. "My eye spared them" (v. 17). The elders may have contrasted this bit of grace to previous assertions that God's eye would not spare them (5:11; 7:4, 9; 8:18; 9:5, 10).

Ezekiel's history now turns to the children of the rebellious wilderness generation. Perhaps with them God can hope for a different outcome; as chapter

18 demonstrates, children can behave differently from their parents. Thus, YHWH commands the children born in the wilderness not to follow their parents' "statutes" and not to defile themselves with their parents' "idols" (v. 18). They should follow YHWH's "statutes" and sanctify YHWH's "sabbaths" (vv. 19-20*a*). Sabbath observance will be a "sign" that the children have attained knowledge of YHWH.

But there is no break in the pattern. The children are no better than their parents (v. 21). Since the next generation continues to rebel, YHWH is similarly stuck in the same rut and determines to destroy them "in the wilderness." It looks increasingly likely that God's vow to bring this chosen people to a land "flowing with milk and honey" will never be kept. But once again YHWH acts "for the sake of my name" and withholds God's hand (v. 22; contrast Lam 2:8). Though they do not suffer "death by deity," the children are nonetheless punished. YHWH swears an oath to "scatter them among the nations" (v. 23; compare 6:8; 12:15; 22:15). Before the people have entered the land, God vows to exile them from it. Again readers search Scripture in vain for such an early vow. In the Pentateuch, God's promise to scatter the people is punishment for their disobedience in the land (Deut 4:24-27; 28:62-64). The repetition of the charges against the next generation (v. 24) makes clear that if rebellion is sufficient justification for YHWH "to pour out my wrath," then it is sufficient for predestining exile.

"Moreover," instead of "statutes" and "ordinances" that give life (v. 11), God gives them "statutes that were not good" and "ordinances by which they could not live" (v. 25). It is unclear whether this refers to Sinaitic law, to a second law (akin to Deuteronomy), or to an event found only in Ezekiel. YHWH thus "defiled them through their very gifts" (v. 26). This is the only instance in the Bible where God is the subject of "defile." Elsewhere "gifts" is a general term for several offerings freely brought or divinely prescribed (e.g., Lev 23:38; Num 18:6-7, 29; Deut 16:17; Block 1997, 636). These "gifts," the "offering up all their firstborn," derives from two traditions. First, since the Egyptians' firstborn were the price YHWH paid to redeem the house of Jacob, all "firstborns" belong to YHWH and must be redeemed (Exod 13:12, 15; 34:19-20; Num 3:12-13; 18:15-18). The second tradition is that of child sacrifice. The verb "to offer up," combined with "fire," is the Deuteronomic idiom designating child sacrifice (2 Kgs 16:3; 17:17; 21:6; 23:10). Thus, Ezekiel's version of Israel's history includes divinely sanctioned child sacrifice. Elsewhere in the Bible child sacrifice is generally condemned. The notion that God demands this of Israel is totally alien to the tradition. Ezekiel's revisionist history goes over the edge of plausibility to absurdity (see pp. 122–23).

Through these "not good" statutes YHWH hoped "to horrify" the next generation. Lexically, this is the same word that describes Ezekiel's experience of sitting "stunned" (or "traumatized") by the river Chebar (3:15). It is possible to read the disturbing verses 25-26 as a divine version of "shock therapy" to move Israel out of their persistent rebelliousness. Surely parents, even rebellious ones, would be shocked by the very idea of killing their firstborn. But will this shock therapy work?

That God gave "not good" laws suggests that God's reputation is not, after all, the overriding concern of this chapter. How would the nations react? Would they be appalled at the ways of this nation and its deity? It seems YHWH is willing to resort to desperate measures, even risking profaning YHWH's name, to bring Israel to knowledge of YHWH.

Having recounted the rebellion of the exodus and wilderness generations, Ezekiel now addresses the rebellious generations that lived in the most glorious of all lands. The transition from distant to recent past is marked by "therefore" (v. 27). Ezekiel is commanded to tell "the house of Israel," the exiles, how their ancestors "blasphemed" and dealt "treacherously" with YHWH. Only here does Ezekiel use "blaspheme," which is translated elsewhere in the NRSV as "affronts" (Num 15:30) and "reviled" (2 Kgs 19:6, 22//Isa 37:6, 23). These translations point to a form of verbal disrespect. The phrase "dealt treacherously" can also be rendered as "betrayed" (see p. 78). In word and deed the landed generations turn against YHWH.

YHWH finally fulfills the divine oath to bring Israel into the land (v. 28; compare v. 6). There the people betray YHWH at any "high hill" or "leafy tree" by performing four acts (v. 28): (1) offering sacrifices, (2) presenting offerings, (3) sending up pleasing odors (i.e., offering incense), and (4) pouring out libations. After Ezekiel's innovative rewriting of Israel's history, he now uses stock Deuteronomic and prophetic vocabulary for Israel's cultic transgressions (see p. 33). The activities of sacrificing, offering, burning incense, and pouring libations are all acceptable forms of worship when directed toward YHWH. But outside of legitimate Yahwistic worship, such practices become a "provocation" (compare Deut 4:25; 31:29; 32:16, 21.

YHWH's shock tactics have no effect on Israel's behavior. God's surprising response to their rebellion is a question, "What is the high place to which you go?" (v. 29). The question presupposes the Deuteronomic mandate for centralization of the cult in Jerusalem (compare Deut 12). In the Deuteronomistic History, prior to the building of the Temple, a "high place" could be a legitimate place of YHWH worship (1 Sam 9:12-14, 19, 25; 1 Kgs 3:2-4), but afterward, "high places" are condemned as illegitimate (e.g., 1 Kgs

15:14; 2 Kgs 12:3 [4]). Therefore, the question condemns the landed generations for failing to worship YHWH where they should: in Jerusalem. The following etiology (explanation of origin) for "high place," and the comment that it is called Bamah "to this day," tells readers that Israel, including the present generation, persists in rebellion.

It is a proverb today that those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it. After reminding them of the past, YHWH asks the present generation if they will go and do likewise (v. 30). Would they "go astray" (lit., "play the whore") after "detestable things" (compare v. 7)? The question is rhetorical. The inevitability of rebellion is underscored by verse 31, which suggests that the present generation obeys YHWH's "not good statutes" even "to this day." The historical recital ends with the generation of the elders who came to consult YHWH. Instead of punishing the elders for their request, YHWH swears another oath, "as I live," refusing to be consulted. God's lengthy discourse does not answer their question.

Verse 32 reveals the audience's response to both the historical recital and God's refusal to be consulted. What they have in mind (lit., "what goes up upon your spirit") is to "be like the nations . . . and worship wood and stone" (v. 32). There is a sense of desperation in the exiles' desire. If YHWH would not answer them, maybe other gods would. But there is more at stake than merely gaining an answer. To "be like the nations" expresses Israel's desire "to end the covenant and thus conclude the experimental alliance between themselves and Yahweh" (Eslinger 1998, 111). The desire to "worship wood and stone" is an anticovenantal stance, as was Israel's request for a king "like other nations" (1 Sam 8:4-8). Essentially, the elders (the exiles, Israel) declared ¡*Basta*! Enough! They will end the warped dance between themselves and God.

YHWH states that this "will never happen." God's next act aims "not at possibly annihilating an unmanageable people but at reforming a covenantal flock hell-bent on escape" (Eslinger 1998, 111). YHWH swears a five-part oath (v. 33). First, YHWH vows that "with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, and with wrath poured out, I will be king over you" (v. 33). YHWH's declaration to be king may be prompted by the similarity of Israel's wish to be "like the nations," with its previous wish for human kingship to be "like other nations" (1 Sam 8:5, 20). This time YHWH will not acquiesce to their decision (1 Sam 8:7, 9, 22) and will reassert YHWH's sovereignty over Israel. YHWH will try again with Israel.

One of a king's roles is military. As a warrior YHWH delivers the people from Egypt (Exod 15:3). "Mighty hand" and "outstretched arm" are Deuteronomic idioms for exodus (Deut 4:34; 5:15; 7:19; 11:2-3; 26:8). This implies that God will accomplish another exodus, only not for liberation, but for judgment.

Second, YHWH will "bring out" the people, a term associated with exodus (v. 34; compare v. 6). Elsewhere in Ezekiel, "to gather" the people signals God's willingness to bring them back into their own land (11:17; 28:25; 36:24). But here the repetition of "mighty hand," "outstretched arm," and "wrath poured out" signals that this event will not be joyful, but dreadful.

Third, having gathered the exiles, YHWH brings them "into the wilderness of the peoples" (v. 35), still a dismal place (compare vv. 10-26). Traditionally, this wilderness has been interpreted as either a literal, geographical locale between Babylon and Israel, for example, the Arabian wilderness, or metaphorically, that is, exile. Wherever readers locate this wilderness, there God will enter into "judgment" with the present generation (vv. 35, 36). "Judgment" has strong royal overtones; entering into judgment is another means whereby YHWH reasserts sovereignty (Allen 1990, 14; compare 17:20).

This confrontation between Israel and YHWH will take place "face to face." The tradition says humans cannot see God "face to face" and live (Gen 32:30 [31]; see also Exod 20:18-19; 33:20). Such an intimate encounter brings what is dangerously "profane" into close proximity with the "holy" (see p. xxiii). If it was dangerous for their ancestors when God entered into judgment with them from a distance, how much more so this direct encounter? The danger is for some, not for all.

Fourth, God makes the people "pass under the staff" and brings them "within the bond of the covenant" (v. 37). The meaning of these expressions is unclear. "Bond" is a *hapax legomenon* with no known derivation or meaning. The only other occurrence of the phrase "pass under the staff" is Lev 27:32, where every tenth animal that "passes under the shepherd's staff" is declared holy to YHWH. Since covenant making is a royal activity (compare 17:18) and shepherd is a royal image (see p. 211), these activities may reassert God's sovereignty. They are also acts of "choosing" (compare v. 5). A select number of those who "pass under the staff" will be "declared holy to YHWH," members of the (new) "covenant" community.

The ones not selected are those who "transgress against" God (v. 38*a*). The fifth part of God's vow is that God will "purge out" the rebels from the remainder of the community. Israel undergoes a purification ritual. Those who are not "purged" will be brought "within the bond of the covenant." The rebels will experience the new exodus—God brings them out of the land where they are exiles—but they shall not return to Israel. They are left to wander in the wilderness of the nations until their death. The vow's purpose is that the covenant community will at last know YHWH (v. 38*b*).

After this complex vow, the command to the house of Israel to "go serve your

idols" seems jarring (v. 39). The verse offers a rationale for God's program. God offers the people a choice (Deut 30:15-20; Josh 24:15). If they choose not to listen to YHWH, then they should go serve their idols, but anyone who so chooses will be outside the bond of the covenant. Covenant membership is determined by the decision "to listen to" YHWH. This choosing also impacts YHWH's reputation. The only ones thereafter who will affect YHWH's good name will be the obedient ones. The actions of those who place themselves outside the bond of the covenant will no longer besmirch God's reputation (Eslinger 1998, 114–15). This plan ensures that YHWH's name will never again be profaned because YHWH is covenanted only to the obedient. In other words, Israel's behavior could only make YHWH look good. (The strategy of ensuring obedience is also employed in 36:22-32.)

In contrast to the rebels, this purified community shall enter the land of Israel. "There" (repeated three times in v. 40)—on God's holy mountain, the mountain height of Israel, in the land—they will "serve" YHWH, "all the house of Israel, all of them." This community will experience not YHWH's outpoured wrath but divine "acceptance." "To accept" connotes "to take pleasure, delight in" (compare 1 Chr 28:4; Pss 40:13 [14]; 147:10-11; 149:4; Isa 42:1). This purged community will experience God's delight.

"There" God will "require" of them "contributions," the "choicest of [their] gifts," and all their "sacred things." The Hebrew verb the NRSV translates "require" is the same verb previously translated "consult" (v. 1). Instead of refusing to answer their requests, God will request their offerings. Instead of "gifts" that "defile" (see v. 26), Israel's "choicest of gifts" will be "sacred things," that is, holy. Instead of "provoking" YHWH with illegitimate "pleasing odors" (v. 28), YHWH will accept Israel itself as a "pleasing odor." And instead of defending the divine name before the nations, YHWH will publicly display divine holiness (v. 41).

The final verses of this chapter lay out YHWH's hopes for this "purged" community, who choose to "listen" to him. Principally, they "shall know that I am YHWH" (v. 42). This attainment of knowledge is linked to two divine acts. The first is bringing the people back to the land (v. 42). The second is that God will "deal with" Israel "for the sake of" YHWH's name (v. 44). Except for the addition of "with you," the Hebrew is the same as in verses 9, 14, and 22, where YHWH "acted for the sake of my name." But now no "evil ways or corrupt deeds" tarnish YHWH's reputation. God will look good, because Israel will be good. Concern for the divine reputation wins out.

The chapter's conclusion leaves unresolved questions. Has the cycle been broken? How realistic is this vision of the future? Will Israel change? For

Ezekiel's audience the answers to these questions lie in a future not yet realized. But their future is today's past. (For consideration of these questions, see p. 226.)

Theological and Ethical Analysis

(1) "Ezekiel 20:1-44 is one of the Bible's most troubling texts" (Darr 2002, 1290). Verses 25–26 are at the center of this trouble. How could God give the people such defiling, deadly laws? Among the most vexing questions of theodicy is: how can bad things emanate from a good God? The Bible is not as disturbed by the notion that God might have a shadow side as readers might be (see p. 80). In monotheism that ascribes to God sovereignty over history, there can be no good and bad deities, but only one God by which to explain human experiences. From a human view, that means God is somehow responsible for the horrors and suffering of the world. Monotheism posits a morally ambiguous God who is both/and rather than either/or. Although many readers may be uncomfortable with the notion, Ezekiel's claim that God granted "not good statutes" is consistent with claims that God deceives (1 Kgs 22:19-23; Jer 20:7; Ezek 14:9-11), intentionally hardens hearts (Exod 9:12; 10:1; 11:10; Isa 6:10-11), wounds and heals (Deut 32:39; Job 5:18), and might be inclined to lead us into temptation (Matt 6:13 KJV). Overall, the Bible presents a God as morally complex and ambiguous as any human being, except on a cosmic scale.

How does one respond to Ezekiel's portrayal of God? One possibility is to concur. Ezekiel's insistence that everything hangs on God's sovereignty has a long and venerable history in the faith. Another possibility is to deny altogether that "evil" is a part of divine character, which also has a long and venerable history in the faith (Jas 1:13; 1 John 1:5). A third possibility is to wrestle with ambiguity and to consider that there might be other options. The challenge of faith is answering the question "Did God cause (fill in the blank)?" The answer could be, "Yes and/or no."

(2) The history of the interpretation of Ezek 20:25-26 in early Jewish and Christian literature is also instructive (relying upon van der Horst 1992, 94–118). Christian exegetes interpreted this passage in an antinomian and anti-Jewish sense. The author of the *Didascalia* (third century C.E.) interpreted the "not good" laws as the "heavy burden and direct commandments too numerous to mention" that were given as punishment for the idolatry of the golden calf (Exod 32–34). The coming of Christ destroyed these laws since Christians have been set free from idolatry (van der Horst 1992, 109–10). Origen distinguished between two types of interpretation of the law, the literal, which renders a law "not good," "that kills" (see 2 Cor 3:6), and the spiritual, which is possible

through Christ and the Holy Spirit (van der Horst 1992, 111–13).

Perhaps in response to Christian interpretation, Jewish interpreters took a different tack. The "not good" laws were not Torah or even given by God. Instead they referred only to Rabbinic rules that were unrewarding for Jews living in Diaspora or to pagan laws that Jews were forced to observe (van der Horst 1992, 100–5).

Considering the history of interpretation of these verses reminds readers of Christianity's tendency to interpret both Testaments in ways that foster anti-Semitism. This is a legacy that readers must steadfastly resist, because it impacts the lives of real people. Pieter Willem van der Horst notes that in the early Common Era "nothing less than the position of the Jews as the covenanted people of God" was at stake (van der Horst 1992, 118). Once Jews were denied this position, the obvious course was to "purge" them from the true covenant community's midst (compare Ezek 20:38). Similar interpretations must be resisted today. Borrowing from Origen, we might call such an interpretation a "not good" law. If readers find the interpretations in this commentary to be anti-Jewish, they should steadfastly resist them.

(3) This chapter brings together three of the four words associated with Israel's views of "purity": holy, profane, and defile (unclean) (see pp. xxi–xxiii). The holiness of YHWH's name must not be profaned.

Most readers, conscious of it or not, believe in God's holiness and the need to protect it from profanation. The unasked questions, however, are how holiness is defined, and who or what would profane it. If a separation is to be maintained between the sacred and the profane, then there must be clear definitions of each. By definition, what is defined as "profane" will be excluded from the category of "holy."

In Judaism today, the question of profaning God's name (Hebr. *ḥilul hašēm*) arises in the context of domestic violence. Some say that such subjects should not be aired publicly; it is *ḥilul hašēm* even to imply that Jewish husbands can be wife batterers. Others argue that a *ḥilul hašēm* is committed daily as women are forced to stay in marriages that endanger them and their children (Graetz 1998, 196). The definition of "profane" is open to negotiation.

Separation of the impure from the sacred lies behind the vitriolic debates around homosexuality in Christian communities. If homosexuality is profane, then clearly homosexuals must be excluded from the "holy" community. But if homosexuality is a gift from God, then clearly gays and lesbians should be welcomed into the "holy" community, including into ordained ministry. Which is *ḥilul hašēm*, being gay or excluding gays?

However one negotiates definitions of profane, "sacred" and "profane"

remain antithetical forces, including and excluding others. Perhaps what is needed today are *other categories* more conducive to peace within faith communities.

(4) Ezekiel does in this chapter what the people are supposed to do in the future (v. 43): he *remembers* the history. Memory is a key issue in trauma where two primary problems may arise. First, intrusive memories or the subsequent reexperiencing of the thoughts, feelings, and images reminiscent of trauma may beset a person. Second, a person's memories may be clouded or confusing. This second problem offers another perspective for viewing the significance of this chapter. Jon Allen says,

> Many persons . . . have gone for years—even decades—without remembering various traumatic childhood experiences. Then, seemingly out of nowhere, images suggestive of traumatic experience start coming to mind. (1995, 95)

Psychologists today know that extreme emotion has significant effects on memory. Extreme emotions may impede the brain circuits that promote storage of coherent memories (Allen 1995, 104). Dissociation, repression, normal forgetting, and even types of amnesia can further impair a person's ability to remember trauma (Allen 1995, 107). Clinical literature demonstrates that this is especially true in the context of severe, prolonged, and repeated trauma.

Ezekiel's emphasis in the "historical" chapters on "knowing," "remembering," and "forgetting" (see 16:22, 43, 61, 63; 23:35) seems to reflect the experience of a victim struggling to remember his or her trauma. Failure to remember could cause Israel to continue to reexperience the trauma. "It's fine to let sleeping dogs lie. More commonly, however, the dogs are not sleeping: they're howling and barking" (Allen 1995, 122). Unattended memories of trauma have a habit of making themselves known in other, often destructive ways, including reenacting the experience (Allen 1995, 122). Israel's reenactment takes the form of its recurrent rebellion. This suggests that Israel needed to remember and explore its past trauma to gain self-understanding (Allen 1995, 123). Remembering traumatic experiences helps explain previously incomprehensible symptoms—such as Israel's recurrent sinful behavior. Remembering is a positive, constructive, though painful, part of the process of recovery.

One of the issues in contemporary treatment of trauma is the question of whether "recovered" memories are real or false. One category for thinking about the clarity and accuracy of "recovered" memories is exaggerated or distorted memory (Allen 1995, 110–12), which may fit the numerous instances in this

chapter where Ezekiel makes claims that are found nowhere else in the tradition, such as Israel's practice of child sacrifice.

> Paradoxically, some individuals may self-protectively "remember" traumatic experience as even *more* horrific than it actually was . . . for example, "memories" of bizarre torture or ritual abuse—as horrible as they are—could be created to obscure the even more unthinkable (but tragically more prosaic and common) abuse that occurs within the family, such as beatings, rapes, deprivation, or incarceration. (Allen 1995, 112)

Although it cannot be corroborated, it is possible that Ezekiel remembered Israel's traumatic past, including child sacrifice, as more horrific than it actually was, as a way to obscure the even more unthinkable (but more prosaic) forms of divine abuse, apathy, or maliciousness.

The overall challenge in remembering trauma is to distinguish past from present. One comes to terms with a traumatic experience by remembering it more clearly, putting it into words, and coming to terms with its implications for one's life (Allen 1995, 93). If trauma derails development, the value of remembering is to get one's life back on track. Was Ezekiel (Israel) successful in coming to terms with Israel's trauma and getting Israel's life back on track?

He Has Loosed the Fateful Lightning of His Terrible, Swift Sword (20:45–21:32)

This chapter was drafted in early 2003 when U.S. military forces were closing in on Baghdad. Television commentators declared that "the tip of the spear" was pointed at the heart of Baghdad. The images of sharpened weapons seemed to be taken straight from Ezekiel: "At all their gates I have set the point of the sword" (Ezek 21:15*b* [20]). The sense of déjà vu was almost overwhelming. Jerusalemites and Baghdadis faced the terrible, imminent, and inescapable onslaught of war. War and its consequences are the major themes of this unit.

Literary Analysis

Christian Bible translations follow the Septuagint's chapter divisions and will note that 20:45 is 21:1 in Hebrew. In the MT, 21:1-37 follows 20:44. Readers should note that chapter and verse numbering will differ in commentaries that follow Hebrew versification.

This unit is difficult to translate. It contains some of the most explicit descriptions of the exile's experiences of siege and deportation. For a moment

the veil over the trauma is lifted and readers are given a glimpse of the terror they must have faced. The fractured nature of the language might be indicative of the traumatic nature of exile (see p. 6). Traumatic memories are initially "*fragmented* components of frozen imagery and sensation" (Herman 1997, 177, emphasis added). The victim's narration may be as fragmented as the initial memories. Moreover, as the narrative closes in on the most unbearable moments, the sufferer often finds it increasingly difficult to use words (Herman 1997, 177). Ezekiel's garbled words and tortured syntax have the characteristics of a trauma victim. A reconstructed narrative of trauma may look more like a puzzle with many pieces still missing. The sense of random pieces in Ezekiel's "puzzle" extends to the issue of genre. This unit contains pieces of numerous genres, as if Ezekiel cannot settle on one into which to pour all his emotion.

The vocabulary of this chapter also expresses the sense of trauma experienced by the exiles. The term "sword" occurs sixteen times in this chapter alone, more than any other chapter in the Bible (21:3, 4, 5, 9 [2x], 11 [2x], 12, 14 [3x], 15, 19, 20, 28 [2x]). Specialized vocabulary associated with preparation, appearance, and use of swords in warfare appears throughout (Darr 2002, 1298–99). Repetition and specialized knowledge transforms "sword" into a metonym for war itself.

Various formulas and thematic issues suggest divisions in the unit. The unit is framed by images of fire (20:45-48; 21:31-32). The *prophetic word formula* introduces three subunits (20:45; 21:8, 18). The first closes with the *prophetic utterance formula* (21:7). The second (21:17), and the unit as a whole, closes with the *conclusion formula for divine speech*. The address, "mortal," a new command to prophesy (21:28), and a change in content mark a fourth subunit. This delineates four separate oracles (20:45–21:7; 21:8-17; 21:18-27; 21:28-32).

The catchword *sword* binds these four oracles together. It is not clear if the oracles were brought together by an editor or were created as a logically progressive unit. The Exegetical Analysis will consider the oracles sequentially without arguing that they form a coherent narrative. Considering the effects of trauma, it seems futile to impose coherence. Although we will try to reconstruct Ezekiel's narrative, in the end ambiguity and unresolved questions remain.

The placement of this unit within the overall book may have been determined by the previous statement that YHWH will be king over the people (20:33). In antiquity kings were warriors. This unit provides a vivid description of both divine and human warring kings.

Exegetical Analysis

20:45–21:7

The oracles commence with the *hostile orientation formula*, to which YHWH adds an additional command, "preach against. . ." (20:46; 21:2; compare Amos 7:16; Mic 2:6). The commands are essentially synonymous, creating a combative mood.

The objects of God's hostility are "the south (*têmān*). . . the south (*dārôm*). . . the forest land in the Negeb." The two different words translated "south" can be understood as place names (Teman and Darom) or a direction (Greenberg 1983, 417–18). "Negeb" has the same dual meaning, so the last place might be translated "the forest land in the south." We are not told *why* God is hostile to the "south," but as a result God will "kindle a fire" (20:47). The language of fire may explain the repetition of "the forest land in the Negeb"; "forest" implies fuel for a fire. This fire "shall devour every green tree . . . and every dry tree" within it. "Green tree" and "dry tree" function as a *merismus*. The destruction's totality is further indicated by the repetition of "every." Not a single tree will survive.

The fire's intensity is heightened by the phrase "blazing flame." The Hebrew juxtaposes two related forms to create a superlative like "holy of holies" (Greenberg 1983, 418). There will not be enough water to quench this fire of fires, which will scorch "all faces from south to north." "Face" also means "surface." The fire will scorch the earth's surface from north to south, another *merismus*. Given the close connection between "faces" (20:47) and "flesh" (20:48), readers should maintain the ambiguity of "face." The fire would also scorch literal faces—of humans and animals.

Fire has been a favorite military tactic since wars began. The ancient world was limited to conventional fire, not the horror of nuclear fire. But readers, ancient and modern, may be horrified to discover that this scorched-earth policy is YHWH's: "All flesh shall see that [I] have kindled it" (20:48).

The announcement evokes one of Ezekiel's rare reactions to God's words (20:49; compare 4:14; 9:8; 11:13). Ezekiel's other outbursts were to events that went beyond extreme (e.g., the destruction of all Jerusalemites), suggesting that Ezekiel protests that God's conflagration is so extreme the exiles accuse him of telling tall tales ("a maker of allegories" [*māšāl*; see p. 63]). Ezekiel does not state why this accusation is problematic. Perhaps he is concerned that the people will dismiss God's words as too extreme to be meaningful.

Although what follows is set off by the *prophetic word formula*, it does not introduce a separate unit. The striking parallelism with the previous verses suggests the function is to decode YHWH's previous speech. This new speech

clarifies a number of aspects of the initial speech. First, the synonymous parallelism of Jerusalem//sanctuaries//house of Israel shows that YHWH's hostility is directed against Judah, the southernmost part of the original kingdom (21:2; compare 20:46). Second, "sword" interprets "fire" as a military weapon; YHWH's hostility will be expressed in battle (21:3, compare 20:47). Fire and sword are paired as weapons of mass destruction in the Bible (e.g., Josh 11:11; Judg 1:8; Isa 66:16; Ezek 5:1-4) and in Western Asian texts (Boadt 1980, 175 and 175n12). Indeed, "slash-and-burn" persists in today's war lexicon.

That the sword cuts off "both righteous and wicked" (21:3-4) unequivocally demonstrates the limits of Ezekiel's view that YHWH punishes only those deserving punishment (9:4-6; 14:12-20; 18:1-32). "Righteous and wicked" function as a *merismus*, expressing the totality of the destruction of "all flesh" (compare 20:47). Ezekiel's theology collapses in the face of war's reality. Fire and sword are the divine equivalent of "shock and awe," and "collateral damage" is inevitable. Neither righteousness nor wickedness determines whether or not one will be a casualty.

This oracle closes with a *sign-act*. Ezekiel is commanded to "moan" (21:6). The verb denotes nonverbal behavior expressing grief and distress (compare 9:4). He is to moan with "rupturing loins" (author's translation; "loins" represent strength). The expression "bitter grief" is a *hapax legomenon*. Although the idioms are obscure, Ezekiel clearly pantomimes trauma's resulting physical and emotional collapse. He is to do this where the exiles can see him. When they ask why he moans, Ezekiel is to respond, "Because of the news that has come" (21:7). The "news" probably refers to the announcement of judgment in 20:45–21:5. Ezekiel reacts extremely to an extreme message.

Those to whom Ezekiel reports that news should also display extreme reactions. Two emotional and two physical reactions are described in parallel lines (21:7). Emotionally, "every heart will melt" and "every spirit will faint." Courage and emotional stamina will evaporate. Physically, "all hands will be feeble" and "all knees will turn to water" (compare 7:17). Hearers will collapse and wet themselves.

The people have apparently failed to respond appropriately to the news of impending war. This is understandable. Faced with hardship, Judeans may have looked for renewed strength, to run and not be weary (Isa 40:31). They may have decided to stay the course, be resolved, and courageous. Ezekiel must demonstrate that they will inevitably respond with shattering fear and grief. When war comes, "it will be fulfilled."

21:8-17

“The sword! The sword!” Repetition demands attention, fastening readers’ eyes upon “a sword” (v. 9), so “sharpened” (also vv. 10, 11) and “polished” (also vv. 10, 11 [2x]; 15 [?]) that it can be used “for slaughter” (v. 10). In regular usage “slaughter” is used for “butchering” (Gen 43:16; Exod 22:1 [21:37]; Deut 28:31; 1 Sam 25:11). In English, “slaughter” can refer to an individual killing or a massacre, its meaning here. The sword is so polished it flashes “like lightning,” recalling Marine Corps commercials, which use images of a flashing sword and lightning to convey their swift, lethal ferocity.

Commentators unanimously declare the last half of verse 10 to be “unintelligible” and sometimes simply omit it from consideration. An initial difficulty is understanding the first-person plural, “can we make merry.” Perhaps YHWH makes use of the “royal we” (Gen 1:26). In addition to a ruler’s scepter (19:11) or a shepherd’s staff (20:37), “rod” can be a stick brandished to discipline the wayward (e.g., Exod 21:20; 2 Sam 7:14; Prov 26:3). God laments there can be no element of joy in punishing Israel (see Deut 28:63). God could delight in Israel’s eventual repentance after being disciplined, but Israel has despised the rod, apparently leaving God no alternative but to resort to a *steel* rod, a sword, that does not discipline but destroys. Thus, God cannot make merry: destruction eliminates the possibility of repentance (ArtScroll, 352–53).

The sword is again polished and readers remain mesmerized by the play of light upon it (v. 11). If readers tear their gaze away, they will notice the sword is grasped in a hand; it will be used (compare v. 5). This is emphasized by the parallel phrase, “in the slayer’s hand.” “To slay” implies premeditated killing (e.g., Gen 4:8; Exod 21:14; Judg 9:54; 1 Sam 24:11 [12]).

The extent and impact of the slaying is intimated in the next verse. Ezekiel is to “cry and wail,” another *sign-act* (v. 12). The Hebrew for “wail” may be an onomatopoetic expression of the ululating wails heard in various cultures today. Individually and in parallel, these are words associated with death (Isa 65:14; Jer 25:34). Ezekiel bewails the deaths of “my people” and “all Israel’s princes.” “My people” is covenant language (11:20; 14:11; 34:30; 37:23, 27; compare Exod 6:7; Lev 26:12; Ruth 1:16). “Israel’s princes” references the Davidic monarchy (compare 19:1; see p. 109). The covenant community and the royal dynasty together are thrown to the sword. No wonder Ezekiel must “strike the thigh,” a gesture of remorse and grief (Jer 31:19; Freibel 1989, 708). Ezekiel’s performance informs his audience that this should be *their* response to the divine message.

Commentators also declare verse 13 “unintelligible” and omit it from consideration. “For consider,” implies an audience response at the end of verse 12. With the repetition of “despise(d)” and “rod” from verse 10, the response

perhaps protests the use of a sword for discipline. YHWH responds that the sword is the consequence of Israel's failure to accept other forms of discipline.

This implied *disputation* prompts YHWH's command to "prophesy" and "strike hand to hand" or clap, which expresses hostility or indignation (v. 14; see 6:11 and p. 35). Ezekiel role-played the exiles in the previous sign-act, here he role-plays YHWH's fury (presumably at Israel's having despised the rod). YHWH's own irate clapping in verse 17 forms an *inclusio* that frames this subunit. Within this frame God's fury is graphically unleashed.

The rest of verse 14 considers the sword's destructiveness. The meaning of the expression "let the sword fall twice, thrice" is debated. Some argue for the presence of three swords. Verse 9 speaks of "a sword, a sword," equated with the swords of "slaughter" (v. 10) and the "slayer" (see v. 11). Now there is a third sword, worse than the other two, "a sword for killing" (ArtScroll, 356; see also Terrien 1996, 124). Others identify falling twice and thrice as a rapid slashing motion, creating the visual illusion of multiple weapons (Block 1997, 680; Darr 2002, 1300). Whether multiple swords or one rapidly moving sword, the effect is of being surrounded by swords, making escape impossible and inducing terror in those who face it (v. 15).

If the news of the sword's unsheathing does not move the people to distress (v. 7), looking down the length of the blade inevitably will. Now the sword is so close that one can see only the blade's point, a point set "at all their gates." Like the spear pointed at Baghdad's center, the sword pointed at Jerusalem's gates means that slaughter is inevitable. In ancient times, gates were a city's main defense. Its best fortifications will not protect Jerusalem from this sword. "Ah," the same word found in 6:11 in association with clapping, is a cry of fury (see above). This may be Ezekiel's cry, the people's cry, or even YHWH's cry. Helpless rage may be all one can cry when facing a flashing, polished sword.

The sword is now commanded as though it were a living force (v. 16). The slaughtering commences. It will slash in all directions. The subunit closes with the announcement that this sword is wielded at YHWH's behest. In fury, YHWH has unsheathed this sword; and the only way to assuage that fury is to use it (v. 17).

21:18-27

Ezekiel is commanded to perform another *sign-act*, somehow making a picture depicting two roads that originate at the same point (v. 19). These are two routes "for the sword of the king of Babylon to come." If the people have yet to comprehend the coming disaster, this sign-act removes any ambiguity or doubt.

YHWH's sword is held in the hand of Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon.

Furthermore, Ezekiel is to place a signpost where these two roads diverge. This signpost will direct the sword toward two cities—Rabbah of the Ammonites or Jerusalem of Judah (v. 20). The normal route of armies from the Tigris/Euphrates Valley was to travel northward up the Euphrates through the Kurdish area of Iraq, west through southern Turkey, and then south through Syria along the Orontes River, which makes Damascus a likely site for the fork in the road. From Damascus armies that took the left route went down the Golan Heights and the east side of the Jordan River to Amman, Jordan (Rabbah of the Ammonites). Taking the right fork down the west bank of the Jordan Valley led to Jerusalem. Rabbah, Ammon's capital, is literally a "great city." Jerusalem, Judah's capital, is a "fortified" city. Neither would be a cakewalk for Nebuchadnezzar. He could expect stiff resistance, making the ease with which he slices through the chosen city all the more shocking.

At the moment both cities face only potential destruction. Nebuchadnezzar stands at the crossroads. He decides which route to take by consulting the gods. In antiquity, a human king engaged in war at the behest of his god, the commander-in-chief, who directed both the nonhuman powers, and the human army. Therefore, war began by divine order, or at least with divine approval, manifested by omens (Jeffers 1996, 236). Israel's leaders sought YHWH's approval before embarking on war (e.g., Judg 20:27-28; 1 Sam 30:7-10; 1 Kgs 22:1-6). This provided divine legitimization for kings' war efforts.

Nebuchadnezzar employs three methods of divination (v. 21). He "shakes the arrows, he consults the teraphim, he inspects the liver." It is easy to be diverted into investigating the various forms of divination and the extent to which they were or were not practiced in parts of Western Asia. The methods related to the arrows and teraphim are particularly obscure (Jeffers 1996, 184–85, 190–93, 227–28). Liver omens are well attested throughout Mesopotamia. The issue, however, is not which type of divination Nebuchadnezzar employs, but that he employs multiple types.

Ancient diviners understood that many factors might prohibit a clear communication from the deity. Performing multiple inquiries was a common practice to ensure a right answer (see Bowen 1994, 14). A biblical example is Jehoshaphat's request to cross-check the answer of Ahab's four hundred prophets (1 Kgs 22:7). Since Nebuchadnezzar performs no less than three separate forms of divination, when "into his right hand comes the lot for Jerusalem" (v. 22), the audience would be absolutely sure that he has received a definitive answer from the god(s) to take the right-hand path.

The horrifying consequences of the king's divinations are presented from

Jerusalem's viewpoint (v. 22). They see Babylon's king appearing with battering rams to destroy their gates, constructing ramps to bring the battering rams closer, and building siege towers (the same Hebrew word as "siege-wall" in 4:2), behind which attackers can observe the Jerusalem army's movements. Over all this rises the "bone-chilling war cries of the enemy soldier" (Block 1997, 687). This is no longer playing war as in 4:1-2; this is the real thing. To appreciate what they faced, imagine rewriting this from Baghdad's perspective. Their lot has been chosen. They see tanks, feel the explosions of bombs, and hear fighter jets and their enemy's bone-chilling war cries.

Although the individual words of verse 23 are reasonably clear, the syntax and meaning are anything but. Jerusalem's reaction to the result of Nebuchadnezzar's divinations is that it is "false." They simply do not believe that the tip of Nebuchadnezzar's sword is pointed at their gates. The next clause is cryptic. Who swears the oaths? What are they about? What is the syntactical relationship of the oaths to the statement about false divination? Who is the "he" who brings guilt to remembrance?

Some intertextual considerations may prove helpful. A similar grammatical construction, "to bring my sin to remembrance," followed by a negative consequence, occurs in 1 Kgs 17:18. Elijah's Phoenician hostess complains that his presence has brought some unknown sin on her part to YHWH's remembrance, resulting in the death of her son (see also Num 5:15). The pattern is that an unknown or hidden sin, when brought to God's attention, results in potentially lethal consequences.

Since "swearing," "oath," and "covenant" are all terms dealing with formal agreements (e.g., Deut 31:20; Josh 9:15; 2 Kgs 11:4), perhaps the "solemn oaths" reference Jerusalem's various political treaty partners (e.g., 16:26-29). Those who believed such treaties would save Jerusalem (17:13) would consider the divination false. The last occurrence of "false" and "divination" in the same sentence described the prophets who assured the people that Jerusalem would be spared (13:7, 23). Israel's rejection of the truth reveals their rebelliousness, bringing to God's remembrance previous divine declarations that the people's rebelliousness merited punishment (e.g., ch. 20). This reading is supported by verse 24, which contains three verbs, all meaning "to reveal," and three nouns, all meaning "rebellious." Denying what is true exposes the hidden sin of rebellion, and the consequence will be captivity (compare 12:3).

Then, without warning, Ezekiel turns the focus on the royal house, loosing a tirade against the "vile, wicked prince of Israel" (v. 25). The prince is unnamed, but Ezekiel's audience may have identified him as Zedekiah. Again, the Iraq War provides a parallel. The initial aim of attacking Baghdad was to depose Saddam

Hussein, its wicked ruler. The fate of leader and city are intertwined. The day of Jerusalem's prince has come, marking the end of everything (compare 7:10, 12).

The prince is commanded to remove his turban and take off his crown, the distinctive headgear that identifies him as ruler (v. 26). Removing this headgear indicates loss of rule and status (compare Jer 13:18). But the ruler's loss of position merely indicates the larger crisis: "things shall not remain as they are." The whole world turns upside down, not just the prince's life.

Reversal characterizes this crazy, mixed-up world. Verse 27 also presents interpretive difficulties. It begins with a thrice-repeated word that in Hebrew sounds almost inarticulate, *ʿawwâ*. It is hardly surprising that cataclysmic upheaval might reduce someone to babbling. The root meaning of *ʿawwâ* is "twist, or distort" (Zimmerli 1979, 447). The place name Ai (Josh 7–8) is probably derived from this root and is understood to mean "ruin," since a ruin is a twisted or distorted town. Jerusalem's world was in ruins like Baghdad, Kirkuk, and other Iraqi cities as Saddam's regime crumbled. "I will make it," says YHWH. It is YHWH who twists the known universe out of recognition.

Ezekiel looks forward to the coming of one "whose right it is," whereupon God will give him that right (21:27*b*). The Hebrew word for "right" (*mišpāṭ*), or "justice," is a term rulers are to embody (2 Sam 8:15; 1 Kgs 10:9; Isa 9:7 [6]; Jer 23:5). Verses 26-27 highlight a transfer of power and authority between rulers. This will not be a transfer from one Davidic king to another but from Judah's royal ruler to one who comes from the outside: Nebuchadnezzar (Seitz 1989, 157). This ultimate regime change has never occurred before. The world is so twisted that Jerusalem's new ruler is the king of Babylon!

21:28-32

The final subunit mercifully turns readers' eyes from the sight of Jerusalem's death. First, attention is drawn to the road not taken, Rabbah of the Ammonites. YHWH commands Ezekiel to prophesy against the Ammonites concerning "their reproach," or "mockery" (v. 28; compare 5:14-15; 16:57; 22:4). Ezekiel 25:1-7 describes the Ammonites celebrating Jerusalem's destruction. Thus, 21:28 suggests that the Ammonites are celebrating Rabbah's deliverance from Nebuchadnezzar's sword. Similarly, Iran and Syria might have breathed a sigh of relief that the United States attacked Iraq and not them. But Rabbah's joy is short-lived.

Generally these verses are interpreted as an oracle against the Ammonites. Rendered colloquially, "they'll get theirs too." These verses pick up the language of the sword song against Israel (vv. 9*b*-10*a*), of false divination (v. 23*a*), and the

wicked prince's punishment (v. 25). Not surprisingly, there are difficulties in translation and interpretation.

Verse 28*b* exhibits an ABA'B' pattern that highlights the sword's deadly aspects. The sword's sharpness is conveyed by two images of the sword's function, "drawn for slaughter" and "to consume" (AA'), and its preparation, "polished . . . to flash like lightning" (BB'). When the sword is drawn against the Ammonites, it will be every bit as deadly as it was against Jerusalem.

Each "you" in verse 29 is feminine singular. The two possible antecedents are the city (Rabbah) and the sword. In Hebrew both are feminine; both occur in this verse. The combination of "false visions" and "divining lies" closely resembles 13:6, 9, suggesting that Rabbah's prophets, like Jerusalem's, assured the populace that all would be well—the sword was not directed at them. Ammonites, however, are vile and wicked and will be punished (v. 29; compare v. 25). The Babylonians will place their sword over Ammon's neck.

The direct address to the sword in the final verses, similar to verse 16, recounts its future fate. Each subsequent "you" is feminine singular, making it clear that the sword is still being addressed. The sword is commanded to return to its sheath (v. 30). A sheathed sword is rendered "safe," like a gun with a safety lock, but with one movement its lethal potential returns. YHWH decides on a more permanent solution. The sword is to return to where it was created. "Create (*bārāʾ*)," used only of YHWH's creative activity (compare Gen 1:1), reminds readers that this sword, though perhaps bearing the imprint *Made in Babylon*, was ultimately crafted by God.

YHWH will "judge" the sword (compare 7:3; 11:10; 16:38; 18:30), pouring indignation and blowing fire upon it, melting the sword back down to base metal (v. 31). The unit returns to the image of fire with which it begins, creating another association between fire and sword. Swords are forged, and destroyed, in fire. YHWH will give this now worthless sword "into brutish hands." The perfectly crafted sword was given into the "hand" of the Babylonian king (vv. 11, 19); the destroyed sword is given to other hands. According to the Greek, they are the hands of "barbarians" who are "skillful to destroy."

"You" (fem. sing.) shall be fuel for the fire (v. 32). The return to the opening imagery raises the question of whether the sword is the antecedent. Land and city, both grammatically feminine, were initially consumed. And "your" (fem. sing.) blood shall enter the earth. Neither swords, land, nor cities bleed. The sword is but a metaphor for Babylon's army. Destroying the sword destroys the army, which "shall be remembered no more." The unit ends with the message that the sword will never again be used as God's weapon against Israel.

Theological and Ethical Analysis

(1) It seemed clear in March 2003, that if "president of the United States" were substituted for "king of Babylon," Iran or Syria for Rabbah of the Ammonites, Saddam Hussein for "wicked prince," and Baghdad for Jerusalem, this chapter could narrate the Iraq War. That the chapter mentions no names allows later generations to insert the names of the equivalent actors in their day. Inserting current names implies divine sanction of the Iraq War. God placed a sword in America's hand as punishment against Saddam Hussein for resisting other forms of discipline (21:10, 13). As God handed Jerusalem over to Nebuchadnezzar, God has handed Iraq over to the United States.

As tempting as this reading might be, it offers a false vision. A crucial piece is missing. In Ezekiel, God's sword is pointed at the heart of *the covenant people*. If the United States somehow corresponds to the covenant people (a debatable proposition) the better analogy would be: "set your face toward Washington, D.C., and preach against the White House and Congress; prophesy against the United States of America." Reading this chapter from the viewpoint of Baghdad helps us appreciate its political dynamics and emotional impact. But the chapter does not describe God's war against the enemies of God's people, it describes God's war against God's people.

Moreover, interpreting this text as indicating that the United States wields the sword on YHWH's behalf would scarcely be cause for celebration. When YHWH uses human power as the instrument of judgment, that power eventually falls under YHWH's judgment. This was true for both Assyria (Isa 10:12-19; 31:8-9) and Babylon (Jer 50:1–51:64; Ezek 21:30-32). There is no glory in being the rod of God's anger (Isa 10:5).

Those who advocate the end of all wars might be comforted by the sword's destruction, though troubled that YHWH can "create" anew (Isa 65:17), even create a new sword. It is therefore worth noting that, in Ezekiel, *Israel itself never wields the sword*. Only God fights the battles in Ezekiel, either against Israel or on Israel's behalf (e.g., chs. 38–39). As in Isaiah, Israel must "be quiet" (Isa 7:4; see also Ezek 38:11) and see what YHWH does on its behalf. In Ezekiel's vision of the new Temple community (chs. 40–48), the "sword" completely disappears. Perhaps as God decommissioned the divine bow (Gen 9:13), God has now decommissioned the sword. If God unilaterally disarmed after this war, no nation can claim to wield the sword on God's behalf. Nations may still fight wars, but God has no part of them.

(2) In biblical "holy wars," none of the enemy—whether Israel or the nations—is left standing. Total annihilation is seen as biblically justified. God's wars

are deemed "just wars." But are they? In traditional just war theory, one criterion for deciding if war is justified (*ad bellum*) is proportionality. That is, will the prospective costs of war be balanced by the values that are being defended? What losses to the world community and oneself can be morally sustained given the values in defense of which the war might be fought? During a war (*in bello*), proportionality establishes limits to the use of justifiable force. Is the good pursued or defended commensurate with the unintended losses that may reasonably be expected? Even discriminate tactics can be immoral if the foreseen, unintended loss of life outweighs the defended values.

Chapter 20 wrestles with proportionality *ad bellum*. Initially, the cost of the war (the destruction of Israel) would not balance the value being defended (the sanctity of YHWH's name). Only when that value is apparently abandoned (20:33-38) is the decision for war made. But there is no argument made *in bello* for proportionality. The moral question is whether Jerusalem's total destruction is commensurate with covenant discipline. On what basis can YHWH's tactics be morally defended?

It is necessary to remember that Ezekiel is theologically interpreting the historical event of Jerusalem's destruction by the Babylonians. But that theologizing depicts God as having no sense of proportionality when engaging in warfare. The book of Amos opens with oracles of judgment against six foreign nations for committing war crimes (Amos 1:2–2:3). Perhaps God should also be held to this standard, so that total destruction becomes a war crime that would profane God's holy name.

(3) The book *The Chalice and the Blade* (Eisler 1987) may illuminate this chapter. Riane Eisler argues that historically there are two major conceptions of the deity. One images the universe as an all-giving Mother from whose womb all life emerges. The other image is the divine Father who wields a thunderbolt or sword. Societies governed by these different conceptions of the universe develop different social structures (xvi). The Mother image develops a partnership model, in which social relations are primarily based on the principle of linking rather than ranking. The Father image develops a dominator model, traditionally defined as patriarchy or matriarchy, where social relationships are based on the ranking of one half of humanity over the other (xvii).

The book's title derives from these two models of god and society. The chalice symbolizes the worship of life-generating and nurturing powers. The blade symbolizes the power to take life, that is, to establish and enforce domination (Eisler 1987). It is stating the obvious that for millennia the blade has been a male symbol. Eisler is convinced that the underlying problem is not men as a sex but a social system in which both men and women are taught to

equate true masculinity with violence and dominance (xviii).

Eisler finds that the weapons of ancient warrior gods often represent the god's powers. This "deification" of weapons leads to a "glorification of the lethal power of the sharp blade accompanied [by] a way of life in which the organized slaughter of other human beings . . . appears to have been normative" (49). Eisler appeals to society to turn away from the blade and to choose instead the way of the Chalice.

Whether or not readers agree with Eisler's conclusions, her research reminds readers that there are alternative approaches to conflict besides the sword. War does not have to be the answer. It also raises questions regarding gender and Ezekiel. What were the women of Jerusalem (and Babylon and Ammon) doing during this war? How would they have theologically interpreted history? Might they have been more willing to consider a theology of divine weakness or of a god reaching out to them in care and support?

Beneath the Cleansing Flood (22:1-31)

This chapter recalls the observation "there is nothing new under the sun" (Eccl 1:9) since it primarily reiterates what comes before. Upon closer examination, a focus on the causes, consequences, and cure of defilement sets this chapter apart. These topics are touched on elsewhere in Ezekiel (see esp. chs. 20 and 36), but here they take center stage. (For further consideration, see pp. xxi–xxiii.)

Literary Analysis

After the near-disintegration of language in the previous unit, chapter 22 is a relief. The material appears crafted, which is evident in the structure. Each subunit (vv. 1-16, 17-22, 23-31) begins with the *prophetic word formula* (vv. 1, 17, 23), with YHWH directing Ezekiel ("mortal") to address a particular topic ("bloody city," v. 2; "house of Israel," v. 18; "a land," v. 24). Each topic is developed in relation to the dominant theme of defilement ("abominable deeds," v. 2; "dross," v. 18; "not cleansed," v. 24). Finally, each oracle closes with the *recognition formula* or the *prophetic utterance formula* (vv. 16, 22, 31).

Despite this orderliness, the subunits seem unrelated—to each other and to the previous unit. Connections are primarily through catchwords. The first subunit employs terms from the previous unit: *city* and *princes*. Two keywords

link the three subunits: "(with)in (*bětôk*)" (vv. 3, 7, 9, 13, 18, 21, 22, 25, 26) and "shed" or "poured out (*šāpak*)" (vv. 3, 4, 6, 9, 12, 22, 27, 31).

Exegetical Analysis

The opening (v. 2) repeats the language of 20:4, except "the bloody city," not the elders, will hear of its abominations. The abominations listed are clearly committed by humans, though every "you" and "your" in the unit is feminine singular, referring to the city. The repeated invocation of the feminine, joined with the continued reference to blood and defilement, evokes thoughts of menstruating women, whose blood is a source of defilement (Lev 15:19-24; Darr 2002, 1307).

Ezekiel revisits two previous themes in verse 3: shedding blood (16:38 and 18:10) and idols (esp. chs. 6, 14). It might be viewed as a proverb: "A city that sheds blood within itself and makes idols, defiling itself: its time has come." A coming time leads readers to expect judgment (compare 7:7, 12).

Through bloodshed and idolatry the city has become "guilty" and "defiled" (v. 4). There are two types of sin, legal and ritual, each requiring judgment. The unusual phrase "the appointed time of your years has come" is an idiom for death. The city will die prematurely. Like smoking and other unhealthy choices, bloodshed and idolatry shorten the "time of your years." The city's demise will be more of an embarrassment than a tragedy, an appropriate fate for a tumultuous city (compare 7:7) that "sins against the Name," that is, YHWH (v. 5, author's translation).

The fate of city and leader are intertwined (see p. 129). The judgment of Sin City includes "the princes of Israel" (v. 6). Each successive "prince" shows his disregard of life in his intent to shed blood "according to his power." Princes with the most power shed the most blood.

The list of their sins (vv. 7-12) is similar, though not identical, to that of the wicked son's (18:10-12). Nor do they correspond exactly to existing biblical laws. The list illustrates offenses reflecting utter disregard for life. They are summarized in one simple statement: "You have forgotten me." This statement recalls the repeated admonition in Deuteronomy that the people "not forget" YHWH. Faulty memory results in disastrous actions with even more disastrous consequences (Deut 4:23-24; 6:12-15; 8:19).

The list's length points to the accumulative effect of these "abominable deeds." The text is overloaded with sins (blood, lewdness, menstruation, nakedness, idols) that "defile" and "profane." The princes' misdeeds have thoroughly polluted the city. Pollution keeps building up until it reaches a point

beyond the level of tolerance, when a cataclysm becomes inevitable (Frymer-Kensky 1983, 408; see p. xxii).

In response, YHWH claps in anger (v. 13; compare 21:14 [19], 17 [22]) and asks, "Can your courage endure, or can your hands remain strong in the days when I shall deal with you?" (v. 14). In light of previous declarations that hands would turn feeble when the inevitable cataclysm comes (7:17; 21:7 [12]), the answer is unequivocally "No."

Just as God dispossessed the land's previous inhabitants because their sins had defiled it (Gen 15:16; Lev 20:23; Deut 9:4-5), God dispossesses the current inhabitants of the city by scattering them among the nations (v. 15; compare 12:15; 20:23). Thus, YHWH will "purge your filthiness out of you." Recalling that the antecedent to the "your" and "you" is the city, this is not about removing the sin from the people, but about removing the people from the city. God's judgment is to rid Jerusalem of its defiling contents. Seeing the people themselves as pollutants provides a clever segue to the next subunit.

Ezekiel is next directed to "the house of Israel." Ezekiel uses a new metaphor, for him, to describe the problem: "dross" (v. 18). The imagery in this unit derives from metallurgical processes. But Ezekiel does something new in his metaphorical application of refining ore. It is instructive to compare Ezekiel with a similar metaphor in Isa 1:21-26. Isaiah argues that an originally pure Jerusalem has become tainted, like impure silver or diluted wine (Isa 1:22). Therefore, it must undergo smelting in order to remove the impurity. Unlike diluted wine, it is a relatively easy process to remove impurities from silver. The metal is heated in the smelter's fire, enabling the impurities to be separated out (Isa 1:25; compare Isa 48:10; Mal 3:2; see Block 1997, 717; *OEANE*, 3.7). Once the impurities are removed, then the city will once again be pure, that is, be righteous and faithful (Isa 1:26). Jerusalem needs to rid itself of its rebellious princes in order to be pure.

After the extensive list of the princes' misdeeds (vv. 7-16), it is not surprising that Israel has become "dross" to God. The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines "dross" as "the scum, recrement, or extraneous matter thrown off from metals in the process of melting." The Hebrew word is derived from a root meaning "to diverge, withdraw," alluding to the divergence of pure metal and waste products during the smelting process (*HALOT*, 744; Zimmerli 1979, 463). "Dross" connotes contamination. It must be removed for there to be useful metal. The house of Israel is no "pure" city that has been tainted but is itself the contaminant. To identify Israel as "scum" is in keeping with the unit's focus on "uncleanness."

Silver, bronze, tin, iron, and lead were the most important and valuable metal

ores in Ezekiel's day. Yet, when put into the smelter, the smith finds that there is insufficient pure metal to be extracted. Instead of valuable metals, only junk rock remains in the smelter (v. 18). With new imagery Ezekiel reiterates Israel's worthlessness (15:1-5).

The logical connection between verse 18 and verses 19-22 is unclear. The "therefore" and "because" in verse 19, which repeats YHWH's evaluation of the house of Israel as dross, indicates that what follows is a consequence of YHWH's evaluation in verse 18. Metals are melted as a means to separate out contaminating elements. Elements can also be added during smelting to strengthen or otherwise enhance a metal. YHWH will deal with the house of Israel as a smith deals with metals, by gathering the people into the midst of Jerusalem and, with the fire of divine wrath, "melt them" (v. 20).

Ezekiel's audience might assume that, as in Isaiah, they would undergo a refining process to remove their impurities or that suffering would strengthen their character (Rom 5:3-4). But Ezekiel goes in another direction. The metals are melted, not refined. There is no mention of purification or improvement. There is no indication of the end product. Nothing good comes out of this evil (Eichrodt 1970, 313–14).

The potentially valuable metals are too contaminated to refine. God melts them *because* they are dross. A smith has no use for dross. Perhaps in a fit of pique over the ore's worthlessness, the smith hurls it all into the furnace, melting it into a giant lump too amalgamated to be useful. Or perhaps the smith doubts his original assay and puts the metals into the smelter anyway, but nothing of value comes out (Eichrodt 1970, 313). Either way YHWH is not trying to purify, YHWH is just melting ore.

Verse 22 makes that point emphatically. Silver usually occurs alloyed with other elements. The ore must be melted to extract the pure silver. But there is no mention of extracting impurities, only of melting the silver. God's only interest is the silver's destruction.

The third oracle addresses "a land that is not cleansed" (v. 24). This is the first appearance of the root, ṭāhēr, "cleansed," the opposite of "unclean" (see pp. xxi–xxii). The land is also "not rained upon in the day of indignation." There are at least two ways to understand this phrase. One, drought is a frequent image of divine judgment (Deut 11:17; 1 Kgs 8:35; Isa 5:6; Jer 5:24-25; Amos 4:7). Two, reference to "prophets" and "smeared whitewash" create a link with chapter 13, where a "deluge of rain" destroys whitewashed walls (13:13). Rain and judgment are connected by the story of the great primeval flood (Gen 6–8). The same word for "rain" is used in all three texts (Gen 7:12; 8:2; Ezek 13:11, 13; 22:24). Also, just as the flood was intended to rid the land of "violence" (Gen

6:11), Ezekiel is concerned to rid the land of the "violence" (v. 26). The land is long overdue for a hard rain. Elsewhere the biblical tradition associates the flood and the exile (compare Isa 43:2; 54:9), grounded in belief in the catastrophic consequences of the land's corruption (Frymer-Kensky 1983, 409–12). The land needs another cleansing flood because the misdeeds of "its" leaders and population have polluted it. Like the city in verses 2-16, the land bears the pollution of its inhabitants. Verses 25-30 detail how various groups have rendered the land "unclean." Most of the specific offenses have been named before; now they are described as polluting.

The first group in the NRSV is "princes" (v. 25), which follows the Greek. The Hebrew reads "a conspiracy of its prophets." There are three reasons for preferring the Greek. One, it better fits other texts where rulers head a list of officials (Jer 1:18; Mic 3:11; Zeph 3:3-4). Two, the imagery of lions tearing prey is also ascribed to princes (19:1-9). Three, "prophets" seems redundant since verse 28 mentions them.

There are five reasons for preferring the Hebrew. One, on text critical grounds one could argue that the Hebrew is to be preferred since the Greek simplifies a difficult reading. Two, this list of officials does not exactly correspond to any other biblical list. Three, "princes" is redundant since verses 6-12 focus on "the princes of Israel." Four, the other leadership groups listed are nonmonarchical. Five, the Bible speaks of numerous conspiracies among the leaders (1 Sam 22:8, 13; 2 Sam 15:12, 31; 2 Kgs 11:14; Jer 11:9), including at least one prophet (Amos 7:10).

Whether princes or prophets, their actions are described in language reminiscent of Israel's princes—they are like roaring lions eating (human) prey (compare 19:3, 6). Their ferociousness extends to stealing the wealth of the land (1 Kgs 21) and causing men's deaths, probably in war, leaving behind widows, as Uriah's death widowed Bathsheba (2 Sam 11).

The priests, the land's cultic leaders, are indicted for violence against YHWH's "teaching" (lit., *torah*; v. 26). They profane "the holy things" and disregard (lit., "shut their eyes" to) YHWH's "sabbaths" (compare v. 8). They fail to distinguish the "holy" (*qdš*) from the "common" (*ḥll*) or the "clean" (*ṭhr*) from the "unclean" (*ṭm'*) (compare Lev 10:10). Here are all four categories in Israel's holiness/purity system (see p. xxi–xxiii). Only by maintaining these boundaries could Israel avoid accumulating pollution levels that would have catastrophic consequences. But they were not kept, profaning both land and YHWH.

YHWH next targets "officials." In Ezekiel "officials" are in a position to offer Jerusalem counsel (11:1) and are some of Jerusalem's elite taken to Babylon (17:12; see Duguid 1994, 110–11). They are compared to "wolves tearing the

prey" (v. 27). The greed and cruelty the Bible associates with wolves are attributed to corrupt leaders (Gen 49:27; Jer 5:6; Hab 1:8; Zeph 3:3; Matt 7:15; John 10:12; Acts 20:29). Bloodshed and economic exploitation demonstrate the greediness and cruelty of the "officials."

The prophets are singled out (v. 28) in ways resembling the indictment of prophets in Ezek 13 (see pp. 68–70).

The final group is "the people of the land" (v. 29). Exactly who they were is debated. Appearing throughout Ezekiel (7:27; 12:19; 33:2; 39:13), they eventually become significant actors in the new Temple (45:16, 22; 46:3, 9). "The people of the land" may have played some role vis-à-vis the Davidic monarchy. Although not part of the royal house, they were often involved in the choice of the Davidic king, and their activity was normally within Jerusalem (Seitz 1989, 42–51, 55–57). Their proximity to the royal house may explain why they are noticed.

They commit extortion and robbery, oppress "the poor and needy," and exploit "the alien" (v. 29), language shared with verse 7 and 16:49; 18:12, 18 (see p. 102). The alien, like the widow and orphan (Deut 24:17, 19-22), has no property and is economically vulnerable (Bird 1997, 76). This verse is one of the few texts where the "poor and needy" are grouped with one of the alien/orphan/widow triad (Isa 10:2; Jer 5:28; Zech 7:10). This comingling creates a *merismus—all* the economically vulnerable are exploited and oppressed. They receive no justice for crimes that are committed against them.

These five groups—princes, priests, officials, prophets, and people of the land—compose Judah's leadership. Their conduct collectively has thoroughly polluted the city to the point that cataclysm is inevitable. That the tipping point has been reached is graphically illustrated (v. 30). YHWH looks for *anyone* to "repair the wall and stand in the breach before me on behalf of the land," language mostly taken from 13:5. The land's cleanness was a matter of national survival (compare Lev 20:22-25; Deut 18:9-12). YHWH looked and looked, but there was not one leader who prevented the pollution from happening! This is most evident with the priests who "shut their eyes" to the distinctions that would ensure cleanness. But Ezekiel clearly considers that the accumulation of all the leaders' sins defiles the land. YHWH looks so hard "so that I would not destroy (*šḥt*) [the land]." This returns to the earlier flood imagery. It is humankind's corruption (*šḥt*; Gen 6:11, 12) that makes YHWH determine to destroy (šḥt) them and the earth (Gen 6:13, 17). With no one to prevent its accumulation, the land has surpassed its tolerance for pollution and the polluters and pollutants must be destroyed.

Destroyed they are (v. 31). Just as these groups have poured out blood, YHWH

pours out indignation. Just as they have metaphorically consumed human lives, the fire of YHWH's wrath consumes (lit., "finishes off") them. Ezekiel leaves no doubt that YHWH has returned their conduct on their heads (9:10; 11:21; 16:43). Along with flood language, "indignation" forms an *inclusio* for this subunit (vv. 24, 31). "Indignation" portends total destruction (Isa 13:5; 30:27; Ezek 21:31). Within the inclusios pollution piles up.

Unlike Noah or Daniel's friends, Ezekiel's audience will not escape the flood and fire of exile. The land's inhabitants have made it filthy; it must be cleansed, which requires removing its inhabitants. In the first oracle, cleansing is accomplished by scattering Israel to the four corners of the globe. In the second oracle, Israel is gathered together and melted in a furnace. In the third oracle, the fire of God's wrath wipes out Israel. Thus, YHWH purges all the unclean inhabitants to cleanse the land. This chapter uses Israel's holiness/purity paradigm to explain the exile. The images of purgation, smelter, and deluge emphasize the totality of the destruction. No remnant remains to begin again, as after the flood or in Isaiah's smelter. Readers must await chapter 36 to see if this land has any future.

Theological and Ethical Analysis

(1) Ezekiel's basic theological assumption was that bad things never happened to good people. Since catastrophe had befallen Jerusalem, the only possible theological explanation was divine punishment for sin. Ezekiel's task was to enumerate Jerusalem's sins that justified the fire and flood of exile. With 2,500 years' distance, Ezekiel's stance seems nonsensical, yet the same kind of retrospection occurs today following catastrophic events. Was this divine punishment? If so, what were the sins that justified this fire and flood?

There is no single or simple answer to questions of theodicy. Uncritical acceptance of Ezekiel's theological stance requires interpreting trauma as divine punishment. That does terrible disservice not only to the victims but also to God. There are other causes of trauma and there are other ways that divine presence is experienced. Even though Ezekiel insisted that God was just, punishing Jerusalem no more than it deserved, it does not mean that modern readers must do likewise (see pp. 29–30 and 132).

(2) The need to "cleanse" the land raises the specter of "ethnic cleansing," when one group claims that the only way to maintain "purity" is by exterminating all alleged human pollutants. On a smaller scale, various religious groups try to cleanse themselves by expelling those deemed impure. The underlying assumption is that holiness must be "protected" from impurity,

sometimes requiring drastic measures, including "purging" the offending (unclean) matter. That is why it is called "ethnic *cleansing*." International law has declared that ethnic cleansing is too high a price to pay for national purity. If the damage done to human life in order to preserve the sanctity of faith or community is too costly, then the categories of "sacred" and "profane" must be rethought (see p. 121).

(3) This chapter is concerned with moral pollution and spiritual toxins. Toxic pollution is a central ecological concern today. Emissions of carbon dioxide accelerate global warming. Pesticides pollute fresh water supplies and create dead zones in oceans where life has ceased to exist. As yet there is no solution to storing highly toxic radioactive waste, a global threat. Readers might consider Ezekiel's message from an ecojustice perspective. Ezekiel views the land's pollution as not curable (see p. xxii). There was no ritual that would clean up the land. When the pollution became too great, the "pollutants," the land's inhabitants, were purged from the land. What will be earth's response to its current inhabitants? Will the pollution build up and ultimately reach a point beyond earth's level of tolerance, making a cataclysm inevitable? Must the "pollutants," earth's inhabitants, be purged from earth in order to cleanse it? This is a sobering thought. Readers should consider acts of ecojustice as essential to faithful discipleship. Perhaps then the land's pollution will not reach an irreversible level of toxicity.

(4) This chapter is one of Ezekiel's many diatribes against Jerusalem's leadership (chs. 8, 12–14; 17; 19; 34). The exercise of leadership invites evaluation. Whether in political or religious life, leaders' conduct is under the scrutiny of their followers, and of God.

Verse 26 charges that the priests have "disregarded" YHWH's Sabbaths. They "shut their eyes." It is hard to observe the Sabbath with one's eyes closed. The problem of "seeing" has been raised before (see p. 66). Here the problem is willful disregard. The charge is dereliction of duty. Ezekiel is not the only one to so charge religious leaders (Isa 28:7; Mic 2:11; Luke 11:42-44). Nor is he the only one to accuse religious leaders of being blind to the injustices around them (Isa 56:10; Matt 23:16-26).

Those who are God's ministers need to work with eyes wide open, paying attention to God's ways of love and justice and to embody them in the world. This is a difficult path. It is usually easier to shut one's eyes to violence and economic exploitation, the themes of this chapter. What is unseen does not have to be remedied. "Out of sight, out of mind," makes one a blind guide leading his or her followers straight to God's judgment.

Girls Gone Wild II: A Tale of Two Cities (23:1-49)

Like chapter 16, this chapter expresses Jerusalem's sinful nature via the metaphor of a wife's infidelity. There are significant differences, however. Instead of an exclusive relationship between one husband and one wife, this tale focuses on the behavior of two sisters (two cities) married to the same spouse (deity) (compare 16:44-58). The misbehavior, while sexualized, has more to do with international relations and politics than with cultic issues. Unlike chapter 16, there is no reconciliation (compare 16:60-63).

The language is graphic, even pornographic. The chapters detailing Jerusalem's sins and announcing the impending judgment culminate here in massive sexual violence. Readers, especially survivors of sexual assault, should be aware that this chapter contains disturbingly violent material.

Literary Analysis

The chapter begins with the *prophetic word formula* addressed to Ezekiel (vv. 1-2*a*) and ends with the *recognition formula* (v. 49). After the introduction (vv. 1-4), the chapter can be divided into three *prophecies of punishment*. The first details the sins (vv. 5-8) and punishment (v. 10) of Oholah. The second details the sins (vv. 11-21) and punishment (vv. 22-35) of Oholibah. The third subunit details both sisters' sins in cultic terms (vv. 36-45) and declares their joint punishment (vv. 46-49), cast as a two-part *prophetic proof saying*. This structure focuses attention on the similarities and differences between the two sisters, while arguing that YHWH justly punishes both.

Although the chapter makes use of other genres, it is composed as an *extended metaphor* (see p. 84). The metaphor's tenor is the history of the Northern (Israel) and Southern (Judah) kingdoms, represented by their capital cities, Samaria and Jerusalem. The vehicle is the history of two sisters married to the same husband.

It is unclear why this chapter was necessary to the book. It seems to function as a climax to the chapters that detail Jerusalem's sins as justification for divine punishment (chs. 6–24). As Jerusalem's destruction looms (24:2), Ezekiel argues that Jerusalem *really* deserves it. The language is especially vulgar. Perhaps because of the focus on "filthiness" in chapter 22, this chapter employs the imagery of "whoring" as the ultimate filth.

Exegetical Analysis

The chapter introduces two sisters (v. 2). Unlike chapter 16, their parentage is immaterial (compare 16:3, 45). The sibling dynamic (rivalry?) is the central concern (compare Jer 3:6-11). Their story commences "in their youth" (v. 3) when "they played the whore in Egypt," engaging in premarital sex, a definite biblical no-no. (On "whoring," see p. 86.) The sex was rough, which is often obscured in translation. More literally, their breasts were crushed (compare Lev 22:24), their virgin bosoms were squeezed (*HALOT*, 893).

The names of these wanton women are Oholah and Oholibah (v. 4). The names are derived from the Hebrew word *ʾōhel*, "tent," but beyond that their significance is uncertain. Then, astonishingly, "they became mine" (see p. 86 on this idiom's meaning). Oholah and Oholibah are YHWH's "Gomer" (Hos 1:2-3). Verse 5 makes clear what readers already suspect. YHWH's promiscuous partners are Samaria and Jerusalem. The sexual dynamics are those of chapter 16, but YHWH now has *two* unfaithful wives to contend with.

The metaphor compares the two sisters. First, the elder sister's whorings are enumerated. Oholah (Samaria) lusts after Assyria and is killed for it (vv. 5-10). This reflects the historical reality that the Northern Kingdom was an Assyrian vassal-state destroyed by Assyria in 721 B.C.E. In fairness, the lust was provoked. Oholah's partners are described as wealthy, powerful, good-looking (v. 6), and sexually potent (v. 8). They "poured out their lust" is grammatically the same as "lavished your whorings" (16:15). Oholah received something from her partner. But regardless of the temptation, "belonging" requires fidelity. The "punishment" (v. 10) visited upon the tenor, the city, are acts of war. The same actions visited upon the vehicle, the wife, become exposure, abuse, and murder. In the end, she becomes a "byword (lit., 'name') among women."

Despite seeing her sister's punishment, Oholibah trounces her in the whoring contest (v. 11). Like her sister, she is attracted to wealthy, powerful, handsome Assyria (v. 12//v. 6). But she carries "her whorings further," lusting even after a picture (v. 14). She sees wall engravings of the Chaldeans (Babylonians) and likes what she sees (vv. 14-16). There is a reason why Internet porn sites are ubiquitous. Lust is not really about a relationship, it is about a body, and body images effectively stimulate lust.

Oholibah then decides she wants the real deal and sends messengers to the Chaldeans, who are up to the challenge. Oholibah quickly turns from her new lovers "in disgust" (v. 17; see 2 Sam 13:15 and p. 93). Literally, "her soul was dislocated" (compare Gen 32:25), indicating she is repulsed by her lovers. Emotional estrangement is a metaphor for political revolt in the real world

(Galambush 1992, 75). YHWH's soul becomes dislocated in turn (v. 18).

As a whore Oholibah cannot go long without lovers. Having rejected one, she immediately seeks out another, her first lover, Egypt (vv. 19, 21). And there is plenty to return to. Apparently size does matter (v. 20).

Since her sexuality belongs to YHWH, Oholibah eventually faces punishment. Since her whorings are that much greater, so will be her punishment. The language of verses 23-25 is clearly the language of the tenor. Cities are brought before international tribunals and then subjected to war. But even here the vehicle—woman—is present. The army is described in the same language as the lovers (v. 23//vv. 6, 12). They will cut off "your nose and your ears" (v. 25), an image relevant to human bodies, not cities. In verses 26-29 Oholibah, the vehicle, is stripped naked of her clothes and fine jewels.

With graphic, sexual language Ezekiel describes Samaria's and Jerusalem's political history. Samaria is accused of preferring covenants with Assyrian to its covenant with YHWH. Jerusalem is accused of preferring covenants with whoever is in power—Egypt, then Assyria, then Babylon, and finally Egypt again. The events' historicity is immaterial. The point is that reliance on any power besides YHWH's dislocates the covenant relationship and evokes YHWH's judgment.

The judgment against Oholibah concludes with a final comparison between the sisters (vv. 31-34). YHWH puts into Oholibah's hand a "cup" that runneth over with "horror and desolation" (Isa 51:17, 22; Jer 25:15-29; 49:12-13; Hab 2:15-16; compare Matt 20:22; 26:39; Rev 14:10). Just as Oholibah out-whores her sister, she also outdrinks her. Others will be appalled at her excessiveness. (Alternatively, imagine a frat crowd urging someone to drink to excess.) Oholibah ends up drunk, not only on wine, but also on "sorrow." In a drunken stupor, Oholibah smashes the cup and gnaws the shards to suck out any liquid they have absorbed. Then she tears out her breasts with the shards. What had been her source of pleasure (vv. 3, 21) becomes her source of pain. This is Oholibah's fate because she has "forgotten" YHWH and cast him behind her back (v. 35; compare 1 Kgs 14:9; Neh 9:26). Oholibah's "out of sight, out of mind" mentality leads her astray. Gross immorality results in grotesque punishment.

The sisters are reunited for an encore performance in the final subunit (vv. 36-49), which opens with a familiar "will you judge," and a command to declare their "abominable deeds" (v. 36; 20:4; 22:2). The sisters "have committed adultery" (v. 37; compare Exod 20:14; Deut 5:18). The text uses the technical term for adultery (*n'p*) instead of "whoring" (*znh*). Covenant fidelity, not sexual promiscuity, is the issue. The sins enumerated are mere corollaries to the main abomination, unfaithfulness. The accusations are couched in familiar cultic

terms (vv. 37-39; compare 5:11; 16:21, 38; 20:16, 31). The result is a defiled, profaned sanctuary.

The initial accusation against the sisters, that they "lusted after" other lovers, is bad enough, but then the sisters bring them home (v. 40). The switch in verse 40 to feminine singular accuses one sister, Oholibah. She does herself up, puts on a good spread (vv. 40-41), and everyone has a very good time (v. 42). The Temple has essentially become "The Best Little Whorehouse in Jerusalem." The verb "sent (for)" (vv. 16, 40) links cultic and political infidelity. Foreign alliances promote foreign deities, as do foreign wives (e.g., Deut 7:1-4; 1 Kgs 11:1-4; Neh 13:23-27). In the imagery of this chapter, political acts equal sexual acts equal religious acts (v. 44).

The hopelessly polluted Temple must be destroyed. The two sisters are declared "guilty of adultery and of bloodshed" (see 16:38). The identity of the "righteous judges" (v. 45) is speculative. They are "righteous" either because their cause is just or because they appear righteous in comparison to Jerusalem's utter depravity (compare 16:47-52). The similarity of cultic imagery between this subunit and chapter 16 evokes the similar punishments of gang rape, stoning, being cut down with swords, and having their houses burned (vv. 46-47; compare 16:40-41). As elsewhere, tenor and vehicle merge. Adulteresses are stoned, but wholesale slaughter and burning are images of war. This marriage cannot be saved. There is no attempt at reconciliation, only the divine desire to eradicate the "lewdness in the land" (v. 48; compare 16:41). There is no hint of any future for YHWH and his two wives.

Especially poignant in this chapter is the focus on "sons and daughters" who are "seized" (v. 10; see also v. 25) and killed (v. 47), anticipating 24:21. Were these YHWH's offspring (v. 4)? Whether the reference is to actual people or to tribes and cities, they suffer for the sins of their mothers. The grim reality of "collateral damage" reveals the limits of Ezekiel's argument that each person dies for his or her own sins (ch. 18, see pp. 106–7). YHWH seems untroubled by this moral inconsistency.

Theological and Ethical Analysis (see also pp. 91–93)

(1) Commentators debate whether the caution "that all women may take warning" (v. 48) is a literal warning against adultery or a warning to other (female) cities against "infidelity" to sworn covenants. This ambiguity also exists in verse 10, where Oholah becomes "a byword among women" (and see 16:41). Despite this ambiguity, the humiliation, mutilation, and death of these adulteresses make them cautionary tales to frighten women into submission to

their husbands, raising significant ethical issues.

Probably every woman at some point has been told a cautionary story about the disastrous fate of some unfortunate woman who acted outside the boundaries of acceptable or conventional behavior. Similar object lessons were embodied in the brutality of lynching. It was primarily successful black men, often someone more successful than white counterparts, who were lynched. In a race-based society, black men were to take warning not to rise above the status imposed by white society.

The problem with such cautionary tales is that they are told by the powerful to control, through threats of violence, those who would act outside of established boundaries. These are not tales of resistance. Tales that caution women against sexual transgressions ignore the double standard regarding adultery. It has always been permissible for men to sleep around. Prostitutes are jailed; johns go free. Only within recent history has spousal abuse been criminalized. Women still suffer disproportionately more than men for sexual transgressions. Similarly, blacks are routinely punished for behavior that whites practice with impunity. Jail has become today's legalized lynching. Today sexual orientation has become the new "lewdness in the land."

Cautionary tales also hide the fact that such control is impossible. The depiction of Oholah and Oholibah demonstrates that YHWH could not control his wives' sexuality. People will refuse to be objects and will act to become subjects. Nor does the horrific violence work. The rapes, mutilation, and murder of Oholah and Oholibah failed to eliminate "sinful idolatry." Revelation 17–19 will repeat Ezekiel's cautionary tales of violent punishment of "whoring" women.

Readers should question both cautionary tales and the structures and dynamics of power that seek to control through violence. When double standards are revealed, when control is revealed to be impossible, when violence is revealed to be ineffective, then perhaps a path is opened to reconfigure our understanding of relationships. Perhaps it is possible to move beyond such subject/object splits to find ways in which *all* can be subjects.

(2) The intertwining of religion and international politics in this chapter raises difficult issues in a country that advocates separation of church and state, yet where religious values often intrude into foreign relations.

The prophets regularly condemn Israel's kings for making foreign alliances as being indicative of lack of faith in YHWH (e.g., Isa 7:1-9; Jer 2:17-18; Hos 7:8-16). This stance argues for political isolationism. Israel was to have *no* foreign relations. This might be good theology, but it is poor politics. Second Kings 16:7 reports that Ahaz sent to Tiglath-Pileser, king of Assyria, for help against Pekah and Rezin.

> No other ruler would have acted differently. The state was in peril, so [Ahab] appealed to a greater power for military aid. Isaiah offered words; Assyria had an army. To rely on God rather than weapons would have been to subordinate political wisdom to faith . . . other folks' lives were at stake, the future of the country was in peril. (Heschel 1962, 64)

Imagine feeling that enemies beset the United States on all sides: bin Laden, al-Qaeda, Islamic fundamentalism, bioterrorism, dirty bombs. Now imagine advocating a foreign policy of trust in God, and *not* in American military, diplomatic, or economic might. No presidential candidate would succeed with this platform.

Ezekiel interpreted Jerusalem's history in the face of overwhelming Babylonian aggression. The implication of Ezekiel's message is that if only Jerusalem had refrained from foreign alliances, this would have prevented the disaster facing them. This seems ludicrous. Neither Ezekiel nor the other prophets provides alternative political, military, or theological strategies. How do politics and theology intersect today? Is it possible for good theology to guide good, even wise, politics? What is YHWH's political way? Whose values guide public life? Ezekiel's bottom line seems to be that divine, and not human, values —even the human value of defense of one's country—must be followed.

(3) In chapters 16 and 23 sexual humiliation becomes the trope for political humiliation. Contemporary interpreters generally offer two ways of appropriating this metaphor. One views the imagery of adultery in marriage as a useful analogy to the violation of the covenant bond. Violence in either relationship is a justified response to unfaithfulness. The other view, usually espoused by feminist interpreters, sees nothing useful in an image justifying women's victimization. Women (and men) are therefore urged to resist the metaphor.

Besides uncritical acceptance or outright rejection, there is another way to consider the imagery of sexualized violence. This imagery is echoed today in rap music. Reviled by many for glorifying violence, especially against women, rap is subject to the same critiques leveled at Ezekiel. But the ugliness and brutality of rap is a form of truth telling. Rap reflects the ugliness and brutality of society. The social context that produces rap is the violence of poverty and racism that swallows entire lives and communities. When daily life is a constant barrage of violence in the streets, drug culture, gang culture, discrimination, and disinterest by the rest of society, violent language is but a mirror of violent life.

And so it is with Ezekiel. If Ezekiel's language physically nauseates people, it is because the world it describes is nauseating. The language of violent assault and rape expressed in Ezekiel mirrors the violence of war and siege. Ezekiel,

like rap, is writing from the perspective of a brutalized people.

How should faith communities respond to this? First, faith communities need to listen and to acknowledge the reality of a messed-up world that the language of sexualized violence exposes. Speaking truthfully about this reality is difficult when "profane" language is considered inappropriate for church, which may explain the alienation of so many from faith communities. The director of an organization that works with battered women reports that these women often use familiar obscenities to describe their experience, and when they cannot say the words expressing their truth they are silenced. Meanwhile, faith communities do not have to face the reality of the violence the women have experienced. Soldiers use the same words that are found in rap lyrics when speaking of war. Were Ezekiel writing today, he would no doubt use profanity to describe his reality. Even though this language and imagery may be totally wrong and abhorrent, faith communities need to listen to people where they are and acknowledge the reality of their experiences instead of shaming them by condemning their language. What is being denied when permission to print the profanity is denied?

Second, faith communities should join feminists in the critique of the language of sexualized violence. We must resist the brutalization of women, including brutalizing language, even while acknowledging that such brutalization is a reality. Increasingly, research suggests that many respond to images of sexualized violence by viewing it as "just a game" or "just a movie." This is like saying that Ezek 23 is "just a metaphor." Real relationships are shaped by these images. Failure to resist violent language perpetuates violent relationships.

Third, it may be that as long as sex and violence coexist in the world, they will coexist in language. But if that link is to be severed, then faith communities need to consider alternative language for expressing violent experiences. Inclusive language developed in recognition of the harm caused by patriarchal language. If language of sexualized violence is problematic, then alternative language needs to be developed.

(Personal conversation [February 14, 2005] with, and an unpublished, untitled essay [2001] on rap music by, Sarah Peterson informed this section.)

In Summary (24:1-27)

How does a prophet prophesy final words of doom? This chapter concludes the oracles of judgment against Jerusalem (chs. 4–24). These oracles explain

exile's trauma by answering the first three fundamental "victim questions": (1) What happened? (2) Why did it happen? and (3) Why did I act as I did then? (Figley 1985, 404; see p. xx). Jerusalem was destroyed as an act of divine judgment on account of Jerusalem's abominations and idolatries. Their wanton hearts led Jerusalem's inhabitants to break the covenant from the beginning. The message does not vary in this chapter, nor does the medium. There is one last disputation, one last allegory, one last sign-act, one last judgment, and one last opportunity to know YHWH. Together they summarize and reinforce the message.

Although another chapter of judgment seems redundant, the oracles close with the spotlight on the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple. It is now "The End." The curtain drops, not on thunderous grief, but on the silent expectation of a new drama.

Literary Analysis

The chapter can be divided into three subunits. After introductory information (vv. 1-2), the first subunit (vv. 3-14) can be divided into three sections (vv. 3-5, 6-8, 9-14). Verses 3-5 are a cooking song. The other two sections are introduced with identical language (vv. 6, 9). This subunit resembles a *disputation speech*, where verses 6-8 and 9-14 are rebuttals to verses 3-5 (Block 1997, 770–71). The rebuttals are introduced with language similar to the introductions' of other disputations (11:7, 16, 17; 12:23, 28; 33:25; 37:12). What exactly is disputed is unclear.

The dominant metaphorical imagery is the cooking pot. Throughout, the vehicle of the *metaphor* is "pot" and the tenor is "city." Within each response some aspect of the imagery is developed (vv. 6, 9-11) or explained (vv. 7-8, 12-14). Shared vocabulary and repetition bind the three sections together. Shared vocabulary with chapters 22 and 23 highlights the themes of moral and sexual filth and recalls the judgments of previous chapters. Rhetorically, this overlapping language communicates that "this day, this very day" (24:2) is the fulfillment of the long-anticipated "day" (7:7, 10, 12, 19).

The *prophetic word formula* begins the second unit (vv. 15-24), which is a *sign-act* consisting of something old and something new. Ezekiel as a "sign" is old (12:6, 11), but "this day" requires a new role-play.

The final unit (vv. 25-27) is set apart by another address to the prophet ("mortal") and structured as a two-part *prophetic proof saying*. It serves a transitional function. Motifs and vocabulary echo the previous section, while the

announcement that Ezekiel's mouth shall be opened links back to the sign-act of 3:26-27. The reference to a survivor anticipates 33:21-22, when Ezekiel's mouth is at last opened. Readers have to wait many chapters to discover what Ezekiel says on "that day."

Exegetical Analysis

The final judgment oracle begins with a date (see p. xxv). God first commands Ezekiel to "write down the name of this day, this very day" (v. 2). The expression "the name of the day" is unique to Ezekiel. Naming the day, like Memorial Day or Independence Day, records its significance. The phrase "this very day" consistently refers to a momentous event, for example, when Noah entered the ark (Gen 7:13), the day Abraham was circumcised (Gen 17:23), and when the people were brought up from Egypt (Exod 12:17). It appears in Ezekiel at the beginning of the call narrative (2:3) and of the Temple vision (40:1). This significant and auspicious day is the day Nebuchadnezzar lays siege to Jerusalem. The "rebellious house" must register the beginning of the end.

God next commands Ezekiel to "utter an allegory" (v. 3). Ezekiel was right to worry that the exiles might accuse him of being "a maker of allegories" (20:49 [21:15]). Previously, twenty-five men at the Temple gate compared the experience of siege to meat cooked in a pot (11:3). The announcement of Jerusalem's siege prompts similar imagery: a cooking song (vv. 3*b*-5). The song describes taking the best stew bones and making a good beef stock. Interpreted allegorically, the city is the pot, the inhabitants are the meaty bones, and they are being cooked. The following sections are disputations, but what is disputed? Perhaps the song represents an attempt to put a positive spin on siege and exile. Cooking transforms meaty bones and boiling water into nourishing stew. The song acknowledges the experience of being "cooked," but hopes that finally something good will emerge (compare Rom 5:3-4).

Instead, Ezekiel announces "woe" to the "bloody city" (v. 6; compare 22:2, 3, 27). "Woe" expresses distress and anguish in the face of death (compare 13:18; 16:23; see p. 67). Nothing good will come from this stew; the pot is dirty. The NRSV translation "rust" is misleading; rust is oxidized iron and ancient cooking pots were ceramic. Readers should imagine disgusting layers of encrusted cooked food stuck to the inside of a clay pot. The meaning of verse 6*b* is uncertain. The NRSV translation suggests that since the "rust" has not "gone out," the cook might as well "empty" the pot of its contents. Nothing is saved. The inhabitants become pieces of discarded meat, the bodies of the slain that fill the streets (compare 11:6-7).

Verse 7 abandons the cooking imagery in order to explain it. If filth renders a pot unusable for cooking, the encrusted layers of injustice within a city render it uninhabitable. The imagery contrasts blood that is clearly visible on exposed rock versus blood that is covered by earth. Although there are legal echoes (Lev 17:13; Deut 12:16, 24; 15:23), the issue is not the violation of these laws but the evidence of the city's guilt. The first dispute closes with God's declaration that this was God's own doing for the purpose of rousing divine wrath (v. 8). Jerusalem's bloodshed was under God's control.

The second dispute contrasts the benevolent aspects of the cook in the song with the true intent of YHWH's cooking. The song sings of culinary art. YHWH's cooking is culinary disaster. Even though the word *pot* does not appear, the imperatives of verse 10 are directed at the cooking pot. An alternative reading to "mix in the spices" is "boil the broth/stew down" (*PIR*, 79; Block 1997, 767). The verse then imagines that the cooking continues until everything in the pot is consumed. No meat, liquid, or even bones remain. The empty pot is then essentially left on the stove with the burner still on. It will then heat up until its "filth melt[s]" and its "rust [is] consumed" (v. 11). Even the pot is destroyed.

The translation and meaning of verse 12 is difficult and uncertain. Even so, the interpretation provided by verses 12-13 is that the pot is destroyed because it cannot be cleaned; its "filthy lewdness" is too ingrained. The pot is useless and therefore destroyed. Similarly, no amount of cleansing will clean the city. An impure city is useless to YHWH and will therefore be destroyed (ch. 22). This section also disputes that the siege will be positively transforming. The only transformation is the destruction of everything—meat, bones, and the pot itself.

This penultimate judgment ends with a series of divine assertions and actions that both justify and guarantee the destruction (v. 14). The repeated "I" emphasizes that destruction is YHWH's doing. Only the initial statement, "I will not refrain," is new. To "refrain" has the sense of avoiding or ignoring something (Num 6:5; Judg 5:2; Prov 8:33; 29:18). God's statement could be paraphrased, "I will not avoid doing what needs to be done," the essential message to the exiles.

YHWH again addresses Ezekiel, informing him of impending calamity, which YHWH will cause with "one blow" (v. 16). The Hebrew for "blow" is elsewhere translated as "plague" (e.g., Exod 9:14; 2 Sam 24:21; Zech 14:12) and "slaughter" (1 Sam 4:17; 2 Sam 18:7). Whether sickness or combat, this "blow" will cause the sudden death of "the delight of [Ezekiel's] eyes" (v. 16). The idiom refers to some-one/something precious or treasured. One assumes Ezekiel would grieve its loss. Yet YHWH commands Ezekiel not to display emotional distress at this loss.

The translation and meaning of the phrase "sigh, but not aloud" is difficult (v.

17). It may mean that Ezekiel is permitted a private expression of grief, but lest that give way to public expression, another injunction prohibits mourning. YHWH then commands Ezekiel to perform four actions (v. 17). There is little biblical evidence that these actions reverse customary ritualized mourning behaviors. Wearing a "turban" is once contrasted with wearing ashes (Isa 61:3). There are two references to going barefoot in contexts of mourning (2 Sam 15:30; Mic 1:8). Hiding the upper lip is associated with shame, not mourning (Lev 13:45; Mic 3:7). The NRSV changes the MT's "bread of men," found only in Ezekiel, to "bread of mourners" (see Hos 9:4). Nonetheless, the actions are intended to convey that Ezekiel is not mourning. YHWH commands Ezekiel not to respond to the impending death as a loss.

Verse 18 recounts Ezekiel's performance of this sign-act. The delight of Ezekiel's eyes is his wife, who dies in the evening. The next morning he displays no outward signs of mourning and the people question Ezekiel's behavior (v. 19). He explains that they will also experience a profound loss (vv. 21-23): their "sanctuary." The devastating nature of this loss is carried by three epithets. What Ezekiel's wife means to him, the Temple means to the people; it is "the delight of [their] eyes." It is also "the pride of [their] power," something one would take pride in and consider a strength (compare Lev 26:19; Ezek 30:6, 18; 33:28), such as the building that encompassed their core identity. Every country and people have such edifices. The sanctuary is their "heart's desire" (lit., "the desire of your soul [*nepeš*]"), an Ezekielian creation. The same verb expresses the compassion of Pharaoh's daughter for the infant Moses (Exod 2:6) and the concern of parents for their children (Mal 3:17). Together the three epithets express the people's absolute devotion to the sanctuary.

YHWH strikes a second blow against the exiles. Their "sons and . . . daughters whom you left behind" shall also fall by the sword. Wives and children would have been left behind when officials were exiled. Not Nebuchadnezzar, but the exiles are blamed—*you* left behind. The verb "left behind" really means "abandoned," a deliberate and permanent act (e.g., Gen 2:24; Ps 22:1 [2]; Ezek 8:12; 9:9). Since the exiles' sins led to exile, *they* are the ones who ultimately abandoned their children.

In the aftermath of this double loss, the exiles are to imitate Ezekiel. The actions are enumerated in essentially reverse order from Ezekiel's performance. Literarily, Ezekiel and the exiles mirror each other in their actions.

The sign-act makes clear that the people are not to mourn the Temple's destruction. Why they are not to do so is left unsaid. The commands to the exiles may explain the reason. The exiles are told "you shall *pine away* in your **iniquities** and groan to <u>one another</u>" (v. 23, emphasis added). Although the

NRSV translation obscures this, the language echoes 4:17: "Lacking bread and water, they will look at one another in dismay, and *waste away* under their **punishment**." These commands emphasize the causal connection between the exiles' behavior and their circumstances. The exiles are not to see God's "blows" as events to be mourned. The sanctuary and their children are gone, but there is no loss, because these events are acts of divine justice. Mourning implies tragedy. This is not tragedy, but crime. They are not victims, but perpetrators. (For a trauma explanation, see p. 150.)

In the final verses God speaks of three things that will occur "on the/that day." First, God will "take from them their stronghold" (v. 25; compare 30:15). "Stronghold" literally means "fortress," appearing frequently in Psalms to describe YHWH as a "refuge" (e.g., Pss 27:1; 31:4 [5]; 37:39). Like the "sanctuary," three epithets convey its importance. It is "their joy and glory," an Ezekielian creation. "Joy" is an emotion associated with Jerusalem (Jer 49:25; Lam 2:15). "Glory," or "beauty," is attributed to God's people (Jer 13:11), Jerusalem (Jer 33:9), the Temple (Ps 96:6), and YHWH (Ps 71:8). The "stronghold" is also "their heart's affection" (lit., "the lifting of their soul [*nepes*]]"), that to which their desire is directed (compare Ps 25:1; Jer 22:27; Hos 4:8). And like the sanctuary, it is "the delight of their eyes."

Because the language echoes verse 21, this may be a reference to the Temple. But Ezekiel is fond of threes. This is the third reference to divine action—take away Ezekiel's wife, profane the sanctuary, take away their stronghold. Perhaps YHWH speaks of another loss, the removal of YHWH's own self from the land, the Temple, and the covenant people.

Second, "on that day," a survivor will arrive to report to Ezekiel what happened (v. 26). Third, "on that day," the restriction placed on Ezekiel in 3:26 will be reversed (v. 27). Instead of his tongue clinging to the roof of his mouth, his mouth shall be opened. Instead of silent sighs (v. 17), he will find his voice. This promise will be fulfilled in 33:22.

Both of Ezekiel's actions following his wife's death and his eventual ability to speak are to be a "sign" (*môpēt*) to the exiles. What the people witness will lead them to understand that the events Ezekiel portrays are divine actions. When Ezekiel does not mourn his wife's death, the exiles are to comprehend that they are not to mourn the Temple's destruction. When Ezekiel speaks, the exiles are to comprehend that God has changed course. In the Exegetical Analysis for chapter 3, Ezekiel's speechlessness was interpreted as an embodied symptom of trauma. That this speechlessness ends signals an important transition. The focus of chapters 4–24 has been on the experience of trauma itself. When Ezekiel speaks again, his speech will reflect God's new direction. Ezekiel will speak of

future recovery.

Theological and Ethical Analysis

(1) The accumulative effect of the oracles of judgment suggests the psychological concept of intrusion (see Herman 1997, 37–42; Allen 1995, 91–93, 172–78). Long after danger is past, traumatized people relive the event as though it was continually recurring. The literature refers to this as "fixation on the trauma" and "repetition compulsion." Trauma's intrusiveness occurs in many forms including nightmares, flashbacks, and an impulse (consciously or unconsciously) to re-create or repeat the traumatic event. With Ezekiel, twenty chapters of judgment and the repetition of themes and vocabulary feel like going over the same ground again and again, re-creating the trauma. The repetition also has the feel of flashbacks, with images of siege and deportation superimposed on the current situation of living in exile. There is often something that triggers a flashback. A car backfiring can send someone who has been in war diving for cover. In Ezekiel, one chapter seems to trigger the next. One can imagine Ezekiel continuing for another twenty chapters.

Although the psychobiology of intrusions is better understood today, there is no agreement as to whether they are adaptive. They may represent a spontaneous, unsuccessful attempt at healing, integrating the traumatic event, or reliving and mastering the overwhelming feelings of the trauma.

Intrusive memories carry with them the emotional intensity of the original event. In essence, each flashback is traumatic. Was this what it was like for the original writer(s) of Ezekiel? Did the writing of each chapter involve reliving the trauma? Readers today may experience a sort of secondary trauma in reading these twenty chapters. Such feelings allow those who have not experienced the trauma to glimpse its emotional force.

(2) It is impossible to imagine not publicly displaying grief after events of great loss. Indeed, in the aftermath of communal disasters, communal mourning is a necessary part of coming to terms with the loss. Israel's own tradition attests to this (e.g., Ps 137; Lamentations). How does one comprehend either Ezekiel's failure to display grief at his wife's death or the exiles' failure to express grief at Jerusalem's destruction?

This chapter evokes a second trauma issue, constriction or numbing (see Herman 1997, 42–50; Allen 1995, 179–80). Situations of inescapable danger may evoke not only terror and rage but also, paradoxically, a state of detached calm. Trauma victims may seem emotionally remote and unresponsive. In extreme form this may involve dissociation where the person may have a sense

of leaving his or her body. Before the language of PTSD, soldiers who experienced such numbing were diagnosed as “shell-shocked.” War veterans speak about the two-thousand-yard stare, an almost hypnotic trance. Numbing protects one against unbearable pain. How-ever else the sign-act of verses 15-24 is interpreted, the failure to display grief has the appearance of a numbing response.

Finally, though, the restriction on grieving may have a significant negative impact. “A major turning point in healing is achieved by survivors when they are truly able to grieve . . . moving away from the distancing and dissociative maneuvers with which she has numbed herself” (Means 2000, 148–49). It indicates a willingness to take the risks associated with reengaging life (Means 2000, 148–49). The text does not say whether the numbness ever went away for Ezekiel or other exiles, or whether tears finally marked their losses.

BYSTANDERS: ORACLES AGAINST THE NATIONS (CHS. 25–32)

Thematic Overview

Anyone reading Oracles against the Nations (OAN) is probably doing so because (1) the professor assigned it or (2) he or she is writing a dissertation on the OAN. One reason for the disinterest may be that no one really understands them. Oracles against the Nations seemed to have been required writing for Israelite prophets. They appear in most prophetic books (Isa 13–23; Jer 46–51 [LXX 25:14–31:44]; Ezek 25–32; Joel 3:1-21; Amos 1:3–2:3; Zeph 2:4-15; Zech 9:1-8), and comprise the whole of a few (Jonah, Obadiah, Nahum). There is no definitive answer as to how and why OAN became required.

Apart from the question of origins, the question of their function in the book of Ezekiel is also perplexing. Commentators offer suggestions but often seem unpersuaded by their own arguments. The most common theory is that OAN is Ezekiel's theological response to nations who threatened Judah or challenged YHWH's dominion. Commentators note Ammon and Moab's mocking, Edom and Philistia's revenge, and Egypt and Tyre's hubris. This is true as far as it goes; it just does not go very far. The audience for the OAN is the exilic community, not the nations themselves. How is OAN a response to exile? Why *these* nations? Also, for the purposes of this commentary, how might the OAN relate to issues of trauma?

One way to answer these questions is to consider the nations in the role of bystanders. Situations of violence are usually defined in terms of the victim and the perpetrator. But there are also those who see it happening, who hear reports of it thirdhand, and whose help is sought by the victims. These are the bystanders.

There are many levels at which one may be a bystander. There is the mother who fails to interfere when her husband sexually molests their daughter. Amira Haas, an Israeli reporter who works in the Palestinian territories, tells of her mother's distress at seeing German women "looking from the side" at sick and dying Jewish women marched from a train to Bergen-Belsen. Haas says her work is motivated by "that dread of being a bystander" (Fisk 2001). Americans who fail to hold companies accountable for their treatment of workers or who buy the products made in sweat-shops are bystanders.

Just as the act of being a bystander takes many forms, the reasons for doing so are legion. Fear (for one's life or the lives of family members), guilt (for not having done something sooner), ignorance (being unaware of what is happening), hatred (wanting a person or people to suffer), disinterest (one is not directly affected), and greed (profiting from the violence) are just a few possibilities.

From this perspective, the OAN explains both *how* and *why* the nations were bystanders. This is not necessarily the original intent of the writer(s), but it is an intertextual possibility. Nor does this solve all of the mysteries around the OAN. The major problem with this view is how to construe theologically the bystanders' failure to respond. If the nations are judged for failing to respond to Judah's distress, then the devastation may not be *all* Judah's fault. The level of violence against Judah might have been reduced, if only the nations had not stood by idly. Nonetheless, considering the nations as bystanders helps make sense of the role of the OAN within the book of Ezekiel.

In situations of violence, justice for the victim normally includes punishment of the perpetrator, but what about the bystander, who failed to prevent the violence, whose efforts were ineffective, or who offered no support when he or she later learned of the violence? What would constitute justice? One form of justice would be punishment for their collaboration. This helps explain why Ezekiel denounces Ammon, Moab, Edom, Philistia, Tyre, Sidon, and Egypt. By 597 B.C.E. Assyria was off the world stage as a global power. These seven neighbors of Judah were the ones most likely to be a "coalition of the willing" with Judah, against Babylon. Indeed, Jer 27:3 recounts five nations—Edom, Moab, Ammon, Tyre, Sidon—gathering in Judah. There is no indication that this coalition confronted Babylon. Judah's neighbors either did nothing to assist Judah in resisting Babylon, or were ineffective. The accusations against each nation (e.g., mocking, vengeful, or hubristic) can be interpreted as the reason they became bystanders. These seven nations, like the priest and the Levite who "passed by on the other side" (Luke 10:30-35), failed to be good neighbors, which leads to YHWH's anger and resulting punishment.

The bystander role explains Babylon's glaring absence in these oracles. Ezekiel spews forth venom against Tyre and Egypt, not Babylon. A "victim's greatest contempt is often reserved, not for the perpetrator, but for the passive bystander" (Herman 1997, 92), who had a chance to help but abandoned her or him to abuse. Victims struggle with the question, "Why didn't anyone help me?" This seems to be the question addressed by the OAN. Why did these nations not help Jerusalem?

Considering bystanders also gives some insight into the location of the OAN

between the oracles of judgment against Judah (chs. 1–24) and the oracles of salvation (chs. 33–48). This commentary argues that the oracles of salvation concern recovery from trauma. Part of recovery includes addressing the problem of bystanders. The OAN may be the first step in that process.

Literary Overview

The number seven dominates the OAN (Block 1998, 4–5). In seven chapters Ezekiel directs oracles of judgment against seven of Judah's neighbors: Ammon (25:3*b*-7); Moab (25:8-11); Edom (25:12-14); Philistia (25:15-17); Tyre (26:1–28:19); Sidon (28:20-26); and Egypt (29:1–32:32). The seventh judgment, against Egypt, consists of seven oracles (see p. 179). Seven dates occur throughout the oracles (26:1; 29:1, 17; 30:20; 31:1; 32:1, 17). In Hebrew numerology seven had connotations of perfection. Given Ezekiel's fondness for numbers, it is not surprising to encounter such numerological expansiveness. But it also speaks to the crafting of these chapters. Lawrence Boadt suggests the choice of seven bears climactic value. The seventh nation, the worst of all, receives the sevenfold fullness of punishment (1980, 178). The tremendous artistry at smaller levels will be noted in the commentary of individual units.

Half of the dated oracles in Ezekiel fall within the OAN. They are generally clustered around the time of Jerusalem's destruction (see p. xxv) and literarily located between an oracle predicting a fugitive telling of Jerusalem's fall (24:25-27) and its fulfillment (33:21-22). Scholars debate the significance of these dates. Some events in this period can be reconstructed, others are elusive. Regardless of a particular date's significance, that the OAN centers on Jerusalem's destruction supports interpreting the nations as bystanders. At that crucial time, Jerusalem's survival or destruction hung in the balance and these nations could have tipped that balance one way or the other. Their failure to act determines that they will be weighed on the scales of divine justice.

The Usual Suspects (25:1-17)

Ezekiel's quarrel with the nations begins with Israel's nearest geographical neighbors, working clockwise from Jerusalem. Ammon, Moab, and Edom compose the Transjordanian countries east of the Jordan River. Philistia inhabits the west coast along the Mediterranean Sea. But these nations are Judah's nearest neighbors in another way. Biblical tradition understands Israel to be

related to them. Ammon and Moab supposedly originate from sons born of incest between Lot (Abraham's nephew) and his daughters (Gen 19:30-38). Edom's eponymous ancestor, Esau, is Jacob's twin (Gen 25:24-26, 30). Tradition remembers these relationships primarily as hostile (e.g., Num 22; Deut 23:3; Obadiah). The Philistines are not ethnic kin but have been in the land as long as Israel (Gen 21:34; 26:1). Israel struggles most against the Philistines for territory and identity (e.g., Judg 16:28-31; 1 Sam 5–6; 17:1-54). Historic animosities exacerbate Ezekiel's anger against these nations' current treatment of Judah.

Literary Analysis

Ezekiel's discontent takes the form of a three-part *prophetic proof saying* repeated in identical language against each nation. "Thus says the Lord GOD . . . because (vv. 3, 6, 8, 12, 15) . . . therefore (vv. 4, 7, 9, 13, 16) . . . you/they shall know that I am YHWH" (vv. 5, 7, 11, 14, 17). This structure shows that the oracle against Ammon consists of two parts, vv. 3-5 and vv. 6-7. The audience for these oracles is not the nations but the exilic community, with the hope they will attain knowledge of YHWH in the actions against each nation.

The structure's repetition is only one of many poetic techniques in this chapter. Parallelism also plays an important role (see Exegetical Analysis below). Repetition of key words and phrases ties the oracles together: to be handed over/given "to the people of the East for/as a possession" (Ammon, v. 4; Moab, v. 10); "malice" (Ammon, v. 6; Philistines, v. 15 creating an *inclusio* for the chapter as a whole); "revengefully," "vengeance" (Edom, v. 12; Philistines, v. 15); and "I will stretch out my hand" (Edom, v. 13; Philistines, v. 16). The NRSV's prosaic layout of the chapter obscures many of these poetic techniques, which often determine central themes and ideas in the chapter. (See Bidlack 2000, 92–95, 103, 118, 131, 141 for poetic layouts.)

Exegetical Analysis

*Introduction (vv. 1-3*a*)*

After the standard *prophetic word formula* (v. 1), the chapter opens with the familiar *hostile orientation formula* (v. 2), indicating judgment will follow. For the first time YHWH's hostility is directed not to Jerusalem or the exiles, but to "the Ammonites." The combination of the *call to attention formula* and the *messenger formula* (v. 3*a*) occurs at other key places where Ezekiel's audience is

really supposed to pay attention (compare 6:3; 20:47 [21:3]; 36:4).

*Ammon (vv. 3*b-*7)*

Two features distinguish Ammon from the other nations in this chapter: it comes first and it is the only oracle addressed personally to "you." The reasons for these features are speculative. Beginning with Ammon, Jerusalem's nearest neighbor, makes geographical sense. The personal tone also makes sense since Ammon was the nation initially spared by Nebuchadnezzar (21:19-22 [24-27]).

Ammon is accused of gloating over Jerusalem's destruction, shouting "Aha!" The Hebrew term's use in Ezekiel and Psalms implies satisfaction at an enemy's destruction (26:2; 36:2; Pss 35:21; 40:15 [16]; 70:3 [4]). The verbal expression is paralleled by physical gestures in verse 6. They "clapped [their] hands," "stamped [their] feet," and "rejoiced with malice." At one level these actions resemble the verbal and physical expressions of hostility Ezekiel is commanded to perform in 6:11 (see p. 35). But there are subtle differences. Ammon's cry is "Aha!" not "Alas." A different verb is translated "to clap," one used in contexts of joy (Ps 98:8; Isa 55:12). The expression "stamping feet" occurs only in Ezekiel but apparently expresses two different emotions: foot-stomping anger (6:11) and here, toe-tapping joy. Ammon plays the bystander role. One can hardly lend a helping hand when busy using it for gleeful clapping.

The final expression, "rejoice," emphasizes Ammon's satisfaction (v. 6). But it is expressed "with malice." This word, unique to Ezekiel (vv. 6, 15; 36:5 [NRSV, "contempt"]), indicates why Ammon rejoices. Like joyous crowds tearing down statues of Lenin or Saddam Hussein, the Ammonites are free to express malice against their hated, oppressive enemy only after that enemy's defeat. The objects of Ammon's gloating are expressed in triad form: YHWH's sanctuary, the land of Israel, and the house of Judah. Ammon celebrates the threefold destruction of Judah's cult (the Temple was profaned), its country (made desolate), and king (taken into exile).

Josephus recounts that some years after Jerusalem's destruction, Nebuchadnezzar conquered Ammon and Moab, assimilating its citizens into the empire (*ABD* 1.195). No destruction layer has been archaeologically documented in these regions corresponding with this alleged "conquest," however. Apparently, Ammonite settlements enjoyed relative prosperity and continued well into the Persian period, suggesting the Babylonians mostly ignored Ammon.

Ammon played a bystander role, protecting itself by collaborating with the Babylonians (2 Kgs 24:1-2). Although a participant in the coalition meeting

described in Jer 27:3, apparently any diplomatic or military efforts quickly collapsed, each nation quietly going its own way. Ammon rejoices in Judah's downfall because it means Nebuchadnezzar will not come after them. Their joy, however, is short-lived. As bystanders, they may escape Nebuchadnezzar, but not YHWH.

Their punishment mirrors Judah's fate. Rejoicing in Judah's loss of territory, Ammon will lose its territory (v. 4) and suffer exile. YHWH will hand them over to "the people of the east." It is less important to identify these people than to know they are foreigners who will receive Ammon for "a possession." This theologically loaded word encompasses YHWH's promise to give land to Israel as "a possession" (Exod 6:8). In Ezekiel, the word always refers to the transfer of possession of land from one group to another (11:15; 25:10; 33:24; 36:2, 3, 5; Strong 1993, 157).

The result of this land transfer is described in three parallel statements (vv. 4-5). First, these new residents will set "encampments" and pitch "tents" in "you" (fem. sing., a reference to land). "Encampments" refer to settlements (Gen 25:16; Num 31:10; 1 Chr 6:54 [39]), not temporary dwellings, and, like refugee camps, even "tents" can become permanent habitations (Pss 49:11 [12]; 74:7; Jer 9:19 [18]; 30:18; Hab 1:6). Second, the foreigners will reap the benefits of Ammon's labor (fruit and milk; compare Deut 6:10-11; Josh 24:13). Third, Ammon's capital, Rabbah, will become pasturage for their animals. The land will be emptied of one people and filled with another.

These events will happen at YHWH's behest (v. 7). Strikingly, much of the language here matches YHWH's actions toward Judah: "I have stretched out my hand against" (see 6:14; 14:9, 13; 16:27); "I will hand you over as plunder" (see 7:21; 23:46); and "I will cut you off" (see 14:8, 13, 17; 21:3, 4). YHWH "will destroy" Ammon (compare 14:9), as if Nebuchadnezzar had taken the left fork in the road after all (21:20 [21:25]).

Moab (vv. 8-11)

The oracle against Moab devotes a striking amount of space to Ammon, perhaps reflecting the close genealogical and geographical relationship between the two (see p. 153). Throughout the Bible, Moab and Ammon are paired twenty-seven times.

The accusation against Moab is limited to their quotation of a proverbial saying, "The house of Judah is like all the other nations" (v. 8). This simple saying has many layers of meaning. It expresses the exile's own desire to end the covenant relationship with YHWH (20:32; see p. 118). This saying denies Israel's

unique relationship with YHWH (compare Deut 4:7-8, 33-34; 2 Sam 7:22-23; 1 Chr 17:21). If Judah is like the nations, there is nothing distinctive about its God. Like other nations, Judah has become Babylon's vassal. Like the deities of other defeated nations, YHWH could not protect the people from Marduk (Babylon's chief deity).

This may explain Moab's role as bystander. If Judah was like the other nations that had fallen to Nebuchadnezzar and YHWH was like their gods, then there was no incentive for Moab to join a coalition against Babylon (Jer 27:3). Judah would not defeat Babylon nor would YHWH defeat Marduk. The strategy was successful. Babylon treats Moab like it treated Ammon (see above).

Ezekiel envisions a different fate for Moab. YHWH will "lay open the flank of Moab" (v. 9). "Flank," literally "shoulder" (e.g., Num 7:9; Deut 33:12; Judg 16:3), is often translated "slope" (e.g., Num 34:11; Josh 15:8-12). "Flank of Moab" may refer to the steep rise up the Jordan rift valley from the Dead Sea to the plains of Moab, an elevation change of several thousand meters. Since the phrase occurs in parallel with "towns on its frontier," it might alternatively refer to Moab's eastern boundary. Beth-jeshimoth, Baal-meon, and Kirathaim run roughly northwest to southeast from the Dead Sea, up the ridge, and end on the plains. The main point is that YHWH will "lay open" Moab from one end to the other, allowing "the people of the east" to enter (v. 10). Like Ammon, Moab will be given to foreigners as a possession (v. 10).

Ammon shall not be remembered among the nations (v. 10*b*; compare 21:32), the equivalent of oblivion. Against Moab, YHWH will "execute judgments" (v. 11*a*), as YHWH judges Israel (5:10, 15; 11:9; 16:41). Moab's (and Ammon's) offense was failure to come to Judah's defense. Justice for Judah will come when YHWH's "judgments" end their bystander role.

Edom (vv. 12-14)

The familiar saying, "Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord" (Rom 12:19 KJV), characterizes the oracles against Edom and the Philistines. Vengeance dominates both. Various forms of the root *nqm*, "to avenge oneself," occur five times in each oracle. The basic motif of the oracles is "*nqm* for *nqm*" (Greenberg 1997, 526). The dynamics of revenge are important for understanding these oracles.

Laura Blumenfeld (2002) writes of her search for revenge against the young Palestinian man who shot her father in the streets of Jerusalem. Although he was not seriously injured, she felt a deep need to avenge this act. She asks, "What makes people lash back?" A psychologist answered, "Shame. When people are

humiliated, they feel like they have to get even" (26). The loss of honor creates the need for revenge. "Getting even" satisfies that need. "Revenge means seeking a kind of cosmic, primal balance," restoring one's sense of dignity and honor (61). Blumenfeld desired revenge because "my father's injury should not go unanswered" (25).

This need to restore balance and honor is evident in the Bible, where vengeance is an obligation. Murder, rape, and serious bodily harm require an act of revenge (*TDOT*, 10.3–5). Esteem for life underlies the demand for revenge in these instances. Scorning life imbalances social relations. God seems to seek revenge to redress shame. Divine vengeance restores God's honor when covenant is desecrated (Lev 26:25), the Temple/Zion are destroyed (Jer 50:28; 51:36), or God's servants are harmed (Deut 32:43; 2 Kgs 9:7; Ps 79:10; Isa 35:4; Jer 15:15; *TDOT*, 10.9; Greenberg 1997, 501).

In taking vengeance upon Judah (v. 12), Edom is trying to restore its honor and dignity. The form of Edom's revenge cannot be definitively determined. One possibility is that Edom welcomed or even helped the Babylonians, instead of aiding Judah (compare Obad 11; Dicou 1994, 184). Edom defecting from the coalition (Jer 27:3) when help was most needed fits the bystander role.

What moved Edom to seek revenge against Judah is unknown. Recalling that Jacob and Esau are brothers gives a certain poignancy and cruelty to Edom's abandonment of "brother" Israel. Of course this "grievously offended." The same verb occurs in Gen 42:21 when Joseph's brothers confess, "we *offended* our brother; we saw the distress of his soul when he pleaded with us, but we would not listen" (author's translation).

YHWH's response is to "stretch out" a hand against Edom (v. 13; compare 6:14; 14:9, 13; 25:7). The resulting action is described with two *merisms*. First, YHWH will "cut off" from Edom "humans and animals." The pairing "humans and animals" occurs "always with the idea of a ravaged and depopulated land" (Boadt 1980, 43–44). Edom's punishment resembles YHWH's pledge to Judah for its own breaches of covenant (14:13, 17, 19, 21). Second, they shall fall by the sword "from Teman even to Dedan," demarcating Edom's entire territory. No place within Edom will escape divine wrath. YHWH will make Edom "desolate (*ḥorbâ*)" when its people fall "by the sword (*ḥereb*)." ("Desolate" and "sword" form a word-play in Hebrew.)

So YHWH will take vengeance upon Edom for taking vengeance upon Judah (see pp. 158–59). Unique to this oracle is that Israel will participate in YHWH's act of vengeance (v. 14). The "avenger of blood" is designated to take the life of a murderer (Num 35:9-28). "Avenger" is literally "redeemer," or "next of kin" (Lev 25:25, 47-49). Perhaps, as Edom's brother, Israel is the only one who can

legitimately take this action.

When YHWH's/Israel's vengeance has been carried out against Edom, then the exiles will know YHWH by another name, "my vengeance." YHWH will restore the cosmic imbalance created by Edom's inaction and Jerusalem's subsequent destruction.

Philistia (vv. 15-17)

The Bible mentions the Philistines more than any other peoples, a testament to the "unending hostilities" between Philistia and Israel (v. 15; compare 35:5; Bidlack 2000, 143). Ezekiel claims that because of these "unending hostilities" the Philistines "took revenge in destruction."

The paradigmatic model of revenge is the story of Samson. When his wife is given to the best man, Samson sets fire to Philistine fields, vineyards, and olive groves. The Philistines retaliate by burning his wife and father-in-law, which Samson pledges to avenge "with great slaughter" (Judg 15:1-8). Later, when Samson is captured and blinded by the Philistines, he prays, "let me be avenged [by this] one act of revenge" (author's translation). Samson pulls down the two pillars of the house, destroying everything and everyone around him (Judg 16:21, 28–30). To this day, military strategists speak of the "Samson syndrome" (Blumenfeld 2002, 30).

Even so, the Philistines' presence is puzzling. In the power struggle between Egypt and Babylon, the Philistines cast their lot with Egypt. Although Nebuchadnezzar was never able to conquer Egypt, he systematically destroyed Egypt's allies, including Philistia. The Babylonian Chronicles recount Nebuchadnezzar's conquest of Philistia between 604–601 B.C.E. Babylonian ration lists of 592/91 B.C.E. mention the "sons of Aga" (Ashkelon's last king) and other important Ashkelonians (see Stager 1996, 59–69, 76–77). By Ezekiel's day, Philistia had already suffered the destruction Jerusalem will soon experience. Philistine envoys are not represented in the coalition meeting (Jer 27:3), leading many scholars to question whether this oracle was added at a later date, perhaps to round out the number of nations to seven (see Strong 1993, 145–47).

Given Philistia's prior destruction, it is difficult to assess their bystander status, unless one considers their destruction a form of vengeance. Then Philistia becomes like the teenager who commits suicide in order to "get even" with his parents. Philistia's demise did do harm to Judah. Philistine cities produced the most important cash crops in the region: wine and olive oil. Philistia's destruction denied Judah access to these necessities, closed down Judah's only

access to sea trade (see pp. 161–62), and left one less potential ally to stand against Nebuchadnezzar.

Even if this oracle was added later to the OAN, that editor seems aware of Philistia's destruction. Three parallel lines describe YHWH's punishment. God will stretch out the hand, cut off, and destroy (compare v. 13). The objects of these actions are the Philistines, the Cherethites, and the remaining seacoast. "Cherethites" (Cretans) reflects the Philistines' assumed origins in the Aegean (Amos 9:7). Together they encompass the totality of Philistine territory. YHWH's "great vengeance" mirrors the Philistines' vengeance with "malice of heart."

Theological and Ethical Analysis

(1) The bitterest feuds are between family members. Because they are closest to us, our family should not betray us, yet betray us they do. Revenge is personal, whether on a familial or a more global scale. Revenge partly motivated war against Saddam Hussein, as attested by President George W. Bush's comment, "This is the guy who tried to kill my dad" (http://archives.cnn.com/2002/ALLPOLITICS/09/27/bush.war.talk/ [accessed July 31, 2009]). Bush echoes Blumenfeld's words: "My father's injury should not go unanswered." Similarly, the fight between Israelis and Palestinians is not surprising. The brothers Jacob and Esau are again at each other's throats. These oracles of judgment against Judah's closest kin are reminders of the pain inflicted in familial relationships.

The ethical issue is how to respond to pain without inflicting further pain. Revenge is unending. Person A takes revenge against Person B, who retaliates against Person A, and so on. Taking revenge against Edom and Philistia, YHWH leaves no survivors, lest later descendants seek vengeance upon Judah in return, continuing the cycle of violence.

For Ezekiel, justice demands the bystanders' destruction. It is evident, however, that behind each nation's inaction lies generations of hostilities. If it is true that "the enemy of my enemy is my friend," it is no wonder that Ammon, Moab, and Edom were willing to cozy up to Babylon, and Philistia welcomed Egypt. But this approach to conflict resolution results in endless cycles of revenge. We need to see Ezekiel as a mirror that reflects how not to act. For a model, we may uphold Lev 19:18, "You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against any of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself," even when that neighbor is your enemy (Luke 10:25-37).

(2) It is not unusual in the Bible that divine punishment of human beings involves maltreatment of the earth. One result of God's judgment in this chapter

is environmental disaster. Edom will be "desolate," with neither human nor animal. Today desertification, deforestation, and pollutants have rendered uninhabitable environments once home to many species and human communities. Along with the Philistines, YHWH will "destroy the rest of the seacoast." We know too well that such destruction has an impact far beyond the human inhabitants. Human disasters (such as oil spills) and natural disasters (such as hurricanes) cause the kind of destruction Ezekiel envisions. The environmental impact of judgment appears elsewhere in the OAN (26:14, 19; 29:8-9, 11-12; 30:12; 31:15; 32:13, 15), highlighting the connection between justice and the environment.

Biblical justification of environmental destruction must be resisted. When nations engage in so-called "justified retribution," the result inevitably afflicts the land. Consider images of burning petroleum wells during Desert Storm, the land mines leaving fields unusable, and the yet-unknown effects of the use of depleted uranium. Ecological responsibility alone makes justifying war questionable (see p. 132).

In an era that confronts global warming, extinction of species, and emerging strains of drug-resistant bacteria, perhaps Earth is avenging human abuses of the environment. "We now know clearly that Earth is a living organism and we might expect from one so ravaged a longing for retribution as demanding and desolating as God's" (Carley 2001, 157). How is humanity to restore balance to the finely tuned, interdependent relationships that constitute healthy communities and ecosystems? This is a theological issue (see also p. 220). It is necessary "to look beyond the book of Ezekiel to see that proof of God's presence and power is demonstrated best in Earth's continuing provision for animate creatures, irrespective of their deserts or status" (Carley 2001, 157).

Oracles against Tyre (26:1–28:19)

Overview

From Philistia, Ezekiel's attention continues up the Mediterranean coast to the Phoenician city, Tyre, a city actively involved in trade with Philistia. The oracles against Tyre and its prince/king take up most of 26:1–28:19. The Exegetical Analysis will consider the nature of Tyre's bystander role, prompting this outpouring of venom. (On bystander, see pp. 151–52.) Familiarity with aspects of Tyre's history in Ezekiel's day helps readers appreciate the rhetorical impact of these oracles.

Tyre had unique fortifications. The Hebrew for Tyre, *ṣôr*, is etymologically related to the words for "rock, cliff" (*ṣûr*) and "flint" (*ṣōr*). The name embodies Tyre's location: a rocky island off Lebanon's southern coast. Its separation from the mainland was a formidable defense, especially against traditional forms of warfare. Neither the Assyrians nor Babylonians destroyed Tyre. But its greatest defensive strength was also a weakness. Isolation from the mainland made it dependent upon inland "daughter-towns" for supplies, especially fresh water and food. Blockading Tyre was an effective tool of war. Josephus wrote that Nebuchadnezzar besieged Tyre for thirteen years (*Ag. Ap*. 1.21), so weakening Tyre that it never fully recovered. But Tyre never capitulated to Nebuchadnezzar (compare 29:17-20). Tyre was never effectively conquered until Alexander the Great built a land bridge from the mainland to the island fortress in 332 B.C.E.

Tyre was the economic and commercial superpower of its day, as Ezek 27 vividly describes. It was more interested in conquest by trade than by troops. Tyre sought to balance open economic collaboration with Assyria and Babylon, while resisting the empire's political control (Corral 2002, 68–76, 85–90). Its alliance with Egypt was particularly strong. Egypt supported every Phoenician (Tyrian) revolt against Assyria in the seventh century. Material remains demonstrate Tyre's vigorous commercial exchange with Egypt (Corral 2002, 76–85). Tyre also had substantial trade with the Philistines and strong commercial links with Edom, allowing it access to the lucrative Arabian trade (Corral 2002, 90–98, 174). For all intents and purposes, Tyre's control of commerce from the overland routes in Western Asia to the sea routes in the Eastern Mediterranean had serious consequences for Judah.

The assumption that Tyre aided Judah in its attempt to withstand the Babylonian siege is increasingly questioned. John Strong notes that there is no direct evidence that Tyre came to Judah's aid. He argues that Tyre remained neutral when Judah rebelled (1993, 173–74; compare 2 Kgs 24:20). Martin Alonso Corral (2002) argues that Tyre's oppressive trading policies motivated Ezekiel's condemnation of the city. Tyre may have restricted Judah's access to strategic metals (iron, copper, tin), tribute metals (gold, silver), and horses (necessary for military purposes), commodities Judah needed to mount any resistance to Nebuchadnezzar. Such trade embargoes would have undermined Judah's revolt, while increasing Tyre's economic assets. Tyre sought to fill its treasuries, irrespective of the impact on others. From Judah's perspective, the result is hardly "neutral."

The oracles against Tyre consist of four units, each beginning with the *prophetic word formula* (26:1; 27:1; 28:1, 11). Judgment against Tyre (26:1-21) is followed by lamentation over Tyre (27:1-26). Judgment against Tyre's prince

(28:1-10) is followed by lamentation over Tyre's king (28:11-19). Because of the misdeeds of Tyre and its rulers, the city and its rulers will be ruined. This is emphasized by the phrase that concludes each unit, "I will bring you/you have come to a dreadful end, and you shall be no more (forever)" (26:21; 27:36; 28:19). This is Tyre's ultimate fate.

I Am a Rock, I Am an Island (26:1-21)

Literary Analysis

Ezekiel's opening salvo against Tyre takes the same form as the oracles against Ammon, Moab, Edom, and Philistia (ch. 25), a three-part *prophetic proof saying* (vv. 2-6). The *messenger formula* (vv. 7, 15, 19), the *conclusion formula for divine speech* (v. 14), and the *prophetic utterance formula* (vv. 14, 21) divide the chapter into four subunits (vv. 1-6, 7-14, 15-18, 19-21; Bidlack 2000, 152; Hals 1989, 184, 186–87). This division is imperfect. The third oracle lacks a concluding formula (v. 18). Moreover, an *inclusio* formed by "bare rock" and "place for spreading nets" (vv. 4-5, 14) suggests reading verses 2-14 as one oracle instead of two. Nonetheless, the chapter exhibits a logical order. In the first oracle, Tyre's anticipation of greater life is thwarted by attack. The second oracle expands the description of that attack, occasioning human reactions in the third. Finally, Tyre descends to death (Darr 2002, 1358; Lind 1996, 222).

Tyre's topography, a rocky island, takes center stage in this chapter, as seen in the repeated water imagery: sea(s) [6x]; waves; water; coastlands [3x]; deep, great waters. The sea is vital to Tyre's success—and to its demise, forming an *inclusio* for the chapter as a whole (vv. 2-6, 19-21).

Exegetical Analysis

The opening date indicates Ezekiel will hear of Jerusalem's fall in about a year (33:21), so at this time Jerusalem feels the brunt of Nebuchadnezzar's siege (compare 24:1). Besieged Jerusalem needed trading partners, such as Tyre, to supply it with military resources and food. Tyre, presumably restricting Judah's access to such materials (see pp. 160 and 166–67), becomes a "bystander" who contributes to Jerusalem's trauma.

Tyre stands accused because it says, concerning Jerusalem, "Aha!" (v. 2), expressing satisfaction with what is transpiring (compare 25:3; see p. 154). They rejoice that "broken is the gateway of the peoples." Corral argues that "gateway"

designates a port, not city gates (2002, 144), suggesting that Tyre's joy is over Nebuchadnezzar's destruction of the Philistine seaports versus Jerusalem's destruction (see p. 158). Tyre benefits from that destruction and the resulting shift in southern trade ("I shall be replenished"). Since Nebuchadnezzar did not resettle destroyed areas, Tyre could increase its trading monopoly by seizing control of the now abandoned Philistine ports (Corral 2002). Tyre's glee is a result of postwar profiteering.

Since Judah was landlocked during most of its history, it depended on Philistine cities for the import and export of products (Corral 2002). Its destruction forces Judah's reliance upon Tyre for trade goods, which leaves Jerusalem vulnerable to Tyre—and Tyre cares only how this event benefits *Tyre*. Its self-interest negatively impacts Judah's interests. (This issue is raised more explicitly in chapter 27.) Tyre becomes a "bystander," attending to its bottom line, even if that comes at Judah's expense.

The next verses detail YHWH's response, summarized in the first phrase, "See, I am against you" (v. 3). The *challenge to a duel formula* declares that this fight will be to the finish. The only one left standing will not be Tyre. As the sea hurls its waves against the shore, so YHWH will hurl many nations against Tyre. As waves erode a coastline, these nations will destroy Tyre's wall and towers (v. 4), leaving it defenseless. Storm waves can strip a coast bare—of sand, of buildings, of vegetation. Thus, these nations will do to Tyre, leaving it bare rock. Verse 5 emphasizes this threat. Instead of thriving commerce, Tyre's rock will become suitable only for drying fishing nets. Just as Tyre thought to "plunder" Philistine and Judean trade, so it will become plunder. The sword will kill the inland daughter-towns, necessary to Tyre's existence (v. 6).

Verses 7-14 expand and elaborate upon Tyre's destruction. The judgment against Tyre is directed against its defensive systems: mainland colonies, physical fortifications (towers, walls), and isolation. Tyre may consider itself to be both impregnable and invincible, just as Judahites believed in Zion's inviolability (Pss 46:5 [6]; 48:1-8 [2-9]; 132:13-18; Isa 37:33-35; 38:6). This oracle batters away at Tyre's physical and metaphysical defenses as relentlessly as the waves.

The anonymous "[many] nations" become one nation, Babylon, with its "horses, chariots, cavalry, and a great and powerful army" (v. 7). The ancient world's super-power brings its full arsenal against a smaller adversary. Tyre has trading ships but lacks horses, chariots, cavalry, and a great and powerful army. Its defenses are primarily that: defensive.

Nebuchadnezzar will grind Tyre to dust, systematically dismantling the city and tossing it into the sea. Before Nebuchadnezzar's arrival Tyre was a strong,

vibrant city, with daughter-towns, towers, gates, people, merchandise, fine houses, stones, and so on. Hammered by Nebuchadnezzar's sword, siege wall, battering rams, horses, cavalry, and chariots, Tyre is reduced to bare rock, useful only for spreading nets. The contrast is shocking, as is the contrast between the sounds of Nebuchadnezzar's destruction and the silence of Tyre's commerce and songs (Bidlack 2000, 193). Tyre's silence is similar to Nebuchadnezzar's silencing of Jerusalem's singing (Ps 137:1-4; Lam 5:14-15). Unlike Jerusalem, which will sing once again (Isa 42:10; 51:3, 11; 52:9; 54:1), Tyre's silence is permanent (v. 14).

Readers of Ezekiel are most concerned with Jerusalem's death, but on the world's stage, Tyre's death is more significant (vv. 15-17). As Tyre's walls "shake" from the noise of Nebuchadnezzar's army (v. 10), so the coastlands, Tyre's trading partners, will "shake" from the noise of its fall (v. 15). YHWH's wrath or impending judgment often shakes the earth (e.g., Judg 5:4; Pss 18:7 [8]; 46:3 [4]; Isa 13:13; Jer 4:24). Tyre's destruction is like an earthquake's epicenter, with the resulting shock waves radiating outward to be felt throughout the Mediterranean basin, especially by its trading partners. Tyre's fall has catastrophic economic consequences for the entire region.

In response, "the princes of the sea," the rulers of these coastal markets, engage in ritual acts of mourning (v. 16). Their movement mirrors Tyre's movement: down. They step down from their thrones, ending up sitting on the ground in mourning (compare 2 Sam 12:16-17; 13:31; Job 2:13). They strip off their embroidered garments, as Tyre is stripped down to bare rock. The tremors and aftershocks of Tyre's collapse reach into their very bones causing them to tremble. So they raise a lamentation over Tyre (v. 17).

The coastlands also "tremble" and are "dismayed" (v. 18). "Tremble" (compare v. 16) describes a response to fear (e.g., Gen 42:28; Judg 7:3). "Dismayed" describes a response to a disaster (e.g., Gen 45:3; Judg 20:41; Job 4:5). Verse 17 suggests that the princes and coastlands may celebrate being rid of Tyre's economic tyranny. But mourning, shaking, trembling, dismay, and lamentation show that Tyre's demise is not experienced as liberation. If Tyre disappears, the coastlands and princes may not be far behind. In mourning for Tyre, the princes are mourning their own impending demise.

The movement downward continues in the final section (vv. 19-21). The sea swallows Tyre, emptied of all its inhabitants and former glory. YHWH will bring "the deep" over Tyre and cover it with "great waters." The forces of the very waters from which it derived life destroy Tyre. But YHWH continues to "thrust [Tyre] down," joining "those who descend into the Pit" (compare 31:14-18; 32:17-32; see p. 202). The "Pit" is the realm of death and the abode of "the

people of long ago (*ʿôlām*)." *ʿÔlām* carries connotations of both eternity (Gen 3:22; 9:16; 2 Sam 7:13, 24; Ps 9:7 [8]; Ezek 16:60) and antiquity (Ps 24:7; Isa 63:9, 11; 64:4 [3]). The implication is that Tyre will be there *forever*.

There is no place lower for Tyre to go than the "world below," Tyre's new dwelling place, where they will be "like everlasting ruins" (author's translation). Ancient ruins such as Stonehenge, Chichen Itza, Luxor, and the Acropolis are ruins precisely because they are dead places where no people live. Tyre's descent to below emphasizes what readers already know—the city that once gloated over its abundant life is now dead and buried.

The final oracle makes clear that there will be no resurrection for Tyre. Their place in the Pit is permanent. Tyre will have no place "in the land of the living." This crown jewel of commercial enterprise comes to "a dreadful end." Future archaeologists may search for Tyre; but their search will be futile, for nothing remains.

Theological and Ethical Analysis

Tyre reigns supreme upon the world stage, yet comes to an inglorious end. There are only hints as to why such a terrible judgment is visited upon it. The argument is made that not Tyre's pride but its self-centeredness goeth before its fall. Tyre sought to increase its bottom line at everyone else's expense, voicing neither sorrow at Philistia's destruction nor concern for Jerusalem's vulnerability. Its only thought is that "I shall be replenished."

Tyre's concern for its bottom line is indicative of the fact that nations are inherently selfish. "National interests" drive international relations. The United States' decision to attack Iraq, despite significant global opposition, reflected the administration's stated concerns of "national" security. Examples could multiply of the ways in which self-interest and self-centeredness drive international commerce and politics. But that selfishness often has detrimental effects upon others. If nations are blind or indifferent to that harm, if nations fail to assist those in economic distress, if nations become bystanders to or perpetrators of economic violence, Ezekiel states that God's judgment will follow as surely as the sea hurls its waves.

The Unsinkable Ship (27:1-36)

Literary Analysis

The *prophetic word formula* (v. 1) identifies the opening of the next oracle against Tyre. Ezekiel conveys his message with two of his favorite forms: *lamentation* and *metaphor*. He laments over Tyre, portrayed metaphorically as a great merchant ship. Lamentation is a fitting response to the depiction of Tyre's descent into the Pit at the end of chapter 26, and focuses attention on Tyre's demise. The metaphor of Tyre as a great ship focuses attention on Tyre's commercial activities. Words related to sailing (builders, rowers, pilots, caulking, planks, oars, etc.) and commerce (business, trade, merchandise, markets, payment, barter, etc.) dominate the chapter. The commercial focus is further sharpened by the list of goods this great ship carried. "The economic character of the second oracle is overwhelming" (Corral 2002, 156). Tyre's "beauty" is a direct result of its economic power.

The chapter divides into four subunits beginning with introductory material (vv. 1-3*a*). Verses 3*b*-11 develop the metaphor of ship with Tyre and is defined by the repetition in verses 3, 11 of "perfect . . . beauty." Verses 5-7 detail the specifics of the ship's construction, and verses 8-11 the ship's personnel. The third unit (vv. 12-25*a*) lists Tyre's trading partners and their goods, emphasizing the extent of its lucrative trading empire. The final subunit (vv. 25*b*-36) resumes the ship metaphor. Verses 26-27 describe Tyre's titanic shipwreck in the characteristic "then/now" pattern of lamentation. Verses 28-36 recount the reactions of various groups to this maritime disaster.

Although the structure is uncomplicated, there are many interpretive difficulties. One issue is how verses 12-25, which abandon the ship metaphor, relate to the other subunits. While many view these verses as a later insertion, the repetition of key terms and phrases connects them to the other subunits: "heart of the seas" (vv. 4, 25, 26, 27); "gave, exchanged" (*nātan*; vv. 10, 12, 13, 14, 16, 17, 22); "barter, wares, merchandise, trade" (*ʿārab*, *maʿărāb*; vv. 9, 13, 17, 19, 25, 27, 33, 34); "merchant, trade" (*rākal*; vv. 3, 13, 15, 17, 20, 22, 23, 24); "wares" (*ʿizzĕbôn*; vv. 12, 14, 16, 19, 22, 27, 33); "wealth, riches" (*hôn*; vv. 12, 18, 27, 33); "do business, traded, dealers, merchants" (*sāḥar*; vv. 12, 16, 18, 21, 36).

The numerous technical terms relating to sailing and trade present another difficulty. Many of them are *hapax legomena*. Locations and commodities, important at the time, are sometimes matters of speculation today. Even if details remain obscure, the overall depiction of Tyre's rich, extensive trade is clear.

Exegetical Analysis

In response to Tyre's death at the end of chapter 26, Ezekiel is commanded to

lament over Tyre (compare 19:1; see p. 108). “Then” Tyre sat “at the entrance to the sea” and was the “merchant of the peoples on many coastlands” (v. 3). These two phrases set the main themes of this chapter: Tyre’s dominance of the sea and of commerce. The former permits the latter. Tyre describes itself as preeminent, “perfect in beauty,” a description applied to bride Jerusalem (16:14). None surpass either Jerusalem or Tyre. Having read chapter 16, however, readers might fear for the future of this other perfectly beautiful city.

Instead of critiquing Tyre’s self-evaluation, the following verses support its claim. One aspect of its perfection is “location, location, location.” Tyre’s “borders are in the heart of the seas” (v. 4). Tyre was surrounded by water, giving it access to trade and providing its security. The next clause, “your builders made perfect your beauty,” begins the ship metaphor. This vessel can sail where it will, even to the heart of the sea.

It boldly goes where no ship has gone before because Tyre is beautifully and expensively built from the finest imported materials (vv. 5-7). Each item also has royal or priestly overtones. “Fir trees” (or “cypress”) and “cedar” were used to build the Temple (1 Kgs 5:8, 10; 6:15, 34; 9:11). “Oak” is associated with important religious sites (Gen 12:6; 35:8; Deut 11:30; Judg 9:6; 1 Sam 10:3). “Deck” is the same word for the “frames” of the tent of meeting (Exod 26:15-29; 36:20-34). “Ivory” is associated with royal palaces (1 Kgs 10:18; 22:39; Ps 45:8 [9]; Amos 3:15). The constellation “linen, embroidered, blue, and purple” is associated with the tabernacle’s construction (compare Exod 25:3-4; 26:1, 31, 36; 27:16), priestly garments (Exod 28:15, 39), and Jerusalem’s bridal finery (16:10, 13). The Chronicler similarly describes the Temple (2 Chr 3:14). Thus, the description of this great ship fuses materials from the tent of meeting, the tabernacle, the Temple, and the palace. That is one impressive ship!

Verses 8-11 describe those who run the ship. Although the identification of Zemer is problematic, the other locations in verses 8-9 are eastern Mediterranean ports politically and economically dominated by Tyre. The “inhabitants,” “skilled men,” “elders,” and “artisans” of these cities are “rowers,” “pilots,” and “seam caulkers.” Nobles from neighboring cities perform the various, even menial, ship duties (Zimmerli 1983, 58). Perfect Tyre is steered by the finest crew. Its competitors would rather serve as laborers on Tyre’s ship than as captains of their own.

Many places in verses 10-11 cannot be identified with certainty. They may document Tyre’s far-flung empire, from Africa in the west to Persia’s eastern edge. These lands’ inhabitants serve in Tyre’s army, hanging shield and helmet in Tyre and their quivers on Tyre’s walls. Tyre can attract not only a noble sailing crew but also mighty warriors from its trading empire.

Here and at the end of verse 9 the metaphor slips. Shields "hung" on walls evoke a city, not a ship. Military personnel and weapons are more often found on land than at sea. They "gave [Tyre] splendor (*hādār*)" and "made perfect [Tyre's] beauty." The military presence is not merely decorative, however, like modern military parades, which display not only splendor but also military power and the implicit threat of its use. *Hādār* is elsewhere associated with YHWH (Isa 2:10, 19, 21) and human military "majesty" (Ps 45:3-4 [4-5]; Lam 1:6; Dan 4:30). As city and ship, Tyre is capable of defending itself by land or by sea. Witnesses of this military display will think twice before engaging it. Its location, quality construction, skilled crew, and military might give Tyre every right to boast, "I am perfect in beauty."

The second subunit (vv. 12-25*a*) further supports Tyre's claim of perfection by itemizing the goods that Tyre trades and their countries of origin. Judah's contribution to Tyrian trade is agricultural products (v. 17), suggesting it produced enough surplus to export such items but also suggesting that it lacked other needed goods. Considering Judah's dependence on trade for indispensable products, and Tyre's control of trade, contributes to understanding Tyre's role as bystander.

Geological surveys of the Levantine area show that Judah's metal resources were insufficient. It had no gold, silver, tin (used in bronze production), or copper. Although there is iron in the region, the best iron deposits were in areas beyond Judah's control (Corral 2002, 103). This metallurgical poverty is significant considering the importance of these metals in antiquity. Gold and silver were "tribute metals," used to pay various overlords (2 Kgs 16:8; 18:14, 16; 23:33, 35). Bronze, requiring both copper and tin, was still used extensively for weaponry as well as more common utilitarian items, including tools and household items. Iron was the basic component of weapons and other tools, especially those used in agriculture, such as sickles and plowshares. Without these metals Judah cannot pacify Babylon nor manufacture tools needed for agricultural production or weapons to fight Nebuchadnezzar.

Judah relied more heavily upon infantry than chariots due to its hilly terrain. "Horses" and "warhorses" (v. 14) were still important military resources, however (Corral 2002, 118–24; Yadin 1963, 2.297–302). Horses were neither native to Judah nor bred by Judahites; they had to be acquired via trade (Corral 2002, 123–24). Judah would also have depended heavily upon "mules" for both military purposes (Yadin 1963, 2.287) and cultivation and transportation of agricultural products.

Many of the remaining products in the list were status symbols (vv. 15, 16, 22, 24). They were important for maintaining the monarchy's and the religious

establishment's prestige (see p. 165) but were resources that Judah could only acquire through trade.

So the items listed—metals, livestock, prestige items—mattered a great deal to Judah. Judah, being resource poor, depended heavily upon trade with Tyre. By controlling trade, Tyre controlled Judah.

> Since Tyre was in a dominant position, [it] could easily take advantage of Judah's weakness. [Tyre] may have charged high dues for commercializing Judah's products, paid very little for them, charged Judah high prices for metals, and imposed tariffs on their distribution, or even curbed Judah's access to international markets. (Corral 2002, 115)

There is no biblical or extrabiblical evidence that Tyre exploited Jerusalem. Still, Tyre's trade dominance and Judah's dependency create the potential for Tyre to devastate Judah's economy.

The image of the bounty in verses 12-25, coupled with the image of Tyre's inviolability, might assuage Judah's fears. As long as ship Tyre sailed, Judah could obtain the goods needed to survive Nebuchadnezzar's siege. But Judah's vulnerability lurks in the shadows of this painting. That Tyre is "filled and heavily laden in the heart of the seas" (v. 25) might generate Judean anxiety instead of relief. Does Tyre boast too much? Is the ship too heavily laden? It looks unsinkable, but other unsinkable ships have gone down.

We quickly discover this ship's fate. Its rowers bring it into "the high seas" (lit., "many waters"; v. 26), a significantly ambiguous phrase. Perhaps the rowers do a good job, successfully navigating ship Tyre to the waters that nourish its growth (compare 17:5, 8; 19:10; 31:7). But the phrase also repeats nearly verbatim "the great [or many] waters" that cover Tyre in 26:19. Impending doom becomes reality when the east wind wrecks Tyre. The "east wind" is always a destructive force (e.g., Exod 10:13; Job 27:21; Ps 48:7 [8]; see p. 96). "In the heart of the seas," the domain of Tyre's prosperity (vv. 4, 25), Tyre comes to an abrupt end. In one short verse, the perfect ship sinks (v. 27). All of Tyre's commerce and all of its personnel are destroyed.

The imagery conveys the cessation of Tyrian commercial activities. Historically, Tyre's shipwreck may be a veiled reference to Nebuchadnezzar's alleged thirteen-year siege of Tyre, or perhaps it references Judah's inability to obtain goods because of Tyre's exploitative trading practices. This becomes the essence of Tyre's bystander status; for whatever reason, Tyre failed to provide Judah the materials it needed to resist Nebuchadnezzar. Tyre is like a sunken ship whose collapse heightens Judah's defenselessness.

That this crushing blow sends Judah reeling is reflected in the vocabulary of

mourning. The countryside "shakes" at the cries of drowning sailors (v. 28; compare 26:15). Surviving sailors race for the safety of *terra firma*, where they "wail aloud" and "cry bitterly" over Tyre (vv. 29-30). Bitter crying bespeaks unbearable loss. The only other occurrence of this phrase is in Esth 4:1. Mordecai wails with a "bitter cry" upon hearing of Haman's plans to destroy the Jews.

Faced with such loss, the sailors engage in ritual acts of mourning (vv. 30-31*a*). They throw dust on their heads (Josh 7:6; Job 2:12; Lam 2:10), wallow in ashes (Jer 6:26), make themselves bald (Isa 22:12; Jer 16:6; Ezek 7:18; Mic 1:16), and don sackcloth (Gen 37:34; 2 Sam 3:31; Ezek 7:18; Joel 1:8). Tyre's collapse creates an economic situation so dire that others experience it as a kind of "death." Verse 31 ends with the repetition of bitterness, bitterness of soul and bitter mourning.

The sailors raise a *lamentation*, poetically creating a lamentation within a lamentation (vv. 32-36). The lament's opening is difficult. Two comparisons are possible, to Tyre's total destruction (so NRSV) or to Tyre's maritime preeminence (Zimmerli 1983, 61). The line may make both comparisons. Who is there to compare with Tyre "in the midst of the sea"? "No one." Only Tyre and its wares "satisfied" many people (including Judeans). Only Tyre with its "abundant wealth and merchandise" "enriched" the kings of the earth (including Judean kings). "Satisfy" and "enrich" suggest a level of excess. Tyre's goods saturated the market.

If none could compare with Tyre in its wealth, then who could compare with Tyre in its destruction? The answer is again, "No one." Tyre is shipwrecked, its crew drowned, and its merchandise sunk. "Satisfy" and "enrich" are often paired with the opposites "hunger" (compare Exod 16:3; 1 Sam 2:5; Prov 27:7) and "poor" (compare 1 Sam 2:7; Prov 10:4; 30:8). Tyre's shipwreck means starvation and poverty for those once sated with food and money. No wonder the coastlands' inhabitants (including Judeans) are "appalled," and kings (including Judah's) are "horribly afraid" (lit., their hair stands on end), so that their "faces are convulsed." No wonder the "merchants" "hiss," an expression of profound grief (compare 1 Kgs 9:8; Lam 2:15; Darr 2002, 1382–83). Lamentation within lamentation ensues when the unsinkable ship Tyre comes "to a dreadful end and shall be no more forever" (v. 36; compare 26:21).

The length and vitriol of the oracles against Tyre are usually attributed to the fact that it withstands Nebuchadnezzar's siege whereas Judah falls. In other words, Ezekiel rants out of envy. In that case, one could expect expressions of glee or satisfaction at Tyre's sinking. Ezekiel's wrath is not directed at Tyre's eventual survival, but at Tyre's failure to provide Judah with needed goods. Had

Tyre avoided being a bystander, perhaps Judah's (and Tyre's) future would have been different.

Theological and Ethical Analysis

(1) The chapters of the OAN address the issue of "bystanders" (see pp. 151–52). The argument here is that Tyre functioned as bystander by depriving Judah of needed resources, either through exploitative trading practices or restrictive trade. Either would have deprived Judah of essential items such as metals and horses, weakening an undersupplied Jerusalem as it faced Nebuchadnezzar. This is primarily speculative. As it stands, the chapter sings of a magnificent trading ship that is there—and then is not, devastating all who rely upon it.

The scenario demonstrates how the various regions of the ancient world were intertwined economically. If that was true then, how much more so today. For those living in the United States, the ethical issue of America's bystander status comes to the fore. It is impossible to enumerate the many ways in which the United States, either intentionally or unintentionally, economically exploits other nations or fails to make needed resources available. Exploitation or embargoes make the United States no more than a sinking ship, a bystander. Tyre may have had good reasons for failing to aid Judah. To increase profits or to avoid retaliation by Nebuchadnezzar are two possibilities. The United States may also have good reasons for failing to give aid: controlling the national deficit, following national policy decisions, or responding to crises at home. But good reasons are irrelevant to those who suffer as a result. The criticism the United States' initial offer of $15 million evoked after the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami reflects this dynamic. If bystanders come under divine judgment, then there should be a bitter cry against the United States's inadequate response to other global crises. For example, Congress periodically restricts aid to combat HIV/AIDS in Africa because some object to distributing condoms. To the quarter of the continent's population facing death, this makes the United States a bystander to their suffering.

(2) God's absence in this chapter is noteworthy. After the initial command to Ezekiel in verses 1-3, there is no further direct divine discourse, nor is there any mention of divine activity. God is not involved either in Tyre's perfection or its destruction, which raises an intriguing theological issue. This chapter presents the possibility that God had nothing to do with Tyre's success. In other words, prosperity cannot in all cases be equated with divine favor. The frequent refrain of "God bless America" equates American success and prosperity with God's blessing. But God's absence in this chapter raises the suspicion that a nation's

prosperity may be a sign of savvy business decisions rather than divine reward.

The Divine Right of Kings (28:1-19)

Literary Analysis

The focus turns from Tyre to its "prince" (v. 2) or "king" (v. 12). There is no meaningful difference between these terms. These oracles stress that Tyre's wealth and prestige were the result of deliberate royal policies. The intimate connection between a city and its ruler is accented through the repetition of "in the heart of the seas" in reference to both (27:4, 25-27; 28:2, 8). As Jerusalem suffered for the acts of its rulers, so shall Tyre.

This unit is composed of two subunits. The *conclusion formula for divine speech* and the *prophetic utterance formula* in verse 10 mark the end of the first subunit. Another *prophetic word formula* and direct address to the prophet in verses 11-12*a* mark the beginning of the second subunit. The first subunit is a *prophecy of punishment*. The text identifies the second subunit as *lamentation* (v. 12), so that lamentation again follows judgment (see p. 161). The formal features of lamentation are absent, however, and the content resembles a prophecy of punishment.

The main themes of the unit are carried through repetition of key words: "heart is/has become/was proud" (vv. 2, 5, 17); "wisdom" (vv. 4, 5, 12, 17); "trade" (vv. 5, 16, 18); "beauty" (vv. 7, 12, 17); and "splendor" (vv. 7, 17). The unit's logic is that wisdom begets trade, which begets beauty and splendor, which in turn beget pride. Since wisdom stands at the beginning of this progression, language associated with Israel's wisdom tradition plays a central role. "Wisdom" can refer to technical skill and ability possessed by artists (e.g., Exod 35:35; 36:2, 8; 1 Chr 22:15-16) and sailors (Ezek 27:8). More often it denotes cleverness or cunning, which can be employed wickedly or benevolently (e.g., Gen 41:8; Deut 1:13; 2 Sam 13:3; 14:2). In Proverbs, wisdom has to do with the ability to successfully navigate life by discerning the correct path to take. All these meanings apply to the wisdom of Tyre's ruler. He is a technician and artist, clever and able to discern the path he should take—in relationship to commercial trading.

The second subunit presents a number of interpretive challenges: textual difficulties, perplexing phrases, and *hapax legomena*. It is tempting to skip this difficult oracle since little can be determined with a high level of probability. Moreover, its metaphors are challenging to decipher. The Exegetical Analysis

simplifies this oracle by reading each verse as distinct and focusing on what is reasonably clear.

Exegetical Analysis

The initial accusation against Tyre's ruler is pride, his "heart was elevated" (v. 2, author's translation). "Elevating the heart" is the basis of the proverb "pride goes before a fall." "Before collapse a man's heart is elevated; and before honor is humility" (Prov 18:12 [author's translation]). Pride leads to destruction because those with elevated hearts are inclined to think they are superior to others (Isa 10:5-14). This is what happens to Tyre's ruler. He elevates his heart and says, "I am a god."

The next phrase shows how high this ruler lifts his heart. "Seat" is symbolic of royal authority (compare 1 Sam 20:25). The Hebrew, *ʾĕlohîm*, is most often translated "God." Tyre's ruler claims both divine status and divine authority: "I am God; I sit on God's seat" (author's translation). There is no evidence that Phoenician kings claimed divine status, but from Ezekiel's perspective, Tyre's ruler let the city's success go to his head, er, heart.

That Tyre's ruler compares himself to God does not make it so. The ruler has lifted his heart "as the heart of God" (author's translation). In Hebrew idiom the heart is the location of the kind of mental activity that today is associated with the mind. To compare intellects in Hebrew is a comparison of hearts. Even now pride is an emotion associated with the heart as in "her heart swelled with pride." "Heart" repeats nine times in Hebrew, showing its centrality to this unit (vv. 2 [4x], 5, 6 [2x], 8, 17).

The ruler does have a superior intellect. "You are indeed wiser than Daniel; no secret is hidden from you" (v. 3 and see 14:14). Ezekiel's audience probably did not know the book of Daniel, but modern readers cannot help thinking of the Daniel famed for his wisdom (Dan 1:17, 20; 2:23, 48; 5:11). Tyre's ruler is even wiser. By his "understanding" Tyre amasses its fabulous wealth (v. 4). The ruler's business acumen makes commerce boom. In today's political climate, where a robust economy determines political success, Tyre's ruler would be reelected in a landslide. The connection between wisdom and wealth also evokes comparisons with King Solomon, known for both (1 Kgs 3:5-28; 5:7, 12; 7:48-51; 9:28; 10:1-27).

Ezekiel never disputes the ruler's boast. His wisdom and riches are sufficient reasons to "elevate his heart." Israel's wisdom tradition would concur, evident in the allusions to personified Wisdom in Proverbs. Both ruler and Wisdom are characterized by "wisdom" and "understanding" (v. 4; Prov 3:13; 8:1). Both are

responsible for filling "treasuries" (v. 4; Prov 8:21). It is by Wisdom that kings reign and rulers rule (Prov 8:15-16). When Ezekiel reiterates "by your great wisdom in trade you have increased your wealth" (v. 5), he is speaking no more than the truth. Every Davidic ruler, and not just Solomon, would have prayed for the wisdom of Tyre's ruler. The problem is neither wisdom nor wealth, per se, but in letting wisdom and wealth go to one's head/heart. "And your heart has become proud in your wealth" (v. 5; compare v. 2). Tyre's ruler elevates his heart to the unforgivable level of considering himself divine (v. 6), resulting in terrible consequences (vv. 7-10).

Inclusio frames the announcement of destruction: "I will bring strangers (*zārîm*) . . . by the hand of foreigners [*zārîm*]" (vv. 7*a*, 10*a*). These strangers/foreigners are "the most terrible," literally the most ruthless of all nations. They attack that which led to the ruler's pride, "the beauty of your wisdom" (v. 7*b*). Symbolically, this resembles the attack against the World Trade Center towers. The terrible nations assault the heart of Tyre's economy, then "defile your splendor" (v. 7*b*). This is a religious as well as political act. If Tyre's ruler sets himself up as God, then he would consider himself "sacred" and must avoid being "defiled" (see pp. xxiii, 121 and 138–39). Defilement is unavoidable, however, as he dies "the death of the uncircumcised" (v. 10). Instead of being God in the heart of the seas, Tyre's ruler will die violently there (v. 8; compare v. 2). The ruler's death proves that he is mortal, not god. Facing his killers, Tyre's ruler cannot claim divinity (v. 9).

That Tyre's ruler considers himself God is insufficient reason for judgment. Many Western Asian rulers believed themselves divine. What matters is the impact that his pride had on Judah, which remains unspecified. The next subunit shows that Tyre's ruler used his godlike wisdom to amass wealth unscrupulously. Generosity to a needy neighbor, Judah, would adversely affect assets (compare Deut 15:7, 11). Ezekiel denounces Tyre's pride as a proximate cause for Jerusalem's destruction. For *that*, Tyre will be destroyed.

The "lamentation" over Tyre's ruler begins, "You were the signet of perfection" (v. 12). This is a place where the Hebrew's meaning is uncertain. The difficulties lie with the two words *signet* and *perfection*, which are in a genitive construction. The meaning of the root of the first word is "to seal," referring to sealing documents. The Hebrew is a masculine, singular participle: "the sealer of [the next word]." The NRSV translates it as the common noun, "seal, signet": "signet of [the next word]."

The next word is even more obscure, occurring only here and in 43:10. The meaning is usually understood as "measurement, proportion, or example," based on 43:10, where it is used in reference to measuring the new Temple. Thus, the

lament is over "the sealer of the measurement." Alternatively, the root may include in its range of meaning the idea of "correctness" (Zimmerli 1983, 81), hence something that is totally "correct," or as NRSV translates, "perfection."

The question remains what the translation means. The next phrase, "full of wisdom and perfect in beauty," offers some clarity. "Full of wisdom" recalls the superlative description of the ruler's wisdom (vv. 3-5); "perfect in beauty" echoes Tyre's previous boast (27:3, 4, and 11). The point is that Tyre's ruler is one of a kind, perfect in every way. Rabbinical texts support this interpretation (cited in ArtScroll, 468). "All proportion or symmetry is at the peak of perfection in you" (*Berachot* 1:4). "Do you think yourself as great as Adam?. . . He was full of wisdom and perfect in beauty and still did not proclaim himself a god" (*Mahari MiTrani*).

Verses 13-14 are hopelessly obscure. All that can be reasonably said of verse 13 is that the ruler was in Eden (the garden of God), there were many precious stones, and YHWH created him, themes echoing the creation stories (Gen 1–2). This evidences a certain logic. Where else would a perfect being reside but in paradise? Eden is probably a metaphor for Tyre. Ruling over Tyre was like Adam ruling over the garden (Gen 2:15). Although there are obvious similarities between the list of precious stones and the stones in the priest's breastpiece (Exod 28:17-20), readers should not lose sight of the fact that gold and precious stones were also a part of the garden (Gen 2:12). The list of nine stones, like the list of goods in 27:12-25, presents difficulties in translation, but precise identification is not necessary to capture the sense of luxury. Finally, something was prepared "on the day that you were created." The verb "created (*bārāʾ*)," whose subject is always YHWH, is central to the creation story (Gen 1:1, 21, 27; 2:3-4). What emerges from these fragments is a comparison of Tyre's ruler with the first human. God created Tyre's ruler and he was very good.

Verse 14 refers to "cherub," "the holy mountain of God," and walking among "the stones of fire." The cherub is associated with YHWH's glory and throne chariot (9:3; 10:4, 7, 9, 14). Although "holy mountain of God" is unique to Ezekiel, "mountain of God" and "holy mountain" are familiar terrain in the Sinai (e.g., Exod 3:1; 24:13) and Zion (e.g., Ps 48:1-2 [2-3]; Isa 11:9) traditions. Fire joins with God's glory on Sinai (Exod 24:17). The phrase "stones of fire" is an Ezekielian creation, but something similar is found among the cherubim of the throne-chariot (10:2, 6-7). Tyre's ruler "walks" among these stones. The Hebrew verb occurs in a stem that indicates iterative action and can be translated "walk to and fro" (compare Gen 3:8; Job 1:7). In 1:13 the fire associated with the glory similarly moves "to and fro." Since cherubim, mountains, and fire are all associated with YHWH's glory, these images suggest that Tyre's ruler walked in

God's presence (Bidlack 2000, 266–67).

Verse 15*a* is straightforward. Tyre's ruler was "blameless in [his] ways from the day that [he was] created." Both Noah and Abraham also "walked to and fro" with/before God and are described as "blameless" (Gen 6:9; 17:1; 48:15). As noted before, YHWH is always the subject of the verb "to create." Tyre's ruler, created by YHWH, was like Noah and Abraham.

As difficult as these verses are, focusing on what is clear pushes readers to attend to the ruler of Tyre's *image*. Superficially, Tyre's ruler looks perfect, like a beautiful gem, a paradisiacal garden, or a great hero. But image is not everything. Tyre's ruler may have been created perfect, but a series of accusations reveals the inner flaws.

First, "iniquity" was found in Tyre's ruler (v. 15*b*). A related form of this word describes failure to treat the poor and great equally (Lev 19:15), dishonest weights and measures (Lev 19:35; Deut 25:13-16), and usury (Ezek 18:8). Tyre's ruler cheated. The second accusation is that "you were filled with violence" (v. 16*a*). "Violence" is the root cause of God's judgment against Jerusalem (7:11, 23; 8:17; 12:19). Tyre's ruler based his commercial policies on violence. The third accusation is "you corrupted your wisdom for the sake of your splendor" (v. 17*a*). "To corrupt" carries connotations of "to spoil, pervert" (e.g., Gen 38:9; Exod 8:24 [20]; Deut 32:5). To spoil something is to destroy it. Tyre's ruler took God's gift of wisdom and misused it—for the sake of the bottom line. The final accusation denounces "the multitude of your iniquities, in the unrighteousness of your trade" (v. 18*a*), another accusation of shady business dealings. The net result is that he "profaned [his] sanctuaries" (v. 18*a*). This phrase's meaning is unclear. Since God's dwelling place is a "sanctuary," one possibility is that Tyre (and its daughter-towns?) is a "sanctuary," where the self-proclaimed divine ruler dwells. The corrupt activities of Tyre's ruler profaned Tyre, just as Jerusalem's leaders profaned Jerusalem.

God created Tyre's ruler with the "wisdom" needed to generate wealth, but instead of ruling in justice and righteousness he ruled in injustice and wickedness. Ruthless trading practices were his fatal flaws. Homer described the Phoenicians as "mariners renowned, greedy merchant men" who behaved more like pirates than respectable traders (*Odyssey*, 15.415 cited in Greenberg 1997, 585). Ezekiel faults Tyre's ruler for using his wisdom to amass wealth by ruthlessly exploiting trading partners, undoubtedly including Judah (see pp. 166–67).

Three judgments are rendered against Tyre's unscrupulous ruler. First, he will be purged from God's holy mountain and expelled from the stones of fire where he once walked (v. 16*b*). Although few elements of *lamentation* are present, this

follows its before/after structure. "Then" Tyre's ruler lived in God's presence; "now" he does not. Second, he will be cast to the ground and publicly exposed before other kings, an act of shaming (v. 17*b*). Here again is the movement downward, which characterizes judgment against Tyre (26:15-20; 27:27). Third, he will be destroyed by fire (v. 18*b*). The phrase "I brought out fire from within you" is puzzling. Since the fire "consumes" (lit., "eats") him, perhaps the ruler self-destructs. Somehow Tyre's ruler becomes "ashes." This last judgment continues to evoke images of Gen 2–3. He returns to the dust from which he was created (compare Gen 3:19; 18:27; Job 30:19). ("Dust" [*ʿāpār*] and "ashes" [*ʾēper*] are homophones in Hebrew.)

Tyre looked perfect on the surface, like a beautiful gem or the garden of Eden, but there was a flaw in the stone and a snake in the grass. A look below the surface reveals that arrogance, violence, and unscrupulous trade, and not wisdom, led to Tyre's commercial success. Whatever divine right the ruler might have claimed will not save him or his city from divine judgment. So Tyre comes to "a dreadful end and shall be no more forever" (v. 19*b*).

Theological and Ethical Analysis

This unit portrays Tyre's ruler as being made in the image and likeness of God (Gen 1:26-27), one who acts in God-like ways. One aspect of God-likeness is creativity. When humans create—begetting and nourishing children, writing, painting, playing, constructing, healing, and so forth—they may be most like God. Tyre's ruler used his potential for quasi-divine creativity to create the commercial gem that was Tyre.

But it is obvious that our powerful potential for creativity can also be used to destroy. God created Tyre's ruler with the wisdom and imagination needed to create another paradise (28:13*b*). But instead of using this divine gift to create trade based on justice and compassion, he imagined more creative ways to cheat. Tyre's ruler chose to use his creativity, his business acumen, in ways that would profit him. His business mottoes may have been "More Income through Creative Injustice" or "Imagining New Ways to Exploit You."

God creates in each of us this same powerful potential. Just as God set before Israel the choice of life and death (Deut 30:19), we must choose how to use creativity and for what purposes. The choice each person must make in how to use that divine gift occurs daily and arises in all relations. The destructive creativity of Tyre's ruler occurred in the areas of economics, business, and politics. The abuse of creativity in these areas is also part of today's world. Two examples will suffice.

First, the early years of the twenty-first century were beset by a string of business scandals where companies employed "creative accounting practices" to artificially inflate profits, thereby driving up stock prices. The most deplorable aspects of these scandals have been the CEOs who retained their millions while their employees lost their pensions. Second, the Supreme Court has ruled that states cannot legislate reparations for African Americans from U.S. insurance companies because it interfered in a federal matter. The case before the Court involved insurance companies that profited off of slavery by selling life insurance policies on slaves and insuring the transport of slaves for slave owners.

These two examples, like Tyre's ruler, illustrate how profitable business practices can be immoral, with devastating economic impact upon others. On the other side are companies who offer health insurance to partners of gays and lesbians, who offer on-site child care for parents, and who adapt their business to reduce environmental impact. The world is not perfect and it may be inevitable that despite one's best efforts even good business decisions will negatively impact someone somewhere. The choice is to continue to strive to combine creativity and wisdom in business with justice and compassion.

A Thorn in the Side (28:20-26)

Just twenty-five miles up the coast from Tyre lies another Phoenician port, Sidon. Like Midland/Odessa or Minneapolis/St. Paul, Tyre and Sidon were inextricably entwined cities. Early in Phoenician history, Sidon was the preeminent port. By Solomon's time, Tyre claimed that status. Two Assyrian kings later claimed to have destroyed Sidon (*ANET*, 290b). Sidon's history during Ezekiel's time is obscure. The only contemporaneous biblical text mentions the Sidonian king as one of Zedekiah's possible coalition partners (Jer 27:3). In extrabiblical literature, Sidon's king appears in a list of rulers captured by Nebuchadnezzar (*ANET*, 308).

Ezekiel provides no further information. The oracle lacks any reason for divine judgment. In what way was Sidon a bystander? Perhaps the judgment against Sidon was necessary to round the total number of OAN to seven. Alternatively, perhaps Sidon is condemned because, like other nations, they abandoned the coalition or responded with contempt to Jerusalem's demise (v. 24; compare 25:6, 15). Sidon's involvement in slave trade might explain it (compare Joel 3:4-6 [4:4-6]; Corral 2002, 125). Maybe Sidon simply follows

Tyre like Durham follows Raleigh. The reason may be all or none of the above.

Literary Analysis

After the lengthy and colorful oracles against Tyre the oracle, against Sidon seems anticlimactic. Yet these verses are very artfully crafted and serve to anchor Ezekiel's judgments against Phoenicia. The artistry appears in numerous ways. First, key terms link these verses with the OAN that have preceded (see below and Allen 1990, 98). Second, various repetitions weave the verses together, including: "execute judgments" (vv. 22, 26); "manifest my holiness" (vv. 22, 25); "treated them with contempt" (vv. 24, 26); "house of Israel" (vv. 24, 25); "all their neighbors" (vv. 24, 26); and "live in safety" (2x in v. 26). These repetitions convey the unit's theme: YHWH will manifest holiness by judging those who have treated Israel with contempt, thereby enabling Israel to live in safety.

The *recognition formula* occurs four times in the span of five verses (vv. 22, 23, 24, 26). Knowledge of YHWH is clearly the goal of God's actions. The frequency of the *recognition formula* effectively creates a collection of very brief *prophetic proof sayings*. The oracle against Sidon consists of verses 20-23. Verses 24-26 compose the precise midpoint of the OAN—ninety-seven verses precede them and ninety-seven verses follow (Block 1998, 123). Thus, they function as a hinge between the oracles against the previous six nations and the oracles against the seventh, Egypt.

Exegetical Analysis

After the standard *prophetic word formula*, the use of the *hostile orientation formula* (v. 21) links the Sidon oracle to the oracles against Ammon et al. (25:2). A *challenge to a duel formula* (v. 22) links it to the oracles against Tyre (26:3). These links promote reading chapters 25–28 as a literary unit, brought to a close by the oracle against Sidon.

Nearly all the language in verses 22-23 echoes the exodus. In Exodus YHWH will "gain glory" over Pharaoh by destroying Egypt's army, leading Pharaoh to "know that I am YHWH" (Exod 14:4, 17-18). Ezekiel declares that YHWH will "gain glory" over Sidon, forcing Sidon to "know that I am YHWH" (v. 22). YHWH will "execute judgments" against Sidon, the same action that results in the death of Egypt's first-born (Exod 12:12; Num 33:4), and send "pestilence . . . and bloodshed" as was done in Egypt (Exod 7:20; 9:3). Egypt's destruction is Israel's

paradigmatic tale of God's victory over Israel's enemies. The language makes clear that what God had previously done against Egypt, God will do against Sidon, and by extension, the other bystander nations. The exodus language also foreshadows God's destruction of another pharaoh in chapters 29–32.

"Manifest holiness" is also associated with YHWH's defeat of enemies (Lev 10:1-3). Furthermore, all of the language in verses 22-23 occurs elsewhere in Ezekiel in connection with Jerusalem's destruction, which has become YHWH's enemy—"I am . . . against you" (21:3); "execute judgments" (5:10, 15; 11:9; 16:41); "manifest my holiness" (20:41); "pestilence" and "bloodshed" (e.g., 5:17; 7:15; 14:19); "sword" (e.g., 5:12; 11:8; 21:15 [20]); "the slain shall fall" (6:7). This language also foreshadows YHWH's final destruction of Israel's enemies in chapters 38–39 (38:16, 21-22; 39:4-5, 6-7, 13, 21, 27). These two verses have but one aim: to announce YHWH's destruction of Israel's enemies.

The consequences for Israel are announced in verses 24-26. Elsewhere, judgment against Israel ended in brief announcements of a future, *after* that judgment is completed (11:17-20; 16:60-62; 20:40-42). Here is a similar brief announcement of Israel's future that comes after judgment against Israel's enemies is achieved.

This announcement is addressed to the "house of Israel" (vv. 24, 25), Ezekiel's favorite designation for the exile community. As a result of their enemies' destruction, Israel will no longer bleed from a "pricking brier or a piercing thorn." "Brier" is an Ezekielian term (2:6) and is modified by a word that elsewhere refers to skin disease (Lev 13:51-52; 14:44). "Thorn" is a generic term for a noxious, thorny weed (Gen 3:18; Judg 8:7; Jer 4:3; Hos 10:8) and is modified by a word that describes physical or mental pain (Gen 34:25; Job 2:13; Isa 65:14; Jer 15:18). In other words, *this hurts*! The source of Israel's hurt has been "all their neighbors," "who have treated them with contempt." The message of verse 24 is that YHWH both feels their pain and makes it go away.

YHWH will then gather the exiles "from the peoples among whom [you have been] scattered" (v. 25). Restoration, as well as destruction, can manifest divine holiness (compare 20:41). Significantly, this gathering occurs "in the sight of the nations." Everything that happens in the OAN takes place in the public arena. Ezekiel interprets these international events as divine activity.

Once gathered, YHWH brings the exiles back to "their own soil," the soil that YHWH "gave to my servant Jacob" (v. 25; compare 37:25). The reference to God's "servant Jacob" occurs almost exclusively in prophetic oracles of salvation (e.g., Isa 44:1-2; 45:4; 48:20; Jer 46:27-28). Israel comes full circle. YHWH took them out of the land promised to Jacob and the other ancestors (Gen 28:3-4, 13-14) and now YHWH returns them to that same land, but with a

significant difference.

The difference is that now Israel "shall live in safety in it." The issue of safety and security will be considered in chapters 34 and 38, especially as it pertains to trauma (see pp. 215–16 and 237–38). The point here is that those who surround it will no longer harm Israel. Ammon, Moab, Edom, Philistia, Tyre, and Sidon will no longer be thorns in their side. The final consequence of their enemies' destruction is that Israel will be able to build houses and plant vineyards. A deuteronomic curse for covenant disobedience is that the people would build houses but not live in them, plant vineyards but not enjoy their fruit (Deut 28:30). Building houses and living in them, and planting vineyards and enjoying their fruit, are signs of security since they require time and no vexing neighbors. Another prophet describes these activities as part of the "new heavens and a new earth" that God will create (Isa 65:17, 21; see also Eccl 2:4; Jer 32:15). Repetition emphasizes that Israel *really* "shall live in safety" when YHWH has executed judgments, not solely on Sidon, but "upon all their neighbors." By this final manifestation of divine holiness, the exiles will know YHWH.

Theological and Ethical Analysis

As proposed at the beginning of the OAN, the nations addressed in these oracles represent the larger sociopolitical matrix in which Israel's trauma of exile occurred. Their response, or the lack of response, contributed to Israel's trauma. Respect for Ezekiel and his audience as trauma victims demands an account of those who are indirectly involved and ordinarily invisible. The OAN makes the role of these nations as bystanders visible. A similar dynamic was at work when the United States used military force against Afghanistan and the Taliban. The Afghanis were not the perpetrators of the events of 9/11, but they were bystanders, fostering an environment in which bin Laden and al-Qaeda could flourish.

Unfortunately, Ezekiel's only proposed redress is extermination. But if extermination of Judah is problematic (see pp. 29–30 and 132), so is extermination of the bystanders to Israel's trauma. Genocide and ethnic cleansing are two consequences resulting from a belief that God defends "our side" by destroying "their side." This dangerous worldview creates a vicious cycle of violence as one trauma begets another.

If destroying bystanders is eliminated from ethical consideration, two ethical questions arise: (1) what are appropriate responses to bystanders, and (2) how can we move people from their bystander role? As to the former, this author does not have the answer. I hope others will take up that task.

As to the latter, here are two suggestions (see also p. 204). Since the role as bystander is seldom considered, the first suggestion is to engage in self-reflection. In what way(s) am I (or we) a bystander? In what situation(s) have I or my community, group, or nation ignored, avoided, or attempted to silence a sufferer? Second, Jews and Christians have within their Scriptures and traditions the means to call persons to action. Ruth will not abandon Naomi to her bitterness. The Samaritan stops and carries a wounded man to safety and healing. There is the demand to love one's neighbor, even one's enemy, as oneself. These suggestions are by no means a full or complete response to the question of how to move out of the bystander role. I hope others will contribute their solutions to a more adequate answer.

Oracles against Egypt (29:1–32:32)

Overview

After the thoroughness of Tyre's judgment, readers might think Ezekiel had exhausted his store of wrath against foreign nations. Yet one-half of the OAN is devoted to Egypt (see p. 175). Consideration of Egypt and Judah's complex history helps to explain why Egypt is singled out as a bystander.

It would be hard to overstate the significance of Egypt in Israel's history. The long sojourn in Egypt of the covenant people, their subsequent slavery, and eventual exodus from bondage compose Israel's defining story. "YHWH who brought you up from the land of Egypt" is among Israel's central images of God (e.g., Deut 20:1; Josh 24:17; 1 Sam 10:18). This story serves as a defining metaphor for the new exodus from exile (Isa 43:15-21). But Egypt was not just a place of oppression but also a place of refuge (1 Kgs 11:17-22, 40; 12:2). When there was famine in the land, Abraham and Jacob went to Egypt for food (Gen 12:10; 42:1-3). In Egypt, Joseph rose to be second only to Pharaoh (Gen 41:37-45). The dual nature of the interactions, where Egypt can either be the cause or the cure of distress, overlays the oracles against Egypt.

Unfortunately, there is little evidence of the relationship between Egypt and Judah during 593–571 B.C.E., the span of time covered by the dates in the book of Ezekiel. The Bible indicates that Egypt exerted a significant amount of influence and control over Judah from the death of Josiah (609 B.C.E.) to the defeat of Pharaoh Neco (610–594 B.C.E.) by the Babylonians (605 B.C.E.). This power is indicated by Egyptian ability to interfere in the succession of the Davidic dynasty (2 Kgs 23:33-35; see also *HAIJ*, 383–85, 388–90). Around 591 B.C.E.

Psammetichus II (594–588 B.C.E.) made a tour through the region following a successful military campaign against Nubia (Freedy and Redford 1970, 479; *HAIJ*, 411). Jeremiah 37:1-11 records that Pharaoh Apries (Hophra [589–570 B.C.E.]) sent an army to Jerusalem that resulted in a temporary lifting of the Babylonian siege. Jeremiah emphasizes that this was only a temporary reprieve and does not indicate exactly when during the siege this happened. There are no Egyptian or Babylonian documents that corroborate this event. This is the bulk of what is known of Egyptian/Judean relations. Most reconstructions rely heavily on biblical texts with no extrabiblical corroborating evidence and are thus interesting but hardly persuasive.

It is useful to examine the other references to Egypt in Ezekiel (Bidlack 2000, 285–86). According to 16:26, Jerusalem "played the whore with the Egyptians." The text condemns some kind of political relationship between the two nations. Jerusalem's king, presumably Zedekiah, is accused of breaking a covenant with Babylon by seeking military assistance from Egypt (17:15). Ezekiel 19:4 speaks of Egyptian domination when the "lion cub" (Jehoahaz) is captured and taken to Egypt (2 Kgs 23:31-34; Jer 22:10-12). Egypt is the place from which YHWH promised to bring Israel out of slavery (20:5-10) and where YHWH sought to punish Judah's apostasy (also 20:36). Finally, Egypt is the place where the two sisters learn "to play the whore" (see 23:3, 8, 19, 27). These references to Egypt display two tendencies. First, Egypt is characterized as the place where long ago Israel learned to turn away from YHWH in the cultic realm, by worshiping Egyptian gods. Second, Egypt is also characterized as the place where Judah presently turns away from YHWH in the political realm, by seeking military assistance.

Ezekiel does not specify the crimes Egypt has committed that come under divine condemnation. Egypt is portrayed as powerful (dragon/crocodile, lion, strong arm), but also as weak (easily captured, reed that breaks, broken arm). These oracles declare Egypt's power will be completely destroyed, never fully to return to its former level of power. Given Ezekiel's other references to Egypt, these oracles picture it as the powerful rescuer who fails to rescue. In contrast to the other nations, Egypt is seen as powerful enough to stand against Babylon, but Egypt either failed to protect Judah or its help was ineffective. Egypt is a bystander, an ineffectual helper (see pp. 151–52). Having failed to use its power effectively, Egypt will never wield that power again. Though not explicitly stated in Ezekiel, one implication of Egypt's destruction is that it prevents Egypt from functioning in its two traditional roles: it shall never again be either a place of bondage or a place of refuge for Israel.

Judgment against Egypt is portrayed in a series of seven oracles (29:1-16;

29:17-21; 30:1-19; 30:20-26; 31:1-18; 32:1-16; 32:17-32). A date, followed by the *prophetic word formula*, identifies the beginning of new units. Examination of the dates raises several chronological questions. The second oracle is the latest date in the book of Ezekiel and interrupts an otherwise chronological order. The third oracle is inexplicably undated. Out of fourteen dates in Ezekiel, seven are in the OAN, and six of those seven are in the oracles against Egypt. Why so many? Unfortunately, there are insufficient data to answer these questions. A general clustering around the time of Jerusalem's destruction suggests the central importance of that event (on p. xxv).

The literary relationship among the oracles is also complex. The metaphor of the Nile crocodile appears in the first and sixth oracles. The theme of breaking/being broken is central to the first and fourth oracles. No verbal connections link the first two oracles, but the second continues describing Egypt's future existence that concludes the first. The second and third oracles share a common theme: the day of YHWH. A brief reference to Egypt's descent to the Pit/Sheol at the end of the fifth oracle is the sole focus of the seventh. The *recognition formula* occurs once in the second, third, sixth, and seventh oracles, three times in the first and fourth oracles, and is absent from the fifth oracle. Other key words (Pharaoh, land of Egypt, sword, horde) are repeated throughout but are each absent from at least one oracle.

The oracles are clearly too interconnected to read them as unrelated texts. Many of these connections will be explored in the following analysis. An overarching pattern or logic is not evident, however, and numerous connections with prior oracles invite comparison and contrast between Egypt, Tyre, and Judah. What they share is that each comes under divine judgment.

Crocodile on the Sandbank (29:1-16)

Literary Analysis

This unit resembles a one-act play composed of a prologue, three scenes, and an epilogue. The prologue (vv. 1-2) sets the stage for the action. In the first scene (vv. 3-6*a*) the "maker of allegories" compares Pharaoh to a great crocodile captured and tossed into the wilderness to die. The second scene (vv. 6*b*-9*a*) compares Egypt/Pharaoh to a staff that cannot bear the weight of one who leans on it and so is destroyed. The third scene (vv. 9*b*-12) focuses on the river, home to crocodiles and reeds, which will become desolate and waste. Verses 13-16 form an epilogue to the previous scenes, describing what will happen to this

river, land, people, and king in the generation after the destruction occurs, and summarizing the unit's central issue (v. 16*a*). The date formula in verse 17 marks the beginning of the next unit.

As with Tyre, things are not always what they seem (see p. 173); the ferocious crocodile can be caught, a supposedly strong staff is easily broken, and great Egypt can be brought low. Each scene downplays Egypt's ability to rescue Judah from Babylon. Reliance upon Egypt is futile. Pharaoh is not the great protector he seems.

Exegetical Analysis

The unit begins with the *hostile orientation formula* (v. 2) and the *challenge to a duel formula* (v. 3). Both portray YHWH and Pharaoh as opponents, as they have been dueling from the beginning of Israel's history (compare Exod 15:1-18). This fight will be to the finish. The one left standing will not be Pharaoh.

Ezekiel makes dramatic use of metaphor. Pharaoh is compared to "the great dragon" (v. 3). This translation reflects the tradition of a great sea monster, a symbol of chaos (compare Job 41:1-34 [40:25–41:26]; Ps 74:13; Isa 27:1; 51:9). In the context of a description of Pharaoh, however, this creature is better identified as the Egyptian crocodile. Since in Egypt Pharaoh was deified, readers might think of the crocodile deity Sobek. Some worshipers of Sobek believed that he created the Nile. Thus, crocodile Pharaoh claims, "My Nile is my own; I made it for myself" (v. 3).

The metaphor is clear enough, but why compare Pharaoh to the crocodile/Sobek? Sobek was the son of the ancient Egyptian goddess of Sais, which was Egypt's capital in Ezekiel's day. Perhaps Sobek/Pharaoh inherited the ferocity, speed, and martial skills of his mother, a war goddess. Crocodiles generally symbolized danger (see *ANET*, 374, 468; Zimmerli 1983, 111). Its power to snatch and destroy its prey particularly symbolized Pharaoh's might. The very word *sovereign* was written in hieroglyphs using the glyph of the crocodile.

The crocodile imagery evokes Pharaoh's and, by extension, Egypt's powerful ability to destroy its enemies. Since the word for "sprawled" can mean "to rest securely" or "to lie at ease" (see Job 11:19; Ps 23:2; Isa 17:2; Zeph 3:13; Block 1998, 135; *HALOT*, 1181), the imagery also contrasts Egypt's security with Judah's insecurity. This is especially potent after Psammetichus II's tour of Palestine following his military successes in Sudan, and given Hophra's (Apries') apparent willingness to defy Babylon (see p. 178). Judeans might also be tempted to worship this great crocodile in the hope of gaining his protection.

Is this the one on whom Judah can rely?

Sadly, verses 4-5 burst that hopeful bubble. Pharaonic ferocity is revealed as illusion when YHWH becomes the crocodile hunter. YHWH will put hooks in its jaws, draw it up from its channels, and fling it into the wilderness. There it will lie in an open field, where scavengers will eat its flesh, leaving only a pile of whitened bones. This Pharaoh will have no monumental pyramid, no abundant supplies of food, no gold jewelry, and no armies of servants for the afterlife. Judah, like the fish attached to the reptile, will gain nothing by clinging to Pharaoh's claims of power (Darr 2002, 1405).

The play's first scene shatters the illusion of Egyptian power. The second scene therefore dramatizes how reliance upon Egyptian power leads to disaster. Pharaoh is like a "staff of reed" (v. 6*b*). The "staff" is a walking stick for the injured (Exod 21:19), the aged (Zech 8:4), or for shepherds (Ps 23:4). The "reed" is a "bulrush," the tall grass that grows alongside the Nile (Exod 2:3; Isa 19:6). Easily bent or broken, bulrushes would make poor staffs. A similar image was used by the Assyrian Rabshakeh to warn Hezekiah not to rely on Egypt (Isa 36:6 [= 2 Kgs 18:21]).

Like the Rabshakeh, Ezekiel details the unreliability, even treacherousness, of this staff (v. 7). "Shoulders" and "legs" (or "loins") make a man "manly" (e.g., Judg 16:3; Nah 2:1 [2]). The idioms about torn shoulders and unsteady legs imply the staff was truly unreliable. Whoever leaned on it would be seriously injured in the process. It would be safer to have no support. This is a stinging indictment against Egypt. The Nile's annual inundation meant a regular and abundant food supply, making it the ultimate symbol of reliability. Yet Egypt was no more reliable than a staff made out of flimsy reed.

The country that could have most affected the outcome of Judah's battle against Nebuchadnezzar was ineffective. Judah's collapse thus leads inevitably to Egypt's downfall. YHWH will bring a sword upon Egypt and mow down these reeds (v. 8). A land teeming with life will become vacant of "human being and animal," a *merismus* for all living creatures. The land made lush by the Nile will be left "a desolation and a waste" (v. 9). The pairing of "desolation" and "waste," which in Ezekiel occurs only here, creates a sense of vindictive overkill, like Esther hanging the sons of Haman, who were already dead (Esth 9:12-13).

The third scene (vv. 9*b*-12) follows the structure of a *prophecy of punishment*. "Because" Pharaoh asserts, "the Nile is mine, and I made it," "therefore" YHWH announces judgment, issuing again a *challenge to a duel* (compare v. 3) against Pharaoh and his "channels." The word *channels* refers to the Nile delta and its irrigation canals. The watery habitat that breeds crocodiles and reeds will be

destroyed.

Words of destruction pile up. YHWH will make Egypt an "utter waste and desolation" (v. 10), "a desolation among desolated countries," and its cities "a desolation . . . among cities that are laid waste" (v. 12). The entire country, from north to south (Migdol to Syene), will be as barren and as lifeless as the moon (v. 11). This will be the fate of the land whose river nourishes toothless crocodiles and unreliable reeds. Egypt's inhabitants will suffer the same fate as Judah's, a fate caused by Egypt's weakness. They will be "[scattered] among the nations and [dispersed] among the countries" (v. 12; compare 12:15; 20:23; 22:15). They will be the victims as others stand by and fail to help.

In these three scenes, YHWH destroys all of Egypt's claims of reliability. No one would rely on a crocodile carcass, shredded reeds, or a lifeless river. Egypt claimed to have, and indeed it did have, the power to aid Judah. Because it failed to do so, it will be rendered powerless.

The play's epilogue is a surprise. Unlike other bystander nations, Egypt will not be totally destroyed. Egypt will be desolate for forty years (i.e., a generation; v. 13; compare Num 32:13; Josh 5:6). Then, as YHWH will restore Judah's fortunes, so YHWH will renew Egypt (v. 14). But unlike Israel, Egypt's restoration will not be glorious. Its territory will be reduced to "Pathros," the area of Upper, or southern, Egypt. At a minimum, the loss of territory implies the Saite dynasty's end; its base lies in Lower, or northern, Egypt. More important, Egypt becomes a "lowly," "small" kingdom (vv. 14-15). The phrase "lowly kingdom" also describes Judah's vassal status in relation to Babylon (17:14). The kingdom that ruled others will itself be ruled. Egypt will "never again exalt itself above the nations" (v. 15) and "shall never again be the reliance of the house of Israel" (v. 16). "Reliance" is related to the word describing living in "safety" (28:26; 34:28; 38:8, 11) or "secure(ly)" (34:25, 27; 39:6, 26). Israel can never again view Egypt as a source of security. Finally, Judah "will recall their iniquity, when they turned to them for aid" (v. 16). Judah's iniquity was relying on Egyptian power. Judah will remember that such reliance offended God when they see Egypt powerless.

Theological and Ethical Analysis

As with Tyre, Egypt's offense is neither pride nor hubris; its claims were justified. Because of the Nile, Pharaoh ruled a secure and prosperous land. But Egypt was not the friend in time of need it claimed to be. Why Egypt was unreliable is unknown. No Egyptian or Babylonian records exist for the last years of Judah's existence. The reason is unimportant to Ezekiel, who

emphasizes the tragedy of Judah's unrealized expectation that Egypt had both the power and the will to aid it.

The oracle against Egypt raises the ethical issue of reliability. If a needy person expects that someone will help him or her and that expectation is unrealized the consequences can be disastrous. The reasons for failure will be varied, and some of them valid. That hardly matters for the victim. The United States claims to have the power to help in time of need, but how many turn to the United States and are let down? For example, in 2003, with overdeployment of troops and fears of another Somalia, the United States dithered about military intervention in Liberia's civil war. The United States finally sent a force of 150 marines that remained for ten days. To some the offered assistance fell far short of expectations. The Associated Press reported comments such as "Why did they go away?" and "They're forsaking us" (http://www.cnn.com/2003/WORLD/africa/08/24/liberia.marines/index.html [accessed July 31, 2009]). Many Liberians died after those ten days.

What is true in politics is also true in religion. A woman goes to her pastor for help because she wants out of an abusive marriage, but instead of finding her a safe place he tells her she must bear this cross (Luke 14:27). Young children looked to their priest for a model of Christian faith only to be molested. When they expected to find justice from higher church authorities, they were silenced. People expect faith communities and their leaders to have the power and the will to help those in need. Yet so often, like Egypt, these communities are more like a reed that breaks when leaned upon. Those who claim to be a staff that supports, yet are no more than an easily broken reed are, according to Ezekiel, under divine judgment.

Support the Troops (29:17-21)

Literary Analysis

The overall structure of this unit does not correspond to any one literary genre. It opens with an introductory *prophetic word formula* (v. 17). Although YHWH addresses the prophet, "Mortal," there is no command to prophesy. Verse 18 provides a reason for the announced judgement against Egypt in verse 19 ("therefore"), which appears to follow the pattern of a *prophecy of punishment*. However, the reason is not an indictment *against* Egypt for *its* sins. The final verse, a promise of deliverance for the exiles, seems unconnected to the previous

verses. The unit's occasion and purpose are also fraught with difficulties.

Exegetical Analysis

YHWH declares that "King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon made his army labor hard against Tyre" (v. 18), apparently a reference back to 26:7. They labored so hard that "every head was made bald and every shoulder was rubbed bare." These idioms are unique in the Bible. What led to these conditions is unknown. Clearly the poor lads have worked hard, but this is not the problem.

The problem is that for this labor neither king nor army "got anything from Tyre to pay for the labor." That is, they received no "wages" (v. 19) for services rendered. Since according to 26:7 they performed this service for YHWH, YHWH could be accused of violating the commandment in Deut 24:14-15. "You shall not withhold the wages of poor and needy laborers. . . . You shall pay them their wages daily before sunset." Other texts depict YHWH employing mercenary troops (compare 2 Kgs 15:37; Isa 10:5-6), but the idea that YHWH must pay these troops is unprecedented.

To avoid being accused of labor violations YHWH decides to give "the land of Egypt to King Nebuchadrezzar," who "shall carry off [Egypt's] wealth" (v. 19). Nebuchadnezzar will "plunder" Egypt as well as Tyre (26:12). YHWH's concern is Nebuchadnezzar's lack of plunder, resulting in his army's lack of wages. YHWH allows Nebuchadnezzar and his army also to loot Egypt as compensation.

YHWH reiterates the purpose of this extraordinary action is "payment for which he labored" (v. 20). This phrase recalls Lev 19:13: "you shall not keep for yourself the wages [or 'payment'] of a laborer until morning." Since Nebuchadnezzar and his army "worked for" YHWH, God must provide payment to avoid being an unjust employer. It would be nothing short of robbery if Nebuchadnezzar does not get Egypt. A later prophet views this as consonant with YHWH's character (Isa 61:8).

YHWH's compensation of Egypt in lieu of Tyre has consequences for "the house of Israel," Ezekiel's favorite expression for the exilic community. Unfortunately, the text is again obscure. When Nebuchadnezzar despoils Egypt "on that day," YHWH will "cause a horn to sprout up for the house of Israel" (v. 21). Since "horn" can be used metaphorically of "strength" (e.g., Deut 33:17; 1 Sam 2:1, 10; Pss 92:10 [11]; 148:14), one possible meaning is that Egypt's destruction will lead to "strength" sprouting among the exiles. The phrase "cause a horn to sprout up" occurs only one other time in the Bible. "There I will cause a horn to sprout up for David" (Ps 132:17*a*). This psalm as a whole celebrates the Davidic dynasty and the Temple's glory. Perhaps Ezekiel foreshadows the

new Temple (chs. 40–48). The vision of a new Temple would constitute a green shoot pushing up through the wilderness of exile.

"On that day" YHWH also "will open your [Ezekiel's] lips among them [the exiles]," more literally, "to you I will give an opening of the mouth in their midst" (v. 21). The only other biblical occurrence of "opening of the mouth" is 16:63; YHWH determines that Jerusalem will "never open your mouth again because of your shame" (see p. 90). Will Ezekiel be allowed to voice some unknown protest? Will Ezekiel's imposed muteness cease (3:26; 24:25-27; 33:21-22)? If so, then neither trauma nor shame will interfere in communication with YHWH (see p. 18). Alternatively, this may mean Ezekiel will resume his priestly role in offering intercessory prayer, or it may mean there will be rejoicing for what YHWH has done.

In summary, to further punish Egypt YHWH will bring Nebuchadnezzar to plunder its land, making up for Babylon's apparent inability to plunder Tyre. Nebuchadnezzar's actions against Egypt will somehow benefit the exiles.

The purpose of this oracle is perplexing. Taking into account the preceding declaration that Egypt shall be "a lowly kingdom" (see 29:15), perhaps the intent is to emphasize that lowliness. Egypt is so lowly that in comparison Tyre seems like Goliath. Nebuchadnezzar labored so hard against Tyre his army was expended, yet he was unable to carry off its wealth. In contrast, Egypt will provide easy pickings. To imply that Tyre is a tougher adversary demeans Egypt. To suggest that YHWH's only reason to bring Nebuchadnezzar against Egypt is to replenish the military budget is even more degrading. The oracle demonstrates just how "small" Egypt was.

This oracle contains the latest date in the book of Ezekiel. Other dates in the Egyptian oracles cluster around the fall of Jerusalem. Modern commentators argue that this late date correlates with the cessation of Nebuchadnezzar's alleged thirteen-year siege against Tyre (see p. 160), a possible occasion for this oracle. Historical reality contradicts the oracles against Tyre, especially 26:7-14, so Ezekiel must now go back and "fix" them to render the prophetic words valid, lest the exiles further discount his prophecies (e.g., 2:5-7; 3:7-11; 12:22, 27). Unfortunately, this analysis is too problematic to be meaningful.

The first problem is correlating the date to the ending of the alleged siege against Tyre. Evidence for the siege and its dates are at best sketchy (Corral 2002, 57–63). Absent this historical connection, there is little to say about the date's significance.

Moreover, even if Nebuchadnezzar did fail to conquer Tyre, to "correct" the oracle of 26:7-14 with the oracle of 29:17-21 simply replaces one failed prophecy with another. No extrabiblical texts substantiate a Babylonian defeat of

Egypt. The explanation that this oracle is a correction of failed prophecy leaves readers with the same problem the oracle was supposed to fix.

The argument for "correction" involves the exiles' tendency to discount Ezekiel's prophecies, but the OAN is replete with reasons for the exiles to disbelieve Ezekiel. Josephus notwithstanding, Ammon, Moab, and Edom probably were not destroyed (see pp. 155 and 157). Furthermore, this oracle is dated some fifteen years after other dated Egyptian oracles, which describe destruction as devastating as the prophecies against Tyre. Yet in 571 B.C.E., Egypt was still going strong. The Twenty-sixth Dynasty does not end until 525 B.C.E. (Freedy and Redford 1970, 474). Surely the exiles would know that Egypt was neither "lowly" (29:15) nor "broken" (30:22). Why "correct" the Tyrian oracle but not others? The assertion that this oracle's purpose is to correct "failed" prophecy is meaningless.

While scholars need to bring their best thinking to texts such as these, it is also necessary to recognize when the limits of understanding have been reached. The assertion that known history contradicts Ezekiel's prophecies against Tyre, thus requiring modification, has been repeated for a century without thinking the position through to its logical conclusions. It is time for new thinking.

Theological and Ethical Analysis

This oracle portrays YHWH as a deity who settles debts fairly. Babylon's recompense exemplifies that "obedient service to Yahweh does not go unrewarded" (Bidlack 2000, 306). This is ethically problematic if we consider the justice of how the reward is given. It would not seem like "justice" to the Egyptians to be given to Nebuchadnezzar as plunder because of his failure to plunder Tyre. It is morally equivalent to saying, "America has labored long and hard against al-Qaeda, but they have not captured or killed Osama bin Laden, so God will give them Iraq as their reward." "Robbing Peter to pay Paul," or in this case robbing Egypt to pay Babylon, is an appalling view of divine justice.

Prince of Egypt (30:1-19)

Literary Analysis

The *prophetic word formula*, address to the prophet ("mortal"), command to prophesy, and *messenger formula* begin the unit. A date in verse 20 marks off verses 1-19 as a separate unit. The repetition of the messenger formula

demarcates four internal divisions (vv. 2, 6, 10, 13), which describe Egypt's destruction in ways that mirror Judah's: Egypt's impending doom (vv. 2*b*-5); Egypt's loss of support (vv. 6-9); agent(s) of Egypt's destruction (vv. 10-12); the scope of Egypt's judgment (vv. 13-19). The unit employs aspects of several genres to announce Egypt's inevitable destruction.

The cadence and rhythm of this unit cannot be captured in prose. Poetry's terseness conveys the imminence of the threat.

Exegetical Analysis

Egypt's impending doom is announced with the command to "wail" (v. 2; compare 21:12 [17]). The command is masculine plural. It may address Egypt, Israel, Egypt's supporters, those whom Egypt supports, or all of the above. "Wail" evokes the pain and anguish of death (see p. 126), as do the words to be wailed, "Alas for the day!"

The reference to "day" connects this unit to the previous one (29:21); more significantly, it evokes "the day" in 7:7-14. Like Judah, Egypt will soon face its own day of reckoning by YHWH. Whenever "the day" is mentioned in chapter 7, dire events follow. Similarly in this unit, dire events follow the announcement of Egypt's "day" (vv. 3*b*-4). It will be "a day of clouds." This may not sound ominous when considering that YHWH appeared in a cloud on Sinai (e.g., Exod 19:16; 24:16) or the pillar of cloud that led Israel through the wilderness (e.g., Exod 40:36; Num 9:17). But the exact construction "day of cloud," only occurs in the Bible in dire contexts (compare 34:12; Joel 2:2; Zeph 1:15). This makes the "dark" and "cloud" that will cover Tehaphnehes frightening (30:18). Egypt's day is also "a time of doom for the nations." The meaning of this unique expression is uncertain. What follows suggests that YHWH's decisive action against Egypt will affect other nations, as did Tyre's destruction.

Like Judah, "a sword shall come upon Egypt" (v. 4; compare 5:17; 6:3; 11:8). YHWH's preferred weapon massacres the populace ("the slain fall") and destroys the economy ("its wealth is carried away"). With its "foundations" (i.e., its population and wealth) torn down, collapse is inevitable. The impact of this collapse "for the nations" is framed by repetition of the impact on Ethiopia (vv. 4, 9). "Anguish" is derived from a root meaning "to tremble, writhe," the body's response to physical pain, as in childbirth (Isa 21:3) or war (Nah 2:10). Judah displays similar responses on its day (7:17, 27). Ethiopians, who are normally a people to be feared (Isa 18:1-2, 7), will become fearful. As Egypt's nearest neighbor, Ethiopia feels "anguish" because with Egypt's demise, nothing stands between it and Nebuchadnezzar's sword.

Egypt's collapse causes extensive collateral damage. The place-names in verse 5 appear to be territories traditionally under Egypt's control or influence. Perhaps Egypt drew additional military resources from these nations—ancient "coalition forces." Whatever their exact connection with Egypt, these nations suffer with Egypt.

The focus then moves to those who "support" and "help" Egypt (vv. 6-8). These two words are roughly synonymous. "Support" is someone or something that you can lean on (e.g., Ps 71:6; Isa 36:6; 48:2). One who has the resources and ability to provide what another needs gives "help." In human contexts help is often sought in military situations (Josh 1:14; 2 Sam 8:5; 18:3), so "helpers" becomes synonymous with "army" (compare 1 Chr 12:1; Ezek 12:14). From Migdol in the north to Syene (or Aswan) in the south (compare 29:10), Egypt's partners share its fate. They shall fall by the sword, be desolated, and laid waste (compare 29:12). YHWH also sets fire to Egypt, another form of destruction that mirrors Judah's (e.g., 5:2; 15:5-7; 20:47). If these "supporters" and "helpers" are those named in verse 5, then in an ironic reversal, Egypt's own coalition forces are "broken," as Egypt was a broken reed to Judah (compare 29:6-7). Like Judah, they will look for aid and find none.

The next section describes this terrible day in excruciating detail (vv. 10-12). YHWH has a two-pronged attack. The first prong is to "put an end to the hordes (*hāmôn*) of Egypt" (v. 10; compare v. 4). *Hāmôn* has a range of meaning (see p. 39). Judah will also see its *hāmôn* destroyed (7:11, 12, 13, 14). It is a key word in the Egypt oracles, occurring sixteen times. Interpretation should incorporate the word's multivalency.

Nebuchadnezzar and his army become "the most terrible of the nations" that YHWH brings into Egypt, filling "the land with the slain" (v. 11). Egypt shares the fate of its trading partner, Tyre (28:7; compare 31:12; 32:12). Babylon strikes at both nations' symbols of strength and identity—Tyre's wisdom and splendor and Egypt's Nile River and culture.

While Nebuchadnezzar is busy attacking on land, YHWH "will dry up the channels," the second prong of the attack (v. 12). For a country that owed its existence to the Nile, its desiccation would be catastrophic. Thus, an Egyptian prophecy of the Old Kingdom's collapse predicts that "the rivers of Egypt are empty [so that] the water is crossed on foot" (*ANET*, 445). The evaporation of the Nile channels would inevitably lead to famine. In a previous Egyptian famine, with Joseph's assistance, Pharaoh bought all the land sold in exchange for food (Gen 47:20). In grim parody, the land will once again be sold in exchange for food, only now Pharaoh is the one selling. This will "bring desolation upon the land and everything in it." "Bring desolation" is a similar

verbal form to YHWH's intent to "horrify" the wilderness generation with evil statutes (20:26). Like Judah, Egypt will experience a form of "shock therapy" (see p. 117).

Verses 13-19 describe the resulting social and religious upheaval, similar to Judah's experience (7:12-13, 16-20, 26-27). Its extent is suggested by the detailed list of cities and contents. The destruction's thoroughness is suggested by the variety of divine punishments occurring in the first person, "I will . . ." Third-person statements describe the experience from the victims' perspective. Almost all of the language regarding what is to be destroyed, how it will be destroyed, and how that destruction will be experienced has already been used of either Judah or the other nations. The overall effect reinforces the message that Egypt's devastation mirrors Judah's.

Verse 13 summarizes what is to come, the destruction of Egypt's religious and political structures. "Idols" and "images"—a *merismus* for the entire pantheon of Egyptian deities—symbolize religion, and Egypt's "prince" (Pharaoh) symbolizes politics. This mirrors the destruction of Judah's religious and political structures. This destruction will put the "fear [of God]" into Egypt.

Destruction then becomes more specific (vv. 14-18). Anyone who has seen the magnificent temples of Luxor and Karnak and the tombs in the Valley of the Kings knows the importance of Thebes, arguably Egypt's most important religious city. Its importance is emphasized by repetition (vv. 14, 15, 16). The punishment, "execute judgments," echoes the final plague of the death of Egypt's firstborn (Exod 12:12; Num 33:4; compare Ezek 5:8; 11:9; 25:11).

When YHWH sets fire "to Egypt" (v. 16; compare v. 8), Pelusium will be "in great agony," which derives from the same root as "anguish" in verses 4 and 9 (see above). This is a terrifying image. Burns are among the most painful of injuries. The ovens of Auschwitz, the nuclear fires of Hiroshima, or the napalm of Vietnam are modern reminders that fire is a terrifying aspect of war.

Memphis was Egypt's other important city. Once it and Thebes have been breached by Babylon, Egypt will be forced to "face adversaries by day" (v. 16). The word for "adversaries" (*ṣārîm*) is a wordplay on Egypt (*miṣrāyīm*). The nation that is usually the adversary of others is itself beset by adversaries.

The "young men" of verse 17 are literally the fully grown, vigorous, unmarried, that is, "choice" men (*HALOT*, 118). Their importance may derive from their priestly status, warrior status, or as symbols of Egypt's virility. Like Judahites, they will fall by the sword (compare 5:12; 6:11-12; 11:10; 24:21). The second clause consists of feminine-plural forms. Who goes "into captivity"? Perhaps they were female counterparts to the "young men," priestesses, princesses, or symbols of Egypt's fecundity. Or, since "city" carries feminine

gender (see p. 84), perhaps On and Pi-beseth are the subjects. Whichever, they will suffer "captivity" (compare 12:11).

The imagery of verses 18-19 derives from the exodus. "The day shall be dark" evokes the plague of darkness that covered Egypt (compare Exod 10:21-22). This occurs as YHWH "breaks the dominion [lit., yokes]" of Egypt. This phrase normally expresses liberation from servitude (e.g., Lev 26:13; Jer 28:10-13; Ezek 34:27; Nah 1:13). The issue is not Egypt's servitude, but the yoke Egypt placed on others. YHWH breaks Egypt's power to subjugate others.

Egypt's "proud might" will not just come down (v. 6), it will end. The *recognition formula* is associated with the plagues (Exod 7:5, 17; 10:2). Instead of being covered with frogs, gnats, flies, or locusts (Exod 8:6 [2], 16-17 [12-13], 24 [20]; 10:12-15), Egypt will be darkened by captivity. YHWH had "executed judgments" on Egypt before in the death of their firstborn (Exod 12:12). The repetition of this phrase (vv. 14, 19) implies that God is delivering another fatal blow. The difference is that plagues were recoverable: frogs and insects die, crops grow next season, and another generation will be born. Now Egypt faces a plague with permanent, devastating consequences.

Theological and Ethical Analysis

This unit is striking in the way Egypt's punishment mirrors Judah's. There is "poetic justice" in Ezekiel's treatment of Egypt in a strictly "eye for an eye" mode. Egypt's punishment is not less than Israel's, but neither is it more. This oracle, and the other in OAN, tends in the ethical direction of "do to others as you would have them do to you" (Matt 7:12). The motivation is the threat of divine retribution. How one treats others is how God will treat you in return.

The interdependency of nations should demand this as a minimum ethic. Weaker nations depend on the support of stronger nations when in dire straits. One who is able to give help may, in turn, need to receive help later. Problems arise when powerful nations fail to recognize their own dependency. Egypt did not anticipate it might need help and support. Those they oppressed might not be inclined to give help. In a world where it is impossible to be totally independent, nations must consider what it means to be a good neighbor and the consequences of their actions upon others.

Unilateral Disarmament (30:20-26)

Literary Analysis

The imagery in this unit is both literal and metaphorical. There is a historical date and there were real Egyptian and Babylonian kings who wielded real swords. Although Pharaoh could literally have broken arms, words such as *arm* and *hand* are also metaphors for power.

As with the last two units, Ezekiel appears to abandon formal genres. The language instead is generic, employing standard formulas and aspects of the *prophecy of punishment* and *prophetic proof saying*. Here the message is conveyed, not through the medium of genre, but through repetition of key words and phrases including "arm/s" (7x), "hand" (3x), "sword" (4x), "to break/be broken" (4x), "to strengthen/strong" (4x), "fall" (2x), "Pharaoh" (4x), "king of Egypt" (2x), "king of Babylon" (2x), "scatter/disperse" (2x). The repetition is as relentless as YHWH's determination. There is a certain sympathy for Pharaoh. Those who have already received YHWH's blows know there is neither protection from nor defense against them.

Exegetical Analysis

The metaphorical aspects of both "arm" and "hand" are significant in this unit. The phrase, "with a mighty (or strong) hand and an outstretched arm," expresses YHWH's power to deliver Israel from slavery (e.g., Deut 26:8; Ps 136:10-12; Jer 32:21). To be delivered into someone's hand is the biblical idiom for domination (e.g., Judg 4:2; 1 Sam 17:46; Isa 19:4). Conversely, liberation from domination is to be delivered *from* someone's hand (e.g., Gen 32:11 [12]; Judg 6:14; Ps 31:15 [16]). The figure of Pharaoh with a flexed arm wielding sword or club, usually against an enemy, is common in Egyptian iconography (see Keel 1978, figs. 395, 397–404; *ANEP*, nos. 296, 310, 312). One of Pharaoh Hophra's (see p. 178) many titles was "Mighty of Arm" (Breasted 1962, §988C).

Thus, Pharaoh with a broken arm is an image of powerlessness. He can no longer dominate and conquer. But a broken arm is only a temporary disability. Properly bandaged "for healing," it would eventually become an arm once again mighty enough "to wield the sword." This time, however, his arm was not "wrapped with a bandage" (v. 21). Without proper medical treatment Pharaoh's arm would end up permanently crippled, which seems to be the intent.

It is unclear what the "therefore" is there for (v. 22). It does not introduce punishment following an indictment as in a *prophecy of punishment*. However, "therefore," followed by the *messenger formula* and the Hebrew *hinnēh* (often untranslated), is a construction that introduces a divine action (e.g., 2 Kgs 21:12; Isa 28:16; Jer 6:21; Ezek 5:8; 29:19; Mic 2:3; Darr 2002, 1420). God is not finished with Pharaoh yet.

YHWH issues another *challenge to a duel*, where YHWH strives to worsen Pharaoh's already weakened condition (v. 22). Breaking the still-strong arm is understandable. After all, Pharaoh could be ambidextrous or could learn to compensate for the weaker arm. The historical reference may be to Pharaoh Hophra (or Zedekiah) having additional plans to thwart Babylon beyond the failed attempt to end Nebuchadnezzar's siege of Jerusalem (Jer 37:5-10). Breaking the remaining strong arm ensures that any additional strategy will fail. But then YHWH rebreaks the previously broken arm in case any strength is left in that deformed limb. This is malicious and gratuitous violence. Pharaoh is already crippled. Like the modern idiom of bombing a country back to the Stone Age, the goal is to render Pharaoh, and thus Egypt, powerless. Like toppling statues of Lenin or Saddam Hussein, the symbolism of the sword falling from Pharaoh's hand is the loss of political and military power. He will be an impotent king, in fact, no king at all.

Pharaoh will stand by helplessly, unable to lift even a finger to prevent his people from being scattered among the nations (v. 23; compare 29:12). His helplessness will be reinforced as he watches while YHWH "strengthen[s] the arms of the king of Babylon" (v. 24). The sword that could have saved Judah is instead transferred to the hand that will destroy both. Others have noted that the Babylonian is the only "king" in this verse. Pharaoh's powerlessness is evident in the loss of the title "king of Egypt" (vv. 21-22). The Babylonian king will wield his sword and with his two strong arms bring disaster upon Pharaoh. Unable to defend himself with two broken arms, he offers no resistance to the Babylonian sword. Pharaoh ends up on the ground at the feet of this strong king shrieking in agony from being run through with a sword.

Verses 25-26 repeat most of what has come before. The only new information is the discovery that the scattering of the Egyptians is an act of YHWH, as well as an act of Babylon's king (v. 26). The repetition emphasizes the contrast between these two kings—one with broken arms and one with strong arms. There could be no greater contrast between powerlessness and power.

But the true power in this oracle is YHWH, who breaks and strengthens arms. A nation's power and strength depend upon YHWH. And that is as true for Judah as it is for Egypt or Babylon. As with 30:1-19, Egypt's punishment for its failure to rescue Judah mirrors Judah's. Powerlessness and helplessness were likely the dominant feelings of most Jerusalemites after more than a year of siege (compare 4:16-17; 12:17-20). Zedekiah was like a king with broken arms. Defenseless against Babylon's king, Zedekiah would shriek in agony before Nebuchadnezzar as his sons were slaughtered and he was blinded, then exiled to Babylon (2 Kgs 25:7). Both Egypt's and Judah's kings end up wounded,

helpless, powerless, and their people scattered to a land not their own.

Theological and Ethical Analysis

God's actions against Pharaoh are violent, even sadistic. Such an image of God is why many decide to reject and repudiate any relationship with the biblical deity. Yet there is a point to this violent imagery. The expression "breaking of the arm" describes depriving the strong of power (Job 38:15; Pss 10:15; 37:17; Jer 48:25). As Walther Zimmerli passionately states:

> World history appears to the observer again and again as the work of strong arms. And those who cannot reflect on it from the outside as dispassionate observers, but endure it personally in affliction, look fervently for the strong hand which can deliver them and will approach it and reach out to it so that it might help them. (1983, 139)

Just substitute the name of any of the tyrants from the last century for "king of Egypt"—Stalin, Hitler, Pol Pot, Ho Chi Min, Pinochet, Milosevic, Hussein—and victims of those regimes might find themselves cheering for this image of YHWH depriving the strong of power.

This imagery is particularly disturbing, and relevant, in light of the prisoner abuses at Abu Ghraib prison in Iraq. Americans have denounced these images and the U.S. Defense and State departments have reiterated that no official policy advocates torture. Soldiers and civilians alike have pondered, "How could this have happened?" American society has been debating whether torture is an appropriate or effective tool in the War on Terror. Senator John McCain, himself a torture victim, argues that torture is never justified. Meanwhile, entertainment media, such as the TV show *24*, repeatedly show scenes where torture helps the good guys win.

In this context it is essential to acknowledge that this text expresses an ideology that justifies torture as a legitimate response to conflict. One could argue that if it is good enough for YHWH, it is good enough for YHWH's followers. But if readers believe that torture cannot ever be justified, then neither can YHWH's actions.

Torture is used in this text as a means to deprive the strong of power. For victims of abuses of power the question is how to end the abuse. An examination of world history indicates that powers do not willingly give up their strength and do so only when confronted by a stronger power. The result is inevitably bloody. Is this just the way things are? How do we "break the arms" of terrorism, for example? Is that even the right question? The response to "strong arms" is the

core issue in the debate about the use of violence versus nonviolence as means to resolve conflict. Are there nonviolent ways to deprive the strong of power? As readers ponder their own answers to these questions, they need to consider how texts such as this function in their reasoning. For advocates of nonviolence, one way to approach this text is as a mirror that reflects the failure of nations and individuals to engage in nonviolent responses to conflict.

A Poem as Lovely as a Tree (31:1-18)

Literary Analysis

Key to interpreting this oracle is answering the question, "Whom are you [Pharaoh and his hordes] like in greatness?" The answer depends on a text-critical judgment. The MT of verse 3 reads, "Consider Assyria [*ʾaššûr*]." Although all ancient versions support this reading, recent interpreters suggest *ʾaššûr* is a variant or scribal error of *tĕʾaššûr*, "cypress," and translate, "Consider a cypress." According to the MT, Pharaoh is instructed to "consider Assyria," an entity comparable to Egypt. The following poem metaphorically describes Assyria as a majestic cedar, which fell because of its arrogance, as will Egypt. According to the alternate, "cypress" parallels "cedar" and the poem metaphorically describes Egypt as a majestic tree.

There are good reasons both to retain the MT and to translate *ʾaššûr* as "cypress." First, a similar textual problem exists in 27:6. The MT reads *bat-ʾaššurîm*, literally "daughter of cypresses." Where the context clearly demands a type of lumber, the word is (mis)spelled as it is here. This warrants considering *ʾaššûr* as a variant spelling of *tĕʾaššûr* in Ezekiel. Second, this unit shares language with 28:1-19, a unit against Tyre. Each views the nation's magnificence as a result of divine action (28:13-15; 31:9). Both reference "Eden" and "the garden of God" (28:13; 31:8, 9, 16), the theme of pride (28:2, 5, 17; 31:10), destruction by "foreigners" (*zārîm*; 28:7, 10; 31:12), and descent to the Pit (28:8; 31:14, 16, 18). The key comparison in this unit is not to Assyria, but to Tyre. Ezekiel employs the same language, themes, and structure against Egypt previously made against Tyre. Third, the repetition of "Pharaoh" and "his horde[s]" (vv. 2, 18) marks the boundaries of the unit, suggesting this is the subject in between.

This is magnificent poetry. Assyria is unnecessary to make the poem applicable to Egypt. Yet Assyria is an apt object lesson to Egypt. The deliberate (?) (mis)spelling invites multiple levels of comparison. The Exegetical Analysis

retains the ambiguity by simply referring to "the [cedar] tree" throughout.

Like the two previous units, this one employs aspects of various genres but does not conform exactly to any specific one. Although the word *lamentation* is not used, its before/after structure is evident in the tree's great height "before" and being cut down "after." Although *māšal*, "allegory," is not used, the tree is more than a tree. Elements of a *prophecy of punishment* are evident in the use of "therefore" in verse 10 and the "punishment" of the tree that follows. We may identify this unit as an allegorical lamentation of punishment.

Typical formulas begin this unit—date, *prophetic word formula*, and address to the prophet ("mortal"). The repetition of the oracle's subject, "Pharaoh" and "his horde[s]" (vv. 2, 18) defines its limits. The most significant division is between verses 9 and 10.

Many of the key words that positively describe the tree and its impact in verses 2*b*-9 are repeated in verses 10-18 with a negative twist. This repetition both weaves the two halves together and highlights the difference between before and after; how the mighty has fallen.

Exegetical Analysis

Ezekiel inquires of Pharaoh and his hordes, "Whom are you like in your greatness?" (v. 2). (For other meanings of *hāmôn*, "hordes," see p. 139.)The answer is "a tree" (see v. 3), a *superlative* tree. (The fate of the mighty trees in chapters 17 and 19:10-14 is echoed here.) This tree has "fair" (or "beautiful") branches (v. 3). No tree in God's garden rivals its "beauty" (v. 8). The tree's "beauty" is comparable to the "beautiful" ship Tyre (27:3; 28:7, 12, 17). Perhaps the most astounding thing about this tree is YHWH's claim, "I made it beautiful" (v. 9). The tree's (Egypt's) greatness is God given.

The tree's greatness and beauty have three dimensions. First, it is really high. Its top is hidden among the clouds (v. 3), and it towers above all the other trees (v. 5). Second, this tree has depth. It is nourished by "the waters" and "the deep" (v. 4), words evoking the primordial world (Gen 1:2). This tree stretches from the heavens above to the deep beneath. The third dimension is horizontal; the tree's greatness extends beyond itself. Where the tree is planted, the waters and deep create a reservoir that sends forth streams to "all the trees of the field" (v. 4). This really is trickle-down economics. The tree grows long horizontal branches (v. 5). In these impressive limbs "all the birds of the air" make their nests (compare 17:23; Ps 104:12, 16-17) and "all the animals of the field" find a protected place to birth their young (v. 6). "All great nations" live in the "shade" of the tree's branches (v. 6; compare v. 3). Here the allegory slips, exposing the

deeper meaning. Shade (or shadow) represents protection and safety for people, provided by God (Pss 36:7 [8]; 57:1 [2]; 121:5; Isa 25:4; Hos 14:7 [8]) or a nation or king (Isa 30:2-3; Lam 4:20). If the birds and animals represent "great nations," then this tree represents an even greater nation, able to extend its protection and security to others. Verse 7 celebrates the three dimensions of this tree: its "greatness" (height), the "length of its branches" (horizontal), and "roots" (depth). No other tree rivals it. Even the trees of Eden are envious (v. 8).

No imperfection mars this tree (compare 28:15), but its perfection will not prevent its felling. The tree "set its top among the clouds" and "its heart was proud" (lit., "it raised its heart") on account of its "height" (v. 10). A similar idiom describes Tyre (28:2). Just as Tyre's wisdom and beauty are not condemned per se, neither are the tree's height and greatness. The problem is its "heart" (see p. 170). How this pride was manifested in reality is not detailed, but it becomes the reason for divine judgment.

The focus on height in verse 10 contrasts with how low the tree will be brought. God, who made this tree, can also bring it crashing down. The instrument of the tree's destruction is the "hand of the prince of the nations" (v. 11). "Hand" is an idiom of power (see p. 190). References to "hand" and to "foreigners from the most terrible of the nations" (v. 12) recall earlier references to the Babylonian king and his army (28:7, 10; 30:11-12, 24, 25). They will become the means by which YHWH will "cast out" the tree. The foreigners leave the timber lying, not where it fell, but "on the mountains and in all the valleys" and "in all the watercourses" (v. 12). The tree is dismembered and its parts (branches and boughs) scattered.

The tree's destruction has dire consequences for those in its shade/protection (vv. 12*b*-13). Poignantly, the peoples of the earth "went away from its shade." Since the tree can no longer provide protection, the people are left exposed and vulnerable and so just walk away. The birds "settle" on the trunk. The Hebrew verb for "settle" is the root of the noun *tabernacle*. The significance of the tabernacle is its portability; it moves. Before the birds permanently "nested" in the tree (see v. 6). Now at best they find the fallen trunk a temporary resting spot before moving on. The NRSV translation regarding the animals is unfortunate. The wild animals do not "lodge" in the boughs, they just are there (lit., "and to its branches they were"). Before they were protected "under" the branches (v. 6). Now they are exposed and vulnerable. One fears for the survival of these creatures that lose their natural habitat. What will become of them if they are unable to give birth to and rear their young?

Verse 14*a* functions as the equivalent of "and the moral of this story is . . ." It provides the deeper meaning of the allegory. While the Hebrew is unclear, the

moral is not. *Do not* do as the cedar tree did. Verse 14*b* provides the rationale for taking this moral to heart: the tree that grows too high will find that its final resting place is "the world below."

Reference to "the world below" and "the Pit" recalls Tyre's fate (26:20; 28:8). Just as ship Tyre does not remain on the ocean floor, tree Egypt does not remain on the forest floor, but goes down to Sheol, a term that appears in Ezekiel only in the Egypt oracles (31:15-17; 32:21, 27). "Sheol," "the Pit," and "the world below" are all the same place: the place of death. Verses 15-18 make the point that the journey to this place is downward. Unlike the journey that Egyptian Pharaohs expected to make through the underworld to the afterlife on the other side, this journey has no "other side," no afterlife.

Verses 15-16*a* further describe the impact of the fallen tree on "the world above." Like the sinking of ship Tyre (27:28-31), the tree's fall has far-reaching consequences. YHWH disrupts the life-giving waters and covers the place where great cedars originate (Lebanon) in darkness, like mourning clothes. Meanwhile, all the trees of the field "fainted." "Fainted" is derived from a Hebrew root meaning "to wrap, be enwrapped" (Greenberg 1997, 643). The trees are "wrapped" or "smothered," as if their oxygen supply is cut off.

YHWH causes the nations to "quake" at the sound of the tree's falling, a reaction resembling the coastlands' shaking from Tyre's destruction (26:15; 27:28).

Verses 16*b*-17 reflect further on the allegory's "moral" (compare v. 14). Not just this tree, but "all" trees are handed over to death. In "the world below" they are "consoled." Instead of envying the towering cedar tree that makes them seem as nothing (v. 8), the other trees receive consolation in seeing it brought low. Verse 17 continues the reversal of verse 6. When the tree is felled, it takes down with it everything in its vicinity. Not just Pharaoh but also the "allies" whom he protected are cast into Sheol.

Verse 18 returns to the original question. "Which among the trees of Eden was like you in glory and in greatness?" Which among all the nations of the world was like Egypt in glory and greatness? The question is rhetorical; the answer is, "None." Yet even this unrivaled tree (nation) shall be brought down to Sheol, where it "shall lie among the uncircumcised, with those who are killed by the sword." Since Egypt's priests and kings were circumcised, lying among the uncircumcised may be shaming (see p. 202). This refrain will be repeated in the final oracle (32:17-32).

In the end, "Pharaoh and all his horde" could not shelter and protect other nations but were themselves defeated. The metaphorical "dismembered" tree scattered over the landscape becomes a battlefield strewn with corpses in reality.

Pharaoh is handed over to the death of mortals, not one befitting a god. For failing to protect (shade) Judah from Nebuchadnezzar, Egypt will forever lose its ability to offer protection (shade).

Theological and Ethical Analysis

Some interpret this oracle as a blanket condemnation of all "arrogant power myths" (Lind 1996, 257). Such an interpretation, however, fails to account for Israel's hope of future political power. The language condemning Egypt is used positively in Ezekiel of Israel. God will plant a "lofty [or 'high'] cedar" where it will produce "boughs" in whose "shade" every kind of "bird" will "nest" (17:22-23). YHWH indeed brings "low the high tree," but YHWH also makes "high the low tree" (17:24)!

The text does not condemn Egypt's power per se but rather its failure to use that power positively toward Judah. The great nation's failure to protect vulnerable peoples is as grievous a misuse of power as actively oppressing them. Significantly, there is no such condemnation of Babylon in Ezekiel, the ultimate imperial power of that day. In Ezekiel's view, Babylon used its imperial power against Judah appropriately, as the instrument of divine judgment.

Concern for just use of power needs to expand beyond the question of who has it and who does not. The issue for those with power is how that power is used. This is a complex question with no simple answers. This oracle suggests that failure to provide protection (shade) when it is needed constitutes the misuse of power.

Troubling the Waters (32:1-16)

Literary Analysis

The sixth oracle against Egypt is characterized as *lamentation* (vv. 2, 16), but it is hardly lament-like. Only verse 2*b* is set in the characteristic 3:2 meter, and a particle of exclamation, such as "alas" or "woe," is absent. Nor is there the characteristic before/after motif except for the initial evaluation of Pharaoh as a lion/crocodile. This is a different style of lamentation. Though the destruction of Pharaoh and his hordes dominates the unit, the emotional tone is not grief but horror. Its words document not sorrow but destruction. The death of the Egyptian crocodile is recorded in gory detail and chanted by the lamenting women (v. 16).

The words used to document this destruction are familiar. Ezekiel returns to

the image of Pharaoh as a crocodile and YHWH as crocodile hunter (see Ezek 29). The language consists of stock phrases occurring either in another OAN or within the judgment oracles against Judah. Pharaoh's thrashing about in the streams (v. 2) indicates lack of forward progress. Similarly, Ezekiel churns up old phrases without progressing toward new insights.

The components of the oracle are generic, including date, *prophetic word formula*, and YHWH's address to Ezekiel ("mortal"). There are no obvious subdivisions. What gives the oracle its tone is YHWH's overwhelmingly dominant voice. "I will . . . I will . . . I will . . ." (compare 5:8-17; 30:10-19). Nineteen times in the MT YHWH says, "I will." By contrast the divine will is completely absent from the final OAN (32:17-32). In this "lamentation" the concern is to document YHWH's decisive actions against Pharaoh king of Egypt.

Exegetical Analysis

"You consider yourself a lion" (v. 2). Although Ezekiel has not previously described Pharaoh as a lion, pharaohs were often praised in leonine imagery (see p. 110). This lion is known not for his prowess or ferocity but for his territorial range "among the nations." Ezekiel then returns to the image that began the Egyptian oracles. "You are like a dragon [crocodile]" (see p. 180). This crocodile also has an extensive habitat. It resides not just amid the Nile's channels but "in the seas." This dangerous denizen of the deep thrashes around wildly, churning up muck. The beast stirs up trouble and generates chaos wherever it goes.

Readers are already aware of the fate of lions and crocodiles (compare 19:1-9; 29:4-5). YHWH becomes the hunter (v. 3). A gruesome account of the aftermath follows the crocodile's capture (v. 4). YHWH flings its carcass onto dry land, where it will become a banquet for the birds of the air and the wild animals (compare 29:5; 39:4-5, 17-20). YHWH next dismembers it, a bloody version of the great tree's similar fate (31:12). YHWH flings the parts on the mountains and fills the valleys with them (v. 5), making the rivers run with blood (v. 6). References to mountains, valleys, and watercourses function inclusively; there will be blood and body parts *everywhere*.

These verses emphasize that the carcass is left unburied. Biblical tradition considers lack of burial shameful (compare 1 Sam 31:8-13; 2 Sam 21:11-14; 2 Kgs 9:10; Jer 16:4, 6; 25:33). For an Egyptian king, who usually spent his entire reign building his burial chamber, nothing would be more humiliating.

YHWH's capture of the thrashing crocodile has cosmic as well as earthly consequences (vv. 7-8). The verb "to blot out" means "to extinguish" as one might "snuff out" a candle (e.g., Lev 6:12-13 [5-6]; 1 Sam 3:3; Prov 31:18).

More figuratively, it can refer to death, the "snuffing out" of a human life (2 Sam 14:7; 21:17). The extinguishing of the beast leads to the extinguishing of *all* the cosmos's lights—heavens, stars, sun, and moon. Darkness also covers the land. Creation is now figuratively clothed in black, the color of mourning (compare 31:15). Coming darkness also indicates divine judgment and recalls the darkness that covered Egypt (Exod 10:21-23). Creation is at the same time collateral damage and sympathetic witness to Egypt's extinction.

In addition to its impact upon "the land" and "the heavens," Pharaoh's demise affects the human populace (vv. 9-10). YHWH will make many peoples "appalled" at what happens to him. Elsewhere this verb expresses horror and shock (3:15; 20:16; 27:35). The impact on the peoples' "kings" will be even more severe. They shall "shudder." The verb literally means "to bristle," in the sense of having one's hair stand on end (compare 27:35). Both peoples and kings shall tremble continuously in fear (compare 26:16, 18; 30:9).

The intense emotions that YHWH purposefully provokes are a kind of second-order trauma, like that suffered by the troops who liberated Nazi concentration camps or the first responders at the World Trade Center. The peoples' and the kings' reactions are proof of the horrific nature of Pharaoh's downfall. They occur as YHWH carries the beast captive among unknown nations. Here the metaphor slips, revealing that exile causes the dismemberment of human communities. The intense emotional response also comes as the peoples and kings see YHWH brandishing his sword on the day of the beast's downfall. The Hebrew underlying "brandish" derives from a verb suggesting flying and movement, recalling the threatening, dancing sword in 21:14-16 [19-21]. The people may fear that the blade will fly their way.

Pharaoh's destruction has so far been described metaphorically. The next verses use more realistic language. Historically, the king of Babylon wielded the sword (v. 11; compare 21:19 [24]). His sword is accompanied by his army's weapons, which cause Pharaoh's "hordes" to fall (v. 12; on "hordes," see p. 39). While the LXX *gigaeton* (giant, gigantic) is not a precise translation of "mighty ones," it captures their fearsome aspect. Together with Babylon's king they shall bring to ruin "the pride of Egypt" (compare 30:6, 18).

Havoc wreaked upon human institutions is accompanied by environmental degradation (v. 13; see 29:8; 30:12). The intent is similar to the determination to make Egypt a "desolation" (29:11-12). YHWH will destroy all of Egypt's livestock so that "no human foot" and no "hoofs of cattle" shall "trouble" the abundant waters. This contrasts with the water that the crocodile "troubled" back in verse 2. With no human or animal to trouble them, Egypt's waters will "clear," a word meaning "to sink." All the churned-up muck will settle, leaving the

"streams to run like oil" (v. 14). This expression is unique to Ezekiel and functions to intensify the waters' clarity, like a calm mountain lake that perfectly reflects its surrounding landscape. The language conveys contrast between turbulence and serenity, chaos and calm. Water can be this still only when nothing disturbs it. Stilling the waters is linked syntactically with the next verse. The waters become still "*when* I make the land of Egypt desolate . . . *when* I strike down all who live in it" (v. 15, emphasis added). The waters calm because there is no living creature to disturb them. When Egypt is finally uninhabited, the people will know this is YHWH's work.

The final verse returns to lamentation (v. 16). Just as the "daughters of Israel" are called to weep over Saul (2 Sam 1:24), "the women [lit., 'daughters'] of the nations" are called to lament Egypt and its hordes, the "lion of the nations." It cannot be determined if this refers to real women (see Theological and Ethical Analysis below) or to the female personification of cities (see p. 84). Either professional mourners or the smaller nations surrounding Egypt will chant the lamentation.

This lamentation reveals no sorrow at Egypt's death. In contrast to Saul (2 Sam 1:17-27), Pharaoh's death is hardly mourned. If there is sorrow in here, it is for Judah. When Ezekiel heard of Judah's dismemberment (33:21), did the survivor describe those final moments when the hills and valleys around Jerusalem seemingly ran with blood? Did he tell of how the smoke from Jerusalem burning made it seem as though darkness descended upon the land? Did he wave his arms to mimic the brandishing of the Babylonian swords? Did he cry over a land desolate and stripped of all that filled it? In describing Egypt's destruction with language used to depict Judah's downfall, Ezekiel again emphasizes that bystander nations will share the same fate. Thanks to Egypt, Judah did not escape destruction. Thanks to YHWH and Nebuchadnezzar, neither will Egypt.

Theological and Ethical Analysis

(1) Verse 16 possibly permits readers a glimpse into the world of real women, here in the role of professional mourners (v. 16; compare 13:17-23 and p. 74). The women are leaders in an organized and professional funeral practice. Cross-cultural studies show that in many societies women are the traditional experts in mourning rituals and in the recitation of dirges. Thus, it is not surprising to find such expertise among the "women of the nations." There is evidence that such a role also existed in Israel. Jeremiah solicited the services of professional women mourners, who are described as "skilled" women (Jer 9:17-20 [16-19]). These

"skilled" women knew or could compose appropriate laments and were considered trained experts. Their skill offered an opportunity to experience leadership and conferred status. When women's roles in "official" religion are largely restricted, there are still legitimate avenues of religious participation. Nonetheless, it is necessary to protest these restrictions and continue to advocate for structures that permit full participation by all in communities of faith.

(2) Verses 9-10 describe an intense emotional display by the peoples and kings. While commenting on this unit I found myself experiencing similar intense emotions. I was appalled and would occasionally shudder and tremble. YHWH considers such horrified trembling the appropriate response to Egypt's destruction. Based upon what is described in this oracle, and using the same standards by which Judah's experience is determined to be trauma (see p. xviii), the judgment against Egypt constitutes trauma as severe as Judah's. It should trouble one's heart that commentators seem unconcerned about God's treatment of Egypt, or about any of the other nations. Commentators generally reach two conclusions. One, Egypt deserves whatever YHWH chooses to dish out. Two, YHWH is absolved of all responsibility. There is no lamentation for Egypt in other commentaries.

Judith Herman writes that trauma survivors need the assistance of others in their struggle to arrive at a fair assessment of their conduct. Survivors need realistic judgments that include recognizing the dire circumstances of the traumatic event, acknowledging the normal range of victim reactions, and recognizing moral dilemmas in the face of severely limited choice. What survivors *do not* need are either harsh criticism or simple pronouncements absolving them of all responsibility (Herman 1997, 66–69).

Yet these two extremes characterize Ezekiel studies. Nothing but harsh judgment is reserved for Egypt. Commentators write about how unrestrained self-assertion stands under divine judgment. Even if a writer is occasionally troubled by the bloody nature of this oracle, no critique of YHWH is offered. Commentators write about divine sovereignty, YHWH's worldwide plan, and divine control over creation.

The book cries out for readers to begin offering realistic judgments regarding both Egypt's *and* YHWH's conduct. Unless genocide is justified as appropriate punishment for pride or being a bystander, the punishment does not fit the crime. It is impossible to construe a land void of life as anything other than genocide. Moreover, Egypt of the Twenty-sixth Dynasty was not nearly as mighty a tree or as powerful a beast as is portrayed. Contemporary Egyptian evidence suggests the dangerously unstable character of the military, on which the Saite kings depended (Breasted 1962, §989, 996–99). However much Judah may have

hoped in Egypt's military abilities, Egypt really was not reliable (29:6-7). Commentaries have demonized Egypt and the other nations, making them the Other so that their deaths are less troubling. We should be as troubled about this as we should be about most Americans' inability to empathize with the deaths of Iraqis. Many who know exactly how many Americans have been killed have no idea how many Iraqis have died.

Failure to be troubled by Egypt's death leads to blindness regarding "collateral damage." If "no human foot" shall trouble the waters, then not only Egypt's "hordes" perish, but so do all the civilians, Egypt's women, children, and elderly. The livestock also die (v. 13). Clearly, neither civilians nor animals deserve to fall under the sword, but commentaries leave their deaths invisible.

As for YHWH, we ought not exonerate, much less extol, such divine violence. Like Job, we should bring God to trial for crimes against humanity. Preservation of divine "sovereignty" comes at a terrible cost of suffering and death. If God is a warrior, then God's hands are bloody. Herman writes that survivors need from witnesses "not absolution but fairness, compassion, and the willingness to share the guilty knowledge of what happens to people in extremity" (1997, 69). Perhaps we must offer God not absolution but fairness, compassion, and the willingness to share guilty knowledge.

One other aspect of verses 9-10 commands attention. The initial reaction to trauma is denial. The ordinary response to atrocities is to banish them from consciousness or deny that they have happened. This is especially true of war where there is a nearly universal tendency to deny its horror. What are commentators trying to deny or forget when they fail to recognize the horror of the images of Egypt's body dismembered by YHWH? Any veteran would recognize Ezekiel's description as a war story. Herman recounts a Vietnam veteran's assertion: "If at the end of a war story you feel uplifted or if you feel that some small bit of rectitude has been salvaged from the larger waste, then you have been made the victim of a very old and terrible lie" (Herman 1997, 70). Those who defend YHWH's right to wreak violence against Egypt, Tyre, Judah, or any other nation are trying to salvage a small bit of rectitude. In the end, that makes all of us victims of a terrible lie. According to Ezekiel, YHWH makes the peoples and kings acknowledge Egypt's fate and YHWH's responsibility for it. Can we do any less?

He Descended into Hell (32:17-32)

Literary Analysis

A date and the *prophetic word formula* (v. 17) demarcate the final oracle against Egypt, which is also the final OAN. God commands Ezekiel to "wail" over Egypt's "hordes" (v. 18; on "hordes," see p. 39). "Wail" occurs elsewhere only in 1 Sam 7:2 and Mic 2:4, both in the context of *lamentation*. The noun form (*nĕhî*) is more common and twice is used synonymously with "lamentation" (Jer 9:10, 20 [9, 19]). Ezekiel uses unique forms of the root in contexts also dealing with lamentation (2:10; 27:32). Thus, "wail" consistently appears in contexts associated with death, but exactly what is involved with "wailing" or how it might differ from "lamentation" is unknown.

This unit is characterized by striking repetition, resembling certain African American spirituals, which are typically composed of repeated short segments or rhythmic patterns. One rhythmic pattern consists of a call and response, which involves a group that responds the same way each time to a changing short melodic statement by the leader, exemplified by the spiritual "Great Day."

Leader: Chariot rode on the mountaintop
Response: God's going to build up Zion's walls.
Leader: My God spoke and the chariot did stop,
Response: God's going to build up Zion's walls.

One characteristic of such songs is their repetition and the ability to vary segments as desired.

Ezekiel's "wail" is highly repetitious, with short rhythmic patterns, and some occasional variation. It would be very easy to structure this oracle as a call-and-response kind of hymn.

Leader: Assyria is there; and all its company, their graves all around it,
Response: all of them killed, fallen by the sword.
Leader: Elam is there, and all its hordes around its grave;
Response: all of them killed, fallen by the sword.

This is not to suggest that this oracle is a spiritual. Rather, considering the call-and-response structure sheds light on the oracle's highly repetitive nature. Rhythmic patterns are a typical way of expressing sorrow. Israelite lamentation typically involved a 3:2 meter and a before/after pattern. Perhaps "wailing" typically assumed a highly repetitious call-and-response-like structure. The repetition emphasizes that these nations are dead, providing an effective

summary of the aim of divine judgment expressed in the OAN.

Like other chapters in Ezekiel, the unit contains many textual difficulties. At points the text is hopelessly corrupt. The Exegetical Analysis focuses on what can be known with reasonable certainty.

Exegetical Analysis

Ezekiel is commanded not only to "wail over the hordes of Egypt" but also to "send them down . . . to the world below" (v. 18). Initially, this sounds odd. How can Ezekiel send Egypt down to the Pit? A modern idiom clarifies this. Ezekiel is to tell Egypt to go to hell, literally. Although "daughters of [majestic] nations" are grammatically the same "women of nations" who mourned in 32:16, as the object of the verb "send down," they are probably the "daughter-nations" dependent upon Egypt (see p. 198).

The wailing song opens with a rhetorical question that serves as the point of contrast with what follows: "Whom do you surpass in beauty?" (v. 19; compare 27:32; 31:2, 18). A different Hebrew word for "beauty" is used here than in reference to Tyre (27:3, 4, 11; 28:12, 17) or to the cedar tree (31:7-9). The root connotes the emotions that beauty evokes, pleasantness, delight, sweetness, love, rather than the aesthetics of beauty (*TDOT*, 9.469–71; compare 2 Sam 1:26). That no place is more delightful than Egypt makes its destination, the Pit, that much more revolting.

"Uncircumcised" occurs ten times in this brief oracle. Whether or not Egyptians practiced circumcision is a moot point. This passage expresses Ezekiel and Judah's own attitudes. "Uncircumcised" occurs most often as a term of derision toward he Philistines, making "uncircumcised" and "Philistine" practically synonymous (1 Sam 14:4-6; 17:26, 36; 2 Sam 1:20). To call people "philistine" today is to indicate they are uncouth. For Israel to call someone "uncircumcised" was similarly insulting. Egypt, laid to rest in such company, will find itself in very unpleasant surroundings.

The next two verses describe what happens when Egypt arrives where they are told to go. Verse 20 reprises the event—Egypt falls victim to the sword. Then a group of "mighty chiefs" sing a song, echoing Ezekiel's "wail" that may be a kind of greeting to the newcomers (v. 21; compare Isa 14:9-10). According to the song, the commands of verses 18-19 have been fulfilled. Those uncircumcised bastards—Egypt and "their helpers" (see p. 187)—have come down, killed by the sword. The song's tone is unknown. Was it full of sorrow, joy, or derision?

What follows in verses 22-31 can be viewed as spoken by the mighty chiefs, perhaps the full extent of their greeting song (see Literary Analysis above).

These verses are not a systematic treatment of Israelite beliefs regarding the afterlife. The purpose of the recital is to contrast Sheol, a place of death, with the land of the living. This contrast underscores that Egypt is dead and not coming back.

The language making this point is stereotypical and repetitious. Egypt and these other nations inhabit the world below, the Pit, Sheol, that is, the abode of the dead. Verbs emphasize direction; these kingdoms *fall*, go *down*, lie *down*. The inhabitants are the slain and uncircumcised (see above) who have "spread terror in the land of the living." The noun "terror" occurs only in Ezekiel, seven times in verses 22-32 and 26:17. The verb commonly occurs in the expression "do not fear and do not be dismayed" (or "terrorized"; compare Deut 1:21; Josh 8:1; Ezek 2:6; 3:9). It depicts the terror evoked when God comes to punish (Isa 30:31; Jer 49:37; *TDOT*, 5.278–82). It expresses the notion "Be afraid. Be *very* afraid." The ability to generate that kind of fear indicates these nations' dominant force. In the Pit these terrorists "bear their shame." Shaming language functions to show that the nations are dishonored.

Along with Egypt, Sheol's residents include Assyria (and its company), Elam (and its hordes), Meshach and Tubal (and all their multitude), the fallen warriors of long ago, Edom (and its kings and all its princes), all the princes of the north, and all Sidonians. The basis for the entries in this international dishonor roll is unknown. Assyria, as the most recent occupying force, was well known. This is Elam's only appearance in Ezekiel and other texts provide little insight (Gen 10:22; Isa 11:11; 22:6; Jer 49:34-39). Meshach and Tubal are little-known peoples of Asia Minor (compare Gen 10:2; Ezek 27:13, 38:2, 3; 39:1; Darr 2002, 1443). The identity of "the fallen warriors of long ago" is unknown. Edom, the brother and enemy of Jacob, was well known (see pp. 156–57). "Princes of the north" is an Ezekielian creation, making it difficult to determine if they are the same northerners of whom Jeremiah warned (e.g., Jer 1:13-15; 4:6; 6:22). The Sidonians were the preeminent maritime power until losing that position to Tyre (see p. 175).

Except for Assyria little is known of the status of each nation/group circa 585 B.C.E. or of their significance to Ezekiel. Whatever their historical status, in Ezekiel's world the key is that they are all dead. The passage depicts Egypt taking its place among a cadre of nations who have all played some role on the world stage but who are no more. They have been defeated and now permanently reside in the underworld. Unlike Israel (37:1-14), these nations will not rise again. If this is the company Egypt keeps, the conclusion is obvious: neither shall Egypt rise again.

There can hardly be a starker contrast to the afterlife than Pharaoh would

have anticipated. This is no heavenly voyage with the sun god Re nor Field of Offerings where he would enjoy the most pleasant aspects of life to the highest degree (*CANE*, 3.1767–68). Egyptians believed in a continuity of life and afterlife. The dead were approachable and reproachable; they could be cajoled and could meddle in the affairs of the living (*CANE*, 3.1765). But in Ezekiel's view Pharaoh is powerless to influence the land of the living.

When Pharaoh and his army see themselves among these other nations in the underworld, they will "be consoled" (v. 31; compare 31:16). It is unclear how Pharaoh would find this consoling. Other possible translations of this verb include "to regret, be sorry" (*HALOT*, 688). Maybe here Pharaoh and Egypt will finally regret their treatment of Judah. The traumatic experience of being cast into Sheol may finally move Egypt to acknowledge its bystander role (see p. 179).

The final verse (v. 32) reads in the NRSV as cause and effect. Pharaoh's terrorist activities result in him being laid to rest among the uncircumcised. The MT suggests a different cause and effect—"For I gave my terror in the land of the living"—referring to YHWH (author's translation). As Egypt terrorized others, so YHWH will terrorize it. Reading with the MT reminds readers that YHWH has ultimate power both in the land of the living and in the land of the dead. With that power YHWH will lay Pharaoh and his power to rest.

Two things are noteworthy in this unit. First, Egypt's descent into Sheol contradicts the partial restoration of Egypt's fortunes in 29:12-16. The second is the amount of space devoted to the topic of the inhabitants of Sheol. The motif of the descent to the underworld appeared earlier (28:17; 31:14-18), but this time Ezekiel dwells at length upon the topic. What might account for these deviations?

A possible answer is suggested by the debate over whether to show photos of the dead bodies of Saddam Hussein's sons. Iraqis wanted assurance the sons were really dead. American authorities ultimately released the photos to convince a skeptical audience that Hussein's regime was as dead as his sons were. Perhaps Ezekiel confronted a similar dilemma in this oracle. Ezekiel 29:12-16 predicts that despite some restoration, Egypt would never fully recover its power. Never again would it dominate or influence Israel. Ezekiel's audience may have been skeptical. Dynasties rose and fell, but Egypt had always exerted influence throughout the region. The audience wanted assurance that Egypt and its army were "gone and will not be coming back" (to quote George W. Bush, http://www.cnn.com/2003/WORLD/meast/07/23/sprj.irq.sons/ [accessed June 19, 2009]). If Ezekiel had bloody photos, he would have used those. Instead, he sings of Egypt as a resident in the Pit with other deceased empires. The proof

that Egypt is “gone and not coming back” is that it is in Sheol, along with Assyria, Elam, and others.

Theological and Ethical Analysis

(1) One question the OAN raises is what these oracles meant to the exiles as sufferers. It is impossible to answer this question except by inferring or intuiting an answer from one’s own experiences. The hope of total annihilation of the bystander nations bears witness to outrage at their actions and to Judah’s determination to hold bystanders accountable for its suffering.

Another question the OAN raises is what these oracles mean to readers today. One hope of justice for victims of trauma includes vindication and voice. Voice means allowing victims to tell their own stories. There is justice for Jerusalem as the exile community speaks the pain it suffered at the hands of neighboring nations. Vindication is what survivors need from witnesses. Readers today bear witness to Jerusalem’s suffering on account of these bystanders. One aspect of vindication is the recognition of the truth. If we really hear Ezekiel, we will recognize the suffering that nations (or individuals) cause when they turn away from another’s affliction. If witnessing this suffering changes us, then perhaps we will do what we can to stop further violence so that there is no longer need for anyone to bear witness to another’s suffering. The justice sought in these oracles will finally be realized when no one need ask, “Why did no one help me?”

(2) Although the Exegetical Analysis does not attempt to reconstruct Ezekiel’s views on the afterlife, it is clear that what is described is not “hell” as Dante and some Christians might conceive of it, a place of eternal torment. Regardless of the exiles’ views of an afterlife, the main point is that these nations are no longer able to terrorize the living. For this, the living can be eternally grateful.

Theologically, Ezekiel’s description of the underworld makes clear that the power of the God who reigns in the land of the living also extends into the regions beyond death. This will become abundantly clear in chapter 37 as God brings life to dry bones and in the New Testament as God brings life to one crucified, dead, and buried.

CHANGE IS COMING (33:1-33)

After the interruption of the OAN (chs. 25–32), chapter 33 returns to the regularly scheduled programming of "Ezekiel in Exile." In the previous episode the siege of Jerusalem had begun (24:1-2). This episode announces Jerusalem's fall (vv. 21-22) and functions as a transition to the oracles of recovery (chs. 34–48).

Literary Analysis

Before looking forward, the chapter looks back. Verses 2-9 return to 3:18-21. Verses 10-20 return to 18:1-32. Verses 21-22 fulfill 24:26-27, reversing 3:26. Verses 23-29 evoke previous disputations between prophet and people, especially 11:14-17. Verses 30-33 return to Ezekiel's initial call to prophesy in 2:1-5. In addition to standard formulas (e.g., *prophetic word formula* [vv. 1, 23] and the *recognition formula* [v. 29]), the chapter also employs previous genres: case law (vv. 2-9, see p. 14), *disputation speech* (vv. 10-20 [which also uses case law], 23-29), and a *sign-act* (v. 22).

The announcement of Jerusalem's fall (vv. 21-22) lies at the unit's center, around which the other subunits pivot. From this center the chapter either echoes the past or speaks about the future. The interplay of past and future is also evident in the interplay between judgment and salvation. The heavy use of disputation suggests that the exiles are no more willing to accept YHWH's promises of restoration than they were YHWH's judgments.

Exegetical Analysis

YHWH's command to "speak to your people" (v. 2) distances YHWH from the people, like a parent distancing herself from her child when she tells her partner, "*your* child is misbehaving." This distance is maintained throughout the chapter (vv. 12, 17, 30). Although change is coming (34:30; 36:28; 37:12-13, 23, 27), the separation between YHWH and the people remains.

The opening subunit (vv. 2-9) reprises 3:16-21. There, Ezekiel's role as sentinel was not to warn the people in order to prevent the catastrophe but to instruct them as to its meaning (see pp. 15–16). Ezekiel's instruction answered the victim question (see p. xx): Why did this happen—to us? Ezekiel could be

assessed by whether the people heard (and hopefully accepted) YHWH's interpretation: exile happened because the people were wicked and did not turn from their wickedness (3:19).

There are two major differences between the initial and this subsequent appearance of Ezekiel as "sentinel." First, 33:2-9 draw an analogy between the prophet and the military sentinel who warns of attack. Second, here Ezekiel's task is limited to two scenarios, instead of the four found in 3:18-21. Despite these differences, the message is the same: will the people learn YHWH's interpretation of the exile? People cannot know if an attack is imminent if the sentinel does not sound the alarm. The exiles cannot know YHWH's interpretation without Ezekiel's instruction. The reprise is a reminder of how to assess Ezekiel's effectiveness.

Verse 10 demonstrates Ezekiel's effectiveness. For the first time the people acknowledge that the trauma is their fault. "Our transgressions and sins are upon us" (author's translation), causing them to "waste away" (compare 4:16-17; 24:23). The acknowledgment of cause (sins upon us) and effect (waste away) means they have heard and accepted the message that destruction and exile are God's punishment for Israel's sins.

Then they ask, "How then can we live?" In 37:3, God asks the same question, which prompts a prophecy of salvation. The language here suggests a *disputation*. Chapter 18, which is reprised in verses 11-20, also begins with a saying of the people and God's vow, "as I live" (18:2-3). Why does God argue? For those wasting away, to ask "how can we live" seems reasonable (compare Pss 22:16-20 [17-21]; 38:5-10, 21-22 [6-11, 22-23]). Nonetheless, "wasting away" is not Ezekiel's precondition for new life. Ezekiel's precondition for restoration is death—the death of covenant promises, the death of the covenant people, the death of the covenant itself. To ask "how can we live" before the moment when the "city has fallen" implies that the exiles have accepted their culpability, but not yet their death. Only after that acceptance will God consider how they shall live (37:11).

Another question is why the exiles' question prompts a review of retributive theology (18:5-30). The answer is not obvious. In light of the announcement of Jerusalem's fall immediately following in verse 21, it is ludicrous to suggest that God declares that "the death sentence of exile may yet be altered" (Block 1998, 250). Death and exile have already happened.

The review results in logical tensions. The form is disputation, yet verses 11-16 sound consoling; those who believed they were dead are not finally cut off from life. "Turning" implies a way back to life, which contradicts Ezekiel's assertion that the people are incapable of righteousness (compare chs. 16, 20,

23). The people's complaint (vv. 17, 20) and God's judgment "according to your ways" suggest continuation on a straight path to destruction.

The people's protest that "YHWH's way does not add up" (vv. 17, 20, author's translation) suggests a possible interpretation that does not resolve all the tensions. The quotation is a verbatim repetition of 18:25, 29, where the people protested YHWH's charge that they were "wicked" (see p. 104). They rejected any responsibility for the trauma of exile. Now they have accepted their moral responsibility (v. 10). The case law focuses on the proposition that if the wicked turn, then they shall live. Based upon God's calculations, should they not live? Did they not "turn" in acknowledging "our" transgressions and "our" sins? Just as wasting away does not equal death, acknowledgment of sin does not equal turning to righteousness. The exiles claim righteousness and demand life, based upon their calculations. But once again their calculation is flawed. Life will come only on YHWH's terms.

After nearly thirteen years in Babylon, Ezekiel and the exiles finally hear "The city has fallen" (v. 21). Given the enormity of the news, one might expect Ezekiel to fall silent. Instead, he is released from speechlessness (see 3:26; 24:26-27). The significance of his speech recovery involves reconciling these three passages, which differ slightly from one another. The initial imposition of speechlessness includes the clause that Ezekiel would be "unable to reprove." The prediction that his mouth would be opened on the day he hears Jerusalem has fallen says nothing about the role of reproving, but indicates that Ezekiel will be a "sign." This third reference to Ezekiel's speechlessness says nothing of reproving or being a sign but states that "the hand of YHWH had been upon" him.

This expression is significant. One way to interpret Ezekiel's speechlessness is as a *sign-act* by which he enacts in his body the symptomatology of trauma (see pp. 17–18). Ezekiel's recovery of speech may therefore be interpreted as a *sign-act* by which he enacts in his body the symptomatology of recovery. This explanation is not entirely satisfactory since neither the confinement nor the binding is reversed. Nonetheless, it explains the reversal of the only symptom directly imposed by YHWH.

Although Ezekiel's renewed ability to speak is significant, more significant is Jerusalem's fall. All of chapters 4–24 aim at interpreting this singular event. Now that it has occurred, the text turns to contemplating the future. Chapters 34–48 are directed at answering the final victim question, how to prevent recurrence of the trauma (see p. xx). YHWH must first address some issues that will hinder that recovery.

The next disputation appears to argue with those back in Judah who survived Jerusalem's destruction (vv. 23-29). However, like 11:15, the saying reflects the

exiles' views (see p. 56). Ezekiel must counter the saying:

Abraham was only one man, yet he got possession of the land; but we are many; the land is surely given us to possess. (v. 24)

This thesis sounds logical and can be supported by biblical tradition (Exod 6:8; Deut 1:8). Indeed, a later prophet will use this saying as a source of hope to the exiles that God was at work to return them, the many, to Judah (Isa 51:1-2). The saying reveals the need to find hope for recovery in the aftermath of trauma.

Unfortunately, appeal to the Abrahamic covenant is problematic for two reasons. First, Ezekiel's sign-act in 12:17-20 aims to shatter the people's hope that God would not exile the people because of the divine promise of land (see pp. 62–63). That hope's destruction implies that neither will God return them to the land because of the Abrahamic promise. If there is any hope of recovery, of once again possessing the land, it will come about on different terms.

Those uttering the saying are then condemned (vv. 25-26). The accusations against them are arranged in two sets of three. They "eat flesh with the blood." This is the first time Ezekiel accuses Israel of that prohibited act (Gen 9:4; Lev 17:10-14; 19:26; 1 Sam 14:32-34). Both to "lift up eyes to idols" (18:6, 12, 15) and to "shed blood" (18:10; 22:3, 4; etc.) are previous accusations. The phrase "depend on your swords" is unique to Ezekiel. The final two acts are also previous condemnations. To "commit abominations" is used forty-one times in the book (see esp. chs. 8–11; 16, 18). To defile a neighbor's wife clearly indicates wickedness (18:6, 15; 22:11; compare Lev 18:20). Ezekiel views all of these as acts that defile the land (see p. xxii). Those who do such things will not possess the land, but will themselves be dispossessed (compare Lev 20:23; Deut 9:4-5). Possessing the land depends upon cleansing, not numbers. They must first be cleansed before they (re)possess the land or they will still defile it (36:25, 28, 33).

Restoration will not come based on the exiles' calculations. This false hope is therefore destroyed. In previous chapters, bad things come in threes; so it is here (v. 27). In Jerusalem's ruins, those who depended on the sword will fall by the sword (compare Matt 26:52). In surrounding villages, the many will be decreased by devouring wild animals (compare Exod 23:29; Deut 7:22). In strongholds and caves, those who desired possession will die by pestilence. The triad of judgment is all-encompassing (compare 14:21). Instead of a possession, these "waste places" will further degenerate into "desolation and a waste" (vv. 28-29; compare 6:14). Their "proud might" will end (compare 7:24; 24:21; 30:6, 18). The desolation is so complete that "no one will pass through" (compare

29:11).

At the beginning of Ezekiel's ministry, YHWH warned him that the people would resist hearing his prophecies and commanded him to speak without fear "whether they hear or refuse to hear" (2:3-7). Regardless of their response, the people would know a prophet was among them (2:5). In chapters 34–48 Ezekiel is about to begin what might be considered a new ministry. Thus, God issues a new warning. The people will still resist hearing Ezekiel's prophecies, but instead of prickliness (2:6), affability now masks their resistance.

Apparently, whenever two or three exiles gathered in Tel Abib, they gossiped about Ezekiel (v. 30). He had become tabloid fodder. Like people gathering at trendy restaurants hoping to see someone famous, they came to Ezekiel's house hoping to hear "what the word is that comes from YHWH." Outwardly, they appear the image of obedience (v. 31). Inwardly, it is a different story.

That the people will "hear your words, but they do not do them" (vv. 31, 32, author's translation) evokes Deuteronomic themes. Hearing involves more than letting the words go in one ear and out the other without any discernible impact. If one *really* hears God's words, then one will *do* them (e.g., Deut 5:27; 12:28; 28:1; 31:12). The exiles who do not really "hear" Ezekiel (or God) are therefore disobedient (compare Deut 28:15). Disobedience (their "heart is set on their gain") proves the people still have a heart problem.

Instead of hostility, they adore Ezekiel like youth today adore celebrities. The exiles have "lust in their mouths" and experience Ezekiel's words to be "like a song of lust" (author's translation; compare 23:5, 7, 9, 12, 16, 20). They find his message enticing, but unlike the lovers in chapter 23, his words fail to move them, until "this comes" (v. 33). The antecedent to "this" is unclear—the vision of restoration (chs. 34–48) or its fulfillment?

The people resisted YHWH's explanation of disaster; they will also resist YHWH's words of restoration because they too do not fit into their theological assumptions. Even though the content of Ezekiel's message radically changes, in many ways things stay the same. As Ezekiel previously refuted alternative explanations of the disaster other than YHWH's, he now must refute alternative visions of recovery that are not YHWH's. Restoration will happen on God's terms, not the exiles'.

Theological and Ethical Analysis

The psychological stages people go through when confronted with death are well known—shock, denial, bargaining, anger, and finally acceptance. This chapter reminds the people they have been warned of death (vv. 2-9) and

confronts them with its irrefutable fact (v. 21). The language of verses 10-20 exhibits aspects of bargaining, suggesting they have not yet come to acceptance. "We have suffered so much already. Surely that is enough" (see v. 10). "If we accept culpability, will you count that as righteousness and let us live?" (see v. 17). The fact that prophets were regularly subjected to verbal and physical abuse is indicative of anger (1 Kgs 22:24-27; Jer 20:1-2; 38:1-6; Amos 7:12-13). Although ancient prophets did not know these stages, they knew they had to persist in their message.

To my knowledge there is no similar study that charts the psychological stages people go through when confronted with life. We are unaccustomed to acknowledging that it might be as difficult to accept a verdict of "life" as it is to accept "death." Does not everyone want to hear good news? Verses 23-33 suggest that acceptance is neither the first nor the only stage. The exiles engage in a kind of bargaining, consisting of dictating the terms of when, where, and how life will happen. "You promised us this. Now is a good time. We are ready" (see v. 24).

Instead of anger, indifference is the strongest emotion. The message is heard politely, maybe even with some initial enthusiasm. But when the good news fails to materialize as promised or when anticipated, indifference sets in and people revert to previous behavior (vv. 30-32). The news makes no qualitative difference to their lives. What does a message of return matter if you still live in exile? There are no stories recounting the prophet's rejection in texts that focus exclusively on consolation (Isa 40–55; Ezek 34–48), but the sheer volume of material hints that they had to be as persistent in prophesying hope as in prophesying destruction.

Just as there are reasons people may resist accepting judgment, there are many reasons people may resist proffered hope. One reason is depression, a common consequence of trauma. Anyone who has experienced depression, or knows a depressed person, understands how difficult it is to imagine that life can be better. Especially in times of despair and death, it is almost impossible to believe in God's ability or willingness to save.

The failure of imagination—to imagine death or life—may be the greatest hindrance to acceptance. It is the prophet's task to imagine one future or the other at the appropriate time. Those who would speak with a prophetic voice today—of God's judgment or God's salvation—will encounter resistance and need to persist in their message.

RECOVERY FROM TRAUMA (34:1–48:35)

Overview

Chapters 34–48 are traditionally described as words of restoration or consolation. Previous chapters have considered how messages traditionally described as judgment can be read as reflections of traumatic experiences. These chapters will interpret messages of salvation and hope as reflections of recovery from that trauma. If trauma is about having one's sense of self and safety shattered, then recovery is about reclaiming a sense of self and safety. The Exegetical Analysis considers how Ezekiel reclaims a sense of self and safety for Israel through a program to ensure that the trauma never recurs. First, a new, trustworthy leader is provided (34:1-16). Then the exile ends and a new covenant is made (34:17-31). Competing claims to the land will be removed (35:1–36:15). The people will be cleansed and given a new heart and a new spirit, ensuring their obedience (36:16-38). They will be returned to the land as a united people (ch. 37), safe from future armies (chs. 38–39). The people will offer acceptable worship at a new temple, where YHWH will dwell (chs. 40–48). The Theological and Ethical Analysis considers what lessons can be learned, and what dangers to heed, from Ezekiel's program for today's traumatized world.

The main units of chapters 34–48 are indicated by the use of the *prophetic word formula* (34:1; 35:1; 36:16; 37:15; 38:1) with two exceptions, which are both visions and are indicated by the *hand of* YHWH *revelatory formula* (37:1; 40:1). A new genre is introduced in these chapters, the *prophecy of salvation*, which announces good news. In contrast to the *prophecy of punishment*, where God responds to human sinful behavior, here God acts unilaterally. The people have not merited deliverance. In Ezekiel, God's actions are primarily formulated as an undoing of or as a contrast to a previous evil situation. For God to undo evil creates the paradoxical situation that an announcement of "good news" begins with "bad news."

After the abundance of dates in the OAN, the absence of dates in this section is striking. The only date occurs at the beginning of the final vision (40:1). Instead, there are general references to a "day" on which God will act on Israel's behalf (36:33; 38:14, 18-19; 39:11, 22; 43:18; 48:35). In contrast to the trauma whose date is known, the future is unknown. Israel is promised a new future but is given no timetable for its arrival.

Homeland Security (34:1-31)

This chapter describes the beginning of Israel's recovery from trauma. A

perfect shepherd replaces imperfect leaders, Babylon is judged, the people return from exile, another Davidic king rules, and the covenant relationship is restored. With adequate resources, Israel's safety is ensured.

Literary Analysis

The opening formulas to chapter 34 have already occurred seven times (6:1-2; 13:1-2; 20:45-46 [21:1-2]; 21:1-2 [21:6-7]; 25:1-2; 28:20-21; 29:1-2); in every instance they introduce words of judgment. Readers therefore anticipate another pronouncement of judgment, a feeling strengthened by the use of "Ah . . . !" (Hebr. *hôy*), a formal indicator of death (see p. 67). Thus, paradoxically, an announcement of "good news" begins with "bad news."

The chapter can be divided into two main parts based primarily on the addressee—the shepherds (vv. 1-16) and the flock (vv. 17-31). The address to the shepherds begins with a typical *prophecy of punishment* (vv. 1-10), followed by a *prophecy of salvation* (vv. 11-16). The address to the flock also contains a brief section with features of a *prophecy of punishment* (vv. 17-22), followed by two *prophecies of salvation* (vv. 23-24, 25-31).

The bad news section of each part functions as historical retrospective, recounting how the flock got into trouble. The retrospective is necessary because it provides a mirror for God's saving acts, which are the exact antithesis of the actions (or inaction) of the shepherds and the strong sheep. In addition to reversing the adverse conditions of the flock, God will judge those responsible. Thus, judgment makes way for salvation. But unlike in chapters 4–24, the trouble is not the focus. Beyond the darkness of Israel's trouble is the light of God's triumph.

The Good Shepherd (34:1-16)

Exegetical Analysis

This section is an *extended metaphor*. The vehicle of the metaphor is sheep and shepherds. The tenor is Israel and its leaders. The identification of the tenor is supported by the evidence that throughout Western Asia, including Israel, "shepherd" is a common idiom for both divine and human kings (*ABD*, V.1188–89; and see Num 27:16-17; 1 Kgs 22:17; Jer 3:15; 10:21; 23:1-4). Ezekiel argues that Israel's leadership bears responsibility for the exile (see chs. 8, 13, 14, 17, 22). There is no need to limit the shepherds to Israel's kings. Ezekiel's previous

condemnations of political, military, and cultic leaders suggest the focus is on those holding positions of power. In contrast, the sheep (people) are the powerless.

The shepherds will be punished because of what they have done and what they have left undone. They took the meat, milk, and wool from the sheep, exploiting them for their own comfort (v. 3). The shepherds also "slaughtered" (or sacrificed) any fat animals. This may refer to attempts to remove those who might challenge the leaders' authority. Exploitation and ruthlessness demonstrate that the shepherds have indeed ruled "with force and harshness" (v. 4). "With harshness" describes the "ruthlessness" with which the Egyptians oppressed the Hebrew slaves (Exod 1:13-14). Therefore, Israel is commanded not to rule over their own slaves "with harshness" (Lev 25:43, 46, 53). The shepherds' treatment of the sheep is equated with Egypt's ruthless oppression of the Hebrews.

The shepherds did not responsibly tend the sheep, making them guilty of dereliction of duty. The sheep were not fed (v. 3); they became "weak" and "sick" (v. 4). These words convey exhaustion, suggesting that the sheep were overdriven and denied needed rest. The "injured" may have suffered broken limbs from wandering through rugged terrain instead of on safe paths. If sheep have strayed, it is because there is no shepherd leading them.

The result of this oppression and neglect is that the sheep are left vulnerable to their natural predators. Left untended, they are scattered over the hills where they became prey for wild animals (vv. 5-6). These are both common metaphors in Ezekiel for exile and punishment (e.g., 5:17; 6:8; 11:16; 14:15, 21). Bad shepherding caused Israel's exile. This message is reinforced with the reference to "a day of clouds and thick darkness" (v. 12), a phrase associated with YHWH's day of divine judgment (compare Joel 2:2; Zeph 1:15; and see pp. 37–38).

The solution to the shepherds' Egypt-like oppression is a new exodus. God is going to "rescue" her flock (vv. 10, 12). The word *rescue* is used to describe the slaves' deliverance from Egypt (Exod 3:8; 6:6; 18:8-10). The sequence "bring out" and "bring into" is also exodus language (v. 13). God brings the Hebrews out of Egypt (Exod 3:10-12; 7:4-5; 12:17; 13:3) and into their own land (Exod 6:8; 13:5, 11). Now God will bring them into a land whose bounteous good pasture and rich grazing land resembles a land flowing with milk and honey (vv. 13-14; compare Exod 3:8).

The antithesis of the shepherd's neglect of the flock is the Good Shepherd's tender and perfect care. The antithesis is seen most clearly in the near perfect mirroring of verses 4 and 16 (1 and 2 are collapsed into each other in v. 16, which is obscured by the NRSV).

v. 4

1. the weak	you have not strengthened (*ḥizzaqtem*)
2. the sick (*haḥôlâ*)	you have not healed
3. the injured	you have not bound up
4. the strayed	you have not brought back
5. the lost	you have not sought

v. 16

5. the lost	I will seek
4. the strayed	I will bring back
3. the injured	I will bind up
2. the weak (*haḥôlâ*)	1. I will strengthen (*ʾăḥazzēq*)

Finally, God will reverse the exile. Instead of inflicting further trauma, God will enable these refugees to recover from their trauma. God will seek out and search for her scattered sheep and "gather them from the countries." No matter to what nation the people are scattered, God will find them and return them to their own land (vv. 11-13*a*). God will feed her starved sheep with abundant food and water (v. 13*b*-14) and those exhausted sheep will finally be able to lie down (v. 15; compare Ps 23:2).

The sheep's salvation, and the possibility of recovering from their trauma, requires destroying their imperfect shepherds and acquiring a new shepherd. Israel will never again be exiled because God is the perfect shepherd who will never oppress them nor neglect them as human shepherds have.

The end of verse 16 serves a pivotal function in the chapter. It begins, "But the fat and the strong I will destroy." This is the first mention of the "fat and strong." Who are they? The most likely candidates are the shepherds, the only ones against whom judgment is directed in this section. The last phrase is literally "I will shepherd her with justice." There are many possible antecedents to the "her," but the most likely candidate is the flock, which is a feminine noun in Hebrew. God's declaration of the just shepherding of her flock is a fitting conclusion to this section.

This clause also functions as a preface to verses 17-31. The word *justice* is derived from the same Hebrew root as "judge," which appears in verses 17, 20, 22. God's justice extends into the next section, where God judges between

sheep. Although the exact words “fat and strong” are not used in verses 17-31, they suit the aggressive nature of the animals judged in those verses.

Theological and Ethical Analysis

(1) The application of 34:1-16 to religious leadership past and present seems almost too obvious. Two examples, one past and one present, will suffice.

George Fox, the founder of The Religious Society of Friends (Quakers), cited this section in writings directed against the bishops, priests, and teachers of England in the late seventeenth century. When Fox wrote “For All the Bishops and Priests in Christendom” from Worcester Prison in 1674. he quoted Ezek 34:1-10 and said, “So here is seen the marks of those shepherds that devour God’s people; come try yourselves ye shepherds, now a-days are not these marks found upon you?” (Fox and Wallace 1990, 24). Fox recorded in his journal that proof of the Anglican leadership’s corruption was that they “taught for the fleece and the wool, and make a prey of the people (Ezek. xxxiv.)” (Fox 1975, 187). Fox clearly saw Ezekiel’s judgment against the shepherds as directly applicable to the religious leadership of his own day.

A more contemporary illustration is the scandal of clergy sexual misconduct against children and youth in the Roman Catholic Church and elsewhere, which can be portrayed in the imagery of this section. Just as oppressive shepherds victimized the sheep, sexually abusive priests have victimized many children. As the sheep were powerless against their oppression, church members felt powerless to deal with the crisis. Just as the shepherds had the power to tend to their flock properly but did nothing, the bishops who had the power to act did nothing. Like so many scattered sheep, many have left Catholicism for other denominations, or have left Christianity altogether.

The connection between the abuses of religious leadership and the abuses of Ezekiel’s shepherds is clear. But if this is the case, then the question is whether this text should be proclaimed more frequently in faith communities. Who today, like George Fox, demands that their religious leaders examine their shepherding in the light of Ezekiel’s message?

(2) The Exegetical Analysis deliberately uses female pronouns for God in order to raise awareness that shepherd can be a female image. There are clear biblical references to female shepherds. Zipporah and her sisters came to the well to water their father’s flock (Exod 2:16-19). Rachel arrived at the well with her father’s flock, “for a shepherd [was] she” (Gen 29:9; author’s translation). Shepherd is a common image for Western Asian gods and, in at least one instance, also for a goddess. The goddess Ningal, the city-god of Ur, wails at its

destruction that she was an "unworthy shepherd" of the city, described as an "innocent ewe" and a "sheep in its fold" (*ABD*, V.1188; *ANET*, 460–61). Even today, girls tend flocks in many parts of the world. When readers think of God as Shepherd, they may image God as female.

(3) Images of Jesus as shepherd clearly echo the language of 34:1-16. Jesus had compassion for the crowds, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd (Matt 9:36; compare 34:4-5). God, the good shepherd, searches for the one lost sheep among the ninety-nine (Matt 18:12-14; Luke 15:3-7). Unlike Ezekiel's neglectful shepherds, Jesus offers his sheep abundant life, does not abandon them, and will even give his life for them (John 10:1-18; compare 34:14, 26-27). Peter learns that tending and feeding Jesus' sheep shows love for Jesus (John 21:15-19). The image of YHWH and Jesus as shepherd contrasts with human leaders who capitalize on positions of power and privilege for personal gain. The Good Shepherd has the sheep's interests at heart.

A Covenant of Peace (34:17-31)

Exegetical Analysis

The beginning of this section continues the sheep/shepherd metaphor. However, the tenor of the metaphor is not as clear. In light of other biblical references to Israel as God's flock (e.g., Pss 95:7; 100:3; Isa 40:11; Jer 31:10), the references to "my flock" and "my sheep" point to Israel as the flock owned by God. It is God's responsibility to judge "between sheep and sheep, between rams and goats." But who are these sheep and goats?

Since this is metaphorical language, considering the actions of the bad animals and of God suggests one possibility. These animals eat the best pasture, then trample down what is left, leaving no food for the others. They not only get to the water first, but they foul the water, leaving nothing for the others to drink (v. 18). These animals are overly aggressive. They "pushed" aside and "butted" with their horns (lit., "gored") the weak animals, scattering them far and wide (v. 21). In modern military terms, the metaphor might be of tanks rolling over everything in their path. This imagery denotes vicious aggression against others.

In light of this situation, God will "save" the flock (v. 22). "Save" is from the same Hebrew root as "salvation," and is found, in part, in the names Joshua, Isaiah, and Jesus. When God "saves" Israel as a nation, the emphasis is on rescue from defeat or destruction by its enemies (e.g., Exod 14:30; Judg 10:12; 2 Sam 3:18; 2 Kgs 19:34). In addition to saving her flock, three times God says

that she will "judge" these bad animals (vv. 17, 20, 22). A form of this verb is used for the "judges" (or deliverers) that God raised up to deliver Israel from its enemies (e.g., Judg 2:16, 18). God's saving and judging activity in verses 17-22 is focused on defeating Israel's enemies.

The bad animals, then, denote the Babylonians, who are the ones who actually scatter Israel "far and wide." Verse 27 supports this reading. God will "break the bars of their yoke," an idiom of release from subjugation (e.g., Lev 26:13; Isa 14:25; Jer 30:8), and "save them from the hands of those who enslaved them," an apt description of Babylonians. Verses 17-22 thus consider Israel's weakness and Babylon's strength.

Apart from 21:30-32 [35-37], this is Ezekiel's only anti-Babylonian oracle. Babylon's judgment is warranted only *after* it has finished wielding YHWH's sword. Throughout this chapter God's activity is directed toward the well-being of Israel in contrast to their experience of exile. This requires destroying the one nation that was stronger and more powerful than Israel.

The *proclamation of salvation* in verses 23-31 declares how God will transform her flock's dire circumstance. First, God appoints a new leader. David's appearance as Israel's shepherd is surprising in light of verse 15. Throughout Israel's history, however, even though God reigned, there were human rulers. Though God is Shepherd, Israel needs a human shepherd. Given biblical references to (1) David as shepherd (e.g., 2 Sam 7:8; Ps 78:70-71), (2) David as God's servant (e.g., 1 Kgs 11:13; Ps 89:3, 20 [4, 21]; Isa 37:35), and (3) other visions of a new Davidic ruler (Isa 9:2-7 [1-6]; 11:1-9; Jer 23:5-6), God's action is not too surprising. God will give Israel a human leader to lead them as she would, in justice (going back to v. 16).

Second, God makes a new covenant of "peace" (compare 37:26; Isa 54:10). The first twenty-four chapters insist that Israel's disobedience ended the covenant relationship. Salvation requires restoration of the covenant relationship. There are two main emphases to this covenant: safety and food. Verses 25, 27, and 28 call for Israel to "live securely," "secure," "in safety," which are all the same Hebrew word. Israel's safety is ensured by banishing wild animals (v. 25), seen in Ezekiel and elsewhere as instruments of divine punishment (e.g., 5:17; 14:15, 21; compare Lev 26:22; Jer 15:3; Hos 2:12 [14]). Their banishment signals the end of punishment (compare Lev 26:6; Hos 2:18 [20]). Security also comes in returning to Israel's own soil after being released from enslavement (v. 27). That it shall no longer be plundered, devoured by animals, or insulted by the nations is indication of safety (vv. 28-29).

It is not surprising that food is also a covenant emphasis given that famine was another means of divine punishment (e.g., 5:12; 6:11; 7:15; 12:16; 14:13).

Now God provides abundant, seasonal rains that ensure a fruitful harvest (vv. 26*b*-27*a*). Israel will no longer suffer the debilitating hunger resulting from siege and warfare (4:9-15) since God gives Israel "splendid vegetation" (v. 29).

God secures Israel's safety by ending its foreign subjugation. Instead of YHWH's judgment, it will experience YHWH's blessings of a new leader, a new covenant, and abundant resources. Language from Lev 26:4-13, which describes what God will do for the people when they obey YHWH, dominates this section. This contrasts with the language of the judgments of Lev 26:15-33 used to describe Jerusalem's fate (see pp. 20, 31). The *recognition formula* appears twice in this section (vv. 27, 30). Previously, the people's knowledge of YHWH was acquired through experiencing judgment. Now the people will acquire knowledge of YHWH through experiencing salvation and safety.

Theological and Ethical Analysis

If trauma shatters one's sense of safety, then recovery begins with the ability to create "safe space." Although never a linear process, successful recovery entails a shift from unpredictable danger to reliable safety (Herman 1997, 155). In trauma's aftermath, the survivor must assess the degree of continued threat and decide what sort of precautions are necessary to ensure future protection (Herman 1997, 164).

Safety includes ending the ongoing trauma. This is what Ezekiel begins for the exiles in chapter 34. "Reliable safety" will be created by God's transformation of everything that has traumatized them. "Unreliable danger" will cease when God liberates them from oppressive foreign leaders and repairs the damage their own leaders have inflicted. A safe space means not fearing further trauma. Today this might mean:

- a woman lives without fear that her husband will beat her
- a child lives without fear of Daddy's visit to her bedroom
- Israelis live without fear of suicide bombers
- Palestinians live without fear of closures, house demolitions, and tanks
- Africans live without fear of HIV/AIDS
- gays and lesbians live without fear of assault or judgment
- Americans and Iraqis live without fear of terrorist attacks
- everyone on our planet lives without fear of starvation or genocide

It makes one breathless even to contemplate. Imagine not feeling afraid because

there is no threat. That is God's promise to her flock; they shall live without fear (v. 28).

In the real world, not even God can keep such a promise. There is no absolute safety. Consider Israel's history beyond Ezekiel. The Romans retraumatized Jerusalem's inhabitants in 70 C.E. No nation has escaped the violence of war caused by faulty leadership and aggressive neighbors. Ezekiel's proposal for the future may help the exiles *feel* safe, but that is not the same as *being* safe. Trauma victims lose their ability to assess their safety accurately (Rosenbloom and Williams 1999, 100, 102, 106). They may feel afraid without being in danger or feel physically safe in a hazardous situation. Ezekiel's response exemplifies the latter. Eventually, Ezekiel's plan will cease to be helpful. To believe that God protects from future harm prevents people from taking actions to protect themselves. Therefore, the next time trauma happens (whether on 9 Ab 70 C.E. or 9/11/2001) the people's assumptions of safety will once again be shattered. They will have to answer the victim questions again (see p. xx), only now they must also ask: why did God fail to keep this promise?

This problem has been addressed historically by pushing the vision further off into the future. God's promised safety will happen when the Messiah comes (for Jewish readers) or comes again (for Christian readers). Is it enough to hope that God will do this someday? If God cannot protect from future danger, then what does it mean for God to be the Good Shepherd? Considering how God does or does not enable people to live without fear is a task for modern interpreters.

Land Rush (35:1–36:15)

This unit focuses on the land. YHWH will again clear it to make way for Israel's entry and then transform barren wilderness into a fruitful garden.

Literary Analysis

Although the structure and compositional history of 35:1–36:15 is complex, it is traditionally read as a single unit. It opens with the *prophetic word formula*, which also marks the beginning of the next unit (36:16). This unit consists of two major subunits marked by the address to Ezekiel, "mortal," and the command to prophesy (35:2; 36:1). Language and content connect the two parts. Following the same rhetorical pattern as chapter 34, Israel's good news is linked to another's bad news (see p. 210). The *hostile orientation formula* (v. 2)

introduces a message of judgment against Mount Seir (35:2-15), followed by God's message of salvation to the "mountains of Israel" (36:1-15).

This unit echoes chapter 34 in other ways. Chapter 34 declares the people's restoration to "their own land," where God will feed them "on the mountains of Israel" (34:13, 14). Now the focus turns to those mountains (35:12; 36:1, 4, 8). Just as harsh shepherds and pushy animals block Israel's restoration (ch. 34), "Mount Seir" blocks the people's return to the land and must be removed. The repetition of language suggests that 36:1-15 intentionally reverses the land's destruction in chapter 6 (see p. 219).

Chapter 35 includes two *three-part prophetic proof sayings* (35:5-9, 10-13). The basic pattern of a *prophecy of punishment* dominates the second subunit (36:2-3*a*, 3*b*-4*a*, 6*b*-7*a*, 13-14*a*). Although there is no clearly defined structure to the unit, these genres provide a way to consider its dominant theme: YHWH will once again clear the land to make way for Israel's entry.

Exegetical Analysis

35:1-15

The unit begins by announcing divine hostility against Mount Seir (vv. 2-3). Mount Seir is a synonym for Edom (v. 15; compare Gen 32:3 [4]; 36:8, 9; Deut 2:4-8), which represents "the rest of the nations" (36:5). Both the *three-part prophetic proof saying* and the accusations against Edom echo the OAN (25:13-14). God is "against" Mount Seir and will judge it. The repetition of "I will" also evokes the OAN (30:10-26; 32:3-15). The result is catastrophe, expressed by the repetition of "desolation," "desolate," and "waste."

Why Edom is singled out here for attention is unclear. One possibility is because Israel's/Jacob's first conflict over the land was with Edom/Esau (Gen 33). Edom's actions toward Israel constitute the reasons for judgment. Edom is accused of contributing to Israel's calamity (v. 5; compare Ps 137:7; Obad 10-14), engaging in hateful speech (vv. 10, 12; compare 36:2, 3, 13), taking advantage of Israel's ruin (vv. 10-13; compare 36:2, 4, 5) and expressing gladness for it (v. 15). Edom's claim to ownership of Israelite land is the central problem. Edom sees the land is "desolate," and intends to "take possession" (vv. 10, 12). But YHWH gave this land to Israel (e.g., Deut 1:8, 21; 5:31). So instead of Edom devouring Israel's territory, its own territory will become a ruin. Since Edom schemed while Israel's land laid desolate (v. 12), God will desolate Edom's cities (vv. 3-4, 9). Since Edom gave Israel to the sword (v. 5), Edomites shall die by the sword (v. 8). Since Edom did not hate bloodshed, bloodshed will

pursue Edom (v. 6). Since Edom rejoiced in Israel's destruction, Israel will rejoice in Edom's destruction (vv. 14-15). YHWH judges them according to their ways.

The most astounding claim in this section is that "YHWH was there" (v. 10). Its significance can only be inferred. Perhaps it recognizes YHWH as the true owner of the land and Israel as the land's tenants. Although the tenants were absent, YHWH was no absentee landlord. As the land's owner, only YHWH could grant possession rights; Edom could not claim them. To Israel, YHWH seemed absent (see chs. 8–11), but verse 10 asserts that despite YHWH's absence from the Temple, YHWH was not absent from the land. Ezekiel's vision of recovery ends with the claim, "YHWH is There," in the city (48:35). Here the exiles learn that YHWH was in the land, even when they were not, preserving it for their return.

In the OAN, Edom was judged for seeking revenge against Israel (25:12). Here Edom is accused of cherishing "ancient enmity" (compare 25:15), "anger," "envy," and "hatred" toward Israel. There is little extrabiblical evidence of animosity between Edom and Israel. Whatever its historical roots, the animosity is enshrined in the Genesis narratives of two brothers vying for the same "inheritance" and God's choice of the younger (Gen 25:23; 27:1-41). In Ezekiel the claim for the land is resolved by Edom's extermination. There is no reconciliation for the brothers nor peaceful division of the land (Gen 33:4-17). Ezekiel's plan for recovery includes eliminating competing claims to ownership of this land. It is Israel's alone. Jacob will again wrest the inheritance from his elder brother.

36:1-15

Having eliminated potential conflicts over land inheritance, YHWH now turns to the land itself. Absent the *hostile orientation formula*, the second part of this unit opens in language identical to the opening of chapter 6:

> Mortal, set your face to the mountains of Israel, and prophesy to them, and say: O mountains of Israel, hear the word of Adonai YHWH. (6:2-3*a*; author's translation)

And:

> And you, mortal, prophesy to the mountains of Israel, and say: O mountains of Israel, hear the word of YHWH. (36:1)

The language might lead readers to expect another *prophecy of judgment* against the mountains of Israel; instead, judgment is reserved for "the enemy" (v. 2),

"the rest of the nations," and "Edom" (v. 5). In contrast, Israel's mountains will be revived.

Before the announcement of the transformation of the land, a series of statements beginning "because" encapsulates the current situation of the "mountains of Israel." The land has suffered at the hands of "the enemy" (Babylon?), "the rest of the nations," and "Edom." *Every* enemy has set its sights on it. These enemies express "wholehearted joy" in Israel's destruction because it allows them to claim Israel's territory for themselves (vv. 3, 5 [on "Aha!" see p. 154]). Since the nation was crushed on all sides, the entire land was vulnerable to being plundered (vv. 4-5). Though they desired to possess it, the enemies considered it worthy of "contempt" (v. 5; lit., "malice," see 25:6, 15). The terms "slander" (v. 3), "derision" (v. 4), and "insults" (v. 6) are verbal expressions of shaming. God is prompted to action by "jealousy" (vv. 5-6), which previously moved God to destroy Israel (5:13; 16:38, 42; 23:25). Now jealous rage leads to the destruction of Israel's enemies (also 38:19).

YHWH's actions are directed toward the enemies and toward the land. YHWH will do unto the enemies as they have done unto Israel. Now the nations shall "suffer insults" (v. 7). The land, however, will be restored. The mountains of Israel once more will be a luxurious vine (v. 8; compare 17:23; 19:10).

The mountains' restoration appears to result from a change in God. Instead of being "against" them, God is now "for" them (v. 9). In Hebrew, however, the expression is identical (*hinĕnî ʾel-*, "Look, I am to . . ."). Like the phrase "prophesy against/to" (6:2; 36:1), identical language conveys opposite divine attitudes. Context, not grammar, determines whether God is "against" (e.g., 13:8; 21:3 [8]; 35:3; 38:3) or "for" someone.

Because God will "turn to" the mountains, God's actions in verses 8-11 completely reverse the events of 6:3-6. Instead of being desolated, "the mountains and the hills, the watercourses and the valleys" will be tilled, sown, and filled with crops. This contrasts with Edom, whose mountains, valleys, and so on, will be filled with the slain (35:8). Instead of uninhabited ruins, an expanding population will rebuild and reinhabit the towns. Mountains emptied of life (14:13, 17) will be filled with humans and animals as in "former times." God will do more "good" for the mountains than "ever before." Instead of being possessed by enemies, they shall again be possessed by the "people of Israel" (see v. 12). The inheritance is not lost after all (35:15).

The Hebrew shifts in verses 13-15 from masculine plural (mountains) to feminine singular. The probable antecedent is "the land" (vv. 5-6), which appears almost as a living entity. To their enemies, the land appears as a voracious beast, devouring its population, leaving behind a nation with no future ("bereave

[them] of children"; v. 13). Even Israel once voiced this slur (Num 13:32). Given its history, the image of an inhospitable, devouring land is a prediction repeatedly fulfilled. Ezekiel envisions a different future; the vicious beast will be tamed (v. 14).

The last verse describes three things that will "no longer" be true of the land. One, it will no longer be subject to the nations' "insults." Two, it will no longer bear its inhabitants' "disgrace" (compare 5:14-15; 16:57; 22:4); it will be free of the pollution of sinful inhabitants. Three, it will no longer cause the nation to stumble. The notion of the land as a stumbling block is unique to Ezekiel. In prophetic literature "stumbling" is associated with iniquity (e.g., Isa 3:8; Jer 18:23; Hos 14:1 [2]). In 6:4, the altars, incense stands, and idols that YHWH will destroy are said to belong to "the mountains of Israel" ("*your* altars . . . *your* incense stands . . . *your* idols" NRSV, emphasis added). In 14:3, 5, and 7, these same idols became a "stumbling block." Since these idols, a cause of Israel's primary sin, have now been removed, "the mountains" (i.e., the land) will no longer cause Israel to stumble.

Theological and Ethical Analysis

(1) Contributors to the Earth Bible Project read the Bible in light of Earth's ecological crises. They have identified passages that may contribute to the crises, and uncovered suppressed traditions that value the Earth. Kalinda Rose Stevenson (2001, 158–71) argues that chapters 6 and 35–36 are texts that contribute to Earth's destruction.

Both the mountains of Israel and of Seir take a beating and YHWH is the one doing the beating. Feminists note that God is imaged as a battering spouse (Day 2000). According to Stevenson, God is also an Earth batterer, treating Earth as an object to destroy or give as a reward as God chooses, not as a subject due respect. She views the mountains as innocent victims of YHWH's struggle with the other deities who claim control of the land. Stevenson interprets the restoration of the land in 36:8-15 as part of the abuse cycle, where the batterer promises never to engage in violence again. Stevenson challenges readers to consider the implications of a theology that claims that because Earth belongs to YHWH, YHWH can treat it as YHWH pleases. She further challenges readers to consider how they too have battered Earth by failing to respect Earth as a subject.

(2) This unit addresses the exilic fear that having been forced out of the land, the people would never return. Chapter 34 addressed this fear with its promise of return. Then another fear arises. When they return, will they find that someone

else is eating their fruit, living in their houses, and drinking from their wells (compare Deut 6:10-11; Josh 24:13; Amos 5:11)? This unit addresses this fear by forcibly removing others who might claim the same land.

The desire for more territory is a constant cause of lethal conflict in human history. The history of warfare could be written based on land grabs. Although there is little extrabiblical evidence of Edom's land grab, the exiles' fear would have been very real. Anyone who has been forced from their home or country knows that "return" is generally an elusive and unrealistic goal, sometimes because former homes have new occupants. The issue becomes more acute when these two groups, returnees and new residents (or those who remained), try to inhabit the same space. "Sharing" the land was not only an issue between Jacob and Esau. Today it is the central issue in the Israeli/Palestinian conflict. Ezekiel's answer to the problem was to annihilate the competition. Judging by the rhetoric, a number of Israelis and Palestinians agree with this solution to their land disputes.

The Genesis stories provide an alternative view. In Genesis, conflict over who would possess what land was resolved nonviolently, partly through the brothers' reconciliation (Gen 33:4-12) and partly by settling in separate territories (Gen 33:15-19). Genesis and Ezekiel express two different hopes for nations who would claim the same land: finding a way to live in peace with each other or one nation annihilating the other. The two books provide nations a choice. The question is which they will choose.

Never Again (36:16-38)

The problem of Israel's persistent sinfulness is solved by permanently cleansing Israel from its uncleanness. God acts unilaterally toward Israel to ensure that Israel will never again be disobedient to God's law, leading to abundant blessings.

Literary Analysis

Ezekiel 36:16-38 form a separate literary unit, beginning with a *prophetic word formula* and ending with the *recognition formula*. "House of Israel," "nations," and "land" are key words that connect it with the previous unit. This unit can be divided into four subunits. YHWH recounts to Ezekiel Israel's history, establishing the problem (vv. 17-21); a *prophecy of salvation*, solving the

problem (vv. 22-32); and two additional statements about Israel's future marked by the *messenger formula* (vv. 33-36 and vv. 37-38).

The four subunits are woven together into an intricate fabric. The phrase "house of Israel" appears throughout (vv. 17, 21, 22, 32, 37). The last two subunits each seem to presuppose what immediately precedes it. The concern for God's name is repeatedly raised (vv. 21-23). The quote by the nations in verse 35 contrasts with their quote in verse 20. The initial aim is the nations' knowledge of YHWH (vv. 23, 36). Israel's knowledge of YHWH is the ultimate goal (v. 38).

This unit demonstrates the close tie between restoration and destruction, or between recovery and trauma. A careful examination demonstrates that this *prophecy of salvation* has numerous direct linguistic links in the Hebrew with the *prophecies of punishment* in chapters 20 and 22, some of which will be identified in the Exegetical Analysis. The echoes of these two previous chapters provide the context for understanding God's acts of re-creation: God's salvific acts directly address the problems of chapters 20 and 22. What God does is not intended to reverse Israel's sinful past, but *to prevent Israel from ever repeating that past*. "Never Again" becomes Israel's new motto.

Exegetical Analysis

YHWH's summary of Israel's history asserts that it defiled the land through conduct like the uncleanness of a menstruating woman, bloodshed upon the land, and idolatry (vv. 17-21). Most of these condemnations are standard Ezekielian vocabulary. "Ways and deeds" is shorthand for the totality of Israel's sins (e.g., 20:43-44). "Shedding blood" and "idolatry" represent its core uncleanness (e.g., 22:3-4). In the purity laws, bloodshed by itself pollutes the land (Num 35:33-34). Only Ezekiel considers idolatry sufficiently serious to defile the land (e.g., 20:7, 18, 31; 22:4). YHWH's speech highlights the themes of defilement and uncleanness (see pp. xxi–xxiii, 121 and 138–39). Ezekiel considers bloodshed and idolatry "incurable" impurities that can only be eradicated by a divine catastrophic act.

Ezekiel is also concerned with "curable" varieties of impurity, as exemplified by the simile of verse 17, "their conduct in my sight was like the uncleanness of a woman in her menstrual period." The significance of this unique phrase is obscure. Although purity laws consider the uncleanness attached to menstrual blood contagious, it is no more serious than other forms of ritual impurity such as ejaculation (Lev 15:16-18). There is no biblical basis to contend that the simile demonstrates the "abhorrent" nature of Israel's sins.

Menstruation is a type of uncleanness that *a purification ritual* can eradicate

(see p. xxii). There appears to be no definitive explanation for Ezekiel's choice of menstruation over similar types of ritually eradicated impurity, except that it also involves blood. By pairing menstrual blood and "shedding blood," Ezekiel brings together both types of impurity—that which can be eradicated by a purification ritual and that which can only be eradicated by catastrophic event. The pairing functions as a *merismus* that includes all forms of Israel's uncleanness that YHWH must address. The solution therefore consists of *eradicating uncleanness* from Israel so that *never again* will Israel be unclean. Referring to both types of uncleanness suggests that both a ritual of purification and purgation are necessary for Israel to be clean (compare 20:38; 22:15).

This is precisely what happens in verses 25-27. The antithesis of being ritually unclean is being ritually clean. "Clean/cleanse" (*ṭāhôr*/*ṭāhēr*) is used three times in verse 25: "I will sprinkle *clean* water upon you, and you *shall be clean* from all your uncleanness, and from all your idols I will *cleanse* you" (emphasis added). Ritual sprinkling of clean water will eradicate the people's curable uncleannesses. Although the expression "clean water" is unique to Ezekiel, the ritual's impetus appears to be Num 19. Ashes of the red heifer were to be kept "for the water of cleansing." Sprinkling (or "dashing") this water cleanses the ritually unclean (Num 19:13, 20). The "water of cleansing" is literally "the waters of the *nīddâ*," which is the same word for a menstruating woman. This may provide another explanation for why menstrual blood is chosen to represent curable uncleanness.

A cleansing ritual alone is insufficient, however. Two forms of pollution require two forms of eradication. God's acts of putting a new spirit within the people, removing the heart of stone, giving the heart of flesh, and putting the divine spirit within the people are acts of purgation. In *torah*, most often the penalty for acts that could defile the land is to be "cut off" from the people (e.g., Lev 18:24-29; 20:17-18). Instead of "cutting off" the house of Israel, these dangerous impurities will be removed by ensuring that they will never recur by giving Israel a new heart and a new spirit (vv. 26-27; compare 11:19).

The range of meaning for the Hebrew, "heart," includes a person's life, the seat of human emotion, the center of cognition and memory, and the locus of human will and decision making, including the will to sin or to follow *torah* (*TDOT*, 7.412–34). Ezekiel previously diagnosed Israel's "heart" problems: it is hard (2:4, see p. 9), "stubborn" (3:7), "wanton" (6:9), and goes after detestable things (11:21; 20:16). False prophets prophesy from their heart (13:2, 17; see p. 68). Most seriously, the people take idols into their hearts (14:3, 4, 7). As long as Israel has its old heart, uncleanness is a given. That stony heart must be replaced with "a heart of flesh." This phrase is another Ezekielian creation, whose

meaning can only be considered in relationship to the heart of stone. As the antithesis of the stony heart, the heart of flesh will "go after" YHWH.

God also gives the people a new spirit (v. 26). Whether the "new spirit" of verse 26 is identical to God's spirit in verse 27 is debated. Though Ezekiel has not previously discussed Israel's spirit, this new spirit will be a key feature of the next chapter. Together the new heart and new spirit effect an inner transformation in the people.

Finally, God has eradicated all of Israel's uncleanness so that they will always follow God's statutes and observe God's ordinances (v. 27). It will be impossible for Israel to do anything else. A cleansed and purged Israel is an obedient Israel. The goal of "never again" has been reached.

Cleansing rituals allow unclean persons to be readmitted into the holy community. Now that Israel is cleansed, it becomes a holy community and can be readmitted into the presence of the holy God. This is the essence of verses 28-30. A cleansed Israel can now live in the land, made ready for them in 35:1–36:15, for they will not defile it. Being admitted into God's holy presence also means that the broken covenant relationship can be restored (v. 28). In Leviticus, after divine punishment, only when Israel repents, confesses, humbles its heart, and makes amends will God remember the ancestral covenant (Lev 26:40-45). In Ezekiel there is no confessing, no humbling, no making amends. Israel does nothing. God acts unilaterally toward Israel to ensure that Israel will never again disobey God's law.

Another issue in this unit is the profaning of YHWH's name by Israel's present existence scattered among the nations (vv. 20-23; compare 20:9, 14, 22, 39). This is highlighted by the nations' observation that YHWH's people "had to go out of his land" (v. 20). Western Asian societies commonly understood that divine anger could lead a deity to abandon the people, resulting in their destruction. The nations understand Israel's defeat as divine punishment.

That punishment was a consequence of Israel's disobedience, which is what ultimately profanes YHWH's name (Lev 22:31-32; see p. 115). Therefore, YHWH must shine a tarnished reputation. Since Israel's obedience sanctifies YHWH's name, restoring YHWH's reputation requires changing Israel's behavior. If Israel obeys, then YHWH will bless Israel, sanctifying YHWH's name in the eyes of others.

The land is also a consideration in YHWH's concern to display holiness. God will gather Israel from among the nations and return it to its own land to live (vv. 24, 28). Furthermore, God will summon abundant grain and make fruits and produce so abundant that they will "*never again* suffer the disgrace of famine" (vv. 29-30, emphasis added).

The restoration of both people and productivity to the land is closely linked with Israel's obedience. Famine and the land's devastation were consequences of Israel's disobedience (e.g., 5:12; 6:11; 7:15; 14:13). Conversely, their obedience leads to its productivity. This explains why attention to the land follows the attention given to Israel. Once Israel's obedience is ensured, the land is restored. The covenant relationship insists that if Israel is obedient, then God will bless them in the land, and will be their God (compare Lev 26:3-12; Deut 28:1-5, 11-12).

The next subunit reinforces the connection between obedience and blessing (vv. 33-36). Once Israel is cleansed, God causes the towns to be inhabited, the waste places rebuilt, and the desolate land to be tilled (vv. 33-34). This language, echoing Lev 26:31-33, implies that God's actions will reverse the desolation that resulted from covenant disobedience (6:6, 14; 12:20).

YHWH's successful display of holiness will be confirmed when the nations observe the land's reversal (v. 35). Seeing the desolate land transformed into a garden, the nations conclude that Israel now completely obeys YHWH. Reference to the garden of Eden recalls that the first humans lived in God's presence as long as they were obedient (Gen 2–3).

Israel's response to this good news is unexpected. Instead of joy, rejoicing, and thanksgiving, Israel will respond with loathing, shame, and dismay (vv. 31-32; compare 6:8-10; 20:43-44). On the meaning of "loathe" see p. 34. Although "shame" (*bôš*) and "dismay" (*klm*) are paired only here in Ezekiel, they are paired elsewhere (e.g., Pss 35:4; 69:6 [7]; Isa 41:11; 45:17; Jer 14:3). Recalling the issue of disgrace-shame and discretion-shame (see pp. 89–90; compare 16:59-63), God's purpose in Israel's restoration is to induce shame. When Israel finally feels disgrace-shame for past actions, it will develop a sense of discretion-shame that will prevent future disobedience.

Ezekiel addresses the root of Israel's history of failure: Israel's behavior. Profoundly pessimistic about Israel's moral self, he replaces human action with something more reliable, the divine gift of knowledge of God and self. This will prevent Israel from acting in shameful ways and thus prevent further disaster (Lapsley 2000, 157).

The final verses (vv. 37-38) add little and link back to previous issues. Before YHWH refused to be inquired of by Israel (see pp. 76–77); now YHWH will permit inquiry, but only to ask that YHWH increase their population. Increased population is of concern to a nation that had lost significant population; it is also a consequence of obedience (Lev 26:3, 9; Deut 7:12-13). Depicting Israel as a flock returns to the sheep imagery of chapter 34. God promises to make the exiles as numerous as the flocks jamming the streets of Jerusalem at festival

time. Like those sacrificial sheep, the people shall be whole and holy (compare Lev 1:10; 4:32; 22:19).

Theological and Ethical Analysis

(1) Ezekiel's consistent response to Jerusalem's destruction has been self-blame. The people are responsible for their suffering. Self-blame is a common reaction following victimization. Survivors feel responsible; if only they had been smarter, quicker, or somehow better, the trauma would not have occurred. Whether this response is positive or negative is debated.

Most trauma-recovery experts assess such self-blame negatively, as an inability to attribute responsibility properly. Victims blame themselves far more than would appear warranted by the actual circumstances. Counselors generally seek to help patients overcome such feelings by assuring the victim that they are not to blame and by building their self-esteem.

Others view self-blame more positively. Jacqueline Lapsley sees the capacity for self-blame as a sign of Israel's "new moral self," which is "capable of making accurate moral assessments" and "is a gift from God" (2000, 141–42, 145). Daniel Smith-Christopher views self-blame as an effective coping strategy. "After all, if one's suffering is because of one's own oversights, and not because of the power of the emperor and his armies, then this holds out considerably more hope about a future restoration" (2002, 81). Studies find a level of self-blame to be a predictor of good coping in response to trauma (Janoff-Bulman 1992, 128–29).

To account for such divergent assessments, Ronnie Janoff-Bulman distinguishes between two distinct types of self-blame, one adaptive, and the other maladaptive:

> "Behavior self-blame" involves blaming one's own behavior and is adaptive, whereas "characterological self-blame" involves attribution to one's enduring personality characteristics and is maladaptive. Thus, the rape victim who believes she should not have hitchhiked . . . is engaging in behavioral self-blame, whereas the rape victim who believes she is a bad person . . . is engaging in characterological self-blame. The primary distinction . . . is the perceived modifiability and controllability of the factor blamed . . . the modifiability of behavior renders behavior self-blame adaptive, for this attribution enables the victim to believe that by *altering their behavior*, they will *avoid being victimized* in the future. (1985, 29 [emphasis added])

To the extent that one believes he or she holds some responsibility for the experience of trauma, one can change one's future behavior and thereby prevent recurrences of trauma. This helps in reordering the fragmented self by allowing

the victim to feel that he or she has regained control. From this perspective, a person can engage in precautionary behaviors that prevent negative outcomes (Janoff-Bulman 1992, 128).

Behavioral self-blame is manifest in Ezekiel in the naming of specific covenant violations, such as idolatry and shedding blood. By engaging in new behaviors, that is, by being obedient, Israel will be able to prevent future recurrences of exile. To the extent this enables exiles to reorder their fragmented selves and regain some control of their situation, Ezekiel's vision of transformation can be viewed as a positive outcome of self-blame.

However, Janoff-Bulman also notes that behavioral self-blame is most adaptive in the absence of characterological self-blame (Janoff-Bulman 1992, 126). The ability to believe one has done bad things without believing one is a bad person is the effective stance. Characterological self-blame is evident in Ezekiel (compare esp. chs. 16, 20, and 23). Israel's "enduring personality characteristic" is disobedience. Counselors today would address this therapeutically by helping the exiles see that the trauma was not all their fault (blame the Babylonians) and by building self-esteem (there is more right with them than wrong). Ezekiel's response is not therapeutic. The exiles cannot fundamentally change their behavior "through their own efforts," but only as an act of God.

Some may view Ezekiel's failure to develop a realistic self-concept that takes the bad with the good as damaging as the initial trauma. Perfect obedience, and thus avoidance of trauma, is impossible. On the other hand, those who have faced feelings of worthlessness and found their way to positive self-esteem may experience that transformation very much as a new heart and new spirit. They may believe God made possible their new self. From a contemporary therapeutic perspective Ezekiel's views of recovery may be both adaptive and maladaptive.

(2) Hardly a day goes by without a reference somewhere in the media to the effect that "never again will we allow a terrorist attack on American soil." "Never again" is the rallying cry of Judaism in the face of the Holocaust. "¡Basta!" (Enough!) has been the cry of the *Madres de los Desaparecidos* (Mothers of the Disappeared) in Latin America. "Never again" may be the words a woman says as she studies self-defense after having been raped. Anyone who has said "never again" understands the hope that God's people would "never again" suffer the trauma and devastation of the exile.

The strategy employed in this unit is an extreme application of social control. Unilaterally forcing a new heart and new spirit upon the people, God exerts total control over them. In the human realm those who use extreme social control to coerce people's obedience are called "tyrants," and their acts of control are

viewed as "coercive" and "evil." That God is the one controlling only makes it more problematic and often provides legitimacy for humans to engage in similar behavior.

As appealing as Ezekiel's vision is for "never again," it ultimately fails because humans will never be completely obedient. Ezekiel confronted the problem of a people who, knowing good from evil, decided to choose evil. There may be some eschatological moment that will solve this problem. While waiting for the eschatological future of "never again," one must consider alternative strategies to total control, such as holding perpetrators of trauma responsible and offering healing for their victims. This requires developing theologies that express God's transformative participation in the here and now.

(3) It is time to eradicate the belief that a woman's menstrual cycle is "unclean," and therefore an appropriate simile for pollution. It can, however, still offer a meaningful simile. Biologically, menstruation removes an egg that has not been fertilized. At the end of the cycle, a new egg is available and a woman is again able to conceive. Like a menstruating woman, Israel needed to rid itself of the deadness of unconceived life, in order to conceive new life. This kind of transformation should be viewed, not as a singular event, but as cyclical, like a woman's menses. On a regular basis each individual, as well as faith communities, needs to bleed out the deadness that is within and prepare for a new conception of life.

Up from the Grave They Arose (37:1-14)

In his first vision after Jerusalem's fall, Ezekiel sees the dead nation of Israel brought back to life by God's spirit.

Literary Analysis

This chapter breaks the literary pattern of previous salvation prophecies. It neither begins with the *prophetic word formula* nor includes words of judgment. Ezekiel again finds that "the hand of YHWH was upon" him (compare 1:3; 3:14, 22; 8:1; 33:22), spiritually transporting him to a valley of dry bones (compare 3:12, 14; 8:3; 11:1, 24).

Old literary wine is poured into a new textual wineskin. The forms are familiar. This is Ezekiel's third *vision report* (compare 1:1-28; 8:1–11:25). Allegorical imagery followed by an interpretation recalls 17:1-24 and 20:45–

21:7 [21:1-12]. The interpretation is a *disputation speech* concluding with a *prophetic proof saying* (vv. 11-14; compare 11:1-12; 33:23-29). The content, however, differs radically. Previously, these forms contained a message of death, now they contain a message of new life so revolutionary it is a wonder that the forms do not burst.

The people have been promised the gift of a "new spirit," which will morally transform them (36:26-27). But this individual transformation is only a part of God's salvation. The spirit takes on a larger role as the agent that brings an entire nation back to life. Its importance is evident in the tenfold repetition of the Hebrew word, *rûaḥ*. *Rûaḥ* is *onomatopoeic*, the sound of "wind" or "breath," or, in reference to the breath of life, "spirit." There is also a tenfold repetition of "bone(s)." Life and death are evenly matched linguistically; theologically *rûaḥ* is stronger than "bones."

Exegetical Analysis

Anyone reading this unit who has not read Ezek 4–24 needs to stop immediately and read them. It is impossible to appreciate the hope of this unit without having experienced the previous despair.

Although this unit is weighty with theological significance, the action that takes place is straightforward. For a second time, Ezekiel comes to a valley (compare 3:22-23). The first time God told Ezekiel of Jerusalem's impending death (chs. 4–5). Now God gives Ezekiel a guided tour of a landscape of bones. There are "very many," "very dry" bones, dismembered and scattered like the pieces of a jigsaw puzzle (v. 2). The bones are anonymous; the flesh that would identify them has long gone.

Then God asks an improbable question, "Will these bones be alive/living?" (v. 3, author's translation). This is not only impossible but also ridiculous. What bones have ever lived again? There is no indication of the tone of Ezekiel's response. Did he snort in disbelief and derision? Did he state his answer with bold assurance? Did he respond with the indifference of depression? The text records only the content of his answer: "O Lord GOD, you know."

God then commands Ezekiel to prophesy to the bones (vv. 4-6), which sounds as absurd as God's initial question. How does one prophesy to bones? How will they hear the words? Nonetheless, Ezekiel is to prophesy that God will cause *rûaḥ* to enter them. *Rûaḥ* is insufficient for life, so God will also put new ligaments, muscles, and skin on these dry bones, reversing the process of decomposition. The bones shall live.

Ezekiel, being an obedient prophet, prophesies (vv. 7-8). As he prophesies, he

hears a "rattling." With so many bones the rattling sounds like an earthquake (compare 3:12-13; 12:18; 26:10, 15). No longer unconnected pieces of a jigsaw puzzle, the bones join to form complete human skeletons. As Ezekiel watches, they are covered with flesh. Today this process could be easily portrayed via computer animation, but it would seem no more real than what Ezekiel saw.

These bones are now bodies, but they are lifeless. Ezekiel must now prophesy to *rûaḥ* and call upon it to "breathe" upon these new beings "that they may live" (v. 9). The verb "breathe" is from the same root that appears in Gen 2:7. This new creation is deliberately structured (a body shaped first, then becoming alive with *rûaḥ*) to correspond to God's first creation of humans.

Ezekiel obeys "and *rûaḥ* came into them, and they lived" (v. 10). The bones are finally identified as belonging to "these slain" (v. 9). Resurrected, they stand as a vast "multitude," a word with military connotations (17:17; 27:10; 29:18-19; 32:31; compare Exod 14:4; 2 Sam 8:9; etc.). Together, "slain" and "multitude" suggest that the bones belonged to defeated soldiers.

Ezekiel, and readers, might marvel at this wondrous event, yet wonder what it has to do with Israel. The next verse explains. The bones are the remains of the battle against Nebuchadnezzar. They are "the whole house of Israel" (compare 11:15). These bones belong to the exiles who no longer are "[wasting] away" (33:10) but whose "bones are dried up." This speaks of a death long past, leading them to feel that all hope is lost (v. 11). That feeling arises from the inability to envision any future.

The exiles have accepted their death (see pp. 205–6). Now God will open their graves (vv. 12-13). The imagery switches from unburied to properly buried bones, but the sense of death remains. As God brought slaves up from Egypt to freedom in a promised land, God will now bring the people out of the grave of exile to life in that land again. As *rûaḥ* entered Ezekiel and he is "set down" in the valley (vv. 1-2), *rûaḥ* will enter the people and set them down on their own soil (v. 14). Israel will know YHWH through this "resurrection." The experience of resurrection is both metaphorical and literal. It is metaphorical because it is not about revived dead bodies but about the re-formation of the nation. It is also literal because the nation of Israel was dead. There were no borders, no capital, no king, and no subjects. The literal re-formation of that nation would be every bit as unforeseen and miraculous as bodies arising from graves. The promise is that with God's *rûaḥ* the nation shall live again.

Theological and Ethical Analysis

(1) This is one of the few Ezekiel texts to appear frequently in Christian

lectionaries. It is helpful to reflect on the nature of resurrection. The downside is that first you must be dead. God begins the business of resurrection with bones —dry, dusty bones, not meaty bones (24:3-5), or even "wasting away" bones (33:10). These are bones that have been picked clean and bleached by years under the scorching sun.

In that situation, it is impossible to imagine resurrection because it is impossible to imagine a future. The exiles despair: "Our hope is lost." They probably felt completely "cut off"—from family, from friends, from meaning, from life itself, a veritable "grave." This is why resurrection is such a surprise.

It is also a gift from God. There is nothing a person can do to make resurrection happen. This is positive because those in graves are unable to help themselves. They must rely on some other power to raise them up. Resurrection cannot be predicted, planned, or coerced, nor can its shape be imagined. It seldom happens at the point when it seems most needed. The exiles must have viewed the time of Jerusalem's destruction as a good time for resurrection, but the re-formation that Ezekiel prophesies will not take place for decades. Waiting for resurrection requires endurance. One often gives up hope for resurrection long before it actually happens.

Moreover, resurrection may not resemble what one envisions resurrection to be. The tendency in situations of distress is to outline exactly what relief must look like. This is what Ezekiel does. Resurrection looks like return to the land, a unified nation with a David-like king, and a new temple where YHWH is appropriately worshiped. But what if resurrection looks like something else? What if, indeed. Second Isaiah's audience faced this challenge. Who would imagine that resurrection would include Persian Cyrus as Messiah (Isa 45:1)? It might seem at the time that new life does not look either "new" or "living." That is what makes resurrection so astounding.

(2) The spirit's work requires sinews, flesh, and skin in order to make dead bones live. The African American spiritual "Dem Bones" is derived from these verses. There are several versions but what they all have in common is the connecting of the bones.

Toe bone connected to the foot bone
Foot bone connected to the leg bone
Leg bone connected to the knee bone
Knee bone connected to the thighbone [etc. on up to the neck].

Some versions pose a question, "How did de bones get together?" Slaves were a group, like the exiles, scattered to the four winds and disconnected from

one another. Further social fragmentation occurred as families were separated at slave auction blocks and children were sold from plantations. “Dem Bones” sings of the hope of reconnecting, of families reunited, and a community restored. As each bone is connected to the next bone, when one African American is connected to another, they will be able to “rise an’ hear de word of de Lord.” The connected bones are then bound together by sinews, strengthened with muscles, and finally wrapped in skin and made whole. It is the image of community and families bound together by common bonds, strengthened by relationships, and wrapped in love and made whole. Later generations interpreted the song as an image of the uniting of body and soul, which strengthened them to work for the wholeness of African American communities.

Families and communities today are becoming increasingly fragmented. Most parents rear their children apart from any extended family, and their adult children live scattered across the country. Fewer neighbors know one another. On a larger scale, the disconnection caused by drought and war has ravaged not only families but entire communities. At the end of 2007, the United Nations Refugee Agency reported a refugee population (people who have fled persecution in their own countries to seek safety in neighboring states) of 11.4 million, increasing for a second consecutive year (see the website of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees at http://www.unhcr.org/4981c4812.html [accessed July 31, 2009]).

This text from Ezekiel and this spiritual can continue to provide inspiration today for those persons and organizations committed to the tasks of reconnecting fragmented communities and bringing wholeness to those broken in body and soul. It provides a vision of God’s intention for wholeness and reminds us that what was possible for Israel then is possible yet even today.

Reunification (37:15-28)

The nation’s restoration continues. Two once-divided kingdoms will become one. Salvation is now complete and all God’s promises are forever.

Literary Analysis

The unit opens with the *prophetic word formula*. It mainly consists of the performance of a *sign-act* (vv. 16-23), the only *sign-act* found among the salvation oracles. The remainder of the unit (vv. 24-28) functions as a summary

of chapters 34–36.

Repetition of the word *one* dominates the unit (eleven times in Hebrew). This repetition occurs almost exclusively in the sign-act, a signal that its message concerns the union of God's people.

Exegetical Analysis

The previous unit announced resurrection to the exiles: the nation shall be restored. But return is not the only good news. This unit proclaims the reunification of the Northern and Southern kingdoms, to form a United Kingdom. Ezekiel is commanded to take two "sticks" (lit., "tree, wood"). He is to write on one, "For Judah, and the Israelites associated with it," and on the other, "For Joseph (the stick of Ephraim) and all the house of Israel associated with it" (v. 16). Each stick represents the tribe most associated with each kingdom. "Judah" was the most prominent tribe of the Southern Kingdom (Josh 15:1-12; 1 Kgs 12:23; 14:29). "Joseph" sometimes designated the Northern Kingdom (e.g., 1 Kgs 11:28; Ps 80:1[2]; Amos 5:15; Obad 18), but it was more commonly known by the names of Joseph's two sons—Manasseh and Ephraim—which may explain the gloss "the stick of Ephraim." Each "stick" also represents those who "associate with" each tribe, literally its "friends" (*ḥāvērîm*). The root has the sense of being joined or allied with. Ezekiel is to take these two sticks, one in each hand, and bring them together until it appears he holds a single stick in his hand (v. 17). This optical illusion is indicated in the Hebrew by a plural form of "one."

This is not Ezekiel's most bizarre sign-act (compare 4:4-15). Nonetheless, the people ask for an interpretation (v. 18). The answer is that the sticks represent the divided kingdoms following Solomon's death. Both kingdoms suffered the traumas of defeat and exile, "Joseph" by Assyria and "Judah" by Babylon. God will make this divided nation one again. God's people will never again be two nations, but "one," under one king (vv. 19-22).

In addition to the nation's reunification, the people shall never again defile themselves with those things that were the cause of each kingdom's destruction (v. 23). They shall no longer be occasions of sin because God will "save them" (see p. 214). As God will save from ravaging sheep (34:22) and uncleanness (36:29), God will save them from "apostasies." "Apostasies" is derived from the verb "turn," suggesting backsliding or disobedience (e.g., Jer 8:5; Hos 11:7). To save from apostasy is equivalent to cleansing the defiled (compare 36:25-28).

The sign-act's interpretation shows God's intent to restore ethnic (v. 21*a*), territorial (v. 21*b*), political (v. 22), and spiritual integrity (v. 23; Block 1998,

410–15). This forms the complete restoration of the covenant relationship between the people and YHWH. Once again, "they shall be my people, and I will be their God" (11:20; 14:11; see also 34:24; compare Lev 26:12; Jer 31:33).

The final verses (vv. 24-28) function as a summary of chapters 34–36 and anticipate chapters 40–48. Four events are to take place. (1) The people will dwell in the land *forever* (34:13-14, 25-29; 36:8-12). This is the land YHWH gave "to my servant Jacob." Instead of God's initial promise to Abraham (see pp. 62–63 and 207), the focus is on Jacob, the father of Judah and Joseph (Gen 28:13-15). (2) David, the exemplary king, will be a prince *forever* (34:23-24). The nation will always have a leader who walks in God's ways, keeping God's statutes and commandments (compare 1 Kgs 11:38; 2 Kgs 22:2). (3) God will make a covenant of peace that lasts *forever* (34:25). (4) God will be present in their midst *forever* (see chs. 40–48). "Dwelling place" is literally "tabernacle," the locus of God's presence among Israel in the wilderness (compare Exod 25–26; 36–40; esp. 40:34-38). Ezekiel returns to one of his favorite intertexts, Lev 26 (see pp. 20, 31–32, and 215). God promises that if Israel is obedient, then God will "place my dwelling [tabernacle] in your midst" (Lev 26:3, 11). Leviticus is clear that God's presence is conditional upon Israel's obedience. There is no conditionality in Ezekiel. Israel's obedience is assured, as is God's presence "forever."

In chapters 34–37 Ezekiel lays out a comprehensive plan for recovery. God will transform the people by giving them a new heart and new spirit, which ensures their obedience. They will return home and the nation will be restored. They will live securely in a fruitful land ruled over by one who follows God's ways. Holy God will dwell among a cleansed people. It is an idealistic plan. Whether or not it is realistic is another issue.

Theological and Ethical Analysis

This text seemed especially pertinent when the Berlin Wall fell and East and West Germany were reunited. It is possible to imagine South Korean Christians seeing this sign-act as hope for the future reunification of Korea. Yet as often as divided nations are reunited, once-unified nations are split asunder. Consider the disintegration of the Soviet Union, Czechoslovakia, and Yugoslavia. Socially and politically the United States is now as divided as the tribes of Joseph and Judah once were. Who will write on one stick, "For the Red States (Republicans, conservatives) and those who are their friends" and on another stick, "For the Blue States (Democrats, liberals) and those who are their friends"? Who will bring the sticks together until they are "one nation" in God's hand? Ezekiel

provides no details as to the process of reunification. There is no guide to how divided peoples shall live as one. But the possibility and potential is held out as a hope for the future.

No War No More (38:1–39:29)

Both Jewish and Christian traditions have demonstrated a concern to relate the events of chapters 38–39 with contemporary events. Judaism associates these chapters with the days preceding the coming of the Messiah. Some modern Christian interpreters, reading the chapters with the apocalyptic material of Dan 7–12 and Revelation, associate them with the Messiah's return. The urge to interpret these chapters in light of contemporary events arises because these prophecies seem "unfulfilled." God has not yet finally defeated the enemies that prevent God's people from living securely in their land. Nonetheless, these chapters are no farther in the future than any of the other passages from chapters 34–48. Nor are they particularly difficult to interpret in the context of the previous chapters, especially 36:16-38.

Imagine an exile in Tel Abib. Like Ezekiel, she experienced the horrors of Nebuchadnezzar's siege of Jerusalem, the hellishly long walk to Babylon, and an uncertain future. She has heard Ezekiel's explanation for the trauma she endured: it is her fault. Now she hears Ezekiel's words in chapters 34–37 concerning the future. YHWH will transform her, any bent to sinning to be washed away by clean waters. Best of all, she shall return home. Then she hears that YHWH has set his face toward Gog of the land of Magog. YHWH is going to lead a great "army, [with] horses and horsemen . . . wielding swords. Persia, Ethiopia, and Put are with them" (38:4*b*-5*a*). Hearing this she thinks, "[Expletive deleted]! That army is even larger than Nebuchadnezzar's!" At the thought, she begins to tremble (compare 7:27; 12:18). She knows that YHWH leads this army against someone; she knows what it is like to face such a fate. Then she hears that this army is heading right for the restored people (38:8-9). Suddenly she is having difficulty breathing and thinks she smells the stench of death. Has she lived through all this only to have to live through it again?

The first sixteen verses of chapter 38 read like Israel's worst nightmare or like the kind of horror movie that has ten sequels. At the end of each movie the monster is finally defeated in battle and the weary survivors are safe at last—until the next movie brings the monster back to life. The goal of previous chapters has been to create a safe space for Israel by ensuring that the trauma of

exile never recurs. Now it seems that the monster of exile has not really been defeated and is on the rampage again. Like other prophecies of salvation, this unit entwines destruction with salvation (see p. 210). This pattern suggests that this prophecy is really a pleasant dream rather than a nightmare for the exiles.

Literary Analysis

Scholarly debate is unresolved over issues of genre and whether these chapters are original or a later composition. What is evident is the repetition of the *recognition formula* (38:16, 23; 39:6, 7, 22, 28). The chapters as a whole consist of a series of three-and two-part *prophetic proof sayings*, which combine to yield "a single powerful proof oracle" (Block 1998, 430–31). The "proof" aspect is emphasized in these chapters. A *proof saying* persuades by offering evidence that YHWH's activity lies behind a particular course of action. Whenever these chapters were composed, they are perfectly placed in the narrative. They prove, beyond doubt, that YHWH has transformed the nightmare of exile into the dream of a new future.

There is no clear-cut way to divide these chapters. Chapter 38 focuses on God's defeat of Gog and his army. The chapter divides into two subunits, 38:2-16 and 38:17-23. Each begins with typical opening formulas and closes with a variation on the *recognition formula*. YHWH brings Gog and his army against Israel in the first subunit and destroys them in the second. Chapter 39 is concerned with the disposition of the fallen army and its significance for Israel. Subdivisions are primarily determined by content.

Exegetical Analysis

The identity of Gog of the land of Magog is unclear. Nor is that identification the most important issue. Gog is like the unidentified Pharaoh in Exod 1:8 who, because of the lack of specificity, becomes an archetypal oppressor. Gog similarly represents the destructive enemy from the north (e.g., Jer 1:13-15; 6:22; 50:3, 9; Ezek 23:24; 26:7). As the pharaoh of Exodus resembled real pharaohs, Gog's army resembles the real armies of Assyria and Babylon.

Gog is not alone in this endeavor. Seven allies join him: Meshech, Tubal, Persia, Cush, Put, Gomer, and Beth-togarmah (vv. 5-6). "Seven" symbolizes completeness. These allies come from the northern and southern extremities of the known world (Darr 2002, 1516–17). Together they form an "axis of evil" whose alliance turns the battle into a "world war."

YHWH had previously summoned the Assyrian and Babylonian armies to destroy Israel and Judah (e.g., Isa 7:18-20; 8:7; 10:5-6; Jer 5:15-17; 25:9). YHWH now puts hooks into Gog to lead him and his army against Israel (v. 4). The temporal language, "after many days" and "in the latter years," makes clear that this is a postexilic event (v. 8). Other language in this verse, echoing chapters 34–37, emphasizes that Gog and his allies are to fight the restored community. The land is "restored from war" literally "brought back from the sword." Since "sword" in Ezekiel symbolizes destruction, this is a powerful image of restoration. The people are gathered from many nations (see also 34:13; 36:24; 37:21. On the mountains of Israel (see also 34:13-14; 36:8; 37:22) to live in "safety" (34:28; see also 34:25, 27).

Into this literary fulfillment of Ezekiel's prophecies, Gog's army will come "like a storm." The word for storm, "shoah," evokes devastation (compare Isa 10:3); it is used by modern Jews for the Holocaust. Gog's army will be "like a cloud covering the land," language recalling other prophecies of destruction (30:3, 18; 34:12; compare Jer 4:13; Joel 2:2; Zeph 1:15).

Verses 2-9 describe YHWH's perspective, which initially looks like judgment against Israel. Verses 10-13 describe Gog's viewpoint. (See Isa 10:5-11 for similarly juxtaposed perspectives.) Gog thinks it is *his* idea to go up against this peaceable kingdom (v. 11). The people are described as "quiet," a word that primarily denotes cessation of war (e.g., Josh 11:23; Judg 3:11; 2 Kgs 11:20; Ps 76:8 [9]). Without war there is no need for fortifications (v. 11). Gog's purpose is to plunder Israel (v. 12). He sees the opportunity for a large reward for little effort on his part. The entire first subsection of this oracle (vv. 2-13) seems to spell doom for Israel.

The second subsection (vv. 14-23) begins with a summary. "On that day," when Israel lives in safety, Gog will come against Israel with a mighty army, "so that the nations may know me, when through you, O Gog, I display my holiness before their eyes" (vv. 14-16). The same language appears in 36:23 where God's holiness will be displayed through God's transformation of Israel. God's holiness will now be displayed through Gog's transformation.

YHWH's query of Gog raises many questions to which there are no definitive answers (v. 17). Should it be answered "yes" or "no"? Does it reference otherwise unknown prophecies or resignify previous prophecies? What matters is that YHWH's agency is behind this foe—but YHWH's purpose is unexpected.

"On that day," God says, "my fury will rise in my anger, and in my jealousy by the fire of my rage" (vv. 18*b*-19*a*, author's translation). Expressions for anger multiply as YHWH's anger ruptures creation in an earthquake of incalculable magnitude. Fish of the sea, birds of the air, animals of the field, all creeping

things that creep on the ground, and human beings (v. 20) are what YHWH created in Gen 1:20-26. This great shaking heralds an act of uncreation, the size of which has not been seen since the great flood (Gen 6–9).

Finally, in verse 21 Israel hears that this act of uncreation is directed, not at them, but at Gog! The sword is not pointed at Israel but at its enemies. God has summoned Gog's great army only to destroy it (compare Joel 3:1-3 [4:1-3]). As elsewhere in Ezekiel, calamities come in threes (v. 22; compare 5:12; 7:15; 13:11). "Pestilence and bloodshed" occur elsewhere in Ezekiel and recall the plagues in Egypt (5:17; 28:23; compare Exod 7:17-21; 9:3, 15). The term "torrential rains and hailstones" is unique to Ezekiel (13:11, 13). "Fire and sulfur" occurs only here in Ezekiel, but recall Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen 19:24). God brings out the big guns! Along with the sword, these three pairs make seven punitive agents unleashed against the seven coalition members. These seven destructive agents represent the totality of God's arsenal. This mother of all wars is waged "in all my mountains," that is, in the land of Israel (v. 21). These quiet people will have a front-row seat to this pyrotechnic display. God transforms Gog by destroying him, as stunning a display of God's holiness as Israel's restoration (v. 23; compare v. 16; 36:23).

Chapter 39 turns to the disposal of the remains and the significance of this event for Israel. It opens with a repeated summons to Ezekiel to prophesy against Gog, emphasizing that YHWH's conflict is with Gog (v. 1; compare 38:2-3). Verses 2-3 summarize the events in chapter 38. YHWH summons Gog to bring his army to the mountains of Israel where YHWH disarms Gog. The depiction of an archer is both realistic and powerful (Keel 1978, fig. 304; *ANEP*, nos. 172, 184, 362, 368). The critical factor for Israel is that without his weapons Gog ceases to be a threat.

Weaponless, Gog "shall fall" (v. 4). The bodies of Gog and his troops will litter Israel's mountains (compare 6:13; 29:5; 31:12; 35:8), where they will be devoured by scavengers. Lying exposed in the "open field" is a further sign of disgrace (v. 5; see p. 197). As if defeat and lack of burial were insufficiently humiliating, God now goes on the offense and overwhelms Gog's homeland, Magog, and all his allies' territories. Ironically, those who thought they lived "securely" find that they lived a lie (v. 6).

These events display God's holiness (v. 7; compare 38:16, 23) and prevent God's "holy name" from being "profaned any more" (see pp. 115 and 223). YHWH's reputation is tied to Israel's behavior; Israel's disobedience profanes God's Name. Israel's defeat by the Babylonians is evidence that its disobedience evoked YHWH's wrath (36:20-21). Conversely, Gog's destruction and Israel's deliverance are evidence that Israel's obedience has warranted God's protection

(compare Lev 26:3, 6-7; Deut 28:1, 7). Gog's destruction is "proof" that it is an obedient people.

The enormity of Gog's destruction is numerical as well as theological (vv. 9-10). The inhabitants will be able to make fires for seven years without cutting down a single tree simply by burning Gog's weapons. Note that Israel neither plunders the weapons to add to its own arsenal nor retools them for peacetime use (compare Isa 2:4). Israel's safety is ensured by the destruction not only of the enemy but also their weapons.

Gog and his army were left unburied on the mountains as a sign of humiliation (vv. 4-5*a*). The bones' burial is now commanded "in order to cleanse the land" (vv. 11-16). Deuteronomy 21:33 states that unburied bodies defile the land. Even though Israel does not bury the bodies "the same day," this may be the impetus for the command; a clean people cannot live on unclean land. It will be an "honor" (lit., "a name") to the "house of Israel" to cleanse the land, in contrast to "the house of Israel" who polluted it (compare Num 35:33; Ezek 9:9 and Lev 18:21, 24-25; Ezek 20:30-31). (Given this concern for purity and Ezekiel's obsession with purity, it is astonishing that he says nothing about the contamination incurred during burial by contact with bones [Num 19:16]!)

The thoroughness of the burial is significant. It takes seven months. "Seven" represents a time of completion. The seventh day is Sabbath. Pentecost occurs after seven weeks and Jubilee after seven times seven years. Here, after seven months, the land is cleansed.

Other aspects of these verses remain uncertain, including the meaning of "block the path of the travelers," the significance of the city Hamonah, and the identification of the burial site's location (For possibilities, see Odel 1994). Its name, "Hamon-gog," conveys that Gog's power has been destroyed. There, "Gog and all his horde (*hāmôn*)" will be buried (on *hāmôn* see p. 39, compare 32:18-32).

The next scene depicts YHWH's preparation of a banquet (lit., "sacrifice") for the carrion birds and scavenging animals (vv. 17-20). They will feast on the bodies of Gog and his armies. This creates a logical problem in the narrative sequence since it occurs *after* the burial. In typical Ezekielian form, he seems to be returning to and elaborating something previously mentioned in passing (compare 36:27 and 37:1-14). These verses develop the reference to devouring animals in verse 4 by providing the formal invitation to that event.

There are no clear antecedents to this vision of a banquet at YHWH's table. The closest parallel is to the ancient practice of celebrating victory with a feast (compare Exod 24:11; 1 Kgs 18:41-42; *ANET*, 134–36). The language resembles other texts where a sacrificial feast symbolizes divine victory (Isa 34:6-7; Zeph

1:7-8) or where corpses consumed by animals symbolize divine judgment (e.g., Deut 28:26; Jer 7:31-33; Ezek 29:5).

The scene further confirms Gog's defeat, like the image of Egypt in Sheol (see pp. 203–4). Nothing of Gog's troops will remain. This monster shall not return. The feast further adds to Gog's humiliation. Unclean animals feast on unclean bodies. Ezekiel describes the equivalent of pissing on their graves.

The final verses explain the significance for Israel of YHWH's battle with Gog (vv. 21-29). Three variations of the *prophetic proof formula* explain that the battle will lead the nations and Israel to knowledge of YHWH (vv. 22, 23, 28). The nations can only "know" YHWH by observing Israel. Israel's defeat by an enemy proves that its iniquity caused YHWH to turn away. The defeat of an enemy attacking Israel proves the opposite. Israel too will come to know YHWH in both judgment and mercy. By summoning, then defeating, Gog's army, YHWH demonstrates to Israel that they are indeed "clean." Gog's destruction proves Israel's obedience.

With this knowledge comes another awareness. Once Israel has become incapable of incurring YHWH's wrath (36:26-27), never again will Israel have to fear such a foe. The battle with Gog is the conclusive victory, eliminating forever the threat posed by foes from the north, indeed, by any of the earth's evil and aggressive forces. One can imagine "all the people" singing Ps 46 while they cleanse the land of their enemies' bodies.

Many commentators view verses 21-29 as a later appendix because much of the language has either never appeared before in Ezekiel or appears in different form. Although God's abandonment is a dominant issue throughout the book, only here does Ezekiel speak of God's hidden face (v. 23; e.g., Deut 31:17-18; Job 13:24; Ps 27:9; Isa 54:8). God's "mercy" ("compassion") is affirmed throughout the tradition (e.g., Exod 33:19; Deut 13:17; Ps 51:1 [3]; Isa 49:15). Only here in Ezekiel does YHWH show this positive emotion (v. 25). Otherwise, Ezekiel always uses other caring words, like "pity," negatively. God's "mercy" is paired here with divine "jealousy," instead of divine "fury" as elsewhere in Ezekiel (compare 5:13; 16:38, 42; 38:19). Only now does God "pour out" God's spirit instead of wrath (v. 29; compare 7:8; 9:8; 14:19; etc.).

"From that day forward" (v. 22) is similar, but not identical, to a phrase in 1 Sam 16:13; 30:25. It means that the defeat of Gog, like exile, also changes time for Israel (see pp. xxiv–xxv). It is now possible to refer to a time "before" and "after." *Left Behind* is a popular theological concept today; here YHWH does a new thing in declaring that *none* will be left (v. 28).

The language at the end of this unit sharply contrasts with Ezekiel's previous language. This rhetorically demonstrates that Israel's future is a radical break

from its past; it even requires new language. These verses summarize the aim of the entire unit: proof that the nightmare of exile has ended, giving way to pleasant dreams of peace and restoration.

Theological and Ethical Analysis

Ezekiel's plan for restoration is consistent with the theology of retribution used to explain Israel's suffering. Israel's defeat was a consequence of Israel's disobedience; the defeat of Israel's future enemies will be a consequence of Israel's obedience. These are the only options Ezekiel provides for theologically interpreting Israel's historical situation.

This theology, applied literally to Israel's subsequent history, reads thusly. The second Temple was destroyed for the same reason as the first Temple: as divine punishment of Israel's disobedience. The continuation of the Jewish Diaspora for nearly 2,000 years becomes a continued sign of God's punishment, and the Holocaust is God's final "cleansing" of the people. Conversely, the creation of the modern state of Israel in 1948 proves a cleansed and renewed people are gathered and restored by YHWH to their land. The wars of 1967 and 1973 offer further evidence of divine favor. The Arab League attacked a people restored from war, living securely in their land, and the Arab League was defeated.

People today also use the template of retributive theology to interpret their historical situation theologically. If we live in security and the economy is booming, that must prove our obedience. If we live in a war zone or are displaced by war, that must prove our disobedience. The application of retributive theology to historical events is problematic for obvious reasons. The causes and reasons for military victory or defeat are far too complex to be reduced to this simplified moral theology. It ends up blaming victims and putting perpetrators of evil on the side of the angels. There is no clear correlation between a nation's obedience or disobedience and its victory or defeat.

This theology also brings a false sense of security. It guarantees people that under certain conditions they need never fear their foes. The "guarantee" is especially troubling from the perspective of trauma (see p. 216). A therapist can never guarantee a victim that trauma will not recur. To the extent this theology tries to guarantee something that cannot be guaranteed, then the next defeat or disaster makes God a liar. This may explain why both Judaism and Christianity have continued to read this text as eschatological. This is not to say that retributive theology can never offer a valid interpretation of history, but it should be applied only with excessive caution.

Recognition of these problems makes it possible to acknowledge the impetus for claiming retributive theology. These chapters are part of the trajectory of apocalyptic literature, the literature of the dispossessed and disenfranchised. When one has no power, one looks for a greater power that can defeat the source of suffering. That greater power is God. What God does in these chapters becomes a job description. "Wanted: deity able to annihilate enemies." Those who suffer desperately want evil to be defeated. Early Christians looked for the warrior Lamb to defeat their Gog, the Roman Empire (Rev 19–20). From Ezekiel to Star Wars, from Rome to al-Qaeda, hope lies in the defeat of the Force's dark side so that all will be well.

The Temple Vision (40:1–48:34)

Overview

Modern readers seldom read these chapters since the cubits, sacrificial instructions, and boundary locations can seem completely irrelevant to the twenty-first century. There is nevertheless much in these chapters still relevant to contemporary society (see Theological and Ethical Analysis sections).

We will consider how these chapters connect with issues of trauma. Since the other oracles of salvation (chs. 34–39) seek to ensure that the trauma will never recur, these chapters probably serve a similar function. As Kalinda Stevenson suggests, "[Ezekiel 40–48] proposes a vision of a new society spatially designed *to prevent any recurrence of the boundary violations* which led to . . . exile" (1996, xxiv, emphasis added). The Exegetical Analysis will focus on how the chapters seek "to prevent any recurrence" of exile.

Questions about the chapters' composition history vis-à-vis chapters 1–39 dominate scholarship on these chapters. Since the aim of this commentary is to interpret the received text of Ezekiel, these issues can mostly be set aside in favor of a narrative approach. This shifts the focus to how these chapters relate to the rest of the book. There are at least three ways to consider that relationship.

First, they culminate Ezekiel's oracles of salvation. Chapters 34–37 anticipate new leadership and a new covenant for a cleansed, transformed people who are returned to a fertile homeland. They end with the promise that YHWH's "dwelling place" and "sanctuary" will be among Israel (37:27-28). That promise cannot be realized until proof is provided that Israel is now an obedient people, which is demonstrated by YHWH's destruction of Gog's army (chs. 38–39). *Now* Israel can live "in safety," free from enemies (34:27-28; 39:26). Chapters 40–48 provide a

vision of God's "dwelling place" inhabited by an obedient Israel.

Second, chapters 38–48 follow the mythic pattern of a deity/king building a special place (temple/palace) to celebrate military victory (Niditch 1986, 220–23). The biblical version of this pattern appears in Exodus. After YHWH's victory over Pharaoh at sea (Exod 14), YHWH commands the building of the tabernacle (Exod 25–40). Similarly, after YHWH's victory over Gog (chs. 38–39), the focus turns to the Temple (chs. 40–48). This pattern symbolizes the establishment of order out of chaos. After YHWH defeats the forces of chaos, YHWH establishes an ordered world.

Third, just as other oracles of salvation have reversed or transformed previous oracles of judgment (e.g., 36:1-15 and 6:1-7), chapters 40–48 reverse or transform chapters 8–11. YHWH, who left a defiled Temple and destroyed city, returns to a cleansed Temple and restored city. These two events, YHWH's departure and return, provide a frame for the entire book.

There are additional literary connections between chapters 40–48 and chapters 8–11. In both, Ezekiel experiences "the hand of YHWH . . . there" (8:1; 40:1) and "visions of God" (8:3; 40:2). A figure of divine appearance participates in the visions (8:2; 40:3). The primary genre of both is a *vision report*, set in the Temple.

There are similar literary connections with Ezekiel's initial vision in chapter 1, including the genre of *vision report*, and vocabulary: "the hand of YHWH . . . there" (1:3; 40:1) and "visions of God" (1:1; 40:2). Ezekiel's first and final visions give two time frames, one correlating with the exile and the other to a significant event (1:1, 2; 40:1). Ezekiel himself links these two visions with the vision in chapters 8–11 (43:3).

Clearly, these three great visions are significant for understanding the book as a whole. They are linked by the appearance of "the glory of YHWH," a phrase that occurs only in the three visions (1:28; 3:12, 23; 10:4, 18; 11:22, 23; 43:4, 5; 44:4; see p. 5). In the first vision, God's glory appears in exile, *not* in the Jerusalem Temple. The second vision explains why God's glory is in Babylon; because the people defiled the Temple by their "abominations," God's glory left Jerusalem. The third vision describes the return of God's glory to the Temple once the Temple is purified. This forms the crux of Ezekiel's argument. Only among a pure people and in a pure temple will YHWH be "There" (48:35).

The text itself identifies the genre of these chapters as a *vision report* (40:2). Just as with the other vision reports, readers should take seriously the characteristics of visions and expect to encounter tensions and inconsistencies (see p. 44). Stevenson argues that the genre of these chapters is also rhetoric, the intentionally persuasive use of language. Specifically, the genre is *territorial*

rhetoric. Territoriality is a technical phrase from the discipline of human geography, which deals with the spatial aspects of societies. It involves deliberate efforts to define area, communicate boundaries, and control access (Stevenson 1996, 11, 161, 163). It is possible to create a new society by changing access to space. This is ultimately the purpose of Ezekiel's rhetoric, to create a new Israel by changing its territoriality.

Human geography studies the way a society is organized in space. Biblical interpretation questions how a community's theological worldview leads to a particular spatial organization. Ezekiel organizes Israel's space as "a temple society with controlled access to sacred space, based on a spatial theology of holiness" (Stevenson 1996, xviii). The issue of control is especially pertinent with respect to trauma. These issues will be explored further in the commentary analyses.

After the initial preamble to the vision (40:1-4), there are no clear literary divisions. The process of measuring the Temple clearly concludes in 42:20. Ezekiel is then "brought" to the "gate facing east" (43:1). Outside of chapters 40–42, Ezekiel's movement sometimes introduces or concludes literary units (e.g., 43:1; 44:1; 46:19, 21; 47:1, 2). New units are also indicated by shifts in content, which are indicated in the Literary Analysis.

Extreme Makeover: Temple Edition (40:1–42:20)

Ezekiel's final vision opens with extensive measuring of a restored Temple. The measurements define the areas of the Temple and their boundaries, which identify the zones of holiness. This provides Israel the knowledge necessary to control access to the holy so that it will not be profaned.

Literary Analysis

Diagrams or models of the building complex measured in this vision are readily found. Such models or diagrams assume the measurements are provided to construct such a temple in the future. That assumption should be challenged. Ezekiel may have been priest and prophet, but he was no architect. Moreover, the language is excessively disjointed as in chapter 1 (see p. 3). For example, the NRSV of 40:14 reads:

He measured also the vestibule, twenty cubits; and the gate next to the pilaster on every side of the court.

A more literal translation is:

And he made/did the pilasters, sixty cubits, and to a pilaster of the court; the gate around around.

Another challenge is the numerous technical architectural terms. Some words, including "pilasters," "recess(es)," and "windows" are unique to Ezekiel. It is not always clear what these words describe.

These chapters are similar to descriptions of the tabernacle (Exod 25–27; 36–38) and Solomon's Temple (1 Kgs 6//2 Chr 3). The Hebrew word for "pattern" or "blueprint," *tabnît*, occurs in both descriptions (Exod 25:9, 40; 1 Chr 28:11-12, 18-19). This leads to designating Ezekiel's measurements as a blueprint. However, *tabnît* never occurs in chapters 40–48 (see p. 246). Furthermore, a blueprint implies sufficient information is given to create something in three dimensions. Such information is lacking here. For example, the only vertical dimension given is for the outer wall (40:5), and the description of the two chambers for the priests in the inner court gives no specific location or dimensions (40:44-46). Perhaps the vision is not about reproducing this heavenly vision in the earthly realm.

This is especially so since this Temple *already exists*. The people "made" the tabernacle (Exod 25:8-9) and Solomon "builds" his Temple (1 Kgs 6:1//2 Chr 3:1). Ezekiel is never commanded to build this complex. Instead he is commanded "to declare" and "make known" what he sees (40:4; 43:11). The Temple complex is already built by God.

The differences between Ezekiel's envisioned temple and Solomon's Temple, along with the textual and translation challenges, show that the purpose of this detailed description *is not* to provide a blueprint for future Temple builders. In a real world, human attempts to reconstruct or re-create this vision will be doomed to disappointment. This is a world that only God can bring about.

Exegetical Analysis

In "visions of God" Ezekiel is brought to "a very high mountain" in "the land of Israel" (40:2), the place where Israel is to be planted (17:22). Reading chapters 40–48 intertextually with the rest of the OT, Jon Levenson argues that this mountain has characteristics of other mountains in Israel's history, Zion and Sinai (Levenson 1976, 7–24, 37–53). In Ezekiel the mountain is nameless. It is both like and not like Mount Sinai or Mount Zion.

South of the mountain "was a structure like a city." Nowhere is the city named Jerusalem. In fact, the word *Jerusalem* never appears in chapters 40–48.

The tendency is to interpret this as a vision of the New Jerusalem (compare Rev 21:2, 10; see p. 267). But this city has another name, "YHWH Is There" (48:35). This city is both like and not like "the city [that] was struck down."

In this vision is "a man . . . whose appearance shone like bronze," which evokes the sparkling bronze appearance of the living creatures (40:3; compare 1:7). He also bears similarities to the "figure" in 8:2. These connections identify the "man" as a supernatural being. He is both tour guide, showing Ezekiel around the city, and surveyor, measuring the dimensions of the buildings. The latter function is indicated by the presence "in his hand" of "a linen cord and a measuring reed" (40:3). The linen cord's purpose is unknown. It never reappears in Ezekiel, nor is a linen cord used for measuring elsewhere in the Bible. The reed, however, is specifically for "measuring" (compare "measuring line" in Zech 2:1 [5]).

The man commands Ezekiel to "see with your eyes . . . all that I show you," and "declare all that you see to the house of Israel" (40:4 [author's translation]; compare 43:10). Ezekiel must first be a careful observer, then a messenger. This is a very different task from that of sentinel (3:17; 33:2-7; see pp. 15–16 and 205). Instead of interpreting what happened, Ezekiel proclaims a future possibility.

The very first detail in Ezekiel's vision is that the measuring reed's length is "six long cubits" (40:5). (Different calculations make the long cubit 20.5, 20.6, or 20.7 inches long, rendering the reed somewhere between 10.25 and 10.35 feet.) For three chapters the man measures. Indeed, the most frequent word in chapters 40–42 is "measure(d)." The purpose of the measuring is to define significant areas. The first measurement is of the thickness and height of the wall around "the outside of the temple area" (40:5). Each is "one reed," that is, over 10 feet. The dimensions of the three gateways in the outer wall, which provide access to the Temple area, are measured next (40:6-16 [east gate], 20-27 [north and south gate). The width and depth of each gate is 25 cubits (almost 43 feet) and 50 cubits (over 85 feet), respectively. These gates permit entry to the "outer court." Another set of gates will permit entry into the "inner court," where one accesses the Temple proper (40:28-37). The inner gates are as imposing as the outer gates; they are also 25 by 50 cubits (40:28, 33, 36).

First Kings 6 mentions no gates to the Temple. What Ezekiel describes, in contrast, are typical six-room structures found as *city* gates in Iron Age cities such as Hazor, Megiddo, and Gezer (Yadin 1963, 288, 370–74; *CANE* 3.1532–35; 4.2672–75). Militarily, walls and gates function defensively to protect the city's inhabitants by separating them from attacking enemies. In 38:11, Gog describes Israel as "the land of unwalled villages . . . without walls, and having

no bars or gates." So why does the Temple area resemble a fortified city or gated community?

A wall is a boundary. Gates control access across that boundary. Authorized access seems to be fundamental to the meaning of much of Ezekiel's vision. Chapters 40–42 define areas, or territory, where Israel will need to be concerned with who has access. Chapters 43–44 deal with which persons are allowed entry, but, initially, the vision focuses on physical boundaries.

The outermost boundary is the wall around the "temple area." The outer gates allow access to an "outer court," which includes "chambers" and "pavement" (40:17-19). As the man measures, he moves farther into the interior of the "temple area." At the gates to the inner court, the man gives special attention to the "vestibule" of the north gate, which has tables for slaughtering animals for offerings (40:38-43). He also lingers on the "chamber(s)" for singers and Zadokite priests (40:44-46). These areas receive special attention because access to them is restricted to authorized Temple personnel only. The only access to the Temple is from the inner court, and there is only one gate, which further restricts access (40:48-49).

The next set of measurements defines three interior areas of the Temple: the "vestibule" (40:48-49), the "nave" (41:1-2), and the "inner room" or "most holy place" (lit., "holy of holies" [41:3-4]). The width of the entrance decreases with each room, from 14 cubits to 6, as if to make it increasingly difficult to enter "the most holy place" (40:48; 41:2, 3). Then the Temple's exterior areas are defined: "the wall of the temple," "the side chambers," and "the outer wall of the side chambers" (41:5-11). These areas function as triple protection around the Temple. "The free space/the area left free" and "the chambers of the court" function as additional buffer zones (41:9-11).

Last, the "building" on the Temple's west side is measured (41:12). Nothing is said of its function nor is there mention of its door or gate. Apparently, no one is allowed access (see p. 246).

The descriptions of the wall decorations and interior furnishings are textually difficult (41:15*b*-26). There are three exegetical considerations. First, the cherubim and palm trees (41:18-20) may or may not function as symbols of the security of the Temple and the fecundity it bestows (compare 47:1-12; Block 1998, 558). Second, the "something resembling an altar of wood" may or may not be the table for the Bread of Presence (41:22, compare Exod 25:30). Third, the doors between vestibule and nave, and between nave and holy place, provide yet another means of restricting access into the holy place (41:23-24).

Throughout the tour, measurements have been made of various chambers. The man identifies and measures another set of chambers (42:1-12), then

explains their function (42:13-14). These chambers are exterior to the Temple, to its north and south, adjacent to the previously mentioned "building" (41:5). The chambers are separated from the outer court by a wall (42:7); access into them is from the outer court (42:9).

These chambers are noteworthy because of their function. They are "holy." The word *holy* appears six times in 42:13-14, emphasizing that the chambers' function is concerned with holiness. Here is where "the priests who approach YHWH shall eat the most holy offerings" and leave their vestments before entering the publicly accessible outer court. The chambers restrict the holy things associated with priestly practices from coming into contact with the profane.

This vision began with the measurement of the thickness of the wall around the Temple area. It concludes with the measurement of the perimeter of the entire area (42:15-20). This "territorial rhetoric" defines the area of the Temple, establishes the boundaries to be maintained, and identifies the means of access into the territory. The boundaries ultimately maintain "a separation between the holy and the common (or profane)," categories that are fundamentally opposed (42:20; see p. xxiii). If the new Temple is to remain holy, then it must be protected from whatever may profane it. Israel's propensity to profane the holy led to the trauma of exile (see chs. 8, 20, 22). To prevent its recurrence, the territory, boundaries, and access must be clearly defined to separate the holy and the not holy.

Holiness will only be maintained by strictly controlling access into the Temple and its environs. The house of Israel no longer needs defensive fortifications of the city to protect it from its enemies, since God has defeated them (chs. 38–39). Defensive structures are needed for the Temple in order to protect it from the profane.

Theological and Ethical Analysis

The careful measurement of the Temple and the arrangement of the various spaces invite contemplation on how the architecture of worship spaces both reflects and shapes our notion of the divine. A number of questions arise. What understanding of God does the architecture of your worship structure communicate? How would changing the existing space change the worshiping community? How does a worshiping community's theological worldview lead to a particular organization in space?

The architecture of Ezekiel's Temple principally communicates a theology of God's holiness that must be protected from being profaned. Thus, the Temple

resembles a fortress, with rigid boundaries and massive barriers blocking access. The most protected space is the altar, which is placed at the very center, with a single entrance through multiple rooms with increasingly smaller doors, and surrounded by multiple buffer zones.

Christian churches are traditionally designed in the shape of a cross, with the altar located at the intersection of the two axes, a visual reminder of Christ's sacrifice in Christian theology. The Bible's authority is represented by the pulpit's elevation above the congregation. Especially in Europe, churches were built on the highest point in the center of the community. The high elevation brought the divine into closer proximity to humanity. The central location encouraged worship to be at the heart of the community's existence. A church's long axis is often oriented east-west, which, consciously or unconsciously, identifies worship of Christ with ancient veneration of the sun. In Orthodox churches the altar is located behind a screen, the *iconostasis*. Access is restricted to the priest or bishop. The mysteries of the Eucharist remain a mystery to the congregation and the holiness of the altar is protected from the profane. The communion rail is the remnant of a similar barrier between altar and congregation in Western Christianity. Contemporary churches are often built in the form of an auditorium. Worshipers sit in tiered rows around a front stage, implying that what happens on the stage is a performance the audience watches.

Take a moment to consider the architecture of your place of worship. Where is it located? Is it highly visible or hard to find even with directions? What is the building's shape? What does that shape communicate? Does your building allow access to those with physical limitations? What about other means of access? Can people locate the front door? Are there places where only "authorized personnel" may enter (see pp. 253–54)? What does the architecture communicate about God and covenant relationship? Is this what your worshiping community intends to visually express? If not, what changes would need to be made?

Does architecture and its connection to the divine matter in the modern world? If such spaces are concrete, visual representations of theology, then, yes, it matters. Architecture and arrangement of space are what a faith community "shows" to the world, and they "declare" that community's understanding of God's presence. Therefore, it is imperative to give attention to the message communicated by the territory of worship spaces.

Mine Eyes Have Seen the Coming of the Glory of the

LORD (43:1-27)

The chapter title slightly alters the opening line of the hymn "Battle Hymn of the Republic" ("Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord"). This hymn extols God's triumphant rule of the whole earth. Ezekiel's claim is more modest: God will reign over Israel.

Literary Analysis

Another literary unit is indicated by Ezekiel's movement (v. 1; see p. 240) and shift in topic from the Temple's dimensions to YHWH's glory (v. 2). This chapter has several distinct, thematically connected subunits. First, YHWH's glory returns to the Temple (vv. 1-6). This is another shift in content, from defining territory to the issue of access to the territory, a topic continued in chapter 44 (Stevenson 1996, 138–39). Verses 6-10 consider the ramification of YHWH's presence for Israel's kings. Verses 10-12 discuss the significance of YHWH's presence for Israel in general. Specific implications will be taken up in verses 13-27, which focus on the altar, the center of the relationship between YHWH and Israel. Chapters 44–46 dictate the necessary outcomes of the altar's centrality regarding access and offerings.

Ezekiel is the only book outside the Pentateuch that includes instruction, or *torah*. Ezekiel's authority to declare non-Mosaic legislation is expressed in language that casts Ezekiel in the role of a new Moses and the holy mountain as a new Sinai (see Exegetical Analysis below). At times this new legislation contradicts Mosaic material, which makes the new covenant community both like and not like preexilic Israel.

Exegetical Analysis

Significantly, Ezekiel is brought to "the gate facing east" (v. 1), where YHWH's glory departed the Temple (10:19). Now Ezekiel beholds "the glory of the God of Israel . . . coming from the east" (v. 2; on YHWH's glory see p. 5). Ezekiel's observation that this is the same glory he saw in previous visions means that the same presence that had left the Temple now returns to it (v. 3; compare chs. 1, 8–11). Not only will the people return to the land, so will YHWH.

YHWH's glory enters the Temple through the east gate, filling it (compare Exod 40:34-35; 1 Kgs 8:11). God's own journey into exile ends as God's presence returns to the people of Israel (see p. 57). This is the most dramatic and

significant moment in Ezekiel, the ultimate restoration for which the people have waited: YHWH's return.

The glory's return is couched in royal imagery, emphasizing YHWH's sovereignty (v. 7). The Temple is the place of YHWH's throne (compare 1 Kgs 22:19; Ps 11:4; Isa 6:1). The place for the soles of God's feet is a variation of "footstool," also associated with enthronement (compare 1 Chr 28:2; Pss 99:5; 132:7; Isa 60:13). As monarch, God is ruler and owner of the territory marked out in chapters 40–42.

Now returned, YHWH "will reside among the people of Israel forever." "Reside" is a verbal form of "tabernacle," Israel's portable temple. Divine mobility is the heart of Ezekiel's theological explanation for the exile. YHWH's departure from Temple left it unprotected (see p. 57). YHWH's final movement will result in permanent residence. Never again will the Temple be threatened; YHWH will always be there to defend it.

Since YHWH reigns, there can be no other rulers who might also make territorial claims. Therefore, although human political leadership continues, the monarchy is divested of power. The exile was a consequence of Israel's defiling of YHWH's holy name (compare ch. 20). If YHWH is to remain forever, then Israel's rulers must cease defiling, which they had done "by . . . whoring" and by "corpses of their kings" at their death (vv. 7, 9). "Whoring" evokes Israel's political alliances (chs. 16, 17, 23). The meaning of the latter phrase is uncertain. The MT reads "high places" (instead of the NRSV's "at their death"), recalling Ezekiel's previous admonitions regarding Israel's religious transgressions at "high places," which resulted in "corpses" (6:3-6; compare Lev 26:30). Politically and religiously, Israel's rulers must give their allegiance exclusively to YHWH.

Nor shall Israel's kings encroach on YHWH's territory (v. 8). Although unconfirmed by 1 Kings or archaeology, the implication is that Solomon built the palace just west of the Temple, with only a wall separating the two. The territorial proximity of palace and Temple reflected a lack of separation between politics and religion. In Ezekiel's view, that lack of separation meant that a king's "abominations" were violations of sacred space.

Ezekiel's vision resolves these problems. The territories of politics and religion will be separated. The "building" on the new Temple's west side has no access points or political function. Political territory will be far removed from the Temple (45:7; 48:21-22). The political leader's new heart compels obedience as a "prince," a position subordinate to "king" (37:25; 44:3; etc.). Instead of politics, service to the *polis*, or city, the focus of this territory is worship, service to YHWH. With these changes, there shall be no end to God's reign, emphasized

by the repetition of "I will reside among them forever" (vv. 9; see also v. 7).

YHWH now commands Ezekiel (v. 10). "Declare to the house of Israel the Temple" (author's translation) repeats the end of 40:4. The only difference is that 43:10 specifies that "all that you see" is "the Temple" (the same verb, "declare," is used in both verses). Ezekiel's new task is evangelism. Like the NT disciples, he is to tell what he has seen (compare Matt 28:8, 10; John 20:18; 1 John 1:1-3).

His proclamation should result in two responses by the people. First, they shall feel shame. As elsewhere in Ezekiel, God's restorative actions lead not to joy but to shame (16:61-63; 36:31-32; see pp. 89–90 and 224–26). Second, the people are to "measure the proportion" (Stevenson 1996, 17–19). The word for "proportion," *toknît*, only occurs here and in 28:12 (see p. 172). (This is sometimes incorrectly amended to *tabnît*, "blueprint," to conform with Exod 25:40; 1 Chr 28:11; see p. 241). The dominant proportion is 1:1, or a square. The entire Temple area, a square, divides into smaller squares: the outer court, the inner court, the altar, the Temple (adding both interior and exterior structures), and the building. In terms of sacred geometry, the square represents perfection, also a meaning of *toknît* (*HALOT*, 1735). Additionally, the four cardinal points (north, south, east, west) form a "square" earth. The orientation of the complex to the four cardinal points puts the perfectly proportioned Temple in perfect alignment with the perfect cosmos. The Temple, YHWH's house, is where the house of Israel will most closely be connected with YHWH. The proportion of a square is a visual expression of Israel's perfect alignment with God's will.

Once the people experience shame (both disgrace-shame over their previous abominations in the Temple as well as discretion-shame, the urge not to repeat them, see pp. 89–90), Ezekiel can then "make known" to them the details of his vision (v. 11)—the territory ("arrangement," "entire plan"), its boundaries ("exits," "entrances"), and access ("ordinances," "laws"). In chapters 40–42, control over access is primarily physical: walls and gates. Laws or rules are another form of control over access, which will soon take center stage (chs. 44–46).

As the previous law, or *torah*, of Sinai was written on stone and doorposts (Exod 24:12; 34:1; Deut 6:9), so the new law, or *torah*, of the Temple is to be written. Ezekiel becomes a new Moses, giving a new *torah* to the people on this mountain (v. 12; compare Exod 19:23). The people are to "observe" (*šāmar*) and "follow" (*ʿāśāh*) the entire plan and all its ordinances (compare Deut 4:6; 5:1; 6:3; 7:11; etc.; "observe" plus "follow" equals "observe diligently"). With a new heart and new spirit the people will do so ("and make you follow my statutes and be careful (*šāmar*) to observe (*ʿāśāh*) my ordinances" [36:27]).

Suddenly, the vision returns to the altar that was briefly mentioned in 40:47

(v. 13). Attention to the altar at the beginning of "the law of the temple" echoes the similar mention of altars and sacrifice at the beginning of the Covenant Code (Exod 20:22-26; compare Lev 17:1-9; Deut 12:1-27). Detailed measurements are given (vv. 13-17). Most of the architectural terms (e.g., base, rim, ledges, hearth) are unidentifiable, making their precise nature and function uncertain. The horns, whose function is unknown, appear on altars in the Bible and in archaeological remains (e.g., Lev 8:15; 1 Kgs 1:50; Ps 118:27; Amos 3:14; Keel 1978, 145–46, *ANEP*, no. 575). The altar's proportion is 1:1, a square (v. 16). If the "hearth" is the altar's top surface, then the altar is also an imposing edifice, over 20 feet across and 17 feet high (1 cubit = 20.5–20.7 inches). It sits at the geographic center of the Temple area, representing what is central to worship of YHWH.

The Hebrew noun for "altar" is derived from the verb "to slaughter," making it the place where sacrifice occurs. The basis of Israelite sacrifice is the concept of *transfer*. As Richard Nelson says,

> Biblical sacrifice was a system of interacting with God, which involved, at least in part, a transfer between the ordinary human world and the sphere of the holy. The gift or victim moved from [human] space and ownership, as it were, into God's space and ownership. (Nelson 1993, 60)

That transfer occurred on the altar, the intersection of human and divine space. Through the ritual of sacrifice, the altar provided access to YHWH. Since YHWH is sovereign, the people are YHWH's subjects, who are expected to serve their sovereign. The Hebrew word for "serve" can also be translated "worship." Israel's obedience to YHWH is centered on worship (service). An altar is essential to Israel's relationship with YHWH, since it is where sacrifices are offered (v. 18).

Before any sacrifices are made or any legislation on them is given, the altar undergoes a seven-day ritual (vv. 18-27). The purpose of this ritual is to "purify," "make atonement for," "cleanse," and "consecrate" it (vv. 20, 26). The ritual is performed by Zadokite priests, the only ones authorized access to the altar (v. 19; compare 40:46). Unlike similar rituals, salt is thrown on the offerings (v. 24; compare Exod 29:36-37; 40:9-11; Lev 16:18-19). Perhaps salt's preservative qualities symbolize the permanence of the covenant relationship (Lev 2:13). This process is a one-time event to prepare the altar for use. Since no mention is made of the altar being impure, this is not a cleansing ritual. Instead, it is a "status elevation ritual," which brings a previously unused and profane edifice to a state of holiness (Nelson 1993, 56). "Consecrate" is an idiom (lit., "to fill the hands") that when applied to priests is usually translated "ordained" (compare Exod 28:41; Num 3:3). As ordination authorizes someone for ministry, this consecration authorizes the altar for sacrificial activity.

On the eighth day, the priests are to offer the burnt offerings and offerings of well-being, two offerings frequently paired in the Bible (e.g., Exod 20:24; Lev 6:12 [5]; 2 Sam 6:17-18). The burnt offering is totally burned; humans eat no part of it. Celebratory eating by the people is the most prominent feature of the well-being offering. "Dashing blood against" the altar may refer to the well-being offering, since it often involved that action (Exod 24:5-6; Lev 3:1-2; 7:14; 9:18). Another way to understand sacrifice is as food for God or as a gift to God (compare 44:7). The burnt offering becomes God's nourishment and the well-being offering the people's nourishment (Block 1998, 611; *ABD* 5.878–79). This common meal establishes and maintains relationships, just as sharing a meal does today. Once the altar is prepared, when the priests make the offerings, YHWH will accept them (v. 27). Let worship begin.

Theological and Ethical Analysis

The return of God's glory to the Temple is the climax of the book of Ezekiel. Israel's "long national nightmare is over" (to quote from Gerald Ford's speech after his inauguration as president following Richard Nixon's resignation on August 9, 1974). The emotional impact on the exiles of the image of YHWH's glory filling the Temple would have resembled the emotional impact of the liberation of Nazi concentration camps. But the end of a long national nightmare is never the end of the story. Just as Watergate and the Holocaust continue to reverberate through U.S. and global politics, the return of YHWH's glory had implications for Israel's future, including God's reign as king and the transformation of the Temple into sacred space. Do those implications still reverberate today?

(1) "King" is the most frequent relational image for God in the Bible. The image derives from the political arena. Since monarchy was the only form of state government known by Israel and its geographical neighbors, this is not surprising. Given monarchy's ongoing role in human history, it has remained a fundamental image of God, which is also not surprising.

In the biblical depiction, God's primary responsibilities toward God's subjects are to provide, protect, defend, and ensure justice, especially for the powerless. In return, royal subjects (people) are to be loyal, obeying divine decrees. Idolatry, serving other gods, is the equivalent of treason. King YHWH reserves the right to levy punishments against disobedient subjects over whom the King ultimately has power of life and death. This image of God had political implications. Human kings and earthly kingdoms should be modeled on the heavenly king and kingdom.

Whether this image is still meaningful in modern democratic societies is an open question. The monarchical language for God is still used in today's faith communities, especially in music, from Handel's "King of kings and Lord of lords" to the spiritual, "Ride on, King Jesus." In Judaism, the language is fixed in prayers, "Blessed are you, O Lord, King of the universe. . . ." It is probably fair to say that many who use the language of God as King do so with little attention to its biblical significance.

Nonetheless, modern citizens continue to be fascinated with royalty because they live life on a grander scale than do mere commoners. This fascination may suggest why the image is still meaningful. Surely God exists on a grander scale than mere mortals do! The term "King" captures some of that scale.

Feminists reject the image as hierarchical and sexist. The relationship of king/subject precludes the possibility of more egalitarian conceptions of the divine/human relationship. Moreover, "king" creates a skewed, male picture of God. This is problematic for those who believe God can be imaged as female or that God is beyond gender. Using "sovereign" and "realm," instead of "king" and "kingdom," serves to modify, but not eliminate, the gendered and hierarchical connotations of the metaphor. Is it possible to abandon monarchical God imagery, yet retain a theology of divine providence and protection that is neither gendered nor socially oppressive? Or does abandoning the image require relinquishing these theological categories?

Another question is whether the political image can be made relevant to today's context. Is it possible to image God in metaphors from the modern political arena such as president or prime minister? Readers are invited to consider their own experiences with God and how the metaphor of king, or another political metaphor, does or does not express that experience and the implications of that metaphor for faithful living.

(2) Ezekiel defines sacred space as the place where God's glory resides. This is only one biblical definition. Nearly anywhere can be sacred space if it is where God and humans meet (e.g., Gen 16:7-14; 28:11-17; Exod 3:5). Sacred space can also be defined inwardly, in the human heart or soul (Ps 51:17 [19]; Mark 12:33). The Johannine tradition emphasizes worship in spirit and in truth, rather than in a particular place (John 4:19-24; Rev 21:22). Pauline traditions redefine sacred space so that the individual body or the church, as Christ's body, becomes the place where the divine presence resides (1 Cor 3:16-17; Eph 2:19-22).

Readers are invited to reflect on their own understandings of sacred space, which will differ for each person. There are many angles from which one could consider issues of sacred space. One is the way that sacred space often generates

conflict, including lethal conflict. Someone profanes another's sacred space, whether intentionally or inadvertently. A group tries to coerce conformity to a particular definition. The opposition of sacred and profane perhaps makes conflicts inevitable (see pp. 121 and 138–39). However, we can seek to lessen the damage. At minimum we should at least "declare" to each other our definitions so we do not transgress from ignorance. We could also forgive offenses. A more meaningful response would be to cultivate respect for diverse definitions.

Authorized Personnel Only (44:1-31)

If worship, centered on the altar, is central to the new relationship between YHWH and Israel, then it must be conducted decently and in order. Chapters 44–46 describe the normal operating procedures for the new Temple. The instructions in chapter 44 detail new rules of access, ensuring YHWH's continued presence in Israel's midst.

Literary Analysis

Ezekiel's movement to "the outer gate of the sanctuary" differentiates a new unit (v. 1; see p. 240). Chapters 40–42 define the Temple's territory and its accessibility by physical boundaries: *where* is restricted. This chapter defines the Temple's access based on social boundaries: *who* is restricted. This must be determined before worship can properly begin. Verses 1-16 consider access to the Temple by YHWH, the prince, foreigners, Levites, and Zadokites. The remainder of the chapter focuses on the priest (vv. 17-31), placing additional restrictions on the Zadokites in order to maintain their, and thereby the Temple's, holiness.

Exegetical Analysis

From the inner court, Ezekiel and the man move to the outer gate of "the sanctuary" (v. 1). This is the first use in the vision of the term "sanctuary" (lit., "holy place"), an area previously designated as the "Temple" (lit., "house"). God's glory transforms a common house into a holy sanctuary.

The first comment on access concerns the east gate, which is shut and "shall not be opened" (vv. 1-2). Because YHWH entered through that gate, no one else is

permitted entry. Because YHWH now resides there permanently (43:7, 9), there is no need for it to be opened again.

Nonetheless, "the prince, because he is a prince, may sit in it" (v. 3). "Prince" (in contrast to "king") is Ezekiel's preferred title for Israel's promised new ruler (compare 34:24; 37:25; 45:7-9; etc.; Duguid 1994, 10–57). He will receive greater attention in chapters 45–46. Here the issue is his restricted access to the sanctuary. He cannot actually enter the inner court. From the outer court he may enter the inner gate only as far as the vestibule, where he may "eat food before YHWH." The prince participates in eating sacrificial meals but is prohibited from the holiest areas, the inner court and Temple. The restriction on his religious presence suggests his role and status is restricted.

Verses 4-5 reframe Ezekiel's commission. He again beholds YHWH's glory and falls on his face (1:28; 3:23; 43:3). YHWH's appearance and Ezekiel's prostration authorize what follows. He is commanded to "set your heart, see with your eyes, and hear with your ears" (author's translation), the same idioms found in 40:4. He is to contemplate what he is *hearing* ("all I am speaking to you"), instead of what he was *seeing* ("all that I shall show you"). He *sees* the physical boundaries; he *hears* the social boundaries. YHWH's speech concerns the "ordinances of the temple . . . and all its laws" (compare 43:11). These govern the community's life, as well as Temple access: "those who may be admitted to the temple and all those who are to be excluded."

"Foreigners" (*nēkār*) are excluded (vv. 6-9). The Hebrew root means "to recognize." "They" are not recognizable as "us." "Foreigners" are "uncircumcised in heart and flesh"; they do not obey YHWH (compare Lev 26:41; Deut 10:16; 30:6). They are excluded because their disobedience would profane the Temple. YHWH alleges that pre-exile, foreigners were present when the "rebellious house" came to "offer . . . food" to YHWH. This could mean that sacrificial food was inappropriately given to foreigners (Lev 7:20-21), that Israel brought defective offerings provided by foreigners (Lev 22:25), or that the presence of foreigners made Israelites unclean. Verses 8 and 11 hint at "outsourcing." Israel permitted "foreigners" to do the Levites' job. All of these are an "abomination." The sanctuary is taboo to anyone unrecognizable as an obedient worshiper of YHWH.

This is the only time Ezekiel mentions these "foreigners." Their exclusion reflects a particular postexilic fear. When identity is threatened, boundaries defining identity are often more narrowly defined. Conversely, when identity is more secure, boundaries are more porous. At other times in Israel's history, foreigners were allowed to participate in Israel's cultic life (compare Deut 29:10-13 [9-12]; Josh 9:21, 27; 2 Kgs 11:4-8). In the postexilic period, when identity

was fragile, fear of foreigners, especially foreign women, was prominent (compare Ezra 10:1-17; Prov 7:1-5).

Verses 10-14 regulate the Levites' access to the sanctuary. This section is notoriously difficult. Discussion is dominated by the reconstruction of history of the Levitical priesthood, particularly whether the new Temple policies "demoted" the Levites (compare Num 18:1-7). Any understanding is complicated by a number of translation issues, including verb tenses and determination of antecedents to the numerous third-person verbs and suffixes.

What is clear is the Levites' restricted access to the sanctuary. They are to "be ministers," serving in the conduct of worship, overseeing "the gates of the temple" and guarding the sanctuary. Their ministry also entails slaughtering the burnt offering and the sacrifice for the people, who elsewhere are allowed to slaughter their own sacrifices (e.g., Lev 1:2-5; 4:13-15; 17:3-5). The Levites are prohibited from actually making the offering on the altar and from entering the most sacred areas. Like the prince, they could enter no farther than the vestibule of the inner gates (40:45).

The only ones permitted access to the most sacred areas are "the descendants of Zadok" (v. 15). Zadokites are a subset of Levites. Zadok was a priest aligned with David (2 Sam 15:24-29), who anointed Solomon as king (1 Kgs 1:32-46). The Zadokites' status in the vision is because they "kept the charge of my sanctuary when the people of Israel went astray." No other biblical evidence supports this claim. Given Ezekiel's continued assertion that all the people went astray, including the priests (7:26; 22:26), this smacks of later Zadokite propaganda.

Zadokites have greatest access to YHWH since they are granted access to the holiest areas. All of their activities are directed toward YHWH. "They shall come near to *me* to minister to *me*; they shall attend *me* to offer *me* the fat and the blood . . . they shall enter *my* sanctuary, they shall approach *my* table, to minister to *me*, and they shall keep *my* charge" (vv. 15-16 author's translation). They will eat *at* YHWH's table.

Governing all aspects of their lives protects the priests' holiness, and thus their ability to enter the holy areas. Distinctive linen clothing, to be worn only in the holy areas, distinguishes the priests from nonpriests (vv. 17-19). The attention to sweat is puzzling. Nowhere else in the Bible is sweat contaminating, although it is analogous to other bodily fluids considered unclean (compare Lev 15; Nelson 1993, 22). The clothing is confined to the holy area so that it does not come into contact with common (profane) people. The priests are further distinguished from nonpriests by a number of lifestyle restrictions (vv. 20-22, 25-27). Only clearly identified authorized personnel are permitted entry to the

holy areas.

In addition to their service to YHWH, the Zadokites also function vis-à-vis the people to enforce boundary restrictions (vv. 23-24). They do this mainly by teaching "the difference between the holy and the common" and distinguishing between "the clean and the unclean" (compare 22:26; on the meaning of these categories see pp. xxi–xxiii). They ensure that boundaries are clearly identified. As "judges," they determine who has or has not transgressed a boundary, rather like a sport referee determines whether someone is out-of-bounds. Keeping the laws of the appointed festivals and the Sabbath holy ensures that the Temple is properly used. The Levites guard the Temple's physical boundaries. The Zadokites guard its spiritual boundaries.

The Zadokite priests are to have no "inheritance" or "holding" in Israel, for their "inheritance" and "holding" is YHWH (v. 28). These terms signify access to land. "Inheritance" carries two meanings (Stevenson 1996, 80). The first is the transmission of property rights through families, usually from father to son (e.g., Num 27:1-11; Ruth 4:5-6; 1 Kgs 21:3). The second is the granting of access to land without ownership. For example, God gives land to Israel as an "inheritance." This permits Israel access while God retains ownership (e.g., Num 26:52-56; Deut 25:19; 26:1). "Holding," from the verb "to seize, grasp," implies possession of land (e.g., Gen 47:11; Lev 25:25; 27:24; Josh 21:12). This further distinguishes the priests from nonpriests. The twelve tribes have land as an inheritance (47:13) and the Levites will have land as a "holding" (45:5). The priests have access to YHWH's "portion" as a place to live (45:4), but they do not have their own land as "inheritance" or "holding." But the Zadokites do have access to YHWH and therefore to YHWH's table (vv. 29-30). The Zadokite "kosher" laws permit them to eat all properly slaughtered offerings (v. 31; compare 4:14). Additional concerns with "inheritance" and "offerings" are addressed in the next chapters.

Theological and Ethical Analysis

What interest is there for contemporary readers in the vision of a worship community where some people are excluded, the majority are onlookers, a small group does the dirty work, and a very few get all the perks? Sadly, this describes fairly accurately most worship communities today. Some people are identified as "foreigners," and are officially, or unofficially, excluded. Membership may be formally restricted to those who are baptized or those born into the community. Unofficially, people are routinely excluded from worship based on race, economic status, sexual orientation, or theological position. The poor, homeless,

convicted, mentally ill, or addicted are treated as "foreigners" by most congregations. Even congregations who claim to be "welcoming" often subtly let "certain people" know they are not welcome.

Among those allowed access, the majority are "the people." Most laity live on the fringes of a congregation, attending worship at major holidays, or as an audience watching the worship performance.

Then there is the small group of people who, like the Levites, really run things. They teach Sunday school, serve on boards, and sing in the choir. They may be secretaries and custodians. Like their ancient counterparts, modern Levites enable the rest of the laity to observe the outward appearance of piety.

Finally, there are the religious professionals, the modern "Zadokites." These are the paid staff (the clergy, music director, business manager, and youth director) and church officials (bishops, superintendents, and presidents). They lead the congregation. Today they may or may not wear special clothing (e.g., collar, robes, a large cross necklace) to identify their role. But there are usually expectations, even if unstated, of conformity to a certain lifestyle. These vary from congregation to congregation and are not always healthy. The maintenance of appropriate sexual boundaries is still an issue for modern "Zadokites," though not the same ones proscribed in this chapter.

For Ezekiel, this structure is the ideal. Examination of this "ideal" congregation affords the opportunity to consider the structures of one's own congregation. Scripture itself provides alternative visions of the ideal worshiping community. Another prophet envisions a worship community that includes foreigners (Isa 56:1-7). Indeed, this later prophet envisions foreigners ministering to YHWH. God will bring the foreigners to the holy mountain, make them joyful in the house of prayer, and accept their burnt offerings, for God's "house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples."

The NT exhibits this same tension regarding inclusion and exclusion. On the one hand, Jesus includes tax collectors, sinners, and prostitutes in God's realm (Matt 9:10-13; 21:31-32). Peter has a vision of the inclusion of Gentiles (Acts 10:1-48). An early baptismal formula affirms the overcoming of various social divisions "in Christ" (Gal 3:28) and there is a tradition of "all" worshiping together (Acts 2:44-47). On the other hand, Paul and others want to exclude various "wrongdoers" from God's realm (1 Cor 6:9; see also Eph 5:5; Rev 21:8), and women from positions of leadership (1 Tim 2:12; 3:2), and to define who may serve as deacons, presbyters, and bishops (Acts 6:3; 1 Tim 3:1-13). The notion of the "priesthood of all believers" is seldom taken literally.

This chapter, as much as any other in the vision, raises the issues of boundaries and access to the holy. Throughout religious history, the framework

of holiness, and therefore the imperative to protect the holy from uncleanness, has provided a rationale for excluding various persons from the realm of the holy. Historically, persons of color, women, and those with various disabilities have been classified as "unclean." More recently, people who are homosexual have been included in that category. All these have therefore been barred from ordination, and thus denied the authority to approach the holy. Although seen as part of the covenant community, they could never be the holy Zadokites. To become the "priest" was to cross the boundary protecting the holy from being profaned. For those forbidden access, crossing that boundary was "sin" that threatened the entire community. Those who guard the boundaries have used all means necessary to keep the excluded out.

This situation has changed to greater or lesser extents among various Jewish and Christian communities. Access to ordination by excluded groups has been achieved, in part, by redefinition. The category of "unclean" had become associated with color, physical abilities, gender, and sexual orientation. Those deemed "unclean" have argued that if all are created in God's image, then all partake of God's holiness. There is no basis for exclusion. Women specifically have redefined menses as "clean" (see p. 226). Since menses are intrinsic to women's bodies, they partake of creation's holiness and do not contaminate the holy altar. This is not to say that there are no legitimate reasons for refusing ordination, but those should be based on behavior, such as sexual misconduct.

The issues of inclusion and exclusion are vexing. Despite the best efforts of many, there are still contemporary faith communities who deny ordination to various persons. With regard to ordination today, it is necessary to relinquish the boundaries of Ezekiel's vision and pursue new visions of who shall enter God's sanctuary.

Book of Worship (45:1–46:24)

These chapters delineate Israel's responsibilities for maintaining the relationship with YHWH through worship. As tenants, Israel is to return a portion of the land as an offering. The prince, the people's representative, is to ensure that this happens. The chapters define how much of each substance is offered, as well as when, and where, and by whom offerings are made. Chapter 45 considers major offerings and chapter 46, minor offerings. There are clearly differences from corresponding pentateuchal legislation, but their significance is unclear. On a literary level, they highlight that worship of YHWH in a new Temple by a new

Israel is distinct from worship in the old Temple by the old Israel.

Literary Analysis

The unit's beginning is marked by a change in focus from Temple activities to the definition of various territories. The attention also shifts from priestly obligations to those of the prince and the people. The structure of chapters 45–46 is hard to discern. The theme of "inheritance," briefly mentioned in the previous unit (44:28), is now expanded. "Inheritance," both as the transmission of property rights (esp. 45:7-8; 46:16-18) and land grants by the owner, YHWH (esp. 45:1-8), unites the disparate parts (on "inheritance" see p. 252). In response to God's gracious gift of land, Israel is to return a portion of its produce to YHWH. Thus, offerings, the major topic of this unit (45:13-17, 21-25; 46:2-15), are also connected with "inheritance" (Stevenson 1996, 140–41).

Translation further complicates understanding this unit. The NRSV uses different English words for the same Hebrew word. For example, *tĕrûmâ* is translated "portion" (45:1; 48:8-9, 12, 18, 20-21); "district" (45:6-7); or "offering" (45:13, 16); and *ʾăḥuzzâ* as "holding" (45:5-7; 46:16, 18) or "property" (45:8; 48:20-22). Movement between second ("you") and third ("he") person throughout chapter 45 complicates understanding who is being addressed and required to perform what action.

Although easily lost in the details, the mutual gifting—of the land by YHWH to the people and of offerings by the people to YHWH—constitutes the center of Ezekiel's vision of the divine/human relationship. This has been so from the beginning of YHWH's relationship with Israel, though Israel's response had been wanting. This vision shows that relationship most fully realized.

Exegetical Analysis

The unit begins with a return to territorial rhetoric (see p. 239). The vision moves out beyond the Temple to the people's "inheritance" (45:1-8), the largest unit of territory the restored people will inhabit (compare 47:13-14). Here the text defines the areas that border the Temple complex. Boundaries of more remote areas are forthcoming (47:13–48:29).

Within "the land," a "portion" of territory is to be set aside "for YHWH." This "portion" will be "more holy than the land" (45:1; author's translation). This holier portion is divided into sections for the sanctuary (45:2), the priests' houses (45:3-4), and the Levites (45:5). Alongside YHWH's "portion" is territory for the

city (45:6), and the prince (45:7). Determining the areas and their relationship to each other is challenging (see p. 266). What is clear is that each group has access to particular territory: the priests to the holy district, the Levites to their holding, the whole of Israel to the city's holding, and the prince to his property. This continues to further differentiate social identities. Groups are defined not just by *what* they do but also by *where* they live.

It is worth noting that the total dimension of these territories, excluding the prince's property, measures 25,000 by 25,000 cubits (slightly more than 8 miles; see p. 242). Its "proportion" is also a square (see p. 246) within which lies the square of "the sanctuary" (45:2). (Technically, the measurement refers to the whole Temple complex [42:15-20], which includes within it the actual Temple or sanctuary [41:13-14].) The altar, central to Ezekiel's vision, sits at the center of the Temple complex and the portion.

Although the prince's property is only one of the territories defined, he becomes the focus of the rest of the chapter as his role in the new Israel is more fully specified (45:7-25). The prince's land borders both sides of "the holy district" (the territories of the priests and Levites) and the city's "holding" (45:7). There are two significant issues regarding the prince's territory. First, territorial definitions further separate the prince and his political influence from the sanctuary. In contrast to Western Asian practices, the Temple is not situated within the city but within the priests' territory. Moreover, a buffer zone of nearly four miles separates the Temple complex and the prince's property.

Second, the prince is allotted nearly as much territory as an entire tribe, so that the prince "shall no longer oppress my people" (v. 8). The nature of the oppression is unspecified. Since the prince is commanded to "cease . . . evictions" (v. 9), the reference may be to the practice of land seizure by the royal household (compare 1 Sam 8:11-17; 1 Kgs 21:1-16; Isa 5:8; Mic 2:2). In the new Israel, the prince will have no need to confiscate anyone else's land.

The character and values of the prince now become an issue, particularly as they pertain to the land and the prince's role in the worshiping community (45:9-12). He is to "put away violence and oppression," a fixed word pair (compare Isa 60:18; Jer 6:7; 20:8; Amos 3:10; Hab 1:3; 2:17). ("Oppression" occurs only here in Ezekiel; the Hebrew connotes "violent action," thus "destruction.") "Violence" has been a concern throughout Ezekiel (7:11, 23; 8:17; 12:19; 28:16). Conversely, he is to "do what is just and right" (or "justice and righteousness"), another fixed word pair (e.g., Prov 21:3; Isa 9:7 [6]; Amos 5:24). In Ezekiel, doing what is just (or "lawful") and right determines whether one "shall surely live" (18:5-9, 19, 21, 27; see p. 101). The prince is to refrain from negative

actions that would harm the people and engage in positive actions for their well-being.

The charge to the prince to have honest weights and measures seems like a non sequitur (45:10). But "honest" is derived from the same root as "right/eousness." The use of dishonest weights and measures would constitute a form of violence and oppression (compare Prov 11:1; Amos 8:4-6; Mic 6:10-11). In pentateuchal legislation, this commandment was given to everyone (Lev 19:35-36; Deut 25:13-16), but here it is the prince's responsibility. The weights and measures relate directly to the offerings. Cheating in the religious realm is as serious as cheating in business. The prince is to ensure that the weights are correct and that justice prevails in both realms.

The remainder of this unit focuses on the offerings the people are to return to YHWH from the land that YHWH has given them. At appointed times the people and the prince are to return to YHWH a specific quantity of offerings and sacrifices (45:13-15). The grains, oil, and sheep are a tax to be collected from all of Israel. The prince and the people together make this gift (v. 16), but the prince, as the people's representative, is responsible for returning the appropriate amounts to YHWH on specific occasions (45:17).

A ritual is to take place on New Year's Day in order to "purify the sanctuary" (45:18). This ritual is otherwise unattested but seems to parallel the altar's purification ritual in 43:18-27. The Temple does not need a good cleaning. Instead, like the altar, it must be made ready to receive the people's offerings (see p. 248).

When the Temple is ready, the first celebration to take place will be Passover; all the people will participate ("you," masc. pl.; 45:21). The date and command concerning unleavened bread corresponds to Exod 12:6, 18, though some provisions of the sacrifice differ from pentateuchal traditions (Exod 12:3, 6-8; Num 28:16-25). This is part of a biblical pattern in which Passover marks significant events (Num 9:1-5; Josh 5:10-12; 2 Kgs 23:21-23; 2 Chr 30:1-22; Matt 26:17-29; Luke 22:7-20). Significantly, as Passover marked the beginning of Israel's old history (Exod 12:2), it now marks the beginning of Israel's new history. This would be an especially meaningful celebration as returned exiles told not only the old story about their ancestors' exodus from Egypt but also their new story of exodus from Babylon (compare Ezra 6:19-22).

Seven months later, in autumn, the prince is to provision another festival (45:25). The Festival of Booths falls on this date (Lev 23:34, 39-44; compare Num 29:1, 12), but this festival is not explicitly identified as such. The point is that twice a year, Israel and YHWH will feast together.

If the purpose of sacrifices and offerings is to supply God's banquet table,

establish union with God, and express gratitude, then the continuation of sacrificial practices in this new community makes sense. But if sacrifice is understood as expiation of sin to turn away punishment, then the appearance of such sacrifices is astounding. If God gives Israel a new heart and spirit to "make you follow my statutes and be careful to observe my ordinances" (36:27; compare 11:20), then why is there a need for offerings "to make atonement" for Israel and the Temple (vv. 15, 17, 20) or for "sin" offerings (vv. 17, 19, 22, 23, 25)? How could someone with this new heart and spirit fail to follow *torah* "through error or ignorance" (v. 20; compare Lev 4:13; Num 15:22)?

While these verses may reflect later editors' efforts to adjust to the reality of continued disobedience, they have some meaning when read in the context of Ezekiel's obsession with purity, holiness, and fear of repeating exile's trauma. Sacrifices and offerings for sin, guilt, purification, and atonement seem to result from hypervigilance, an increased state of watchfulness, which is symptomatic of PTSD. This effect can be seen in the hyper-concern for security following 9/11. Someone in this state creates backup systems, just in case the primary systems fail. For Ezekiel, external controls (gates and sin offerings) exist as additional protections in case "it may be" that internal controls (new heart and spirit) fail.

Ezekiel next attends to additional feast days. The outer east gate is permanently closed (44:1-2), the inner east gate, leading into the inner court, and therefore the altar, remains closed except for Sabbaths and new moons (46:1). Sabbath was, and is, the center of YHWHistic worship, derived from YHWH's creation of both cosmos and Israel (Gen 2:2-3; Exod 20:8-11; Deut 5:12-15). Since the cultic calendar was lunar based, the marking of the lunar month was also significant (Num 10:10; 28:11; 29:6). Israel will gather for feasting weekly and monthly (46:2-8). Along with the spring and autumn festivals (45:18-25), these compose the "festivals and the appointed seasons" that Israel is to observe (46:11). Finally, there are to be regular daily offerings (46:13-15). Worship occurs not only to mark special times and significant events but also to mark the ordinary time of daily life.

The prince and the people ritually participate in these celebrations. For Sabbaths and new moons, the prince enters the east gate and stands "at the post," where he can see the priests making the offering (46:2). The prince and the people (who are outside the east gate) shall "bow down" in the altar's direction (46:2-3). The action is a gesture of homage and submission before a superior, especially the king (e.g., Gen 42:6; 2 Sam 14:4, 22; 1 Kgs 1:23, 31). Equivalent contemporary practices would be Muslims placing their foreheads to the ground or Christians kneeling. The people and the prince are to demonstrate reverence

and submission to their Sovereign.

Although prince and people participate in worship, their access and movement is regulated. The prince may enter the inner east gate but must exit the same way without crossing the threshold into the inner court (46:2, 8, 12). The prince and the people are to enter the outer court via the north or south gate and exit by the opposite gate (46:9). As anyone who has ever tried to go against the flow of a large crowd can appreciate, if all Israel is participating, then safety concerns would demand control over entrances and exits.

The prince has special status in several regards. He is permitted greater access than the people are (46:2, 12). He is responsible for providing the offerings and sacrifices (46:4, 6, 13-14). He may offer spontaneous offerings of joy and well-being (46:12). In one area he remains equal to ordinary folk; he must enter and exit with the people (46:10).

In addition to asking when, where, and who, the question of how much of each substance to offer is a key concern (46:4-7, 11-15). All the bulls, lambs, rams, goats, ephahs of grain, and hins of oil for all the festivals compose a considerable amount of livestock and produce going to the Temple on an annual basis. Since the prince is responsible for providing the sacrifices and offerings, it makes sense that he needs a large allotment of land to provide grazing for animals and storage for grains and oil until they are required in the sanctuary (45:7).

Perhaps this unstated rationale for the prince's property, as well as the previously stated rationale of justice (45:8-9), explains the shift in verses 16-18 from attention to YHWH's "inheritance" to the prince's "inheritance." These laws determine what the prince may and may not do with his land (45:7). He *may* give it to his sons, who may keep it in perpetuity. He may also give it to a servant, but it must be returned to the prince in "the year of liberty" (or Jubilee; Lev 25:10). He *may not* take any of "the inheritance of the people." The words *thrust out* (also "wrong" and "oppress" in the NRSV) and *dispossess* (also "scatter" in the NRSV) connote oppression and exile (e.g., Exod 22:21 [20]; Lev 19:33; Deut 4:27; 28:64; Ezek 18:12; 20:34). The prince cannot usurp other Israelites' inheritance. These laws protect the prince's property from being reduced and protect the people by prohibiting princely propensity for expansion (compare 45:8).

The section concludes with Ezekiel's movement (46:19; compare 44:4). It seems odd to end matters pertaining to worship with a description of what are essentially kitchens (46:19-24). Having described the offerings by how much, where, and by whom, this section explains the offerings' final disposition. Previously the area where the priests "shall eat" the offerings was defined

(42:13). It is the Levites' responsibility to slaughter the people's sacrifices (44:11) in a designated area (40:39-42). It is also probably the Levites' ("the priests . . . who serve at the temple") responsibility to boil sacrifices in this designated area (46:19-20, 24; Stevenson 1996, 94). Slaughtering, cooking, and eating each take place in separate areas. These activities partake of the holy and must be kept apart so that they do not "communicate holiness to the people" (46:20; compare 44:19). Activities involving the offerings must be kept within the confines of the inner court.

This arrangement effectively removes the people from responsibility regarding the sacrifices. The prince presents them, the Levites do the slaughtering and boiling, and the Zadokite priests offer them on the altar. The prince can singly bring an offering, but not the people (46:12). Nor can people access any area except the outer court. They are nearly as excluded from the worshiping community as the foreigners (44:6-9).

A counterpart to the vision of abominations in the Temple (8:5-16), this unit envisions the perfect worship of YHWH. The ultimate goal of the exodus was to worship YHWH on the mountain (Exod 3:12). That goal remains the same for the new exodus from Babylon. Therefore, the "law [*torah*] of the temple" that YHWH gives from this holy mountain is solely concerned with the governance of worship. No laws are given pertaining to other issues. Nothing is said, for example, of economic justice (Deut 24:20-21), sexual behaviors (Lev 18:6-20), or clean and unclean foods (Lev 11:2-47). This vision speaks almost exclusively of the divine/human relationship; it says little of how the people are to relate to one another in this new Israel. The only exceptions pertain to worship (44:17, 20-22, 25, 31; 45:10-12; 46:16-18). The vision speaks volumes of how Israel is to express its love of God (Deut 6:5), but not how Israel is to love its neighbor (Exod 20:17; Lev 19:18).

Theological and Ethical Analysis

There are at least three obstacles to considering this unit's contemporary significance. First, the ideal of worship presented in this unit is alien to the experience of modern worshipers. The unit's primary lesson may be the great distance between the sixth century B.C.E. and the twenty-first century C.E. Even those who long for that "old-time religion" would reject the pattern of worship commanded here. What then, is its relevance today?

Second, Ezekiel's legal code raises the same question as pentateuchal legal codes, namely, how do modern faith communities appropriate these laws?

Third, these chapters are further evidence of the unfulfilled and eschatological

quality of chapters 34–48 (see pp. 216, 226, 232, and 267–68). Chapters 45–46 describe the perfect sacrificial worship of YHWH, perfectly conducted by a perfect priest. Ezekiel envisions Israel's recovery from exile's trauma as the restored relationship between the people and YHWH lived out in worship through gifts of sacrifices and offerings. Yet the ink is hardly dry on the scroll before the people are again defiling the Temple.

Malachi, a postexilic prophet, complained of priests offering polluted food, thus profaning the Temple (Mal 1:7-8; 2:3). Once again YHWH proposes to send a "day" of judgment to refine and purify the people (Mal 3:1-4). Jesus similarly indicted the religious establishment of his day (Matt 12:1-14; 21:12-13; 23:1-39). Two thousand years of Christian history attest to the continued profaning of God's holy name. What can modern readers gain from this unattainable goal of perfection?

One solution to these obstacles is to consider that *torah* functions to order the covenant community's life together. The need to do so is still present today. Before dismissing this unit as irrelevant or unrealistic, readers should consider how the whole system of laws orders covenant life, and the extent to which that ordering might speak to the conditions of covenant life today.

(1) Although participation in worship varies from people to priest, the point is that "all the people" participate (45:16). The emphasis in the vision is on Israel's corporate expression of faith. This contrasts with various Christian expressions of religious life that discount or denigrate organized or institutional religious practices. A desire for informality in worship, instead of structured rituals, leads to the contemporary sentiment, "I'm spiritual, not religious." There is no denying that institutional religion has its problems, but what informal, individualistic practices of faith neglect is the importance of the communal nature of being God's people. Is it really possible to be the church or synagogue if there is no gathering with others on a regular basis to worship God as a community? That gathering can happen for regular, seasonal moments (Yom Kippur/Passover, Christmas/Easter, Shabbat/Sunday), as well as for infrequent, occasional moments (bar/bat mitzvahs/baptisms/confirmations, weddings/funerals). Communal worship necessitates to some degree a certain amount of institutional structure. Whatever form that takes, Ezekiel insists that the gathered community is central to covenant life.

(2) There is no way to know whether the legislation on festivals in the various legal codes reflects actual preexilic religious practice (Exod 23:10-19; Lev 23:1-44; Deut 16:1-17). To the extent that they do, the differences between Ezekiel's *torah* and pentateuchal *torah* suggest that Ezekiel is proposing a reformation of worship. Just as the exile necessitated a new calendar (see pp. xxiv–xxv), it also

necessitated new expressions of worship. The Temple's restoration is not about returning to the good old days or to some original, uncorrupted form of worship. Rather it is about creating new forms of worship for a new time. Ezekiel will similarly re-create the boundaries of tribal territories (47:13-20; 48:1-7, 23-29). Ezekiel's reformation is not a complete break from the past. The types of offerings and the occasions of sacrifice are not unfamiliar or alien. In its break from Judaism, Christianity did something similar in creating forms of Sunday worship, rituals of baptism and Eucharist, and the seasonal celebrations of Easter and Christmas.

These changes imply that worship is something dynamic and not static. It has always changed and is ever changing. Every generation has to figure out how it will serve (or worship) God. Many churches today are fighting over traditional versus contemporary forms of worship. Advocates of the former rightly point to the need for worship to remain grounded in the historical roots of the faith. Advocates of the latter rightly point to the need for worship to adapt to the styles and interests of a new generation. Both sides are tempted to dismiss the rightness of the other. Ezekiel's vision argues that the challenge of worship is to consider how it might be both/and versus either/or. For example, antiquated language in hymns and creeds can be updated, while retaining the essence of their affirmations. The language of "tradition*ing*" expresses the attitude of both/and: continuity with the past while creating new forms in new contexts. Readers are invited to consider how the worship of their faith communities is engaged in "traditioning."

The Good Earth (47:1–48:35)

After the revelation of a perfect Temple and the regulations that ensure perfect worship therein, the final section considers the larger territory of the land of Israel. The perfect Temple will lead to the land's perfecting, which will then be perfectly divided among the tribes. The name of the city at the center of the land reflects the outcome of all this perfection: YHWH is There.

Literary Analysis

Ezekiel's movement indicates the beginning of another unit (see p. 240). Ezekiel moves outward from the Temple's entrance to "outside" the Temple complex (47:1-2), signaling the further expansion of boundaries. This unit

expands beyond the boundaries of the areas around the Temple (chs. 45–46) to the whole land of Israel. This expansion continues the vision's territorial rhetoric (see pp. 239–40). The importance of boundaries is conveyed by the repetition throughout of the Hebrew word, *gĕbûl* ("boundary," "border," or "territory").

Unlike the previous unit, this unit's structure is straightforward. It begins with a description of a river flowing from the Temple, orienting both Ezekiel and readers outward from the Temple to the land (47:1-12). Once the land's entire boundary is defined (47:13-23), individual tribes are allotted their "portion" (48:1-29). The poetry is as carefully measured as the territory. Repetition and symmetry characterize 48:2-7, 23-27. Each division is recorded: "Adjoining the territory of [*tribe*], from the east side to the west, [*tribe*], one portion" (v. 2). The division moves methodically from the northern to the southern border, pausing between Judah and Benjamin (48:9-22) to consider the territory previously defined in 45:1-7. Repetition also structures the grouping of the "exits," or "gates," of the city (48:30-34). The unit, and the entire vision, ends with the declaration that the city's name is "YHWH is There" (48:35).

The unit also presents difficulties. Ezekiel was a prophet, not a surveyor. It is impossible to determine precisely the boundaries of the land or tribes. Some of the geographic names are unknown. The north-south dimension of the tribal allotments is not measured, nor is a unit of measurement supplied in the Hebrew. Ezekiel 48:8-22 (and 45:1-6) measures "twenty-five thousand," "ten thousand," and so forth, without specifying if those are cubits or reeds (40:5) or some other unit. The addition of "cubits" in translations is reasonable, but it obscures the difficulty. Numerous other text-critical and translation problems render some verses almost hopelessly opaque. The Exegetical Analysis gives greatest attention to what is known instead of what is unknown.

Exegetical Analysis

After concluding the Temple tour and dispensing Temple *torah*, the man brings Ezekiel to the Temple's entrance where he sees "water . . . flowing from below the threshold of the temple toward the east" (47:1; compare Ps 46:4 [5]; Zech 14:8). From there Ezekiel and his guide go with the flow. The water is "coming out" from the Temple. The Hebrew word is a *hapax legomenon*, but "bottle" derives from the same root. Like water poured from the neck of a small bottle, the flowing water is merely a trickle (Zimmerli 1983, 511–12). The guide has a "cord" in his hand. Though different from the "linen cord" (40:3), its function is to measure (compare 1 Kgs 7:23; Isa 28:17; Jer 31:39; Zech 1:16). As he measures out the distance from the Temple, Ezekiel's body parts sound the

depth. In a thousand cubits (approximately one-third of a mile) the water becomes "ankle-deep." In another thousand cubits it becomes "knee-deep," then "waist" high. At 4,000 cubits out (over a mile), Ezekiel is in over his head as the trickle becomes "a river that [could not be] crossed" (47:5).

The man asks Ezekiel, "Mortal, have you seen this?" (47:6). It is tempting to imagine Ezekiel, soaking wet, replying, "Well, duh!" The guide reminds Ezekiel that his commission was to "look closely" (40:4; 44:5). Ezekiel must carefully consider this river. Prompted by this reminder, as they return along the riverbank, Ezekiel notices "a great many trees" on both banks (47:7).

The guide then explains what Ezekiel saw (47:8-12) The river flows east and down into "the Arabah" (the Jordan Valley between present-day Israel and Jordan) and into the Dead (or Salt) Sea. The Dead Sea is highly saturated with minerals and salts due to evaporation and the lack of an outlet, making the water toxic to living organisms. Yet, when this river reaches it, the Dead Sea will become living water. It will become "fresh" (lit., "healed"). Wherever this "fresh" water goes, everything "will live" and "become fresh," that is, be healed. The Dead Sea will be alive with swarming creatures, whose natural habitat is water (Gen 1:20-21), teeming with fish like the Great Sea (Mediterranean). People will fish all the way around its shores. Moreover, all the trees that Ezekiel sees on both banks are "for food" (compare Gen 1:29; 2:9; 3:6). Miraculously, they bear fruit not once a year but once a month, ensuring a perpetual supply.

The only limit to this miraculous transformation is that the swamps and marshes of the formerly stagnant waters are to be left for salt (47:11). The reason for this is not given. Possibilities include that salt was (1) an important commodity in antiquity, in some cases functioning as currency (compare 1 Macc 10:29; 11:35), (2) essential as a preservative for meats, (3) viewed as life sustaining (2 Kgs 2:20-22; Ezek 16:4), and (4) used liturgically, being viewed as food for God (Exod 30:35; Lev 2:13; Ezek 43:24; *TDOT* 8.331–33).

Given the physical realities of a landscape as lifeless as the Dead Sea's, this vision of groves of trees flourishing where there is nothing but rocks and dirt is astounding. The power of the image of abundant water in the desert makes it a compelling metaphor in the postexilic period (e.g., Isa 41:18; 43:19-20; 44:3-4; 58:11). The transformation is even more astounding considering the images of environmental degradation in earlier parts of the book (e.g., 6:14; 12:20; 14:15; see pp. 139, 159, and 220). In light of previous references to famine (4:9-11, 16-17; 5:10, 16-17), perhaps "fruit for food" and "leaves for healing" should be read as synonymous parallelism (47:12). Surely, satiety instead of starvation would be "healing." The poetry permits other interpretations. On a more literal level, "leaves for healing" suggests their medicinal properties are central. Taken

metaphorically, the leaves might represent spiritual balm for the traumatized human soul (compare Jer 8:22).

This vision functions as a corollary to the vision of the valley of dry bones (37:1-14). Not only the people but also the land "will live." The Dead Sea's transformation illustrates the nations' statement that "this land that was desolate has become like the garden of Eden" (36:35). The direction "east," a river watering a garden, and abundant trees good for food are echoes of Eden (Gen 2:8-10). Previously, Tyre was identified as Eden (28:10-14). The reference to "a place for the spreading of nets" in the vision also relates to Tyre (47:10; compare 26:5). These associations set up an ironic contrast. Tyre, the garden, will become desolate. Israel, the desolate, becomes the garden. Instead of fishing nets "spread" to dry, net after net will be "spread" to haul in the abundant catch. The God who brings low also exalts (17:24); now is the time of Israel's exaltation.

This edenic garden is also associated with a mountain (40:2; 43:12), which in Zion traditions is linked to a healing river (Isa 8:6-7; 33:20-24; Joel 3:17-18), significant trees (Josh 24:26), and God's presence (Pss 46:5, 7 [6, 8]; 48:1 [2]; Levenson 1976, 10–14, 25–36). These same aspects are associated with Eden (Gen 2:6-10). In 47:1-12 Ezekiel brings together the Eden and Zion traditions. Consequently, Eden's marvelous fertility originates not in some mythical or unknown place but in the temple on God's holy mountain.

Nor is the restored Temple in a mythical or unknown place. It is located in an identifiable geographic area. The final territorial definition is "the land for inheritance" (47:13-23). It begins with the announcement that "these are the boundaries." Their importance is emphasized by the repetition of the Hebrew word *gĕbûl* ("boundary," "border," "territory"), which occurs nine times in 47:15-20 and twenty times in chapter 48. These borders define "the land of Israel" (47:18).

This land has three important identifications. First, it is for "the twelve tribes of Israel" (47:13), reflecting the tradition that Israel derived from Jacob's (Israel's) twelve sons (Gen 29:31–30:24; 32:28 [29]; 35:16-18). The phrase implies a "united kingdom" (compare 37:15-28). Israel will not be politically divided (compare 1 Kgs 12). The tribe of Joseph, however, shall have two portions (compare Gen 48:20-22), which also reflects tradition. Since Levi was not given land as inheritance (Deut 10:9; Josh 13:33), in order to keep the number of tribes twelve, Joseph was divided in two: Manasseh and Ephraim, the names of his sons (Deut 34:2; Josh 14:4). Plus, in the new territory the Levites will have their own holding (45:5).

Second, the land is to be divided equally (47:14). The tribes are to be economically equal. Third, this is the promised land, the land that YHWH "swore

to . . . your ancestors" (47:14; compare Gen 13:14-17; 50:24; Exod 6:8; 13:5; Deut 1:8). A united, equal, promised land "shall fall to you" (compare 45:1; 47:22; 48:29 [NRSV, "allot"]). This idiom reflects the practice of casting lots to apportion land in Num 33:54.

Like Moses, Ezekiel apportions territory (47:15-20; compare Num 32:28-33; see also p. 247). The boundaries of this territory are similar, but not identical, to those in Num 34:1-13. The border cannot be identified with certainty. Some place-names are unknown. Moreover, the place-names are not a "connect-the-dots" picture. The cities lie inside, not on the borders (Block 1998, 712). Nonetheless, one can determine that the borders approximately incorporate the territory of present-day Israel, Palestine (West Bank and Gaza), two-thirds of Lebanon, the southwestern corner of Syria (including Damascus), and a corner of Sinai. It also approximates the traditional idealized northern and southern limits of Israel's last united kingdom (1 Kgs 8:65).

The land is "for the aliens who reside among you," as well as Israel's tribes (47:22-23). In Hebrew, "alien" is a different word from "foreigner" (11:9; 28:10; 44:7-9), although by definition aliens are also foreigners. Aliens were those who, for a variety of reasons, had separated themselves from clan and home and placed themselves under the legal protection of others (*TDOT* 2.443). They were antiquity's immigrants and guest workers. Along with orphans and widows, they required special economic supports precisely because they had no property (Deut 24:17, 19-22; 26:11-13; Bird 1997, 76–78). YHWH judged the exiles for failing to provide that support (22:7, 29).

This accommodation of aliens seems totally random. Two intertextual connections provide some design. First, in Leviticus, "anyone from the house of Israel" and the "aliens" form a fixed pair (e.g., Lev 18:26; 17:8-15; 24:22; see p. 76). Perhaps "aliens" functions similarly here.

Additionally, they "have begotten children," indicating that their sojourn has lasted into a second generation. In Egypt, Israel's "alien" status lasted over four hundred years (Exod 12:40); therefore, they were enjoined to protect the aliens (Deut 10:19; 23:7 [8]). Perhaps because Israel will sojourn in Babylon more than one generation, they are again enjoined to care for the aliens in their homeland. Instead of gleanings, aliens shall now receive an inheritance. Inheritance bestows on them equal economic status. They shall indeed be "as citizens of Israel."
Although Leviticus assumes that "aliens" participate in the worship of YHWH and are keepers of *torah* (Lev 17:8-9; 18:26; 22:17-20), in Ezekiel, as "foreigners," they are excluded from both (44:6-7). Ritually, their status is lower; economically, their status is higher than in other legislation. They have access to land, but not to the Temple. Aliens can work in Israel, they just cannot worship

there.

Next, individual tribal boundaries are determined (48:1-7, 23-29). The allotment begins in the north with Dan, and each tribe receives "one portion." The text does not specify its size (compare Num 26:53-56). The land is apportioned symmetrically, if not necessarily equally. Since the area defined by the boundaries results in varying east-west dimensions (47:15-20), the northern tribes would receive more land. "From the east side to the west" lays out the tribes horizontally, from north to south: Dan, Asher, Naphtali, Manasseh, Ephraim (placing the two Joseph tribes next to each other), Reuben, Judah, Benjamin, Simeon, Issachar, Zebulun, and Gad. The holy portion (48:8-22) is positioned between Judah and Benjamin, with seven tribes to the north and five to the south.

The boundaries supersede traditional tribal settlements. For example, Reuben, Gad, and all of Manasseh are now west of rather than east of the Jordan (Num 32:1-42; Josh 18:7). Traditional northern tribes, Zebulun and Issachar, are moved southward (Josh 19:10-23). Any explanation for the arrangement is speculative. It seems somewhat determined by birth mother. The four tribes descended from the sons of the handmaids Zilpah (Asher, Gad) and Bilhah (Dan, Naphtali) are farthest from the Temple. The eight tribes of the sons of Leah and Rachel are divided evenly on either side of the holy portion. Overall, despite claims of equality, some tribes are more equal than others.

The tribal division is interrupted by a thirteenth allotment between Judah and Benjamin (48:8-22), returned, or "set apart," to YHWH. Judah's and Benjamin's affiliations with Jerusalem's kings may explain their proximity to YHWH's portion (Gen 49:8-10; 1 Sam 9:16, 21; 10:20-24; 17:12; 2 Sam 2:11). This interruption provides greater details of the territory previously described in 45:1-7, which includes territories for the priests, the Levites, the prince, and the city (see p. 255). The exegetical analysis here focuses on new information.

The priests' territory includes the sanctuary, which is "in the middle of it" (48:10). The Zadokite priests are "consecrated" (lit., "made holy") in accord with their access to "a most holy place" (lit., "holy of holies"; compare 45:3). The Levites' portion is "choice" (lit., "first"; 48:13-14). Like agricultural first fruits (Exod 23:16, 19; 34:26; Deut 18:4) and the Levites as substitutes for firstborn of the womb (Num 3:12-13, 41, 45), the land is dedicated to YHWH and they cannot sell, exchange, or transfer it.

The city's territory is for "ordinary" (lit., "profane") use (48:15-20; compare 45:6). It is "not holy." This territory includes three areas. First, the city proper, "for dwellings," is situated in the center. A second area of "open land/country," surrounding the city, serves as pasture for animals and livestock (compare Num

35:3; Josh 21:2). The city plus open land form a square (48:16-17; see pp. 246–47, 256). Third, the "remainder," east and west of the city, is to be used for farming. The resulting produce shall feed "the workers of the city." The unique phrase apparently refers to those who cultivate the land and tend the livestock. Each tribe is to contribute an indeterminate number to this labor force. Apart from the city's workers, nothing is said of the city's function. It is not needed for defensive purposes. Since no palace is mentioned, it does not seem to be a political capital. Nor is the Temple located there. The "holy" Temple does not come into contact with the "profane" city (see pp. xxii–xxiii on holy and profane). Whatever the city's significance in antiquity, in this vision it is primarily the worker's residence. Politics and government are pushed to the periphery of restored Israel (see also pp. 246 and 256).

The arrangement of all the territories in the thirteenth allotment cannot be definitively determined. Perhaps the text continues to arrange territory from north to south so that the priests' holding adjoins Judah's southern border, followed by the Levites' holding, the city's territory, and Benjamin's allotment (Block 1998, 733; ArtScroll, 709). Another possibility is to swap the position of the priests' and Levites' holdings. Then the territories from north to south would be Judah, the Levites' holding, the priests' holding, the city's territory, and Benjamin's allotment. In this arrangement, the sanctuary, with its altar, is located in the holy portion's center, and thus at the heart of the land as a whole (Zimmerli 1983, 535; Stevenson 1996, 35). The prince's territory is situated on the east and west sides of the combined territories of the priests, Levites, and the city (48:21-22).

The final issue addressed in the vision is access to the city. Just as each tribe gets one piece of land, each is assigned one gate (48:30-34). Just as today, Washington, D.C. is not within any state, the city is not within any tribal division. There are twelve gates for the twelve tribes of Israel. Each tribe has access by means of its own gate. The gate assignments include Levi, giving the Levites and Zadokites access to the city. Unlike the Temple, where access is restricted, there is unrestricted access to the city. Any rationale for the tribal arrangement is speculative.

The city is never named Jerusalem. It does not lie in Judah's territory (tribal affiliation) as Jerusalem had (Josh 15:63). Nor is it David's city, the city of the king (2 Sam 5:7-9). Since the city is not situated in the prince's holding, and given the restrictions of the prince's power, it is certainly not the prince's city. With its perfect square proportion, unlike defiled Jerusalem, this city is perfectly aligned with God, the visible expression of Israel's alignment with God's will (see p. 247). Therefore, this city has another name: YHWH is There (48:35).

Theological and Ethical Analysis

(1) John's revelation of "the new Jerusalem" clearly borrows language and imagery from Ezekiel's Temple vision (Rev 21–22). Both are visions of the place where God will "dwell" (43:7, 9; Rev 21:3). There is a divine figure (angel) who gives a tour and "measures" the city, its gates, and its walls (40:1–42:20; Rev 21:15-17). Like Ezekiel's Temple, John's New Jerusalem is a square, providing a visual expression of the people's perfect alignment with God's will. John's vision similarly displays a concern over boundaries and access. There is a high wall with twelve gates inscribed with the names of Israel's twelve tribes (48:30-34; Rev 21:12-13). In both visions, the "unclean" are denied access (44:6-9; Rev 21:8, 27; 22:3). John also envisions a life-giving river that flows outward from the holy place (47:1-2; Rev 22:1). On either side of John's river is the tree of life. Similar to Ezekiel's perpetually bearing fruit trees, they bear twelve kinds of fruit every month and their leaves are for healing (47:7, 12; Rev 22:2).

The main distinction between Ezekiel and John's visions is the place they envision. Ezekiel's center is the Temple. The ideal community is the returned, purified people who worship YHWH. Because Ezekiel identifies the problematic relationship between palace and Temple as a cause of the exile (43:8), it becomes necessary to prevent the city from defiling the Temple again. Therefore, the city is declared "profane," pushed to the periphery, and renamed because "Jerusalem" is too polluted. Moreover, all female imagery for the city is absent (Galambush 1992, 147–56). If woman Jerusalem is metonymous for defilement itself, how could she be included in the new creation? YHWH will not covenant himself again with his former bride (compare Hos 2:18-20 [20–22]).

In contrast, John's center is the city, "Jerusalem" (Rev 21:2, 10). This city is the antithesis to Babylon (Rome), which is imaged as the defiling whore (Rev 17:1-18). Jerusalem can still be God's bride, so John incorporates the female imagery lacking in Ezekiel (Rev 21:2, 9).

If Ezekiel is suspicious of the city, John is suspicious of the Temple. Indeed, there is no temple in John's city, "for its temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb" (Rev 21:22). Although John also envisions a community at worship (Rev 22:3), the NT community is hostile to institutional religion. In their view the Temple's destruction by Rome in 70 C.E. only proved that the second Temple was as defiled as the first.

It is easy to wax poetic about the edenic aspects of these visions. To trauma victims, a place without perpetrators is paradise. To the millions worldwide who lack adequate food and clean drinking water, an everflowing stream and constant food supply is heavenly. Whether temple or city, here is the place where the stale

becomes fresh, the hungry are fed, the thirsty receive drink, the wounded are healed, the desolate are restored, the sorrowful become joyful, and the dead come alive!

Ezekiel and John envision the ideal relationship between humanity and God. But we must remember that these are both ideal visions (see p. 44). What they portray is unreal; neither can be realized in this world. For some, the visions provide hope of something more than life's traumas. For others, they are a source of disappointment. Humans who constantly fall short of the ideal inhabit earthly congregations. No matter how glorious the initial possibilities and potential, eventually they become defiled and polluted.

There are several predictable paths people take when faced with this tension between vision and reality. One path of secularism abandons religion altogether. If the vision is no more than fantasy, it is best to live in the "real" world. Another path is a never-ending quest for the "perfect" faith community. When a community disappoints, one moves on to the next utopian movement. Another response to disappointment resembles Ezekiel. One thinks that all would be well "if only" a certain event had or had not taken place and seeks out someone to blame and punish. To prevent another disappointment one creates additional restrictions, since the previous ones were apparently insufficient. This leads to increasingly narrow and rigid fundamentalism. Yet another path is to push the quest for perfection further into the future and further removed from the real world. Some day far in the future or after death the vision will be realized. This leads to increasing cynicism about any possibility of real change in the world.

Each of the above paths tries to resolve the tension between vision and reality in favor of one or the other. An alternative is to consider a path that seeks to hold the tension. This involves learning to live with human imperfection—in oneself, in one's neighbors, and in the world. Instead of experiencing some as good and others as bad, persons on this path know each individual is both. They do not consider themselves to be inherently sinful, so there is no need to wait for God to give them a new heart. They are already whole, created as God intends them to be. Persons on this path hold a vision of what they are working toward, with the aim to take practical steps toward the vision, changing what they can. To make changes for justice and healing, they must be flexible, ready to negotiate with all others involved. Persons on this path know that there will be missteps, but these are not viewed as abominations. They understand that sometimes no one person is to blame, especially when confronting systemic injustices. There must be corrections and changes, but not punishment or destruction.

This greatly oversimplifies the issues. The aim is to consider that living in the tension may be the option that actually moves us closer to the ideal, even in a

less-than-ideal world. This path is not as impressive as Ezekiel's and John's visions, but it is livable in this world.

(2) This unit was initially drafted in the summer of 2006, during the fifth week of the conflict between Israel and Lebanon. It was uncertain whether Syria would become militarily involved. Writing of the commentary also took place during various phases of the Israeli/Palestinian conflict. These conflicts raise the issue of the significance of the territorial limits of Eretz Israel for today (47:18). Ezekiel outlines a territory that includes within its boundaries all of modern Israel, all of Palestine (West Bank and Gaza), a small portion of Sinai (Egypt), half of Lebanon, and the southwestern part of Syria, including Damascus and the Golan Heights (47:13-20). Expecting the "literal" fulfillment of the envisioned tribal boundaries in today's world would be catastrophic. What should be done with these verses?

First, numerous biblical texts are in tension with this vision. For example, even at the height of biblical Israel's power, it never controlled Damascus (Syria), the Phoenician coast (Lebanon), or Philistia (Gaza), as evidenced by the account of David's census (2 Sam 24) and the list of "unconquered cities" (Judg 1:27-33). Solomon's territory also excluded the Mediterranean coast, and the territories of Lebanon and Syria that are claimed in Ezekiel (*HAIJ*, 214–15). Despite state propaganda (compare 1 Kgs 4:24), there is no evidence that either king exerted influence beyond the territory of "Dan to Beersheba" (compare 2 Sam 24:2; 1 Kgs 4:25). These texts caution against absolutizing Ezekiel's ideal. Political realities, both today and in antiquity, require accommodating other territorial claims.

Second, it is important to remember that 47:13-20 is *ideal*. The territorial proposal is as unreal as 47:1-12. These boundaries are as impossible to achieve in this world as it is to "heal" the Dead Sea. Like the healing river, the boundaries express hope, namely, of the people's "return" to their historic homeland. All refugees hope for an end to exile. However this hope might or might not be accommodated in today's political realm, it needs to be acknowledged.

Accommodating that hope, however, is fraught with problems. Because Ezekiel's vision is ideal, he envisions "an empty land for a people without a land." The land is empty because any competing claims have been violently eliminated (see p. 220). The tension between vision and reality is evident in the traditions of the return from exile. The planned homecoming encounters resistance from those already living in the land (Ezra 4:1-7; Neh 4:1-8 [3:33–4:2]).

Third, if one is willing to live in the tension between ideal and real, the vision

can yet speak to current political realities. The tension resulting from refugees returning home to a land that has, in the meantime, become home for others, is at the heart of the Israeli/Palestinian conflict. Naim Ateek, a Palestinian Christian, sees hopeful possibilities in Ezekiel's accommodation to the "aliens" (47:21-23), whom he identifies as the native inhabitants already living in the land when Israel returned. According to Ateek, Ezekiel views these native inhabitants differently from Joshua, where the emphasis is on their extermination. This different attitude reflects actual changes in history. "Certain demographic changes had taken place, and the prophet pronouncing the word of God exhorts the people to accept these changes and to share the land with those who are living on it" (Ateek 1992, 111). Ezekiel envisions Israel as a people who could share land with "aliens." Acknowledging the hope/ideal of return, along with the reality of competing claims, combined with an ethic of sharing, can be next steps toward a vision of peace and justice for both Israelis and Palestinians.

(3) It is appropriate to conclude with some final considerations of trauma and Ezekiel (see p. 0000). The first act of care for a trauma victim is to get him or her to a tangible place of safety. Either in addition to or in the absence of real, physical safety, "it is also possible to seek shelter in one's imagination" (Allen 1995, 48). What Ezekiel does in chapters 34–48 is to imagine a place of safety. That imagined space functions as Ezekiel's answer to the fifth victim question, "What if it (the catastrophe) happens again?" (see pp. xviii–xxi). A traumatized person's worst fear is that the trauma will recur. Ezekiel's "answer" develops a theological plan to eliminate that possibility. Victims become survivors by answering, to their satisfaction, the five fundamental victim questions, which help them place their experiences in perspective and alleviate the trauma and subsequent stress. The book of Ezekiel answered those questions to the satisfaction of not only the exiles but also following generations who would grant this book authoritative status. Without doubt, Ezekiel was a survivor.

Ezekiel also acted as a survivor by rebuilding shattered assumptions. Certain cognitive strategies represent means by which survivors facilitate this demanding reconstruction process. One cognitive strategy involves reinterpretation, reappraisal, and reevaluation of the traumatic experience. The aim of reinterpretation is to maximize self-worth and the perception of benevolence in the world and to minimize the differences between prior positive assumptions and the negative assumptions implied by the traumatic event (Janoff-Bulman 1992, 117, 140). Ezekiel's behavioral self-blame is an example of the cognitive strategy of reinterpreting trauma (see pp. 224–25). Blaming oneself makes the world less threatening because one can take precautions to avoid such trauma in the future.

Another powerful cognitive strategy is to transform the traumatic experience by perceiving positive elements in it. Meaning is often discovered by imposing the concept of purpose on the trauma. Ezekiel finds meaning by perceiving the purpose of his and Israel's victimization as divine punishment. But that purpose precludes seeing oneself and the world in a positive way. "Thus a perception of the victimization as punishment is similar to characterological self-blame; both may satisfy questions of meaning but negatively affect assumptions about benevolence and self worth" (Janoff-Bulman 1992, 134). This is the aspect of Ezekiel most troublesome to trauma victims.

A more positive interpretation of purpose involves evaluating victimization in terms of its long-term benefits for others:

> Survivors can choose to derive benefits for others. They can turn their traumatic experience into an altruistic outcome, either through interpretation or behavior. . . . Concentration camp survivors sometimes interpreted their suffering in terms of "bearing witness." . . . Transmitting the horror of the camps . . . created purpose in their lives. (Janoff-Bulman 1992, 138–39)

Ezekiel seeks to make Israel's world safer by "bearing witness." He teaches future generations the lessons of behaviors to avoid, with the ultimate aim of protecting against future evils. The primary lesson to learn is knowledge of YHWH. Significantly, the *recognition formula* is absent from the Temple vision. The lesson has been learned; now they know!

Although Ezekiel was clearly a survivor, it is less clear how helpful his answers to victim questions or his cognitive strategies are to contemporary trauma victims. The Theological and Ethical Analysis sections consider some of the limitations of Ezekiel's response to trauma. Above all, Ezekiel's imagined safe space does not offer a viable answer to the question of "what if the catastrophe happens again." Absolute control and total perfection are unattainable, so they cannot prevent trauma from happening. This is a world where trauma happens, no matter how vigilant one is, and that will not change. Like the tension between ideal and real, the challenge is developing religious responses to trauma that take reality into account. One aspect of developing a Jewish or Christian response will be to consider which biblical texts and biblical interpretations are helpful in both reducing the instances of trauma and in healing trauma's wounds.

There are at least two ways that Ezekiel might contribute to a more adaptive religious response to trauma. First, there is some evidence that suggests that writing about the trauma has beneficial effects (Park and Blumberg 2002). The writing process changes a victim's assessment of situational meaning; the trauma

becomes viewed as less stressful and less threatening. Writing also brings about changes in cognitive processing, reflected by decreased intrusions and avoidance (on intrusion see p. 150). Because of these changes in mental health, writing even results in improved physical health. Therefore, the very act of writing the book would have been beneficial to Ezekiel and to later editors (compare 24:2; 37:16; 43:11). The process of "disclosing trauma through writing" provides a model for moving toward recovery.

Second, even though Ezekiel's assertion that exile was divine punishment remains troubling, the oracles of salvation and their placement within the book attest to the belief that neither punishment nor death are God's final words to humanity. If Ezekiel is an evangelist, then the "good news" he proclaims is that God moves in the world in order to end the world's many long national nightmares. To grasp the significance of this today, we may "measure the pattern" of transformation that Ezekiel declares: God transforms destruction to restoration, death to resurrection, trauma to recovery. We are called to describe our visions of transformation, and the practical steps they entail (see p. 268). To those who live in a world replete with traumatic events, the hope Ezekiel offers to the world's victims is faith in God's enduring desire and ability to restore life and to transform victims into survivors.

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