## Ezekiel John Goldingay

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## [Epigraph in place of a foreword]

Jerome of Stridon, a town in the Balkans, began his commentary on Ezekiel in the aftermath of the fall of Rome to the Visigoths in AD 410. He was about seventy and his eyesight was failing. Many refugees from Rome were coming to Bethlehem and he explains that the demands of hospitality meant it took much longer to complete this work than his work on Isaiah. Half way through, he says:

Any good our dictation does in bringing the prophets to others belongs to the judgment of God, and to the awareness of those who forget about rhetorical declamations, applause, and composition of words, and desire to know what the prophetic discourse is narrating about the past, accusing in the present, or proclaiming about things to come. Meanwhile, the first benefit comes to us, for while we do this and think of nothing else, we approach the commentary in the manner of a thief, and we compensate for the miseries of the daytime by nocturnal studies. The soul is fed and is not oblivious to the misfortunes of the age, which groan and suffer birth pains [cf. Rom 8:22], being already set at the final end. (Jerome, 278).

Javier Marías, the Spanish novelist and literary critic, makes this comment about another literary critic.

I managed to depress him by pointing out that… his many acclaimed critical writings were destined to last only as long as he did. After him would come others who were by definition more competent, more informed and more advanced in their methodologies… and who would render his interpretations and discoveries outdated or even absurd in their naiveté—the past always seems naïve.

So much, perhaps, for critics and interpreters. Marías adds that he and all Spanish writers are dependent on the greatest of all Spanish writers, Miguel de Cervantes:

Neither our existence nor our pages erase or annul his, which continue to be studied and read without ever becoming outdated or invalid; this is a field in which the passage of additional time doesn’t advance or improve or determine the course of what came before.[[1]](#footnote-1)

His comments are applicable to biblical interpretation and to the text it seeks to interpret.

## Abbreviations

AIIL Ancient Israel and Its Literature

ANEM Ancient Near Eastern Monographs

*ANEP The Ancient Near East In Pictures.* Ed. James B. Pritchard. 2nd ed. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969

*ANET* [*Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament*](http://fulleripac.fuller.edu/ipac20/ipac.jsp?session=13124149T366V.14350&profile=main&uri=search=ATL%7E%21The%20Ancient%20Near%20Eastern%20texts%20:%20relating%20to%20the%20Old%20Testament%20/&term=The%20Ancient%20Near%20Eastern%20texts%20:%20relating%20to%20the%20Old%20Testament%20/%20edited%20by%20James%20B.%20Pritchard.&aspect=basic_search&menu=search&source=%7E%21horizon). Ed. James B. Pritchard. 3rd ed. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969

Aq. Aquila’s Greek translation, as documented in Frederick Field, *Origenis Hexaplorum quae supersunt*. Oxford: Clarendon, 1871

*b.* (followed by the name of a tractate) Babylonian Talmud, as posted at sefaria.org

*BBR Bulletin for Biblical Research*

BBRSup Bulletin for Biblical Research Supplement

BDB Brown, Francis, Samuel Rolles Driver, and Charles A. Briggs. *Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament.* Corrected ed., Oxford: Clarendon, 1962

BETL Bibliotheca ephemeridum theologicarum Lovaniensium

*BHS Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia:* ספר יחזקאל *Liber Ezechiel*.Ed. K. Elliger. Stuttgart: Württembergische Bibelanstalt, 1971

BibInt Biblical Interpretation Series

*BN Biblische* *Notizen*

*BZ Biblische* Z*eitschrift*

BZAW Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft

CBH Classical Biblical Hebrew

*CD Church Dogmatics*,by K. Barth.Translated by Geoffrey W. Bromiley et al. Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1936–69

CEB Common English Bible

*CTAT Critique textuelle de l’Ancien Testament: Tome 3. Ézéchiel, Daniel et les 12 Prophètes*, by Dominique Barthélemy**.** Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1992

*CTJ Calvin Theological Journal*

*DCH The Dictionary of Classical Hebrew.* Ed. David J. A. Clines. Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press (vols. 1–5) and Sheffield Phoenix Press (vols. 6–8), 1993–2011

DG Gibson, John C. L. *Davidson's Introductory Hebrew Grammar–Syntax*. Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1994

diss. dissertation

*DSS The Dead Sea Scrolls: Study Edition*. Ed. Florentino García Martínez and Eibert J. C. Tigchelaar. 2 vols. Reprinted Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000

*DTT* *A Dictionary of the Targumim, the Talmud Babli and Yerushalmi, and the Midrashic Literature.* Compiled by Marcus Jastrow. New York: Choreb, 1926

*ETL Ephemerides theologicae Lovanienses*

f. feminine

FAT Forschungen zum Alten Testament

FRLANT Forschungen zur Religion und Literature des Alten und Neuen Testaments

*GK Gesenius’ Hebrew Grammar as Edited and Enlarged by E. Kautzsch*. 2nd English ed. Revised by A. E. Cowley Reprinted Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1966

*HALOT The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*. By Ludwig Koehler, Walter Baumgartner et al. Trans. and ed. Mervyn E. J. Richardson. Leiden: Brill, 2001

hapaxhapaxlegomenon, a word occurring only once in the Hebrew Bible

haplog haplography, the accidental omission of a word or phrase similar to one next to it

*HBT Horizons in Biblical Theology*

*HeBAI Hebrew Bible and Ancient Israel*

*HSM Harvard Semitic Monographs*

*HTS Hervormde Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies*

*HUB The Hebrew University Bible: The Book of Ezekiel*. Ed. Moshe Goshen-Gottstein and Shemaryahu Talmon. Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 2004

*IBHS An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax.* By Bruce K. Waltke and Michael O’Connor. Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1990

*JANES Journal of the Ancient Near Eastern Society*

*JATS Journal of the Adventist Theological Society*

*JBL Journal of Biblical Literature*

*JBQ Jewish Biblical Quarterly*

*JETS Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*

JMJoüon, Paul. *A Grammar of Biblical Hebrew*. Trans. and revised by Takamitsu Muraoka. Rome: Editrice Pontificio Istituto Biblico, 1991

*JNSL Journal of Northwest Semitic Languages*

JSJSup Supplements to the Journal for the Study of Judaism

JSNTSup Journal for the Study of the New Testament Supplement

*JSOT Journal for the Study of the Old Testament*

JSOTSup Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement

*JTS Journal of Theological Studies*

K Ketiv (“written”) consonantal Masoretic Text

KJV King James (Authorized) Version

LBH Late Biblical Hebrew

LHBOTS Library of Hebrew Bible/Old Testament Studies

LXX Septuagint Greek translation, as printed in *Septuaginta*, ed. Alfred Rahlfs, revised by Robert Hanhart.Stuttgart: Deutsch Bibelgesellschaft, 2006

LXXL The Lucianic text of LXX

m. masculine

*m.* (followed by the name of a tractate) Mishnah, as posted at sefaria.org

ms(s) manuscript(s)

MG Miqraʾot Gedolot, as posted at sefaria.org

MT Masoretic Text

MTA The Aleppo manuscript of MT, as printed in *HUB*

MTC The Cairo manuscript of MT, as reproduced in *Codex Cairo of the Bible from the Karaite Synagogue at Abbasiya*. Jerusalem: Makor, 1971

MTLThe Leningrad manuscript of MT, as printed in *BHS* and the Lexham Hebrew Bible

MTR The Reuchlin manuscript of MT, as printed in *The Hebrew Bible with Pre-Masoretic Tiberian Vocalization: The Prophets according to the Codex Reuchlinianus*, ed. Alexander Sperber. Leiden: Brill, 1969

*NETS A New English Translation of the Septuagint*, ed. Albert Pietersma and Benjamin G. Wright. New York: Oxford University Press, 2007. Ezekiel translated by J. Noel Hubler.

NIV New International Version

NJPS *JPS Hebrew-English Tanakh.* 2nd ed. Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1999

NRSV New Revised Standard Version

OBO Orbis Biblicus et Orientalis

*OHE The Oxford Handbook of Ezekiel*, ed. Corrine Carvalho, online

OL Old Latin text, as reported in *BHS*

*OTE Old Testament Essays*

OTL The Old Testament Library

*OTP* *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, ed. James H. Charlesworth. 2 vols. Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1983 and 1985.

OtSt Oudtestamentische Studiën

PBH Post-biblical Hebrew

ptc. participle

Q Qere’ (“read out”) Masoretic Text, with vowel markers

1QEzek, 3QEzek, 4QEzek, 11QEzek

Manuscript fragments of Ezekiel from Qumran Caves 1, 2, 4, and 11, as printed in Eugene Ulrich, *The Biblical Qumran Scrolls: Transcriptions and Textual Variants*. VTSup 134. Leiden: Brill, 2010

*RB Revue Biblique*

*RevExp Review and Expositor*

*Sanh. Sanhedrin*

SBLDS SBL Dissertation Series

SBLSymS SBL Symposium Series

SBLSCS Septuagint and Cognate Studies

*SJOT Scandinavian Journal of the Old Testament*

Sym. Symmachus’s Greek translation, as documented in Field (see under Aq.)

Syr. Syriac text, as printed in *The Syriac Peshiṭta Bible with English Translation: Ezekiel*. Ed. and trans. by George A. Kiraz et al. Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias, 2015

*TDOT* *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, ed. G. Johannes Botterweck et al. Trans. John T. Willis et al.17 vols. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974–2021

Tg. Targum, as posted at sefaria.org

Theod. Theodotion’s Greek translation, as documented in Field (see under Aq.)

*TLOT Theological Lexicon of the Old Testament*, ed. Ernst Jenni and Claus Westermann. Trans. Mark E. Biddle. Peabody, MA: Hendricksen 1997.

*TTH A Treatise on the Use of the Tenses in Hebrew and Some Other Syntactical Questions*. By Samuel Rolles Driver. 3rd ed. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1892

*TynB Tyndale Bulletin*

Vg. Vulgate Latin translation, as printed in *Biblia sacra iuxta vulgatam versionem*, ed. Robert Weber. 3rd ed. Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelanstalt, 1983

*VT Vetus Testamentum*

VTSup Vetus Testamentum Supplement

*WO Die Welt des Orients*

*ZAW Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft*

In a reference such as 20:45 [21:1], the first reference applies to English Bibles, the second to printed Hebrew Bibles

In quotations, emphasis (italics) is always original unless otherwise noted.

All translations are mine unless otherwise noted.

References and bibliographies in this volume work as follows.

* Commentaries are quoted simply by name and page number or passage reference. The commentary bibliography gives the information on them.
* The bibliographies at the end of the volume cover other works that relate broadly to the volume.
* For works referred to in footnotes by a short title, the “Selected Bibliography” at the end of the section gives the full information.

C. J. Conroy has systematic bibliographies on Ezekiel at cjconroy.net.

## Introduction

Now, in the thirtieth year, in the fourth [month], on the fifth of the month, when I was among the exile community at the Kebar Waterway, the heavens opened and I saw a divine vision.

The Ezekiel scroll begins as it intends to go on, taking the form of a memoir by a priest among people from Judah who are living in exile in a not-very-significant settlement fifty miles south of Babylon. I call it a “scroll” as a reminder that it is nothing like a “book” in the modern sense, and it differs from most other prophetic scrolls in being entirely first-person, as told by Ezekiel himself.

### The Prophet/Priest

At the turn of the sixth century BC, Judah declared its independence from the Babylonians. In 597, Nebuchadrezzar came to reassert Babylonian authority there, and took back to Babylonia much of Judah’s political, military, and religious leadership and its skilled workforce. He repeated the action more drastically in 587. The forced migrants were not imprisoned or enslaved. Many could be put to work in ways related to their background and usefulness. Others would have had to work on the land, and as a community they had lost their freedom. The family of Buzi, Ezekiel’s father, was evidently among a minority in the Judahite community from Jerusalem who had stayed faithful to the Torah, and when Ezekiel reached the age of thirty, as a priest he could have a ministry of exhortation, teaching, counseling, and encouragement to the Judahites in Kebar.[[2]](#footnote-2) At that point Yahweh gave him a more specific and distinctive commission of exhortation, teaching, counseling, and encouragement, as a prophet to his community. In the scroll he describes how he went about fulfilling this commission when community leaders came to consult him. Presumably on other occasions he took an initiative in speaking to the community, perhaps when it met for worship or for other reasons.

What would it mean to be a prophet? The variety among prophets suggests a wide range of answers. Ezekiel was a prophet to whom Yahweh gave visionary experiences, whom he grasped in a quasi-personal way, to whom he gave messages for his community that were designed to drive it to acknowledge Yahweh (messages often expressed in metaphors, parables,\* and allegories),\* whom he instructed to enact his messages in symbolic dramas, whom he commissioned to confront Israel about its failure to live by the Torah, whom he informed about his intentions to attack Israel (and other peoples) but then to restore it.

In his focus, Ezekiel compares with Jeremiah,[[3]](#footnote-3) though more of the Jeremiah scroll belongs to the period before the fall of Jerusalem in 587 and thus constitutes challenges to turn to Yahweh in order to forestall Yahweh taking action against Judah. And Jeremiah is in Jerusalem until his move to Egypt after 587, whereas Ezekiel is in Babylonia. Ezekiel is nevertheless preoccupied by Jerusalem, and either his community is also so preoccupied, or he thinks they should be, because their destiny lies there. Further, this prophet-priest has more points of connection with the Torah than with Jeremiah. He often reflects Leviticus, along with the second half of Exodus and Numbers (in other words, the material that scholarly parlance designates as “Priestly” and as the “Holiness Code”). Like Jeremiah, he also reflects Deuteronomy. But uncertainty about the dating of material in the Torah opens up the possibility that the Torah reflects Ezekiel’s influence on it as well as vice versa. The comparison with Jeremiah and with the Torah highlights the complexity of Ezekiel’s person as both prophet and priest, and it is possible to put more emphasis on one or on the other.[[4]](#footnote-4)

Origen of Alexandria (414–15) comments:

Not all those who were led away in captivity to Babylon by Nebuchadnezzar went to Babylon because of sins.… The righteous among them did not—such as Daniel, Hananiah, Azariah, Mishael, this Ezekiel [whom I am discussing], Zechariah, Haggai, and those like them. God, who is good, and who punishes sinners, and hands over into captivity those who are not able to be in the holy land because of their sins—for opposites cannot coexist—sends prophets along with them, so that the sinners may not be completely without help, when they have become captives. For on the assumption that the sinners had been led away to Babylon on the basis of their sin, and there had been no righteous ones among them, there was no [possibility of] healing for the sinners. Therefore, this was provided by [God’s] ineffable goodness. For he does not hand over sinners to complete abandonment, but rather watches over them through his holy ones, about whom he said, “You are the light of this world, and the salt of the earth”—he said this not only about the Apostles, but also about those who are like them.

Ezekiel falls on his face when Yahweh appears to him, but Yahweh does not want him to stay there. He has something for him to do (1:28). He appears to this one person so that he may then speak in his name to other people. The Scriptures do not answer the question why Yahweh does not speak to everyone all at once. Possibly the idea would scare people (Exod 20:19). But Yahweh touches Ezekiel in a forceful way to propel him into action, and urges him not to be rebellious like his people. He is not to be scared of them. It could be a temptation, because he is to talk confrontational. He is to digest Yahweh’s confrontational message and share it with them, assimilating Yahweh’s bitter fury and sharing it, even though being devastated by it. He needs to be tough, like them.

His responsibility is to be a lookout, for individuals as well as for the people (3:16–21). As a lookout, he will see what is coming and warn people so that they can take appropriate action. His words concern what Yahweh intends to do in their life, and the implications of those intentions for their life now. He appeals to their imagination as well as their brains. He models things and describes himself modeling things. He is a sign or portent for the people. And he is a means of God doing things. His words are performative. He makes things happen. But his immediate job is to build up the ruins of Judah before more devastation arrives. If he fails to fulfill this responsibility, he will risk his own life. He is to continue to speak whether or not they listen (2:7). He describes his responsibility in this way not so that other Israelites or Christians may see themselves as prophets or see their contemporaries that way, but to spur them to pay serious heed to this prophet’s message.

Prophets sometimes have distinctive ways of speaking. Ezekiel repeats that people are going to “acknowledge that Yahweh is God,” either through Yahweh’s acting against them or through his restoring them. In introducing his messages, he characteristically says not merely that “Yahweh has said this” but that “the Lord Yahweh has said this,” emphasizing Yahweh’s sovereignty (some of the significance of this usage is obscured by the convention in English translations, following Q, LXX, and Vg., of replacing the name Yahweh by a word for Lord). On the other hand, he hardly uses the word “king” for Yahweh, or for a Judahite king, for whom he prefers the word “prince” (נָשִֺיא). Yahweh has a distinctive term for Ezekiel as בֶּן אׇדׇם, literally “son of man” (see the verse-by-verse commentary on 2:1). His distinctive term for Israel is as a “household,” commonly in the distinctive combination “rebellious household.” Ezekiel’s links with the Torah extend to his speaking much about sacredness and ordinariness and about cleanness and defilement, and also about “outrage” (תּוֺעֵבָה, traditionally, “abomination).” He has his own favorite term for idols, “lumps” (גִּלּוִּים). He never refers to Zion and he speaks little of love or about commitment (חֶסֶד, traditionally “steadfast love”), though his not using such words might in itself not mean he is uninterested in the attitude that the words represent.[[5]](#footnote-5)

### The Memoir

One can picture Ezekiel functioning like other prophets, appearing in front of members of his community and declaiming messages that were commonly of a length to occupy half a page or a page in a modern Bible. The existence of the Ezekiel memoir implies that eventually he put these messages into writing. He becomes “a book prophet,”[[6]](#footnote-6) with the result that the scroll gives an account of his ministry over the twenty years or more that followed his commission (see 29:17). Putting messages into writing and compiling the memoir implies the assumption that the messages from Yahweh were significant not only for the occasion when he first delivered them but at least for the ongoing life of the Kebar community. Maybe, like Jeremiah, he first put his messages into writing before the fall of Jerusalem, in hope that somehow people might yet take notice of him and catastrophe might yet be forestalled. Maybe he did so only after the city’s fall, with the hope that they might now come to their senses. Maybe he (or a curator) did so only at the end of his ministry. The scroll’s structuring marks it as a united whole designed to address people at least then.

While Ezekiel might have liked the idea of leaving something of his ministry behind him, however, he doesn’t talk much about himself, and it might be misleading to call the scroll a memoir. A memoir focuses on the person who is its subject, and the Ezekiel scroll doesn’t focus on Ezekiel. It frustrates the reader who wants to know about the prophet as a person. It focuses on God.[[7]](#footnote-7) Although the scroll is quite carefully organized, it is hard to picture someone producing it as an academic or creative exercise. More likely its purpose was to persuade its readers to think in the way the scroll does, about the situation of people in Babylonia and about Yahweh’s message to them in the different decades they live in, and to look at their own lives and at Yahweh’s relationship with them in light of this portrayal. Scores of times Ezekiel says that the object of a particular message was that people should acknowledge that Yahweh is God, and it doesn’t seem a big leap to infer that this is the object of the scroll as an assembled entirety. Its aim is that people should think about Yahweh as God in the way it describes him and to acknowledge him thus by living in light of who he is.

One way or another, then, Ezekiel’s memoir is an exercise in rhetoric in the sense of an exercise in persuasion. [[8]](#footnote-8) It is designed to have an affect on people’s thinking. It aims first to convince people of the truth of Ezekiel’s confrontations and warnings, because the warnings have been fulfilled. The scroll comes to a happy ending, but this does not mean readers can skip over the horror of its first half. The end of the story or the life does not determine the significance of the preceding episodes. Ezekiel is not simply a story offering hope. But it does aim to give them reason for hope that Yahweh had not finished with them. Both in connection with the confrontation and with the promises it seeks to change the thinking. attitudes, and life of its hearers and readers.

Its opening account of Ezekiel’s vision and commission, designed to get people to heed what follows, immediately points in that direction, as do rhetorical features of the opening chapters, while the first-person form of the memoir would suggest a claim to reliability.[[9]](#footnote-9) “Vision and rhetoric were two primary instruments by which he would urge them to imagine a future in which they would continue to be a people in covenant with Yhwh.”[[10]](#footnote-10) Rhetorically, the material in different sections of the scroll addresses different readers: Jerusalemites, Jerusalem prophets, the Ammonites, Nebuchadrezzar.…[[11]](#footnote-11) But it is his community in Kebar that Ezekiel actually addresses. It is their thinking, attitudes, and life that he wants to change. We don’t know whether he ever envisaged being heeded by people in Jerusalem, then or later, but evidently some people saw that he should be.

Running through the scroll is a series of dates marking when he received different messages. The dates are a distinctive feature of the scroll. They are expressed in different ways and they may not always cover all the material that follows until the next date arrives, nor is it explicit that they were designed to define the scroll’s structure. But a number of them do indicate transitions in blocks of material, and they form a series of markers that readers could use as signposts. They sometimes dates events by the years in a king’s reign, sometimes by the years since the community’s expulsion from Jerusalem, and sometimes by the years of Ezekiel’s life. Relating them to a modern Western calendar is thus tricky, as is the fact that the ancient Near Eastern year may begin either in spring or in fall but definitely not in January.[[12]](#footnote-12) If we treat some prominent and key dates as markers, they suggest seeing the scroll as follows.

1:1–7:27 Messages concerning Jerusalem’s waywardness and coming fall.

They begin with references to year thirty (of Ezekiel’s life?) and year five after his community’s transportation (593)

8:1–19:14 More messages concerning Jerusalem’s waywardness and coming fall.

They begin with a reference to year six, presumably after the transportation (592).

20:1–23:49 Yet more messages concerning Jerusalem’s waywardness and coming fall.

They begin with a reference to year seven, presumably after the transportation (591).

Through the first half of the book things are thus repetitive and more grim. Through the second half of the book, they get more positive.

24:1–33:20 Yahweh’s announcement of the city’s fall, and his messages about other peoples.

They begin with a reference to year nine (apparently of Zedekiah’s reign) and include references to years ten to twelve, and in a brief note out of chronological order refer to year twenty-seven (after the transportation?) (588, 585, 571).

33:21–39:29 Messages concerning Judah’s restoration and the putting down of Gog of Magog.

They begin with a reference to year twelve, presumably after the transportation (585).

40:1–48:35 A vision of a new temple and new land.

They begin with a reference to year twenty-five, presumably after the transportation (573).[[13]](#footnote-13)

The dates thus begin in 593 BC, between the two falls of Jerusalem to the Babylonians in 597 and 587. They end in 571, midway through the period of Babylonian rule over Judah. While 587 is thus not the chronological midpoint of Ezekiel’s ministry, it is the key event at the center of his memoir, and it comes near the spatial center of the scroll. The two halves of its story are then dominated by two questions: Will the city fall? And when it has fallen: Does its people now have any future?

### The Scroll

Through prophets such as Ezekiel God was speaking to our spiritual ancestors (Heb 1:1). His messages did not concern events to take place in centuries’ or even in decades’ time, though the preserving of his messages might imply the conviction that they would also speak to future generations. The scroll’s dates suggest that Ezekiel delivered his messages over the twenty or thirty years from the 590s to the 570s, after which he or someone else put them into writing and assembled them into an organized form. That’s all we know about Ezekiel and the scroll. What happened to it over the next three or four centuries is largely a matter of guesswork. The prologue to Ben Sira from about 200 BC tells us that the Jewish community in Egypt then had a collection of scrolls called the Torah and the Prophets, which would have included Ezekiel, and which were in effect the community’s Scriptures. And by this time, these writings were being translated into Greek, the everyday language of Jews in Egypt, eventually to form the translation called the Septuagint (see Olley, 4–5). Beginning in the same period, other Jews in Judea were making copies of these works that they took with them to a community they founded at Qumran by the Dead Sea. The contents of the Greek translations are broadly the same as those of the Hebrew manuscripts, though translating them back into Hebrew reveals lots of detailed differences between the versions that Jews in Egypt had and the ones that Jews in Judea had—a little like the differences between modern translations of the Scriptures. The Hebrew versions from which the Qumran copies were made were perhaps four to five per cent longer than the ones the Greek translators were working with (Olley, 32).

My guess about what happened between the 570s and the 200s or 100s is along the following lines. In 539 Persia took over from Babylon as the imperial power in the Middle East and permitted Judahites in Babylonia to go back to Judah. By now Ezekiel would surely have passed, and many of the Judahites in Babylonia had been born there and didn’t wish to move to Judah, but some did. I assume that some copies of Ezekiel’s memoir had probably been made, Ezekiel might have become known in Judah, and copies of the memoir might already have reached there. If not, when Judahites returned from Babylonia to Jerusalem, copies would now be taken there. Among the returners were many priests, and one can imagine them ”sponsoring” the scroll with the Jerusalem priests. Through some such process, the scroll came to be among that collection of “the Torah and the Prophets” of which we hear later. One does wonder about the dynamics of this process and about tensions between different groups, of the kind that we know about from when the Christian Church worked towards having an agreed collection of New Testament Scriptures. But we can only guess about the process.

Whereas the Ezekiel memoir could have functioned for the Kebarite community in the 570s onwards as a contemporary version of Ezekiel’s oral ministry, in Jerusalem and elsewhere in later decades and centuries it thus came to have a place more like its subsequent position as part of the Christian Scriptures, or the eventual place of Romans or Corinthians in different churches around the Mediterranean. They would know it had not originally addressed them, but they recognized it could speak to them and demand their attention. Surprisingly, perhaps, the later existence of those different forms of the Ezekiel scroll (and other scrolls) among Jews in Egypt and Judea (and elsewhere) implies that the Jewish community did not seek to keep the scroll in precisely the form that it had had from the beginning. While some detailed differences between the main forms of the scroll reflect accidental omissions of words or other such changes, other differences suggest deliberate additions or simplifications of the text. Again there is some similarity with the dynamics of modern translation. Whereas prophets had been prominent in the Assyrian and Babylonian periods, they are no longer prominent in the Persian or Hellenistic periods. There might seem to be some mystery about “the disappearing prophet.”[[14]](#footnote-14) But there is some continuity between the ministry of prophets and the later work of scribes or theologians. The people who copied the text of Ezekiel both recognized the life in the text of Ezekiel’s God-given messages and also sought to give it further expression in a way that spoke to the people and the situations of their day, as New Testament writers later did when they modified the text of the Torah, the Prophets, and the Writings. These prophetic scribes were people whom the Holy Spirit enabled to fulfill their vocation in doing so.

The dynamics of this process are thus reflected in the differences between MT and LXX. Both are slightly updated versions of the scroll as one might have come across it in the Persian period. MT’s version is a little expanded, though sometimes LXX may have lost something by accident or may have shortened the text where it thought it was a bit wordy. A classic difference between them is that MT commonly has “the Lord Yahweh” where LXX has simply “the Lord” as its translation of “Yahweh” (e.g., 2:4; 3:11; 5:5, 7, 8, 11). In principle that might mean MT expanded the expression or that LXX made it more succinct or traditional. Sometimes MT has one Hebrew word or expression and LXX implies a different one. Sometimes MT was seeking to clarify something in its Hebrew text or to make links with other texts in Ezekiel or with other Scriptures.[[15]](#footnote-15) Likewise LXX can be “idiosyncratic” or “curious,” partly because of the influence of the LXX translation of the Torah.[[16]](#footnote-16)

This process of updating continued through to the end of the Second Temple period and the fall of Jerusalem in AD 70. It might be that this event triggered a concern to keep the text of the Scriptures inviolable. But we know of no occasion when Ezekiel or any other works were “canonized.” As far as we can tell, that happened in an informal way. And we know of no occasion when the canon was “closed.” As far as we can tell, the community just stopped finding that it had to recognize any more works and add them to its collection.

### The Theology

The complexity of links such as those between Ezekiel and the Torah means that in some respects the Ezekiel scroll constitutes a synthesis of Israelite thinking paralleling that in the Torah itself.[[17]](#footnote-17) If it is so, what is the faith it implies?

Ezekiel’s ongoing repetition that Yahweh’s aim through his messages was to get people to acknowledge that Yahweh is God suggests three motifs for an understanding of the message:

* who God is
* what it then means that Yahweh is God
* what is involved in acknowledging Yahweh as God

*Who God Is*.The scroll begins with the heavens opening and God appearing in awe-inspiring magnificence, speaking and putting his hand on an individual. So God is not essentially a being inside the world, inside the heavens and the earth. The implication is that even when there were no heavens and earth, God was already alive, in a different realm from the one he went on to create. He is thus independent of the heavens and the earth, but he gets involved with them. He appears within the world, in a way that reflects how awe-inspiring he is. Ezekiel speaks in the name of “the Lord Yahweh,” too powerful to be called a mere King. God is the great sovereign of the universe. The world and Israel have only one Lord. King Nebuchadrezzar is unwittingly the servant of God and his destiny is subject to God’s determining (Ezek 17; 21). Likewise Ammon, Moab, Edom, Tyre, and Egypt are subject to God’s making decisions about them (Ezek 25–32).

Rather than reigning like a king, Ezekiel’s preferred model for understanding God’s position is his having decisive authority, the authority and power to act assertively and ruthlessly in the world. The usual verb for that exercise of decisive power (שָׁפַט) is commonly translated “judge,” with the related nouns (מׅשְׁפָּט and שְׁפָטׅים) being commonly translated “judgment” or “justice.” But “judge” and “judgment” give too negative an impression. Decisive authority is primarily designed to be exercised on the positive behalf of what is right. And “justice” is too abstract and too unequivocal in its ethical implications. When exercised by human agencies, decisive authority is not always ethical. The words suggest something more like “rule” and “ruling.” When God reminds people “I am alive” (e.g., 5:11; 20:3; 33:11; 35:6), it is not least to back up his declarations that he intends to exercise decisive authority. He is not merely alive as opposed to dead but lively and active, full of life.

God is, in fact, full of passion (קׅנְאָה), which can express itself in fury (e.g., 16:42). His passionate fury forms a reaction to the shedding of blood, and to people serving entities that they might call gods but that are not worthy of the name. Ezekiel applies the word אֱלֹהׅים only to the one real God. An implication is that there is only one God. Monotheism is not in itself a subject that interests either Testament—its importance lies in European thinking rather than Middle Eastern thinking. But like other First Testament writings, Ezekiel does imply that there is only one God. There is no rivalry among a number of gods. Further, his people serve those outrageous, pathetic entities for which his favorite term is “lumps,” that have shrines, altars, and burners appropriate to the real God that they are not. They are lumps of wood, or of something less polite, an expression “connoting a quite literal grossness.”[[18]](#footnote-18) In Ezekiel “images are employed in order to reject them.”[[19]](#footnote-19) God’s authority and sacredness are stresses in Ezekiel. They are not very congenial to Western thinking, but they correspond to two of humanity’s fundamental transcultural ethical categories.[[20]](#footnote-20)

This God of whom Ezekiel speaks is the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the God to whom Jesus introduces people and whom he makes it possible for them to know, the Lord who is sovereign in the world. It is an assurance and also a challenge.

*What it means that Yahweh is God.* There is thus only one God, the God of Israel. Yahweh is that awe-inspiring deity. “I am Yahweh,” אֲנִי יהוה, is a key way whereby he makes that declaration[[21]](#footnote-21) It is a key declaration in Ezekiel (sixty-seven occurrences), though also in Leviticus (forty-five) and Exodus (seventeen).[[22]](#footnote-22) It is a compressed expression. A Babylonian would be prepared to acknowledge that Israel’s God was Yahweh. It would seem to be saying something uncontroversial. But it implies “I am Yahweh and I am God.” The replacement of “Yahweh” by אֲדׄנַי in reading the Scriptures, issuing in the translation “you will acknowledge that I am the LORD,” generates a statement that is usefully controversial: Yahweh, not (e.g.) Bel, is Lord. But the statement makes a different and less subtle point from the compressed one that Yahweh actually makes, which implies that Yahweh is the real God. Through much of the first half of Ezekiel, the affirmation that Yahweh is God occurs in the context of declarations of Yahweh’s capacity and will to bring trouble on Judah for its waywardness. In due course things becomes less gloomy, as the emphasis in the occurrences of the expression lies in its asserting Yahweh’s authority. In Ezek 25–35 it becomes the fact proven by his bringing trouble on powers such as Egypt, then in backing declarations about his restoring and renewing Judah.

The fact that Yahweh is God tells Ezekiel’s audience something about God and about Yahweh, and something about themselves and their destiny. Yahweh has been involved with Israel over the centuries in a relationship that began with his initiative. It took Yahweh into a covenant relationship with Israel, one designed to mean that “they will be a people for me, and I will be God for them” (11:20). Being a people implies having an ethnic identity, whose significance is sharpened in one direction by Ezekiel’s emphasis on Israel’s being a household, something like a large family that lives together. It is sharpened in another direction by his describing Israel as a nation, an entity with a political form that relates to other nations such as Babylon, Ammon, Tyre, and Egypt. The “my people—your God” relationship also means that Yahweh dwells among Israel. Yahweh’s sanctuary is within Israel.

Unfortunately, this household is defiant, rebellious, severe of face and tough of mind, wayward, faithless, whoring. It has defiled Yahweh’s sanctuary with its outrages and abhorrent worship practices (Ezek 8–11). As a nation it has turned to other nations for alliance and support. Its leadership is characterized by arrogance and violence. Disasters are therefore going to follow: epidemic, famine, sword, destruction, wasting, contempt, reviling. Its end as a people is approaching (7:1–6). It faces the prospect of Yahweh leaving his sanctuary (10:1–11:23). Ezekiel’s messages are thus extreme, dark, and horrifying.[[23]](#footnote-23) Yet they are not just dark, and the threat and the actuality of catastrophe portrayed can hardly be the end of the story. Yahweh will restore the covenant relationship (16:60). His promises are developed in the last third of the scroll, in terms of a covenant relationship, of a renewed people, of a renewed land, but especially of a renewed presence in a renewed sanctuary. The affirmation “I am Yahweh” does not feature in the vision of the new sanctuary, the new land, and the new city in Ezek 40–48 (as it did not in the vision and the opening chapters in Ezek 1–5), but this will be a place where supremely Yahweh is God.

The church of Jesus Christ is a reshaped version of Israel as the people of Yahweh. Its core comprises members of Israel who have come to recognize Jesus and on whom the Holy Spirit has fallen, then in keeping with Ezekiel’s emphasis on the nations coming to acknowledge Yahweh, this core is surrounded by an innumerable company from every people, nation, and language.

*What is involved in acknowledging Yahweh as God*. The aim that people may come to acknowledge Yahweh stands alongside the identity of God and the identity of Yahweh as God. Ezekiel refers to this aim over seventy times. It makes the scroll a missional work[[24]](#footnote-24) and it points ro the nature of mission. The Israelites and all the nations are destined to acknowledge Yahweh not Marduk as God (Sweeney, 15–16). The verb for “acknowledge” (יָדַע, traditionally “know”) can refer to knowing people or things in the sense of being acquainted with them, but it commonly means acknowledging them in the sense of recognizing and submitting to them, and the verb regularly has in this meaning in Ezekiel. Acknowledging that Yahweh is God implies not simply being aware of a theological fact but responding to it.

While an appropriate symbolic response to Yahweh is to fall on one’s face (1:28), that symbolic submission has to find further expression in a life lived in light of who Yahweh is and what Yahweh expects. “In the use of a range of formulae and motifs in Ezekiel we find evidence of a distinctive emphasis on the absolute centrality of YHWH and his self-manifestation, a radical theocentricity that is of an order difficult to parallel anywhere in the Hebrew Bible” (Joyce, 27).[[25]](#footnote-25) God-centeredness is then Ezekiel’s key contribution to the moral transformation of Israel.[[26]](#footnote-26) The nature of that life to which Israel is called comes into ironic concrete focus in the scroll, as Ezekiel describes the way Israel fails to acknowledge Yahweh. Ezekiel “calls on his audience to reclaim a proper sense of guilt, by lining themselves up against God’s standard.”[[27]](#footnote-27) The negatives make it possible to infer the positives. In the Torah, whose biddings Ezekiel often reflects, Yahweh has laid down rulings by which he expects Israel to live and thus to acknowledge him in its religious, societal, and political life.[[28]](#footnote-28) In its religious life, it means relating to God in light of who he is, which means (for instance) not trying to make those images of him that are only “lumps.” In its community life, it means honoring one another and not cheating one another. The third area is more prominent than it is in the Torah, that it trusts in Yahweh for its independence as a nation and does not turn to other nations for support. In all three realms, It has the responsibility and by implication the capacity to acknowledge God, a responsibility applying to Israel as a nation, as individuals, and as generations (Ezek 18).

For the church of Jesus Christ, acknowledging God means living in light of his biddings in its religious life (the way it worships and prays), its communal life (the way church people relate to one another), and its political life (how it lives in the world).

### The Origin of the Ezekiel Scroll

A memoir has the outward appearance of an autobiographical narrative, but it need not actually be that. While its subject might simply have written it, someone else might have organized it, or edited what the person wrote, or a ghost writer might have written it on the basis of material supplied by the person, or the ghostwriter might have elaborated it on the basis of such material, or a creative writer might simply have fashioned it from scratch on the basis of imagination. The Scriptures include material of all those kinds and God evidently approves in principle of all of them. There are or have been scholars holding all these understandings of the origin of the scroll and there has not been any development in a scholarly consensus over the question.[[29]](#footnote-29) Among the scholars over the past century who have seen Ezekiel as more or less the product of creative writing have been Gustav Hölscher, Charles Cutler Torrey, JoachimBecker, Udo Feist, and Karin Schöpflin (see the Selected Biography).

What happens when one compares Ezekiel with other prophetic scrolls?

* Isaiah, Hosea, and Jeremiah mix third-person stories and references with first-person stories more than Ezekiel does.
* Ezekiel is more systematically organized than other scrolls.
* Isaiah explicitly refers to people and events after the time of Isaiah ben Amoz—not predicting them but speaking of them as having happened. Ezekiel and other prophets do not.
* Jeremiah gets someone else to write down his messages from his dictation, and Isaiah may be doing the same in Isa 8:16.
* Differences between MT, some Qumran and Masada manuscripts, and LXX suggest that through the Second Temple period the text of scrolls continued to be adaptable in small ways, though the difference with Jeremiah (for instance) is greater than that with Ezekiel.
* While Hosea and Amos worked outside Judah, their messages include notes relating them to Judah that look like adaptations reflecting how their work was taken south.

In light of these models, we might comment on the origin of Ezekiel as follows.

* Many sections give the impression of going back to messages delivered in a setting such as a meeting of the Kebar community or a visit that people made to Ezekiel at home.
* The scroll is unique in being entirely in the first person (except 1:2–3), as if Ezekiel devised it. It gives the impression that Ezekiel lies behind the whole. It is unique for the rigorous orderliness of its arrangement.
* Most individual sections can stand on their own, and give the impression of having been brought into being individually, like an individual section of Isaiah or Jeremiah. In the scroll, they read like written compositions, assembled and perhaps revised on the way or reworked in small ways afterwards. The example of Jer 36 would make one expect that Ezekiel himself might have adapted his earlier messages so that they speak to a later context, perhaps after 587.
* As a priest, Ezekiel would be able to write, and might have delivered his message as written compositions, or perhaps spoke orally and produced a written version later.
* The example of Jer 36 illustrates how adaptation naturally includes the removing of specific references and names, whose lack is often a feature of Ezekiel (Odell, 145).
* Ezekiel contains no explicit references to events or people after the prophet’s lifetime, but much knowledge of and influence by the cultural context of Babylonia in the sixth century. The message is embedded in the life of a migrant community in Babylonia in a way that would be hard for a later author in another context to emulate. It manifests linguistic features suggesting a knowledge of and the influence of Akkadian[[30]](#footnote-30) and an acquaintance with Babylonian culture and iconography that are harder to fit with the idea of its being a creation from the Persian or Hellenistic period.[[31]](#footnote-31)
* Its message concerns Yahweh interacting with Israel in the Babylonian period in threatening and bringing calamity because of Israel’s religious, social, and political life, and promising to bring restoration after calamity, with the implication that the account of this involvement brings challenge and encouragement to people reading the scroll. To present teaching about God as sovereign and speaking, when actually he does not, seems dubiously paradoxical. Its ideas appeal to historical realities, and their appeal collapses. If the scroll is the product of imagination, the message deconstructs.
* While Ezekiel’s messages that are so interested in and significant for Judah and Jerusalem were eventually taken there and might have been reapplied there, unlike Hosea or Amos, Ezekiel includes no evident reapplications to readers there.
* We have noted that differences between MT, the Qumran and Masada manuscripts, and especially the shorter LXX text do suggest that through the Second Temple period the text continued to be adaptable in detailed ways.

I thus follow the prima facie impression that emerges from the memoir, that the “I” in Ezekiel is Ezekiel’s own “I,” while the “he” in 1:2–3 is a curator’s speech. This person might have been responsible for writing the scroll (like Baruch in Jer 36) or for arranging it, including points where it looks as if it combines messages from Ezekiel that were not originally together (e.g., Ezek 16). This working assumption places me at the conservative end of the spectrum of Ezekiel scholarship, within which all the above understandings of what a memoir might be are current or are logically possible.

Actually, the persistence and recurrence of different opinions about the scroll’s origin rather suggests that the task of tracing its history will never be fulfilled. C. S. Lewis once commented on the process whereby scholars formulate hypotheses concerning the origin of ancient writings and present plausible accounts of the motives and aims that lie behind them.[[32]](#footnote-32) Scholars discussing his own works often formulated hypotheses concerning his motives and aims, and they were then invariably wrong. If that is true of modern scholars’ hypotheses concerning another modern writer, it seemed questionable whether we can identify motives and aims lying behind ancient writings from another culture, in keeping with the aim of scholarly hypotheses concerning redactors’ intentions in their work on the text they received. And Ezekiel cannot answer back, but only gnash his teeth in Sheol. A further paradoxical consideration that threatens scholarly hypotheses is their frequent presupposition that redactors received a coherent text and turned it into something less coherent. “It is axiomatic with moderns that the primary creation was free of tension and ambiguity” (Greenberg, 1:218) and that editors have changed it, even though commentators’ own experience is that editors seek to turn unnecessarily complicated and puzzling material into something more straightforward.

A synchronous or holistic reading of a work such as Ezekiel could issue only in rather general theological statements,[[33]](#footnote-33) but it need not do so. And a diachronic reading can issue in dynamic theological statements, but its hypothetical nature must imply the hypothetical nature of the statements. While scholarly hypotheses can draw attention to features of the text and contribute to understanding, there are no formal or empirical criteria for determining whether they are right or what view of Ezekiel’s origin is right. Resolving that question would enhance our understanding of the scroll, but we cannot definitively resolve it. We have a scroll inviting readers to take it as Ezekiel’s words, and I picture Ezekiel as its author (allowing for a curator doing some arrangement), without basing too much on that picture. I will thus use the expression “Ezekiel says” without thinking that comments it introduces collapse if the verses in question came from a later associate rather than from him.

Likewise, Ezekiel (or an associate) will often say “Yahweh said to me,” and it is impossible to determine whether the words came into Ezekiel’s head direct from Yahweh or whether Ezekiel devised them with Yahweh working via his mental processes. The scroll simply invites people to accept these as Yahweh’s words, and the Jewish and Christian communities accepted that invitation. I will thus move between “Ezekiel says” and “Yahweh says.” “Ezekiel says” also means “Yahweh says,” and “Yahweh says” also means “Ezekiel says.” I will refer to Ezekiel’s hearers as well as his readers, aware that originally he communicated by speaking but later by writing. And I am also aware that the scroll was designed to be read out, and further that hardly a Jew or Christian would possess a copy until recent centuries, so that most people became acquainted with it by hearing it read, not by reading it for themselves. Indeed, even in the context of modernity, most acquaintance with Ezekiel comes through hearing it read, in synagogue or in church. Ezekiel has always had more hearers than readers. It has been so throughout history.

### The Text of the Scroll

Three main forms of the text of Ezekiel exist today,[[34]](#footnote-34) though the differences between them are again a little like the differences between modern translations(so the invention of the printing press didn’t make so much difference), and they thus don’t imply significant differences over the substance of the scroll. With translations, there are traditions such as KJV—ASV— NRSV, the various editions of the NIV, the Jerusalem Bible—New Jerusalem Bible, and the NJPS Bible, each of which represented a fresh start in Bible translation. With the text of the First Testament, the main traditions are the Masoretic Text, the Septuagint, and the text reconstructed by scholarly study, each of which has several sub-versions.

The standard source for the text of Ezekiel reconstructed by scholarly study is *Biblical Hebraica Stuttgartensia* or *BHS*, edited by Karl Elliger. It prints MT, but in the margin notes ways in which one should emend the text, as well as possible variants from other editions of the text and from the ancient translations. By the time this commentary is published, *BHS* Ezekiel may have been replaced by the *Biblia Hebraica Quinta* text edited by Johan Lust. In due course, a more radical version of the scholarly tradition will be the text of Ezekiel in *The* *Hebrew* *Bible*: *A* *Critical* *Edition* (originally entitled *The Oxford Hebrew Bible*). It will be an eclectic text more like editions of the Greek New Testament, not simply reproducing the Masoretic Text but seeking to construct the text underlying all available textual resources in the way that a critical commentary does, and possibly printing different ancient versions of the text in parallel.[[35]](#footnote-35)

The text in the Qumran and Masada scrolls is a thousand years older than MT, but there are only a few readable fragments of Ezekiel, manifesting only very slight differences from MT. We have some fragments older than MT from the Cairo Geniza, the storeroom at the Cairo synagogue. When *BHS*, modern translations, and commentaries refer to readings in other Hebrew manuscripts, these are mostly manuscripts later than MT that are likely to have come into being after MT and are unlikely very often to be preserving readings older than MT.

Our oldest copies of the complete Hebrew text of Ezekiel, then, are in the copies of the Masoretic Text, from between about AD 900 and 1100, of which the most complete or most famous, mostly made in Tiberias but named after where they were long kept, are the Aleppo Codex, MT A, the Leningrad Codex, MT L, the Cairo Codex, MT C, and the Reuchlin Codex, MTR. MT A is in print in *HUB*, MT L in *BHS*, and the texts are also available online. They issued from the work of Jewish scholars who had been guarding the traditional consonantal text, its vocalization, and the notes preserving other aspects of its interpretation through the centuries following the temple destruction in AD 70. This preserving could include two versions of particular words in the text, the text as written, the Ketivor K, and the text as read out, the Qere or Q. With K and Q, similar considerations apply to some of those implied by differences between MT and LXX. For instance, Q may sometimes simply be clarifying spelling, notably where Q explicitly has pl. and K might be sg. (e.g., 3:20; 18:21, 24; 31:5; 33:13, 16; 37:16). Or Q may be correcting or clarifying a difficult K reading (e.g., 1:8; 3:15).

“Tradition” is *masora* (מׇסֹרׇה), and it is hence that these scholars were the Masoretes. They also preserved the traditional division of the text by paragraph markers (a setumah)\* and chapter markers (a petuhah).\* The different copies of MT often differ over these, as they do not differ over the text itself, and the textual notes in this commentary thus usually refers to them simply as “markers.” These markers indicate something of the way MT interprets the text, and they offer a useful check on the chapter divisions in printed Bibles which were added to the text only in the late medieval period.[[36]](#footnote-36)

The fragments of Ezekiel from the Qumran Scrolls are:

1QEzek: 4:16–5:1

3QEzek: 16:31–33

4QEzeka: 10:6–16, 10:17–11:11; 23:14–15, 17–18, 44–47; 41:3–6

4QEzekb: 1:10–13, 16–17, 19, 20–24

4QEzekc: 24:2–3

11QEzek: 1:8–10; 4:3–5, 6, 9–10; 5:11–17; 7:9–12[[37]](#footnote-37)

Examples of differences in the Qumran texts from MT are:

* In 1:10 MT has m. לְאַרְבַּעְתׇּם “the four of them” in 1:10a, then f. לְאַרְבַּעְתׇּן in 1:10b. 4QEzekb has m. לארבעתם in 1:10b.
* In 1:22, MT has וּדְמוּת “and a form,” 4QEzekb has ודמותם “and their form.”
* In 5:15, 4QEzekb lacks the ו “and” in וּבְתֹכְחוֹת “and in chastisements.”
* In 10:8, MT has יַד “hand of,” 4QEzekb has ידי “hands of.”
* In 10:21, MT has m. וְאַרְבַּע “and four” following two f. forms, אַרְבׇּעׇה. 4QEzekb has f. וארבעה.
* In 23:44, for וַיָּבוֹא “so someone went in,” 4QEzeka has pl. ויבאו “so they went in,” which LXX, Vg. also imply.
* In41:5, for סׇביב סׇביב, “all round,” 4QEzeka has simply סביב, “around.”

The text of the fragments of Ezekiel from Masada comes from Ezek 34. It also resembles the text in MT rather than that in LXX.[[38]](#footnote-38)

Much older than the copies of MT, we have a copy of a translation of most of Ezekiel into Greek from about AD 200, in Chester Beatty Papyrus 967,[[39]](#footnote-39) and complete manuscripts of the Septuagint from the fourth or fifth century AD, the Vatican Codex and the Alexandrian Codex. Thus the LXX has its own history, extending back into P 967 before the text represented by the Vatican and Alexandrian manuscripts, and continuing after it in the Lucianic text.[[40]](#footnote-40) In principle one may seek to reconstruct from MT and LXX a version of the Hebrew text that is older than either.[[41]](#footnote-41) While views differ over whether P 967 may evidence an older version of Ezekiel than that in MT, which will carry implications for this project, there is no evidence of P 967 before the common era or in the first century, the Qumran and Masada manuscripts are similar to MT in their text and sequence, and a Qumran text called Pseudo-Ezekiel carries the same implication.[[42]](#footnote-42) The textual notes in this commentary draw attention to differences between MT and LXX, from which one might guess where LXX has lost something or MT has added something, but LXX is also interesting for the way it indicates how Jews in its context interpreted the text and were led to bring home its significance for people.

Further insight on the way Jews and Christians interpreted the Scriptures issues from the other old translations, notably the Latin Vulgate (Vg.), the Syriac or Peshiṭta (Syr.),[[43]](#footnote-43) and surviving fragments of the other Greek translations bearing the names of Aquila, Symmachus, and Theodotion (Aq., Sym., and Theod.). The Vulgate and the other Greek translations generally correspond more to MT than LXX does, while Syr. generally corresponds to LXX, but they may occasionally put us on the track of different forms of the text. The approach to translation in the Aramaic paraphrase in the Targum is more like *The Message*[[44]](#footnote-44) than other modern versions, but it also reveals ways in which Jews in its context were understanding the text.

It is quite possible and valid to write a commentary on the text implied by any of the three traditions, the text reconstructed by scholarly study (see Zimmerli and Allen), LXX (see Olley and Lilly), or MT (see Greenberg and Ganzel). In this commentary I work with MT, except where I think it may have suffered accidental alteration. This policy is more conservative than that assumed by translations such as NRSV and NIV, and the textual notes in the commentary mention where they presuppose a text differing from MT. I am influenced by the consideration that differences between scholarly opinions about the scriptural text parallel differences about the development of the scroll. They suggest that we cannot with conviction revise MT so as to reach an earlier text corresponding closer to Ezekiel’s. Changes we make may sometimes be right but sometimes be wrong, so that the end result is no nearer Ezekiel then MT. I am also happy to focus on MT as the traditional Jewish text of the Scriptures[[45]](#footnote-45) and to operate with what might look like “Masoretic fundamentalism,”[[46]](#footnote-46) on the assumption that an MT-type text is one that the Holy Spirit was happy with. And I am happy to follow the traditional Hebrew text because it is expressed in the language of Ezekiel and his curators and is not a translation. It is a converse to the view now held among Septuagint scholars, that LXX should be considered and interpreted as a work in its own right and not simply quarried for help with the Hebrew text (see Olley).

### The Poetry, the Prose, and the Translation

The bulk of Ezekiel is prose, which distinguishes this scroll from the other prophets. Perhaps Ezekiel spoke more in prose than other prophets did, or perhaps he spoke in poetry but put his messages into prose when writing his memoir.[[47]](#footnote-47)

In Hebrew the distinction between prose and poetry can be fuzzy. Prose can be poetic and poetry can be prosaic, and translations vary over how much of Ezekiel they print as poetry. Hebrew poetry has three classic formal markers. Its sentences are generally short, comprising four to eight words, though a poet can cheat by hyphenating words, and sometimes one line can flow into the next by enjambment (e.g., 7:11–12, 16). Second, the lines are generally bicola,\* with not more than four words in each colon.\* Third, the second half restates, contrasts with, or completes the first half, with a verb or some other element in the first colon sometimes also applying in the second (e.g., 7:4b, 21). The poetry may make use of anaphora\* (e.g., 7:2, 5, 6–7), sometimes a tricolon\* may open or close a section (e.g., 7:4b, 21, 23), and sometimes a long or short colon may add emphasis (e.g., 7:8; 17:9; 22:3; 25:7; 27:34) or may signal closure (7:9). On the basis of the presence of rhythm and parallelism,\* I maximize the extent to which I lay out the messages as poetry.

Poetry’s nature is also to be succinct and to make less use of the little words that facilitate communication in prose (the object marker, the relative, and even prepositions). This helps poetry be dense and it drives listeners to be more attentive and to think hard if they want to understand. It can also make the poetry elliptical,\* a factor that prompts editors to emend the text to make it more straightforward. Denseness and challenge also issue from poetry’s use of imagery, though Ezekiel’s poetic language is not very different from his prose, and his prose is also colorful in its use of imagery, simile, metaphor, parable,\* and allegory.\* The creativity and vividness of Ezekiel’s use of imagery, metaphor and simile, go along with his insistence on the illegitimacy of material images.[[48]](#footnote-48)

Ezekiel’s prose has a number of distinctive features that English translations may ignore, and I do not usually comment on them, but some make a difference to translation. The most significant relate to variations from the basic form a Hebrew sentence. A typical Hebrew sentence runs:

וַתִּשָּׂ֣א אֹתִ֣י ר֣וּחַ בֵּֽין־הָאָ֣רֶץ וּבֵֽין־הַשָּׁמַ֡יִם

And a spirit lifted me between the earth and the heavens. (8:3)

Such a sentence’s standard features are to link onto the previous sentence, to begin with the verb, and then to come to the subject and object (in this case the object and subject, with an adverbial expression following). But one common variation is to place the subject or object before the verb and thus give it emphasis (GK 142):

Then, while I prophesied, Pelatyahu ben Benayahu—he died. (11:13)

The person who offends—he is the one who will die. (18:4)

It is also quite common for a sentence to be asyndetic,\* not linking onto to the preceding sentence. This has a slightly jerky effect. The translation commonly marks this asyndeton by a dash:

What you find, eat—eat this scroll (3:1)

Say, I am your portent—as I did, so it will be done for them (12:11)

Much less commonly, a sentence can combine asyndeton with placing the subject or object before the verb. That usage suggests a circumstantial or other subordinate clause, which may then follow or precede a main clause (GK 156; *TTH* 156–69, especially 163, Observation). This usage is common in Ezekiel. It is a noteworthy feature of his Hebrew, and it can make a difference to the text’s meaning. The translation in this commentary includes many examples of clauses beginning with expressions such as “in that” or “as,” or translated with a hanging participle. These translations usually represent asyndetic clauses of this kind whose verboccurs later in the Hebrew clause than one expects.

No longer will any message of mine delay, in that I will speak a message and it will happen (12:28)

In that you have acted more outrageously than them, they are more faithful than you (16:52)

Occasionally, that word order may suggest subordination even where the sequence is not asyndetic (e.g., 37:22). Conversely, asyndesis may suggest subordination even where a clause has the regular word order (e.g., 11:7; 20:47). And passages such as 36:15 have an unexpected word order so as to generate an abb′a′ sequence, a pattern that is more poetic than prosaic. Actually, in general asyndesis is more common in Hebrew poetry than in prose. Indeed, the line between prose and poetry can be hard to draw, not least in Ezekiel. So distinctive features of Ezekiel’s prose may reflect the overlap between prose and poetic expression in the scroll.

Ezekiel uses other expressions that can seem puzzling but that he has in common with other First Testament writings, and yet others that occur elsewhere but are more noticeable in Ezekiel. Further, if Classical Biblical Hebrew can be distinguished from Late Biblical Hebrew,[[49]](#footnote-49) in his time the language is changing, and he stands between the two.[[50]](#footnote-50) So his forms of expression may just be regular Hebrew, or may be aspects of his distinctive form of Hebrew, or may reflect the context in which he lives, or may show the influence of Aramaic. Here are examples:

* He can use *weqatal*\* in narrative instead of *wayyiqtol*.\* While some examples may indicate that the verb has frequentative significance, some occur where one would expect a *wayyiqtol*. E.g., 37:2, 7, 8, 10; 40:24, 35 (see GK 112).
* A *waw-*consecutive *weqatal* may carry the connotations of a purpose clause.\* The translation renders these as simply future statements, to mark the form that is featuring. E.g., 2:4; 11:20; 37:17 (see GK 112).
* A volitional or non-finite verb (imperative, infinitive, participle) can be followed by a *waw*-consecutive or other finite verb that continues the sense of the preceding volitional or non-finite verb. E.g., 3:11; 22:3; 37:19, 21 (see GK 112–14).
* A *qatal\** can refer to an event that is future but is so certain it can be spoken of as if it has already happened, or to something that the speaker intends to make happen, so that the expression is performative. I translate such *qatals* with present continuous verbs. E.g., 3:17, 25; 12:6, 23; 14:4 (see GK 106).
* Ezekiel can open the beginning of sections with וַיְהִי, translated “then,” but literally meaning “and it happened,” especially to introduce extraposed\* statements. E.g., 1:1 (where the translation is “now”); 3:16; 8:1.
* The rhetorical interrogatives הֲ and הֲלֹא, “did?” and “didn’t?” can introduce something that is more a statement than a question, like their English equivalents, and they hardly require a question mark. E.g., 8:6, 12, 15, 17.
* Something similar applies to ironic נָא (traditionally “please”), translated “will you.” E.g., 8:5, 8.
* Ezekiel commonly prefaces quotations of someone’s words with לֵאמֹר, “[in] saying,” which functions like quotation marks in English. The translation marks the expression by the use of a colon. E.g., 3:16; 12:1; 13:1.
* Ezekiel uses עַל (strictly “on” or “against”) and אֶל (“to”) with similar meaning to signify “to” or “on.” The translation preserves the difference where possible. E.g., 1:9, 12, 17.
* He uses the relative particle אֲשֶׁר to introduce a word or phrase, not only a relative clause. The translation commonly marks this with a comma. E.g., 6:7, 8, 14, 15.
* He switches without announcement between second and third person, between speaking to people and speaking about them. E.g., in 5:14–15; 6:11–13 he is rhetorically addressing Jerusalem because the message concerns it, but he also speaking about it because he is directly addressing the Kebarites.
* He similarly switches between using “I” of Yahweh because he speaks Yahweh’s words and using “he” of Yahweh because it is he who is speaking, about Yahweh.
* He can use varying forms of words, such as variant forms of verbs. E.g., 14:6; 18:30; 37:16; 38:7.
* He can juxtapose verbs with their related nouns. E.g., the expression “defiant people who have defied me,” 2:3.
* In keeping with regular Hebrew convention, he uses masculine singular to refer to individuals who might be male or female, and in keeping with the policy of this commentary series, this volume does the same with English he/him.
* On the other hand, Hebrew distinguishes between “you” singular and plural and between “you” masculine and feminine, and the translation sometimes adds expressions in square brackets to clarify which it is. E.g., “[Jerusalem]” when “you” is feminine singular.
* An infinitive absolute can precede (or follow) the finite form of the same verb to emphasize the actuality of the event or action. E.g., 1:3, 12; 3:16, 18, 21 (see GK 113).
* Yahweh can use the convention of saying “if” or “if I do not” to introduce a clause that makes one expect an apodosis\* stating what will follow or of the way one would punish oneself for failing to act, but that lets what will follow remain unstated. E.g., 5:11; 16:48; 17:16, 19.
* A participle can refer to an event that is going to happen rather than happening now, as when one says in English “I’m coming” when one has not yet set out. E.g., 37:19, 21; 39:17 (GK 116).
* Where English would use an expression such as “three on each side,” Ezekiel uses a repetition such as “three on a side and three on a side.” E.g., 1:23; 5:6; 40:10, 12.

### Ezekiel over the Millennia

The study of Ezekiel takes place in historical and social contexts, and different contexts allow some aspects of any work to emerge more clearly or less clearly. As times go by, scholarly approaches to Ezekiel thus change. We should perhaps not think of them as advancing, in the sense of growing significantly in insight. New theories are not necessarily more reliable than earlier theories, and one can be sure that more recent theories will be out of date shortly. Ezekiel in particular has been studied more unevenly over the centuries than Isaiah and Jeremiah, but it has continued to raise intriguing issues and offer insight.[[51]](#footnote-51) And it has caught up more with other prophetic scrolls over recent decades, perhaps partly because some of it happens to resonate with themes on which we will comment here, as well as because scholarly research needs to find topics to study. We here note a number of approaches to Ezekiel that have flourished over the millennia, without implying that they have flourished one by one, or that a particular scholar will work with only one approach.

* In the section on the scroll’s text, we have noted that Second Temple Judaism somehow came to include Ezekiel in its Scriptures, that the Qumran community and the Masada community had copies, and the Qumran community also generated works that built on Ezekiel.[[52]](#footnote-52) Within subsequent Judaism, a main focus of the study of Ezekiel has been the vision in Ezek 1, and a main significance of Ezekiel has been the related development of Kabbalah[[53]](#footnote-53) and Hasidism (Sweeney, 21).[[54]](#footnote-54)
* As an aspect of Ezekiel’s being the least-remembered of the prophets,[[55]](#footnote-55) Ezekiel is not quoted in the New Testament, though the scroll’s imagery and thinking is influential on John in Revelation. Indeed, John has been called a new Ezekiel.[[56]](#footnote-56) Ezekiel also finds echoes in John’s Gospel.[[57]](#footnote-57) Within Christian faith, a main ongoing focus has been the conviction that the coming of the Holy Spirit brought the fulfilment of the vision in Ezek 37:1–14, and this passage has a prominent place in Christian reading of the Scriptures at Pentecost. Other passages that feature in church lectionaries are:

2:1–5 (commonly alongside Mark 6:1–13; 2 Cor 12:2–10)

17:22–24 (commonly alongside Mark 4:26–34; 2 Cor 5:6–17)

18:1–4, 25–32 (commonly alongside Matt 21:23–32; Phil 2:1–13)

20:1–8, 33–44 (commonly alongside Mark 8:27–38; Acts 20:17–38)

33:7–11 (commonly alongside Matt 18:15–20; Rom 13:8–14)

34:11–16, 20–24 (commonly alongside Matt 25:31–46; Eph 1:15–23)

* The land is a key theme in Ezekiel[[58]](#footnote-58) and in some circles within Judaism and Christian faith, especially since the late nineteenth century, particular significance has attached to Ezekiel’s messages concerning Israel’s return to the land, concerning Gog and Magog, and concerning the building of a new temple.[[59]](#footnote-59) Other circles have been intrigued by the possibility that Ezekiel might have seen a spaceship.[[60]](#footnote-60)
* The background to scholarly focus on tracing the development of the Ezekiel scroll is the development of historical criticism in the nineteenth century. While the scroll could only benefit from a more rigorously historical approach than had been built into the premodern era, the stress on history in the context of modernity (“history is God nowadays”)[[61]](#footnote-61) risked the scroll’s inherent significance getting lost through a focus on the history lying behind the scroll as we have it. The world of scholarship has subsequently been engaged in an unresolved debate between diachronic and synchronic approaches to Ezekiel.[[62]](#footnote-62) The question of the relationship between Ezekiel and the Torah overlaps with this topic, being capable of being open both to a historical focus and to a substantial one.
* Although the scroll tells readers little about Ezekiel’s personality or character, so that he has been called a prophet without characteristics,[[63]](#footnote-63) his revelations do give the impression that he might be rather an exotic prophet, and the development of psychology in the twentieth century has encouraged efforts to understand him in light of various possible theories about his psychology. His “dread and loathing of female sexuality,” for instance, might convey to us “the pain of his elemental human wounds.”[[64]](#footnote-64) While psychology has thus been an aid in understanding Ezekiel as someone malformed or sick, it has also been suggestive in connection with a more sympathetic understanding.[[65]](#footnote-65)
* Late-twentieth century emphasis in wider Western culture on theodicy has contributed to the shaping of the agenda for Ezekiel as for other works. A premodern context was inclined to assume that humanity’s problem was anthropodicy rather than theodicy, the justification of human beings rather than the justification of God, and humanity’s obligation was to “acknowledge Yahweh.” The justifying of God’s action or non-action in the world now became an important question, which can be asked of an event such as the fall of Jerusalem in 587. Ezekiel has been called “fundamentally a book of theodicy” that attempts to explain the disaster of 587 as the righteous action of God.[[66]](#footnote-66) And if one asks that question about 587, then Ezekiel provides the same firm answer as 2 Kings or Jeremiah. “His primary concern was not to call the people of Jerusalem to repentance but to expound in various ways upon the justice of YHWH *to the exiles*.”[[67]](#footnote-67)
* Coping with trauma is a related question that has gained traction in biblical studies. Bowen (xv–xix) begins her commentary by discussing “Ezekiel and Trauma.”[[68]](#footnote-68) Ezekiel and his contemporaries went through a sequence of traumatic experiences in the first decade or two of the sixth century, and in a sense Yahweh did, too.[[69]](#footnote-69) Lamentations is a witness to the people’s trauma, which it sees as the intended result of Yahweh’s action. It is a plausible hypothesis that writing and reading the first half of the Ezekiel scroll would cause people to relive the trauma of living with the aftermath of 597 (Bowen, 150). Yahweh’s promises could then have the effect of applying a balm to trauma. Ezekiel is then “making sense of the past, imagining the future.”[[70]](#footnote-70) Admittedly, it has been said that the trauma plot has become prominent in modern literature because in a modern context the notion of trauma has become “all-engulfing” through the prevalence of war, sexual violence, racism, and other horrific experiences.[[71]](#footnote-71)
* Sexual violence is a motif in Ezekiel, and feminist biblical study has paid particular attention to Ezek 16 and 23. Ezekiel has been seen as having a “negative view of women.”[[72]](#footnote-72)
* The postcolonial and continuing colonial experience of human communities overlaps with that of Israel through much of its history, especially with the experience of Judahites in Babylonia and in Judah in Ezekiel’s time,[[73]](#footnote-73) while postcolonial insights have also been a basis for critiquing Ezekiel itself.[[74]](#footnote-74) Related are broader sociological approaches to Ezekiel and questions such as the possible difference between living in an imperial center such as Babylon or a rural and agricultural context, as most Judahites in Babylonia likely did.[[75]](#footnote-75)
* In turn, forced migration is a related focus in the study of Ezekiel,[[76]](#footnote-76) and also a focus that relates to the question of trauma.[[77]](#footnote-77) Ezekiel’s community are not people in power but refugees.[[78]](#footnote-78) Not surprisingly, Ezekiel shows a “visceral” interest in the land that makes for a contrast with Jeremiah.[[79]](#footnote-79)
* Concern about humanity’s devastation of the earth raises concern over Ezekiel’s portrayal of Yahweh’s devastation of the earth, though it also points up Ezekiel’s appreciation for the created world. In Ezekiel, “for the most part, Earth is the passive object of horrifying maltreatment.… largely meted out by God in the process of punishing human misdeeds.” And “while Earth is sometimes animated, it never speaks up for itself.”[[80]](#footnote-80) It exists for humanity’s sake.[[81]](#footnote-81) But Ezekiel does interweave talk of a positive transformation and blessing of created reality with his talk of a restoration and blessing of his people.[[82]](#footnote-82)

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## Part One: Yahweh’s Messages to Ezekiel, Year Five (1:1–7:27)

Part One of the Ezekiel Scroll comprises Ezekiel’s account of Yahweh’s commissioning him as a prophet and giving him his initial messages, which focus on warnings of the upcoming fall of Jerusalem and devastation of the country of Israel. The same will be true about Parts Two and Three of the scroll, though there will be more focus there on the reasons for the coming catastrophe, increasing starkness in the portrayal of Israel’s prospects, but also notes of promise as well as threat. The arrangement of Ezek 1–23 thus combines the chronological and the thematic, and the dates in Ezek 1, 8, and 20 link with the theme. They may carry no implication concerning the precise date of the material within each part, except that it relates to that upcoming catastrophe. In other words, Ezek 6 and 7, for instance, might not come from year five but might appear here because they fit the plot of Ezek 1–23.

The first segment (1:1–3:15) relates a vision that leads into the giving of a message:

A summary of the vision (1:1)

A third-person summary of the giving of the message (1:2–3)

An account of the vision (1:4–18bα)

An account of the giving of the message (1:18bβ–3:15)

The middle segment (3:16–5:4) gives precision to the charge Yahweh is giving Ezekiel:

An account of a commission to be a lookout (3:16–27)

An account of actions he is to take (4:1–5:4)

The third segment (5:5–7:27) is a sequence of reports of messages Yahweh gives Ezekiel, which in the context explain the significance of the actions he bade Ezekiel undertake:

A message addressed to Jerusalem (5:5–17)

A message addressed to the mountains of Israel (6:1–14)

A message addressed to the land of Israel (7:1–27)

Each of these units has a formal beginning (5:5; 6:1; 7:1) and a formal ending (5:17bβ; 6:14b; 7:27bβ). They are separable, though similar in content, in announcing the actions Yahweh intends to take in his fury, by sword, famine, and epidemic, indicating the rationale for these actions in the outrages Israel has committed, and stating the aim that Israel should thereby acknowledge Yahweh.

The three segments lead into one another, as 3:12–15 leads into 3:16–21 and 5:1–4 leads into 5:5–17. A continuous narrative account of Yahweh’s dealings with Ezekiel thus runs through 1:1–5:17, without sharp breaks. In a broader sense there is a narrative plot about Ezek 1–7 as a whole:

* How Yahweh appeared to me in a storm wind (1:1–28bα)
* Why did he do that? Because he was appointing me to give warnings to Israel as a rebellious household (1:28bβ–3:15)
* How was I to go about this work? By acting out signs of what threatened Jerusalem (4:1–5:4)
* What did the signs signify for the city? Cataclysmic disaster for its rebellion (5:5–17)
* What about the country more broadly? It will also experience disaster for its faithlessness (6:1–14)
* How grim will it be? It will be the end of the city and the country for their waywardness (7:1–27)

Adding to the difference between MT and the medieval chapter system, commentaries differ about how to divide up the text. The divisions between the segments are not watertight. One chapter may raise an issue that a succeeding chapter will come back to. While I picture Ezekiel as the author of the whole, this is not to imply that the segments are his transcript of events as they happened. They form a literary and rhetorical construction in which one chapter may raise questions or open up issues that are taken up and taken further later. Part One is a work of creative imagination in which Ezekiel reconstructs how things happened at the beginning and puts into writing the messages Yahweh then gave him, and builds the whole into a coherent narrative and sequence. The whole is designed to communicate, as a continuous piece of work that someone might read. Any individual section within it makes sense on its own, but the whole is greater than the parts.

## Preface (1:1–3)

### Outline

A book’s preface may incorporate something from the editor and something from the author, and that is true of the Ezekiel scroll, though this preface is the introduction to Part One of the scroll rather than the whole work. First Ezekiel introduces his vision (1:1). Then his editor introduces how his message came from Yahweh (1:2–3).

The twofold preface fulfills a twofold function. Ezekiel’s own summary introduction to the vision that will follow compares with Isaiah’s introduction to his vision of Yahweh enthroned (Isa 6:1). The following summary introduction to the commission, the only third-person passage in the scroll, was apparently provided by a curator. It compares with the third-person introduction to the Isaiah scroll (Isa 1:1), and more closely with the introductions to the Jeremiah scroll (Jer 1:1–3) and to most of the Twelve Prophets. It provides a clearer chronological framework than Ezekiel’s own introduction, some personal background, and the geographical context. The curator evidently had information about the date in relation to the deportation of 597, about Ezekiel’s father, and about his priestly status. The description of how Yahweh’s message came to Ezekiel and how Yahweh’s hand came on him could derive from material in the scroll.

In combination with Ezekiel’s own introduction in 1:1, this sole personal appearance by Ezekiel’s curator makes it possible for the opening three verses to function like a headline for the scroll’s first three chapters. They tell readers in outline what to expect in 1:1–3:15 and encourage them to read on to discover the content of these visions and the nature of the message from Yahweh.

### Translation

1Now, in the thirtieth year, in the fourth [month], on the fifth of the month, when I was among the exile community at the Kebar Waterway, the heavens opened and I saw a divine vision. 2On the fifth of the month (i.e., the fifth year of King Jehoiachin’s exile), 3Yahweh’s message indeed came to Ezekiel ben Buzi, the priest, in the country of Chaldea,[[83]](#footnote-83) at the Kebar Waterway. Yahweh’s hand came on him there.

### Textual Notes

**1:3** For עָלָיו, LXX implies עָלָי “on me.” 1:3b then becomes the introduction to 1:4–28bα.

### Verse-by-Verse Commentary

**1:1** In starting with a reference to himself, Ezekiel is unusual.[[84]](#footnote-84) In referring to the thirtieth year, Ezekiel might be counting from Hilkiah’s discovery of the Torah book (2 Kgs 22:8) (so Tg.), or from the jubilee (Rashi, in MG), or from the beginning of his own life. If he were still in Jerusalem, it would then be when he might have been ordained, according to the canons in Num 4:3 (but contrast Num 8:24; Ezra 3:8). It would also anticipate Jesus (Origen [Homily 1:4], 28–29). It might the thirtieth year after the fall of Jerusalem in 597, the usual starting point for dates in Ezekiel, and then be the date of his visions of restoration[[85]](#footnote-85) or of the completion of the scroll (Joyce, 66). It could then mediate between the forty years of 4:6 and the seventy years of Jer 25:11–12 (Pohlmann*,* 1:48). The fourth month would be June/July. More precisely, the date has been calculated to be July 31, 593 (Allen, 1:23).

The Kebar Waterway (see further 3:15, 23; 10:15, 20, 22; 43:3) was part of the Babylonian irrigation and transport system. A century after Ezekiel’s time, it features in an archive related to the business of the Murashu family that was found in its house in Nippur, east of Babylon itself.[[86]](#footnote-86) So the waterway was presumably near Nippur. Apparently Ezekiel and his family lived with a group of Judahites by the Kebar (cf. 3:15) in what might have been rather like a refugee camp.[[87]](#footnote-87)

Not all the Judahites in Babylonia would be living there. People of more significance for the empire, such as people who had been involved in the Jerusalem administration, might be in Babylon, Farmers would be in a location such as Kebar, though it may then be puzzling that Buzi’s priestly family was there.[[88]](#footnote-88) Psa 137:1 speaks of proximity to Babylonian waterways more generally. Judahites might gather in such locations for worship (cf. Acts 16:13) so as to have access to water for purification rituals. John the baptizer, Jesus, and his disciples will likewise preach by the Jordan and thus be able to baptize there ( e.g., John 3:22–23, 26; 4:1–2). The location seems to have no significance as a place for a visionary experience. Ezekiel’s next vision happens in his house (8:1–3; and see 43:3). He gives no hint of whether this vision was expected or a surprise.

“The heavens opened” (נִפְתְּחוּ שׇׁמַיִם) points to the objective reality of the event and (in due course) to the reality of God’s presence the other side of the heavens, the location from where God’s entourage came. The heavens, in other words, means the sky God created (Gen 1:1) rather than the place where God lives.[[89]](#footnote-89) It’s not explicit that Ezekiel sees anything of what lies beyond the heavens. Their opening is more the means whereby Yahweh’s entourage is able to come into the world. The implication is thus different from the heavens’ opening in connection with Stephen’s martyrdom, where Stephen sees into the realm beyond the sky, as John also does (Acts 7:56; Rev 4:1). The heavens may look like a firmament (KJV), a רָקִיַע (Gen 1:6), but they are not rigid. God can open them.[[90]](#footnote-90) Elsewhere, the opening of the heavens leads in to something happening on earth (Isa 63:19; Mark 1:10; Rev 19:11), which would be the implication here, though Ezekiel actually sees something coming from the north rather than from the heavens.

“Vision”(מַרְאוֺת) is plural, suggesting the complex, multiform nature of what Ezekiel sees (GK 124). LXX, Vg. have Ezekiel seeing “visions of God,” which implies seeing God, but Ezek 1 is not really a vision of God, and the phrase does not imply a vision of God in 8:3; 40:2. Ezekiel does not use the usual word for a vision (חָזוֺן). The form מַרְאֶה, “appearance,” subsequentlyrecurs through the chapter. Both מַרְאָה and מַרְאֶה likely refer to what Ezekiel sees (a sight, an appearance, a revelation) rather than the process of seeing. The word in 1:1 thus affirms that the vision was divinely-given. But it is only the first of many ambiguous or allusive expressions in the chapter, and at the end we might look back and say, “it was in a way a vision of God” or “an appearance of God.”

**1:2** There follows a transition to a third-person account of a message coming to Ezekiel, which he himself will recount in 2:1–3:12. The provision of a date for a message coming compares with Jer 1:1–2; Hag 1:1; Zech 1:1. These three prophets also sometimes give dates for subsequent messages, like Ezekiel. As in their case, the date may have significance beyond simply fixing the event chronologically. Jeremiah’s clash with Hananiah and a visit by Zedekiah to Babylon happened at about this time (Jer 28:1; 51:59). It wouldn’t be surprising if hopes for a speedy return home were high among some of the displaced Judahites (cf. Jer 29), especially if they knew they were the good figs (see Jer 24), and even if some were weeping by the waterways (Psa 137). For Ezekiel, with some parallel to the experience of Stephen and John, perhaps the heavens open partly “that he might not feel the pains of the captivity. Below he sees troubles, but above, when he lifts up his eyes, he takes in ‘the heavens opened’” (Origen [Homily 3:1], 17). The date with its reference to Jehoiachin also arouses wondering about the relationship between Jehoiachin in Babylon and Zedekiah in Jerusalem. Ezek 17:12 refers to Jehoiachin as king and 7:27 to Zedekiah as king. Ezekiel, like Jeremiah, however, might be prepared to declare “a plague o’ both your houses.”[[91]](#footnote-91)

**1:3** “Yahweh’s message indeed came to Ezekiel” is a variant on a standard expression in Ezekiel (e.g., 3:16; 6:1; 7:1; 11:14) and Jeremiah (1:4, 11, 13; 2:1)*. “*Message” is דָּבַר, the ordinary term for “word.” Its use in this broader sense will be picked up in (e.g.) John 1:1, 14; 8:31; Acts 2:41; 4:31. While the First Testament sometimes describes Yahweh coming to prophets and speaking to them in a person-to-person way, more often it gives the impression of a message coming into their heads. The emphatic expression “indeedcame”(הׇיֹה הׇיׇה, more literally, “in happening happened”) draws readers’ attention to the really important event in the chapters that will follow, which is not the vision in Ezek 1 but the message it introduces. The message’s importance is underlined further by the formulation “Yahweh’shandcameonhimthere”(again, literally, “happened on him,” וַתְּהִי עׇליו), which also increases the emphasis on the objective actuality of the event. It additionally points forcibly to the way the vision affected Ezekiel. Even if the coming of the message was not a person-to-person event, God’s conveying it was a perceptible reality in his body.[[92]](#footnote-92) Yahweh’s hand is often the means by which he acts and makes his presence felt or takes hold of Ezekiel in connection with speaking and revealing things (3:14, 22; 8:1; 33:22; 37:1; 40:1).

Grammatically, the text could be describing either Ezekiel or Buzi, his father, as a priest, and the word would apply to both if it applied to one. But in itself Ezekiel’s father’s position is irrelevant here, whereas Ezekiel’s priestly position will be significant throughout the scroll in shaping its concerns and its way of seeing and describing things. Jeremiah also came from a priestly family, in Anatot, but Ezekiel’s involvement as a young man with the Jerusalem temple is more formative for his message than Jeremiah’s priestly background. Chaldeareceived its name from a people in Southern Babylonia who gained control in Babylon. The Judahites being back in Chaldea is a sad irony, given that their ancestors originally came from there (Gen 11:27–31).

### Biblical Theology Comments

Although Yahweh is most at home in Canaan, there is nothing surprising about his showing the capacity to reveal things and speak in a foreign land. He has spoken and acted in Mesopotamia before, as he has in Egypt and in the region between Egypt and Canaan. But it might have been a question in Ezekiel’s mind whether he would wish to reveal himself or speak here, at the moment. The Judahites are in this alien country because they had lived in impiety in Yahweh’s country and Yahweh has thrown them out from there. It might seem that he would not wish to relate to them here. His appearing to Ezekiel suggests it is not so. Yahweh is God all over the world and he can appear wherever he wishes. Perhaps it is not so surprising that he now appears “inthecountryofChaldea, attheKebarWaterway,” given that he first related to the Israelites’ ancestors in Chaldea. Perhaps Yahweh could start again here, and there could be a new beginning.

The same possibility might emerge from the fact that the First Testament’s one previous reference to מַרְאוֺת, “a vision” (pl.) occurs when Jacob is on his way out of the promised land (Gen 46:2) and leads into a promise that Jacob need not fear going to live in a foreign country, because Yahweh would be with him there, would make of him a great nation (the same promise Yahweh made to Abraham: see Gen 12:2) and would then bring him back. On the other hand, in Ezekiel we will discover that there are big obstacles in the way before Yahweh can start again, and such a positive message is not what is harbingered by the sight that Ezekiel sees. The parallel with Jacob does fit the significance of the vision that will follow, not as a supernatural experience in its own right but as the setting for a message from Yahweh. The same applies to other references to a “vision” using this same rare word מַרְאׇה (sg.), in Num 12:6; 1 Sam 3:15. Thus the transition from Ezekiel’s own talk of his vision in 1:1 to his curator’s talk of Yahweh’s message in 1:3 is natural.

Ezekiel would recognize the truth in Solomon’s declaration that “the heavens and the most heavenly heavens cannot contain God” (1 Kgs 8:27). While “in the theological tradition, heaven is the part of creation that the Creator has made as his own place within his creation”(Jenson, 33), it is unlikely that First Testament theologians thought of God as living in a physical location above the sky dome, any more than Stephen or John did. They knew that God is not a physical being and they more likely thought of him as dwelling in another realm or dimension. It would be one reason why he could be present anywhere in the physical realm. He lives in a different dimension to which humanity does not have regular access, but the heavens opening symbolizes the possibility of movement between the two realms when God wills it.

### Application and Devotional Implications

This preface to Ezekiel in parallels the prefaces to other prophetic scrolls in reminding readers of two sorts of fact that they need to keep in mind in reading it. The contents of the scroll are chronologically and geographically rooted in the person of a specific Judahite whose human distinctiveness will be clear in what follows. They also have an origin in Yahweh to which subsequent generations of Israelites need to pay attention, as is confirmed by the New Testament’s treating the collection of writings to which Ezekiel belongs as “God-breathed” and profitable for shaping the lives of people who trust in Jesus (2 Tim 3:16–17). “Yahweh’s message indeed came to Ezekiel ben Buzi.” It was aided rather than hindered by who Ezekiel was—a priest in a foreign country living among people who could be depressed and cynical. The importance of the Ezekiel scroll for the church derives from the fact that it issued from a special revelation from God, which is important for the church not because we too may receive revelations as Ezekiel did, but because distinctive importance attaches to the revelation God gave Ezekiel. “God spoke to our ancestors” through prophets such as Ezekiel (Heb 1:1) and we have inherited the messages he spoke. This revelation therefore demands our attentiveness.

Perhaps the heavens open by the faith of the believer (Jerome, 17). But Ezekiel says nothing about being engaged in prayer when his revelation came. Some accounts of a divine commission make a point of noting that the person commissioned was not looking for such an experience but just going about their life (e.g., Exod 3; Judg 6; Amos 7; Acts 9). Ezekiel’s account compares with them. If anything, he implies that “the Key of Heaven is in the hand of God” (Greenhill, 17).

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## Yahweh Appears in His Magnificence (1:4–28bα)

### Outline

Ezekiel reports what he saw after the heavens opened: an entourage coming from the north, the direction from which trouble commonly comes. Born by the wind are four blazing creatures that combine human, animal, and bird form. They are interconnected and have the capacity to face and move in any direction. Alongside them are wheels, crisscrossed to facilitate their moving in any direction. Throughout, the vision emphases brightness and brilliance. Above the creatures is a shining platform, on it there is a throne, and on the throne there is a fiery human-like being. Aware that he is seeing Yahweh in his magnificence, Ezekiel falls on his face. If readers might wonder if there is something that the vision harbingers, it will transpire that there is, but in this “overture” (Häner, 49) Ezekiel does not tell us what it is.

Olley (238) comments (on the LXX text):

There is detail, but no quiet reflective meditation on elements; rather there is an impression of being overwhelmed as words pour out in an effort to adequately communicate what is seen—but the very words and their structure point to inadequacy. Words that are of necessity placed in serial order are unable to describe the ultimately indescribable.

Ezekiel underlines the point by repeating various expressions: something like, the look of, the form of, their appearance, often in combinations such as “a profile something like the appearance of.” He thereby enhances the impression of describing something and simultaneously warning readers against relying on the description to clarify things. Consequently, “if any one asks whether the vision is lucid, I confess its obscurity, and that I can scarcely understand it” (Calvin, 1:40). “Who is able to explain these things one by one? Who is so receptive of the Spirit of God as to make clear these holy mysteries? (Origen [Homily 1:11], 48–49). Indeed, Ezekiel’s account of his vision is as much a series of disconnected notes and observations, with repetitions, as a connected report. It unfolds:

A storm (1:4)

Four living beings, their faces, wings, legs, hands (1:5–14)

Four wheels and their role in the living beings’ movement (1:15–21)

A platform and some sound (1:22–25)

A throne and a figure seated (1:26–28aα)

Ezekiel’s falling down (1:28aβbα)

The outline points to an aspect of the way the passage works rhetorically. We know that we are to learn of “a divine vision,” perhaps of an appearance of God. Yet for ten verses we hear only about four creatures, and then for seven verses about the way they get around, neither of which subjects seems so important. Then we hear of a platform and of some noise that seems quite important. Only after twenty-one verses do we hear of surely the important thing for which we have been waiting, the throne and the figure on the throne. Here, the lack of detail contrasts with what precedes, and this climactic part of the vision is quite allusive. Yet the laconic description has extra impact after the raising of anticipation through 1:4–25. It also raises suspense of its own as it gives no explanation of the troublesome report about the noise in 1:24, and leaves this as agenda that will need taking up later.

Meanwhile, the main part of the report of the vision unfolds with rhetorical drama and building of suspense. It raises questions about particulars to which it subsequently gives partial though incomplete answers. Why is there flashing fire? It talks about a *hashmal*—what is that?What are the four living creatures for? It raises other questions to which it does not provide answers but perhaps expects people to be able to work them out, given things they know. Why do the creatures have those particular four faces? Why do they have wings and wheels with eyes? It raises yet other questions to which readers would like to have answers, but only later in the scroll will they get at least or at most partial ones. Why do the creatures have hands? What is the spirit that goes and that the creatures follow? Why is the wind stormy and why is there thunder and the sound of an army?

God gives the vision to Ezekiel and Ezekiel passes it on to his people in a way that makes use of ways of God’s revealing himself that are familiar from what they know in the Scriptures or in potentially-scriptural traditions, or from things they were familiar with in Babylonia. The exotic and detailed description of the living beings has partial parallels with other Scriptures and more parallels with aspects of Mesopotamian culture that Judahites in Babylonia might be familiar with. As a whole, the account is like and unlike Exod 24, where there is a platform on which God appears, but no creatures and no prophetic commission. It’s like and unlike Jer 1, where there is a commission, something to see, and something pouring out from the north, but no appearance of God. And it’s like and unlike Isa 6, where there is an appearance, the presence of the seraphim, and a prophetic commission, but the vision takes place in Jerusalem. Ezekiel gives more detail compared with Isaiah 6, and *B. Hagigah* 13b hints that this is because Ezekiel is an excited villager and Isaiah is a quiet city-dweller. Ezekiel’s report is also like and unlike Mark 1, with the heavens opening and an implicit commission, but no appearance of God. It’s like and unlike Acts 9, with light from heaven and a commission but no appearance of God. Dazzling light also makes for a link with Acts 9, since Ezekiel speaks so much of brightness, sparkling, polished bronze, torches, lightning, beryl, crystal, sapphire, and also of fire, burning, coals, and *hashmal*.

### Translation

4I saw, and there: a storm wind coming[[93]](#footnote-93) from the north, a big cloud, and fire consuming itself.[[94]](#footnote-94) It had brightness all around, and from the middle of it something like[[95]](#footnote-95) the look of[[96]](#footnote-96) *hashmal*,[[97]](#footnote-97) from the middle of the fire. 5And from the middle of it: the form of four living beings. This their appearance: they had the form of a human being, 6but they[[98]](#footnote-98) had four faces each and four wings each of them. 7Their legs: a straight leg, and the sole of their feet something like the sole of a calf’s foot, and they were sparkling with something like the look of polished bronze. 8Human hands from under their wings on their four sides. The four of them had their faces and their wings, 9their wings touching one to another. They would not turn when they went—straight forward[[99]](#footnote-99) they would individually[[100]](#footnote-100) go. 10The form of their faces: a human face, and the four of them had a lion’s face to the right, and the four of them had an ox’s face on the left, and the four of them had an eagle’s face. 11So their faces. They had their wings spread out above individually, two touching individually and two covering their bodies. 12Straight forward they would individually go. Where the spirit would be, they would definitely go—they would not turn around as they went. 13So the form of the living beings. Their appearance: something like coals of fire burning, something like the appearance of torches—going about between the living beings. The fire had a brightness, with lightning going out from the fire, 14and the living beings running and returning, something like the appearance of a flash.[[101]](#footnote-101)

15I saw the living beings, and there: a single wheel on the earth beside the living beings with its four faces. 16The wheels’ appearance and their construction: something like the look of beryl, and the four of them had one form. Their appearance and their construction: something like what a wheel in the middle of a wheel would be 17on their four quarters as they went—when they would go, they would not turn as they went. 18Their rims had both height and awesomeness, and the four of them had their rims full of eyes all around. 19When the living beings went, the wheels would go beside them, and when the living beings lifted from on the earth, the wheels would lift. 20Wherever the spirit would be, they would definitely go (the spirit going), and the wheels would lift alongside them, because the living being’s spirit was in the wheels—21when they went, they would go, when they stood still, they would stand still, and when they lifted from on the earth, the wheels would lift alongside them, because the living being’s spirit was in the wheels.

22A form over the heads of the living beings, a platform, something like the look of crystal, awesome, spread over their heads, above. 23And beneath the platform, their wings straight, one to another, individually having two covering their bodies for them. 24I heard the sound of their wings, something like the sound of much water, something like the sound of Shadday, when they went, the sound of a tumult, something like the sound of an army—when they stood still, they would relax their wings.

25So there was a sound from above the platform that was over their head—when they stood still, they would relax their wings. 26And above the platform that was over their head, something like the appearance of sapphire stone, the form of a throne, and on the form of the throne a profile something like the appearance of a human being on it, above. 27I saw something like the look of *hashmal*, something like the appearance of fire—It had housing all around, from the appearance of its waist and upward, and from the appearance of its waist and downward—I saw something like the appearance of fire, and it had brightness all round, 28something like the appearance of the bow that would be in a cloud on a rainy day—such the appearance of the brightness all around.

That: the appearance of the form of Yahweh’s magnificence. I saw, and I fell on my face.

### Textual Notes

The report is slightly less jerky in Hebrew than in English because Hebrew is used to verbless sentences in which readers are accustomed to doing without a word such as “is,” though in another respect it is jerkier than Hebrew regularly is because of its use of asyndeton.\* LXX lacks some of MT’s repetitions[[102]](#footnote-102) and Zimmerli (1:81–88) comments extensively on different phrases that seem clumsy, awkward, superfluous, uneven, dispensable, or out of place, and therefore secondary. But attempts to recover an earlier version of Ezekiel’s report vary. Given that editorial work usually makes texts smoother rather than rougher and may be more inclined to eliminate repetition than to introduce it, it is plausible that Ezekiel composed something jerky and repetitive that ancient and modern readers are inclined to make smoother. While his account might then correspond to the jerky impression or disturbing effect that the vision made on him, or the disturbing situation of his community,[[103]](#footnote-103) the text’s nature in any case contributes to the passage’s rhetorical effect.

**1:8** Whereas Q has יְדֵי “the hands of [a human being],” K has ידו“his/its hand[s] [a human being’s]” (see Keil, 23). Cf. 10:7.

**1:11** LXX lacks “so their faces,” which makes the text simpler. The same applies to a number of the lacks in LXX noted below.

**1:13** For וּדְמוּת,LXX “and in the middle of” could suggest וּבְתוֺךְ (cf. NRSV), but *HUB* compares 10:2 LXX.

**1:13** LXX lacks “the living beings”(cf. the wording in 10:9)*.*

**1:16** LXX lacks “and their construction,” also “and their appearance.”

**1:17** LXX lacks “as they went.”

**1:20** LXX lacks “(the spirit going).”

**1:21** LXX lacks “thewheels.”

**1:22** LXX lacks “awesome,” perhaps an MT elaboration (cf. the textual notes on 1:24 and 27).[[104]](#footnote-104)

**1:24** LXX lacks “something like the sound of Shadday and the sound of a tumult, something like the sound of an army.”

**1:27** LXX lacks “something like the appearance of fire—It had housing all round.”

### Verse-by-Verse Commentary

**1:4** “I saw” (וׇאֵרֶה), Ezekiel says again (cf. 1:1). He now sees something with specifically this-worldly associations: a wind, a storm, the north, a cloud.… The sight is not in the supra-heavenly realm and Ezekiel doesn’t explain its relationship with that realm. Perhaps “theheavensopened*”* was a metaphor, or perhaps the entourage he will describe came out of the heavens, set down north of where Ezekiel was, and from that direction came towards him. But Ezekiel skips any explanation of the link between the heavens opening and the sight he sees. While thenorth, Zaphon, can be the symbolic location of God’s dwelling (Psa 48:2 [3]); Isa 14:13), it is more often the direction from which disaster comes, perhaps both because the north is God’s location and because calamity often does come to Judah from the north. The motif goes back to Yahweh’s commission of Jeremiah (1:13–15; also, e.g., 4:6; 6:1, 22; 10:22). Jeremiah eventually identifies the northern entity as Babylon (25:9), but also recycles the expression in order to speak metaphorically about the fate of other peoples including Babylon itself (e.g., 50:3, 9, 41; 51:48), as in due course does Ezekiel (26:7; 38:6, 15; 39:2).

It fits, then, that it is a storm windthat comes from the north. Meteorologically that would make sense in Babylonia, but it would be surprising if this was all Ezekiel meant. Whereas a storm wind need not be threatening or destructive (e.g., 2 Kgs 2:1, 11), it usually is (e.g., Ezek 13:11, 13; Isa 29:6; 40:24; 41:16) (Rashi, in MG).[[105]](#footnote-105) With overlapping ambiguity, a cloud can both suggest and conceal the presence of God. Fire, too, suggests both God’s presence and the power and danger of that presence, like that of the sun (e.g., Exod 13:21–22; 19:9–18). Typically, Ezekiel enhances the images: it’s a bigcloud, the fire is consumingitself, and it has the brightness associated with fire and with the bright light of the sun that can surround clouds, allaround, and break through them. It happens when Yahweh comes in force in Psa 18:7–15 [8–16]). The enigma in this description is חַשְׁמַל, transliterated as “hashmal,”whose mystery was a stimulus to Jewish reflection on Ezekiel’s vision.[[106]](#footnote-106) It was perhaps a mystery to Ezekiel’s readers until they get a little clarification at the end of his testimony. In 9:3 Ezekiel will identify the living creatures as כְּרוּבִים, traditionally transliterated “cherubim” (cf. 1:8 Tg.), which is also the term for the beings associated with the covenant chest in 1 Sam 4:4; 2 Sam 6:2, while in 2 Sam 22:11 Yahweh rides on aכְּרוּב . One way or another, the vision presents Ezekiel’s readers with a revelation that would fit with what they know about Yahweh, but its implications would not be clear. The storm’s victims could be Israel’s enemies, and Ezekiel’s listeners might have hopes in that direction. Perhaps the wind is going to deal with Nebuchadrezzar (*b. Hagigah* 13b). He will indeed meet his fate in due course. But at this opening point, already “the prophet makes us aware of the terrible judgment of the Lord against Jerusalem” (Oecolampadius, 5; cf. Beckwith,9). In this vision “God wished first to invest his servant with authority, and then to inspire the people with terror” (Calvin, 1:41). Ezek 1 is “the initial programmatic statement of the book’s theme of Yahweh’s campaign to bring the rebellious house of Israel once again under his rule.”[[107]](#footnote-107) While the imagery of Yahweh coming in a storm can be positive, then (e.g., Pss 18; 77; 97), here it will have the opposite significance (cf. Mic 1:3–6; Allen, 1:24–25).

**1:5** Meanwhile, instead of any explicit reference to Yahweh appearing, from the middle of the fire there emerged the form of four living beings (חַיּוֹת). The phraseology suggests something that could represent living beings or could resemble them, even if it was not a real thing. Like *hashmal*, these composite creatures do not have a biblical background, but they do have a background in Assyrian sculptures and figurines that could have been familiar in Babylonia to Ezekiel and to some of his community.[[108]](#footnote-108) They may also link with astrology.[[109]](#footnote-109) They are in some respects human-like, perhaps in standing upright.

**1:6–12** Throughout the description, four suggests totality. The beings’ four visages enable them to face in all directions and move without turning. Their wings enable them both to move (though the verb “fly”will not occur until Ezek 10) and to cover their bodies, like the six-winged seraphs in Isa 6:2. The wooden equivalents in the temple had just two wings, but they were also touching, like these creatures’ wings. Their straight legs and jointless feet perhaps enhance their appearance. The description leads into the portrayal of their sparkle (Zimmerli,1:126). Their hands would enable them to act in the way Ezek 10 will describe. As well as a human face, they have a lion’s face, suggesting fierceness (Job 4:10), an ox’s face, suggesting strength (Psa 144:14), and an eagle’s face, suggesting speed (Deut 28:49). “Whereהׇרוַּחwouldbe*,* theywoulddefinitelygo”: the ambiguity of the word for spirit or wind is a further tantalizing note that Ezekiel does not clarify here, but later will.

**1:13–14** וּדְמוּת,“sotheform,” introduces a resumptive further description of the creatures that picks up the fire and brightness from the beginning in 1:4 and elaborates it.

**1:15–21** Ezekielcontinue to keep readers in suspense over what the living beings signify and how Yahweh comes into the picture, as he now describes the wheels alongside the living beings. Presumably the wheels make travel possible across land, the wings through the air. Each wheel’s comprising a wheel within a wheel might mean they interrelate concentrically, though it’s not clear what would be the point of that or how it would work. But then, this is not supposed to be the description of something that is possible in earthly terms (Sweeney, 64). More likely they interrelate at right angles like a gyroscope, to facilitate turning in different ways, though practically it’s not clear how that would work, either. They are of impressive size and their rims are full of eyes, which presumably enables them to see anywhere they need to go. Although the description does not establish a physical connection between wheels and creatures, it affirms a connection by virtue of רוּחַ הַחַיׇּה, “thelivingbeing’sspirit,” which spells out the implications of “the spirit” in 1:12 and 20a: the creature knows where it must go and it goes there.

**1:22–25** Ezekiel’s description relieves the suspense a little as he takes the portrait further, though in another sense he increases the suspense. Theרָקִיעַ , “platform,” is elsewhere the vault of the sky, mainly in Gen 1:6–8, 14–20, while in Exod 24:10, the platform where Yahweh sits is a piece of brickwork, a pavement. Perhaps Ezekiel makes a point of using words that are puzzling alongside avoiding words that might make the scene seem familiar. As well as there being no specific term for the creatures in Ezek 1, there is no “chariot” (מֶרְכָּבָה), which became the regular term for the conveyance but does not feature in Ezekiel. The platform on the backs of the living beings suggests someone sitting on it, but nothing is said of that at this point. Rather we learn of the sound of the creatures’ wings, thesoundofmuchwater, a threatening, potentially overwhelming sound, not waving but drowning (Pss 18:16 [17]; 29:3; 32:6; 93:4; 144:7). It suggests the sound of שַׁדַּי, “Shadday.” That is simply a name for God in most of the First Testament (e.g., Num 24:4; Ruth 1:20; Job 5:17), but when there is reference to the name’s possible meaning in Isa 13:6; Joel 1:15, it is given a connection with שָׁדַד, “destroy.” Jeremiah frequent uses this verb and the noun שׁוֺד. Here, then, the sound of Shadday would point to the sound of destruction or of the destroyer. The sound of the wings also suggests “thesoundof a tumult” (הֲמֻלָּה). This word occurs only once more, in connection with Yahweh setting Zion on fire (Jer 11:16). Here, that noise while the wings were flapping suggests the “soundofanarmy.” The sound of this entourage is sinister. Yahweh’s visionary appearances “inspire awe rather than comfort.”[[110]](#footnote-110)

**26–28a.** Much suspense is now resolved by the description of the throne and the one sitting there. He is like a human being (which naturally makes Christian exegetes wonder about the relationship of this figure to God’s becoming incarnate).[[111]](#footnote-111) Again there is *hashmal*, fire, and brightness, as there was in 1:4 without any reference to a figure. Now those features are revealed to be the encompassing of the figure, from the waist, upward and downward. This description may reflect another Assyrian motif, the *melammu* or divine radiance that surrounds the deity, which here becomes combined with more traditional Israelite ways of picturing Yahweh, and in the terms of a Babylonian way of picturing things affirms that he is present as the real God.[[112]](#footnote-112) Fire and brightness enhance the impressiveness of Yahweh’s appearance but also indicate that it was impossible to look at. Ezekiel adds one more motif, a bow as bright as a rainbow. In the context, it is not a bow with the transformed positive sense that obtains in Gen 9:8–17. Following on 1:24, it is a bow with its regular significance, as a weapon.[[113]](#footnote-113) Even though Ezekiel has not spoken of the structure in this chapter as a chariot, his description has recalled the war chariots of Isa 66:15; Jer 4:13; Hab 3:8. And when brightness recurs in the summary of the scene at the end of 1:28a, it underscores the scene’s scary nature.

**28bα.** The figure was Yahweh in his כָּבוֺד,“magnificence,” traditionally, “glory.”[[114]](#footnote-114) The term denotes the splendor that attaches to a monarch, a splendor of outward magnificence (I write a few weeks before the coronation of King Charles III) that is the outward, formal, expression of an inherent power and honor. The observation about Yahweh’s magnificence brings the vision account to its climax. There might be multiple reasons for falling down in front of Yahweh at this awareness. Isaiah’s reason was his sense of his defilement and that of his people, but he might also be worried about what could follow on that defilement. Ezekiel is perhaps overwhelmed by a sense that Yahweh’s coming will bring catastrophe to his community. But we don’t know yet.

### Biblical Theology Comments

Yahweh’s home as God lies in a realm outside the world, though he also made a home among his people in the temple in Jerusalem and he will later make his presence felt in the gathering of people who believe in Jesus. In addition, from time to time he reaches into the world to take action within it.[[115]](#footnote-115) He has done so in many locations. Ezekiel gives no hint of there being anything surprising about Yahweh being present in Babylonia. But his making his presence felt in the world can mean disaster. Taking such action does not usually involve making himself visible, though he may do so, and the Scriptures are appropriately ambiguous about whether anyone ever sees God. God is not a physical being, and therefore logically he cannot be seen. If he makes himself visible in some sense, his visibility may take an abstract form such as brightness, though he would then be many times more dazzling and fiery than the sun, and his brightness could not safely be seen. His becoming visible may also take concrete form, usually a human form, though a form such as a lion might be possible. Taking human form fits there being some correspondence between human beings and God such as the possession of mind, will, and emotions, and the capacity for relationship, which reflect humanity’s being made in God’s image. So God can take a physical form or clothing to enable someone to see him, though seeing the human body may not then exactly imply seeing God. In Jesus he takes human form in a more radical, profound, or deep-rooted and permanent sense.

Here, Ezekiel does not say he saw God when the heavens opened, but he implies seeing God in the manifestation on the throne. It would be adventurous to hypothesize that the figure on the throne is a pre-incarnate Jesus, but it would be possible to make a link between an understanding of God as Father, Son, and Spirit and the complementarity of (a) God’s dwelling in the realm beyond the heavens, (b) there being a figure on the throne upheld by the living creatures, and (c) the spirit’s directing the throne structure’s movement. But the forms of expression in this chapter underline the impossibility of comprehending the beings in the vision (the creatures, the platform, the throne). How much less, therefore, can we comprehend the one who sits on it.[[116]](#footnote-116)

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## Yahweh Issues a Commission (1:28bβ–3:15)

### Outline

Following on the manifestation in 1:4–28bα, Yahweh speaks to Ezekiel to commission him. The testimony to his commission thus continues the report of the vision. The introduction in 1:28bβ leads into a series of biddings by Yahweh, and as “I saw” reverberated in the vision account, “hesaidtome”now reverberates (Allen, 1:16). After the first and last of the biddings (2:1 and 3:11), a spirit takes some action to implement Yahweh’s charge (2:2; 3:12), while the middle of the biddings (2:8–10) leads into some action by Yahweh (3:1–3) that is also related to the exhortation Yahweh has issued. The section’s narrative framework is thus important to it. But the section mostly comprises words of Yahweh that commission Ezekiel to take Yahweh’s message to his people. The commission makes explicit and explains the threatening nature of the divine appearance in 1:4–28bα, emphasizing the community’s rebelliousness and indicating the ominous nature of the message Ezekiel is to deliver. Yahweh’s words contain much repetition, though it is repetition with intensification, so that both the repetition and the intensification strengthen this dynamic of the exchange with its stress on Yahweh’s speaking and Ezekiel’s compliance. After the “obscurity” and “mysteries” of 1:4–28bα with its “many dark forests,” we now “go out rejoicing to some plains” (Gregory, 157), but the section also raises questions that will find answers only later and over the first half of the entire scroll. What is the nature of Israel’s rebelliousness, now and over the generations? Will people listen or refuse to listen—or rather, how will they resist Ezekiel’s message, and how will he respond? Why does he sit there for seven days (well, wouldn’t you?).

The section unfolds:

Ezekiel falls on his face 1:28bβ

Yahweh bids him stand (2:1)

A spirit raises Ezekiel (2:2)

Yahweh tells Ezekiel he is commissioning him (2:3–5)

Yahweh bids Ezekiel not to be afraid (2:6–7)

Yahweh bids Ezekiel eat a scroll and opens it in front of him (2:8–10)

Yahweh bids Ezekiel eat the scroll, which he does (3:1–3)

Yahweh bids Ezekiel go deliver the message and promises to strengthen him (3:4–9)

Yahweh bids Ezekiel go (3:10–11)

A spirit lifts him up to take him to the Kebar community (3:12–15)

There is thus a linear aspect to the account and also a palistrophic\* aspect, which links with the repetition.

In 2:1 Yahweh only bids Ezekiel stand to be addressed.

In 2:2 a spirit simply lifts him up.

In 2:3–5 Yahweh tells him he is sending him and tells him of the people’s defiance.

In 2:6–7 Yahweh tells him not to be afraid and repeats the point about their rebelliousness.

In 2:8–10 Yahweh bids him listen and not be rebellious like them, and in this connection introduces the scroll with its gloomy contents.

In 3:1–3 Yahweh bids him eat the scroll and bids him go and speak.

In 3:4–9 in light of the eating Yahweh repeats the bidding to go and speak, reformulates the points about the people’s rebelliousness and about not being afraid, and offers reassurances about strengthening Ezekiel. It is Yahweh’s longest address.

In 3:10–11 Yahweh summarizes the bidding to listen, go, and speak.

In 3:12–15 A spirit lifts Ezekiel up, a noise echoes from the vision, Yahweh’s hand comes on Ezekiel, and he comes to the community at Tel Abib.[[117]](#footnote-117)

The commission involves no dialogue between Yahweh and Ezekiel, unlike the commissions of Moses, Gideon, Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Paul. Yahweh does all the talking and Ezekiel says nothing. Nor does he do anything except when controlled or directed. Indeed, it is only rarely explicit that he speaks in subsequent chapters, as generally he simply says that a message comes to him. He does not report delivering it. Indirectly, however, his commission does compare with those other commissions, as in effect he relates Yahweh’s replies to concerns he might have about his commission, even though he does not directly tell the readers of his objections. Thus from Yahweh’s words one could formulate his possible objections, with Yahweh’s responses.

1. The people are defiant (but they will acknowledge you eventually)
2. They may attack you (but don’t be afraid)
3. You may be tempted to rebel like them (so listen and eat this scroll)
4. You may think you will dislike the message (but it will taste sweet)
5. You may think the task is too hard (it’s not, and I will make you hard)
6. They may not listen (speak it anyway)

Ezekiel’s not speaking to express these objections means all the focus lies on Yahweh’s initiative and action. As well as implicitly responding to Ezekiel’s possible worries, Yahweh deals with his practical needs by a spirit/wind, to stand him up and then get him to Tel Abib.

### Translation

1:28bβI heard a voice speaking. 2:1He said to me, My man, stand on your feet, and I will speak with you. 2A spirit[[118]](#footnote-118) came into me as he spoke to me, and stood me on my feet, and I listened to the one speaking to me.[[119]](#footnote-119)

3He said to me, My man, I am sending you to the descendants of Israel,[[120]](#footnote-120) to nations, the defiant people who have defied me in that they and their ancestors have revolted against me until this very day. 4With the descendants severe of face and tough of mind, I’m sending you to them, and you will say to them, “The Lord[[121]](#footnote-121) Yahweh has said this.” 5And they, whether they listen or whether they refuse because they are a household of rebellion, will acknowledge that a prophet has been among them.

6But you, my man, don’t be afraid of them,

and of their words don’t be afraid,

Because[[122]](#footnote-122) briers and thorns are with you,

and by[[123]](#footnote-123) scorpions you are staying.[[124]](#footnote-124)

Of their words don’t be afraid, and of their looks don’t be scared,

because they are a household of rebellion.

7You will speak my words to them whether they listen or whether they refuse, because they are rebellious.[[125]](#footnote-125)

8So you, my man, listen to what I am speaking to you—don’t become rebellious like the household of rebellion—open your mouth and eat what I’m giving to you. 9I saw, and there, a hand stretched out to me, and there, in it a document scroll. 10He unrolled it in front of me, and it was written on, front and back. Written on it were requiems, moaning, and “oh.”

3:1He said to me, My man, what you find, eat—eat this scroll and go, speak to Israel’s household. 2So I opened my mouth and he got me to eat this scroll. 3He said to me, My man, you are to get your stomach to eat and fill your insides with this scroll that I’m giving to you. I ate it, and it became in my mouth like molasses[[126]](#footnote-126) for sweetness.

4He said to me, My man, Go, get to Israel’s household and speak with my words to them. 5Because it’s not to a people obscure[[127]](#footnote-127) of lip and heavy of tongue that you are sent—to Israel’s household, 6not to many peoples obscure of lip and heavy of tongue, whose words you would not [be able to] listen to—if it actually was[[128]](#footnote-128) to them I sent you, they would listen to you. 7But Israel’s household, they will not be willing to listen to you, because they are not willing to listen to me, because Israel’s entire household are tough of forehead and severe of mind.

8There, I am making your face tough

alongside their faces,

Your forehead tough

alongside their forehead.

9Like adamant tougher than flint

I am making your forehead.

You will not be afraid of them and not be scared of their looks,

because they are a household of rebellion.

10He said to me, My man, all my words that I shall speak to you, receive into your mind. With your ears, listen. 11Go, get to the exile community, to the members of your people,[[129]](#footnote-129) speak to them, and say to them, “The Lord Yahweh has said this,” whether they listen or whether they refuse.

12A spirit lifted me up, and I heard behind me a big quaking sound (“Blessed be Yahweh’s brightness from his place”), 13the sound[[130]](#footnote-130) of the wings of the living beings linking[[131]](#footnote-131) one to another, and the sound of the wheels alongside them, a big quaking sound. 14When a spirit lifted me up and took me, I went, bitter, in the fury of my spirit, with Yahweh’s hand strong on me. 15I came to the exile community at Tel Abib that was staying by the Kebar Waterway, and I stayed where they were staying. I stayed there seven days, desolate,[[132]](#footnote-132) among them.

### Application and Devotional Implications

At some point in 1:28 (rabbis differ about the precise point) Jewish wisdom thought that attempts at exposition of this chapter were wise to stop (e.g., *m. Megillah* 4:10; *b. Hagigah* 13a). They could become too dangerous. The vision did, however, become a set reading for Pentecost (*b. Megillah* 31a). While the church has not reflected at the same length on this revelation to Ezekiel, it has reflected widely.[[133]](#footnote-133) The four living creatures suggested ways of seeing the four Gospels.[[134]](#footnote-134) They suggested the four affections, prudence, fortitude, justice, and temperance (Gregory, 63). The interwoven wheels suggested the two Testaments: “the Old moves within the New and the New within the Old”[[135]](#footnote-135) (a more illuminating image than Augustine’s problematic “the New is hidden in the Old and the Old is revealed in the New”).[[136]](#footnote-136) They have been considered in light of the command to love God and love neighbor (Gregory, 124). These insights illustrate how the Scriptures prove themselves θεόπνευστος, God-breathed, breathing out edifying insights.

Yet these insights do not relate to the way Yahweh was speaking through Ezekiel to his people. What might emerge from considering that dynamic? A key truth is that a revelation from God and a visit from God may be devotionally scary. Calvin (1:39) suggests this prayer:

Grant, Almighty God, since thou didst bless thy people with the continued grace of thy Spirit when it was cast out of its inheritance, and didst raise up a Prophet even from the lowest depths, who should recall it to life when it was all but despaired of — O grant, that although the Church in these days is miserably afflicted by thy hand, we may not be destitute of thy consolation, but show us, through thy pity, that life may be looked for even in the midst of death; so that we may bear all thy chastisements patiently, until thou shalt show thyself our reconciled Father, and thus at length we may be gathered into that happy kingdom, where we shall enjoy our full felicity, in Jesus Christ our Lord.

### Textual Notes

MT has a marker\* after 1:28. The analysis under “Outline” then corresponds to MT’s markers except for subdividing 2:1–2 and 3:10–15.

**2:2** Instead of “ashespoketome,” LXX has “and took hold of me and lifted me up,” anticipating 3:14 (*HUB*).

**2:3** For בְּנֵי יׅשְׄרָאֵל,“the descendants of Israel,” LXX “Israel’s household” might imply בֵּית יִשְׂרָאֵל*,* but it is a “common interchange” (*HUB*). It occurs in reverse in 4:3.

LXX lacks “tonations” and “havedefiedme,” and thus has a simpler text (cf. the textual notes on 2:5; 3:1; 3:14).

**2:4** LXX lacks 2:4a, an anticipatory repetition of 3:7–8.

**2:5** LXX lacks וְהֵמָּה, and for חָדַל, LXX “are terrified” implies a verb equivalent to Aramaic דְחַל (BDB, 1087); cf. Heb. זָחַל. So also in 2:7.

Here and consistently, LXX takes מְרׅי to mean not rebellionbut bitterness/embitterment, as if from מָרַר rather than מָרָה, while Vg., Aq., and Sym. use words for being annoying.

**2:6** For וּמִדִּבְרֵיהֶם אַל־תִּירׇא, “of their words do not be afraid,” LXX “and of their look do not be scared” is similar to the wording in the fifth colon.\*

**3:1** LXX lacks “whatyoufind*,* eat.”

**3:12** For בָּרוּךְ, “blessed,” NRSV and NIV read בָּרוּם “when [Yahweh’s brightness] rose” (cf. 10:17; Hitzig, 24).

**3:14** LXX lacks “bitter.”

**3:15** For Q וָאֵשֵׁב“and I stayed,” K has ואשׁר “and which” (cf. NRSV, NIV). The clause then lacks a verb but the meaning is not affected, though the suggestive expression “I sat where they sat”[[137]](#footnote-137) disappears.

### Verse-by-Verse Commentary

**1:28bβ** Ezekiel makes the transition from describing the vision to describing the commission that followed. So far he has been saying “I saw …. I saw …. I saw …. I heard …. I saw …. I saw …. I fell,” withthe space between these first-person verbs steadily decreasing until the overwhelming nature of what happened came to a climax with that last verb about his falling. Now there is a different hearing from the one in the vision. Its object (still a קוׄל) is now a voice rather than a sound. And as there was a slightly puzzling gap between the opening of the heavens (1:1) and the wind coming from the north (1:4), there is a momentarily puzzling gap between the appearing of something like a human figure in 1:26–28bα and the voice that now speaks, in that the voice is unidentified. It leaves a touch of mystery and it requires readers to put two and two together. Ezekiel will often leave readers to do that.

**2:1** “My man” renders בֶּן אָדָם, of which the literalistic translation is “son of man.” It is Yahweh’s default way of addressing Ezekiel, occurring 93 times in Ezekiel and occasionally elsewhere in the First Testament. While the phrase in due course comes to have the more exalted connotations that feature when Jesus uses it, idiomatically it simply denotes “human being,” It parallels expressions such as “son of Ammon,” idiomatically, “Ammonite.” But it implies the contrast between “the Lord Yahweh” (2:4) and the humble human being, and like the English expression “my man,” keeps Ezekiel in his place lest he should think too much of himself as one who has seen what he has seen (Rashi, in MG). He is a mere human being. It might also designate Ezekiel a “descendant of Adam” over against the “descendants of Israel” (2:3).[[138]](#footnote-138) Whereas falling on one’s face could be an appropriate reaction when one is confronted by themajesty of a king and *a fortiori* of Yahweh, Yahweh’s bidding presupposes that standing is then the appropriate posture for the servant of a king or of Yahweh, who is about to receive orders.

**2:2** A little paradoxically, Ezekiel does not simply stand in obedience. A spiritstands him up (cf. 3:24). He must stand, and be willing to do so, but by implication the devastating effect of seeing Yahweh in his magnificence makes him unable to do so unaided. God’s breathing into him makes it happen.

**2:3** “Seeing visions of God or even hearing him speak does not yet make a prophet” (Jenson, 46). To bring that about, Yahweh has a commission for Ezekiel. He is giving him a mission in the way a king commissions an envoy. He is sending him to בְּנֵי יׅשְׄרָאֵל,“the descendantsofIsrael” (cf. 4:13; 6:5), to בֵּית יִשְׂרָאֵל*,* “Israel’s household”(3:1, 4, 5, 7), to בְּנֵי עַמֶּךָ, “the members of your people” (3:11), more specifically to הַגּוֹלׇה, “theexilecommunity” (3:11), which represents in part Judah itself (4:6) and whose leadership can thus be called “theeldersofJudah” (8:1). Yahweh does not see this community as comprising Judah as a whole or Israel as a whole. He has not given up on the larger whole (see, e.g., 9:9; 37:15–28; 40:1–48:35). But neither does he see it as not counting as Judah or Israel (as some people back in Jerusalem could think). The relatively small, displaced community to which Yahweh sends Ezekiel counts as an embodiment of Israel. In the First Testament, only Numbers and 1 Kings have more references to “Israel” than Ezekiel. Yahweh also says that he is sending Ezekiel to גּוֹיִם, “nations.” In Jeremiah’s commission “nations” means foreign nations, and Ezekiel will have things to say about their destiny (25:1–32:32). Here, in the context of the expressions on either side, “nations” more likely implies Ephraim and Judah or the twelve clans. But alongside the implicit good news about sending him to a people that he has not given up on, Yahweh characterizes this Israel by a series of negative expressions of overlapping meaning. The first two are also similar in appearance and sound. The Israelites are “defiant”and they have “defied” him (מָרַד), which is often a word for political insubordination (17:15). And they have “revolted” against him (פָּשַׁע), the First Testament’s most common term to denote political or religious insubordination. The political connotations of these words presuppose the covenant relationship between Yahweh and Israel, which they imply Israel has flouted. Israel’s waywardness and wrongdoing implies more than an act that ignores a proper path or moral principle. It implies a personal rebellion against a relationship (Greenhill*, 77*). Israel has been thus from the beginning “untilthisveryday.” A systematic indictment such as the one in Ezek 20 will also underline the application of this critique to Israel as a whole (Ezek 16 and 23 will speak more specifically of Jerusalem).

**2:4** The adjectival expressions קְשֵׁי פׇנִים, “severeofface,” and חִזְקֵי־לֵב “toughofmind” or heart, add further to Yahweh’s list of negative terms. They indicate a problem with the people outside and inside. They show no external emotion such as shame when they are accused of anything. Nor do they possess any flexibility of thinking so as to change their attitude. Yahweh piles up expressions to bring home the impossibility of Ezekiel’s vocation. The phrase כֹּה אׇמַר אֲדֹנׇי יְהוׇֹה “theLordYahwehhassaidthis” adapts a familiar form of words to introduce a message from someone such as a king. In Ezekiel’s regular adaptation, the title for God becomes “theLordYahweh,” which emphasizes Yahweh’s authority and sets him over against בֶּן אָדָם, the lowly “son of a human being.” This first occurrence of Ezekiel’s distinctive and characteristic title for God (which here does not actually introduce words from the “messenger”) appears in the context of Yahweh’s multiform stress on Israel’s insubordination. They have revolted against him (מָרָה), a word that almost invariably denotes revolting against God’s authority.

**2:5** The antithesis between שׇׁמַע, “hear”or “listen,” and חָדַל, “refuse” or “hold back,” adds further to Yahweh’s list of negatives. The people are, indeed, he now adds, “ahousehold of rebellion”(מְרׅי), an expression frequent in and unique to Ezekiel, his “sardonic” alternative to “household of Israel” (Allen, 2:59). Ezekiel uses that expression “householdofIsrael”much more than anyone else (beginning in 3:1, 4, 5, 7a, 7b), and “householdofrebellion” makes for a link and a contrast. Through all its life Israel is one household, one family (Zimmerli,2:564; cf. Olley, 245). The positive use of the expression is also uniquely prominent in Ezekiel, suggesting its capacity to offer a new identity to a community in exile.[[139]](#footnote-139) But throughout its life it is also a rebellious household (see again Ezek 16; 20; 23). “How distinguished a proof of covenant love and faithfulness in God, that he should condescend to deal with such a people, and send a prophet yet again to instruct them!” (Fairbairn, 36).On the other hand, “it is the most serious form of opposition to a prophet when someone says to him, ‘Yahweh has not sent you’” (cf. 13:6) (Zimmerli,1:132). Ezekiel will be able to urge people to listen to him as a prophet on the basis of Yahweh’s having appeared to him, spoken to him, and sent him (Clements, 8). On that basis Yahweh encourages him to believe that people will in due course “acknowledgethat aprophethasbeenamongthem.” It is the first occurrence of another expression that will recur in Ezekiel. “Acknowledge” (יָדַע) is the ordinary verb meaning “know” (e.g., 11:5; 17:12), but in Ezekiel it usually denotes coming to recognize something that one was not inclined to recognize (see 6:7). Admittedly, the comment that people “willacknowledgethataprophethasbeenamongthem” is a little opaque or ironic. There are lots of prophets among the Judahites in Babylonia (see, e.g., 7:26), and there is not much to be said for being recognized as one (see, e.g., 13:1–16; 14:1–11). Yahweh’s point is clearer when he repeats it much later: it will be “when it comes about,” the message that Yahweh has spoken through Ezekiel, that “they will acknowledge that a prophet has been among them” (33:33). They will recognize that Ezekiel was distinctively a prophet who brought Yahweh’s message. These two passages (2:5; 33:33) are the only ones where Ezekiel is clearly described as a prophet. Yahweh’s commission allows for two possible outcomes from Ezekiel’s work. The aim is that people will recognize the truth in his message and give up their rebellion. But they may do no such thing, and they will have the excuse that other prophets are giving them a more positive message (Greenberg, 1:80). The recognition will then come only when they have paid the penalty for their rebellion.

**2:6–7** Yahweh’s exhortation not to be afraid, and specifically not to be afraid of theirlooks, repeats his exhortation to Jeremiah (1:8) but also given on many other occasions (e.g., Gen 15:1; Isa 41:10; Dan 10:12).Whereas it is characteristically a reaction to an already existent explicit or implicit apprehension, in this context it is an example of Yahweh’s anticipating possible objections or problems through 1:28bβ–3:15 and keeping control of the argument. And whereas he is satisfied with one exhortation to Jeremiah, it is typical in Ezekiel that he should pile up variants on the exhortation. The force of his words is further enhanced by the poetic rhythm of the three lines in 2:6 (4-2, 4-3, 4-4), with abb׳a׳ parallelism\* in the first of the three, aba׳b׳ parallelism in the middle line, and internal parallelism in the first colon of the third line. The reference to “looks” might suggest the looks they give one another that imply plotting, while the emphasis on “words” might also suggest plots and threats, the metaphorical briers, thorns, and scorpions—or alternatively, these might be metaphors for Yahweh’s protection around him.[[140]](#footnote-140) Ezekiel doesn’t get physically attacked like Jeremiah. He does get verbally attacked and derided.

**2:8–10** To follow up yet more talk of rebelliousness and the application of it to Ezekiel himself, Yahweh becomes more than a voice, though there is again a gap between the appearing of Yahweh’s exalted majesty and the reaching out of a hand. Apparently the visionary event continues and Yahweh enables Ezekiel to see a bodiless hand holding a scroll, which he will shortly give Ezekiel the impression of eating. Meanwhile Yahweh unrolls it. Ezekiel and the readers become aware of how extensively the scroll is inscribed. With an actual scroll, if it were papyrus, then writing on both sides would not be odd, though if it were skin, it might be impossible. But asking about practicalities likely misses the point. Ezekiel is relating something that happens in a vision. The extent of the writing on the scroll stands for the fact there is much for him to assimilate and share with his people. All his words will come from his having assimilated Yahweh’s message, and it will all be expressed in “requiem*s*” or mourning chants,in “moaning” or lamenting,andin “oh,” an inarticulate cry—that is, threats of calamity that will arouse such reactions.

**3:1–3** Again, really eating a papyrus scroll would be strange but not impossible, while really eating a scroll made of skins would be even odder and more difficult, though also not totally impossible, but asking about practicalities again misses the point. The experience in the vision signifies Ezekiel’s being given his message and being initiated into his task. He is to assimilate the scroll so that its message becomes part of him. There us something beyond that: “by eating the scroll, Ezekiel takes into his inner being the fate of his people” (Odell, 45). He accepts it. But in contrast to its ominous and calamitous nature, the scroll tastes sweet to him: that is, he assimilates it readily (cf. Jer 15:16).

**3:4–9** Having done so, he is to go to the people whose resistance Yahweh again ironically notes, and to speak withor in Yahweh’s own words, not mix them with his own. Assimilating the scroll will facilitate that. Yahweh adds two further comments. The first is that in a superficial sense there will be no problem of communication with the people to whom he is sent, in understanding them or in their understanding him. The background to Yahweh’s comment is that the Judahites could be in contact with many other peoples who had been taken as forced migrants to Babylonia, as well as with the Babylonians themselves. A collection of clay tablets from Babylon records the rations allocated to people from a variety of locations as well as from Judah.[[141]](#footnote-141) One can imagine that Judahites would be used to having a hard time understanding and being understood by such people. This will not be Ezekiel’s problem. But that will underscore the problem of communication that he will have, in the Judahites’ unwillingness to listen to him. The second comment is thus that Yahweh will make sure (perhaps through a spirit again breathing into Ezekiel) that Ezekiel’s toughness matches his people’s toughness. Adamant is a legendary mineral of famed hardness, like diamond. In 3:4–9 for the most part Yahweh is simply reformulating things he has said already, though heightening his statements, but this second comment is a promise that adds to what he said before. The heightening is increased by the poetic rhythm of the last four lines (4-2, 3-2, 3-2, 4-3), with anaphora\* running through the first three (face, tough, forehead, alongside) and internal parallelism in the first colon of the last.

**3:10–11** The commissioning over, Yahweh sets Ezekiel going to fulfill his commission to the people, again summarizing and restating his words so far.

**3:12–13** A spirit thus reappears, not to lift Ezekiel onto his feet (he is already standing) but to transport him to his community, in the fashion of Elijah (1 Kgs 18:12, 46). Ezekiel will later speak of a spirit lifting him up and taking him to Jerusalem, but he is explicit there that the journey happens in a vision (8:3; 11:1, 24). Although he refers here to the reverberations of the earlier vision in 1:4–28bα, he does not suggest that this lifting up is visionary, and the context implies that the spirit now enables him to make a physical journey from somewhere in the region of the Kebar to the particular place there where the Judahite community was. So the spirit’s lifting him up was like the spirit’s entering him and standing him up (2:2). There was something supernatural about the way he was conveyed to that new location. He felt carried or he was able to make a journey that humanly he could not have made, as he had felt supernaturally enabled to stand. The big quaking soundhe hears is the sound of the wings of the living beings linking with another and the sound of the wheels beside them. These words connect with 1:4–28bα, where there was a big cloud, the sound of the wings of living beings located by one another, and the wheels beside the living being*s*. In various ways, then, 3:12–15 closes off 1:1–3:15 and “provides a literary winding down” (Allen, 1:43). “Linking” (מַשִּׁיקוׄת) is one new expression in the reprise. It makes its impact as a rare word, or a familiar word with an unusual meaning. The other new expression is the repeated “quaking”(רַעַשׁ), a sinister word. When it does not refer to an earthquake, it most commonly suggests the noise of war(e.g., Jer 47:3; Nah 3:2) (Allen, 1:43). Tg. takes the doxology “blessed be Yahweh’s brightness from his place” to be the sound the creatures make, but 3:13 goes on to indicate the nature of the sound they were making. More likely the doxology is an exclamatory parenthesis by Ezekiel or a curator who has added it or modified it (see the textual note). In Jewish worship, the exclamation functions as a doxology, a Kedushah prayer that sanctifies God’s name (Fishbane, 319–20). Its nearest parallel is Psa 135:20. The comparison would suggest that “hisplace*”* is Zion.

**3:14–15** Ezekiel goes on his journey מַר, “bitter,” which might seem odd after finding the scroll sweet. The irony is both explained and deepened by the further comment associating bitterness with חֲמַת רוּחִי, “the fury of my spirit.” Fury is Yahweh’s business in Ezekiel (e.g., 5:13, 15). The exception proving the rule is 23:25, where again human beings express Yahweh’s fury. So Ezekiel goes to the Judahites bearing Yahweh’s fury in his spirit, and feeling Yahweh’s bitterness (cf. 21:6 [11]), “understanding the indignation of God” (Jerome, 43). To put it another way, he went with Yahweh’s hand strong on him, another characteristic Ezekiel expression (e.g., 1:3; 3:22). Although he was in a broad sense “among the exile community at the KebarWaterway”in 1:1, he has evidently not being closely among them through 1:4–3:11, and he is now in a more precise location by the Kebar. While in Hebrew “Tel Abib” or Tel Aviv means Spring Mound and suggests a location somewhere old that can become something new, in Akkadian the town’s name *Til abūbi* would mean “Flood Mound” and would suggest somewhere that had been destroyed by the Flood. Although Ezekiel has been bidden to go and deliver Yahweh’s message to the people, he evidently does not assume he has to set about this task immediately. For a while he just stays there looking devastated. But that might constitute a start to his fulfilling his commission, arousing the question, “What’s wrong with Ezekiel?”

### Biblical Theology Comments

No, receiving a vision from God does not make someone a prophet. Nor is a prophet someone with particular commitments, insights, or gifts. A prophet is someone sent and informed by Yahweh. We are unwise to routinize the notion of calling (Blenkinsopp, 23). Neither is a calling to be a pastor to be identified with the commission of a prophet such as Ezekiel—we then also routinize prophecy. We might compare God’s commission of Ezekiel with his commission of Moses, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Jesus, or Paul. The Scriptures give no hint that such commissions suggests a pattern for a calling to Christian service. On the other hand, Paul’s account of his commission does reflect Ezekiel’s language: Acts 26:16 takes up the words of 2:1[[142]](#footnote-142) (in Gal 1:15 Paul reflects the language of Jeremiah and Isaiah 49:1–6). The significance of Ezekiel’s account of his commission is not to provide the people of God with a model for what a calling might be. It is the opposite. It assures his community that they could take his message as coming from God, and challenges it to take it as from God. And like Paul’s account of his commission, it assures the church that the contents of this scroll issued from God, and challenges it to receive it as such. The words of Ezekiel and Paul came to be breathed out from God because they had been breathed in from God. As a result, Ezekiel is consumed with God-talk, whereas churches will often rather talk about themselves.[[143]](#footnote-143)

Ezekiel’s commission involves the activity of a spirit and the activity of Ezekiel himself. If we think in terms of a coming together of human openness and divine enabling (Calvin, 1:95–96), then here the divine enabling is the key factor (cf. Gregory, 157–58). Indeed, arguably there was virtually no human openness on the part of Ezekiel, any more than there will later be on the part of Paul. When God wants to take hold of someone as an envoy, he doesn’t worry too much about their desires. He certainly doesn’t wait on them volunteering. Even the great volunteer, Isaiah ben Amoz, offers God his services only after God has overwhelmed him, like Ezekiel (Isa 6:1–8). Ezekiel is “God’s marionette.”[[144]](#footnote-144)

### Application and Devotional Implications

Ezekiel’s report of Yahweh’s words ironically implies that Ezekiel will use plain words to his people, which is hardly so. But paradoxically, being enigmatic may contribute to effective communication.[[145]](#footnote-145) Lady Eleanor Davies paraphrases, “I send thee not to the Cotages unto Day-laborers, those of a rude speech, them of thick or great lips; surely had I sent thee unto them they would have hearkned unto thee, and have answered.”[[146]](#footnote-146) Ezekiel’s account of the household of God as a body characterized by rebellion matches the life of the household of God through the Scriptures and in subsequent millennia. Over the centuries, the church has (for instance) persecuted and otherwise failed the Jewish people, collaborated with the masters of and otherwise failed African Americans, and facilitated and condoned sexual abuse. We too have been a household of rebellion. If “Holy Scripture is our food and drink” (Gregory, 183), we have to let it be the basis on which we keep examining ourselves in light of its critiques. Calvin (1:104) invites us to pray:

Grant, O Almighty God, since thou hast counted us worthy of enjoying the privilege of daily listening to thy word, that it may not find our hearts of stone and our minds of iron, but may we so submit ourselves to thee with all due docility, that we may truly perceive thee to be our Father, and may be confirmed in the confidence of our adoption, as long as thou perseverest to address us, until at length we enjoy not merely thy voice, but also the aspect of thy glory in thy heavenly kingdom.

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## Yahweh Sends a Lookout (3:16–27)

### Outline

Two follow-ups to 1:1–3:15 form further preambles to Ezekiel’s accounts of receiving the concrete messages that will appear in 4:1–7:27. They thus form a bridge between the vision- commission and the concrete messages, and they connect both ways—they add to the commission and they lead into the messages. They outline:

A further defining of Ezekiel’s task (3:16–21):

to be a lookout for the community, warning people to turn from their faithlessness (or maintain their faithfulness) and thus not die.

A further defining of the action or non-action Ezekiel is to take now (3:22–27):

to go home and stay home and say nothing until he receives further instructions.

The first unit links more with what follows and the second more with what precedes. The defining of Ezekiel’s task in 3:16–21, that is, connects more directly with his performing the task, which begins in chapter 4. The commission to go home in 3:22–27 refers again to the coming of Yahweh’s hand, the appearance of Yahweh in his magnificence, and the entering of a spirit, which 3:12–15 related. This arranegment tightens the section’s functioning as a bridge between 1:1–3:15 and 4:1–5:17.

A virtually word-for-word further version of 3:16b–19 appears as 33:1, 7–9:

3:16b–19 33:1, 7–9

16bYahweh’s message came to me: 1Yahweh’s message came to me:

17My man, a lookout 7So you, my man, a lookout

I am making you for Israel’s household. I am making you for Israel’s household.

You will hear a message from my mouth, You will hear a message from my mouth,

and you will warn them from me. and you will warn them from me.

18When I say regarding someone faithless, 8When I say regarding someone faithless,

“You will definitely die,” “Faithless one, you will definitely die,”

but you have not warned him, but you have not spoken

thus not spoken to warn someone faithless to warn someone faithless

from his faithless path from his path

so as to keep him alive,

that individual, someone faithless, that individual, someone faithless,

through his waywardness will die, through his waywardness will die,

but this blood I will require from your hand. but his blood I will require from your hand.

19But you, when you have warned 9But you, when you have warned

someone faithless and he hasn’t turned someone faithless from his path, to turn from it,

from his faithlessness and he hasn’t turned from his path,

or from his faithless path, that individual, that individual

through his waywardness will die, through his waywardness will die,

but you, you will have saved yourself. but you, you will have saved yourself.

In addition, more extended versions of the statements in 3:20–21 appear in 18:1–32; 33:10–20 (see especially 18:24, 26, 33:13, 18). Perhaps this single statement in 3:16b–21 was “inspired by” the several subsequent passages (Allen, 1:59). Or perhaps they represent independent elaborations of 3:16–21 (cf. Block, 1:141). Further, the two clauses in 3:16a and 16b form an unusual combination. On one hand, “Yahweh’s message came to me” (3:16b) doesn’t usually have a preamble, and on the other, 3:16a would lead nicely and smoothly into 3:22–27 if 3:16b–21 weren’t there. So maybe 3:16a once did lead into 3:22–27, and Ezekiel or his curators inserted 3:16b–21 with the result that the combination in 3:16–27 enhances the complex way it binds chapters 1–7.

The form of 3:16b–21 parallels the pattern of rules in the Torah such as those in Exod 21:2–23:9, and its language matches rules of this kind in speaking of the faithless and faithful, the person in the wrong and the person in the right, the guilty and the innocent (Exod 23:7–8). Those rules also declare that someone guilty of certain wrongdoings “will definitely be put to death”(Exod 21:12–17). It would be a priest’s business to teach people about the rules in the Torah, so there is a hint here that Yahweh is commissioning a person who would have had that role in the context of the temple to function as a prophet in a priestly fashion, and on the basis of priestly principles, among people who are exiled from the temple.

In contrast, Yahweh’s commission in 3:22–27 matches the way prophets such as Isaiah and Jeremiah may dramatize and put into effect their message (see further the “Outline” to 4:1–5:4). This drama indeed pictures what it symbolizes and thus (paradoxically) prevents Ezekiel from functioning as a prophet. It thereby stands in tension with the commission to issue warnings in 3:16–21. It also raises related questions that it does not answer. Perhaps people are expected to work out the significance of Ezekiel’s going home and staying home, his binding with ropes, and his silence, so that they there face their rebelliousness. Ezek 4–7 will take up these questions, but in the meantime Yahweh is leaving people to work out that Ezekiel’s actions signify Yahweh’s intention not to speak to them.

The question of the relationship between the two testimonies in 3:16–27 may be clarified by considering the relationship between what Yahweh said in 593 and what he needed to say after 587. In Ezek 1–3 Yahweh does not tell Ezekiel to relate his vision or his commission to the Kebarites. He only tells him to issue warnings and perform the sign acts. Something similar is true about Jeremiah and other prophets, who are not described as relating their commissions. The exception that proves the rule is Amos, who relates his commission after having been fulfilling it for a while and being challenged about it (Amos 7:10–17). Isaiah may be another exception, as we hear of his commission only in Isa 6. Perhaps Yahweh commissioned Ezekiel in 593, he related his vision and commission to the Kebarites subsequently when challenged by them, transcribed it in connection with producing the scroll, and added 3:16b–21 in that context.

The report of the commission to give warnings such as 3:16b–21 describes, and that Ezekiel goes on to give, implies that Yahweh’s warnings about inevitable disaster coming to Jerusalem were designed to push people to take such action as would make disaster avoidable. In the context of Ezekiel’s initial mission to the displaced Judahites, they function as an argument for turning back to Yahweh so as to forestall the final calamity. That is the point of sending a prophet, and of being one. Ezekiel’s community were people who had been on the receiving end of Jeremiah’s warnings in the decades running up to 597, and they had not listened (Clements, 18). So “who could give an adequate account of the divine lovingkindness” with which Instead of denying the people salvation, Yahweh seeks to win them back (Theodoret, 45)? If the message about disaster did not reach the Jerusalemites from Ezekiel (as it reached them from Jeremiah), it was an important perspective for the Kebarites in connection with their understanding of their own relationship with Yahweh as well as Yahweh’s relationship with them and Yahweh’s relationship with Jerusalem.

After 587, 3:16–27 would also function to provide some explanation for what subsequently happened. It would function as theodicy (cf. Pohlmann, 1:73). And as the Kebarites, and eventually a wider circle of Judahites, read the testimony in 1:1–3:27 as a whole in the context of the scroll, it would once more place a choice in front of them. Ezekiel asks, will you now believe that Yahweh gave me this vision and commission and heed the message I was commissioned to give? The alternative in 593 (he implies) was to resist his message and find Yahweh making it impossible for him to speak to them, and the same options would lie in front of them after 587. Perhaps even more now (3:16b–21 implies), individuals need to be prepared to make their own decision about their response to the message. While Ezekiel speaks to the community as a whole, Yahweh deals with individuals as well as with the community. And while he speaks of the individual, Yahweh deals with the community as a whole as well as with individuals.

### Translation

3:16Then, at the end of seven days,[[147]](#footnote-147) Yahweh’s message came to me: 17My man, in that I am making you a lookout for Israel’s household, you will hear a message from my mouth and warn them from me. 18When I say regarding someone faithless, “You will definitely die,” but you have not warned him, thus not spoken to warn someone faithless from his faithless path so as to keep him alive, that person, someone faithless, will die through his waywardness, but his blood I will require from your hand. 19But you, when you have warned someone faithless and he hasn’t turned from his faithlessness or from his faithless path, that person, through his waywardness will die, but you, you will have saved yourself. 20And when someone faithful turns from his faithfulness and does wrong and I put in front of him something that causes his downfall, that person will die because you have not warned him. While he will die through his offense, and his faithful acts that he has done will not stay in mind, his blood from your hand I will require. 21But you, when you have warned someone faithful so that the faithful one does not offend, and that person has not offended, he will definitely live because he has taken warning, and you, you will have saved yourself.

22Yahweh’s hand came on me there and he said to me, Get up, go out to the plain, and there I will speak with you. 23So I got up and went out to the plain, and there, Yahweh’s magnificence was standing there, like the magnificence that I saw by the Kebar Waterway, and I fell on my face. 24A spirit came into me and got me to stand on my feet. He spoke with me and said to me, Come, shut yourself inside your house. 25And you, my man, there, they are putting cords on you and tying you up with them. You will not go out among them. 26And your tongue I will make stick to your palate. You will be silent. You will not be for them someone reproving, because they are a household of rebellion. 27But when I speak with you, I will open your mouth, and you will say to them, “The Lord Yahweh has said this,” as one who listens will listen and one who refuses will refuse, because they are a household of rebellion.

### Textual Notes

MT has markers\* in 3:16 after שׁׅבְעַת יָמׅים, “sevendays” (see the translation footnote), and after 3:19, 21 and 27.

### Verse-by-Verse Commentary

**3:16a** Sevendaysis the period for a priest’s consecration (Lev 8:33) (Odell, 47), but these seven days are a period of recovery from the vision (3:15), and seven days is a common term to designate a longish period of time, as in English we can say “a week.”

**3:16b–17** Ezekiel and his listeners would know what a “lookout” (צֹפֶה) was. Lookouts played key roles in providing intel for kings such as Saul, David, and Joram, in battle and over security issues (e.g., 1 Sam 14; 2 Sam 13; 18; 2 Kgs 9). Their key task was to keep watch so as to see when danger threatened and forewarn their master. Yahweh thus uses the lookout’s role as a model for a prophet’s role in warning people of danger. His job is to destroy illusions.[[148]](#footnote-148) It has been the role of Hosea and Jeremiah (Hos 9:8; Jer 6:17). Paradoxically, Yahweh thus commissions someone to warn people about danger that is coming from him. “The foe who attacks is strangely also the friend who wants those who on moral grounds are necessarily his enemies to escape. The judge who passes the death sentence… is loath to order the execution” (Allen, 1:58). The vast majority of occurrences of the verb for “warn”(זָהַר) come in Ezek 3 and 33. The occurrences elsewhere are less threatening and mean something like “inform,” which also suggests the connotation of the distinctive Ezekiel usage. By means of a lookout Yahweh provides his people with information of which they must take note. A homonym\* meaning “shine” (which lies behind the name of the Zohar) might be a variant of the same verb.

**3:18–19** Yahweh introduces the key antithesis between faithlessness (רֶשַׁע) and faithfulness(צֶדֶק). Fortuitously, English can use two nouns whose opposite nature finds expression in the form of the nouns. Traditionally, translations render the negative noun with a general word such as “wickedness” and the positive noun “righteousness” or “justice.” These words convey part of the Hebrew words’ connotations. But essential to those connotations is the idea of there being a committed relationship between two parties—between human beings, or between human beings and God. A righteous or just action is one that does the right thing in light of that committed relationship. A faithless action is one that ignores the obligations that issue from a committed relationship.

Yahweh adds the term waywardness (עָוׄן), whose traditional translation is “iniquity.” This noun compares with and evokes a verb meaning twist, bend, or go astray (עָוָה),[[149]](#footnote-149) and Ezekiel’s readers might thus make a further link with his reference to turning from a faithless path (דֶרֶךְ). The word “path”occurs more often in Ezekiel than in any other book, often denoting the route that people take in their lives. The word “turn” (שׁוּב) here nicely links with it. In a context such as this, the verb is traditionally translated “repent,” but that English word is inclined to suggest feeling regret, whereas its juxtaposition with the phrase “fromtheirfaithlesspath” makes explicit that it is an action word. It denotes turning from one way to another way.

Presumably the threat that a faithless person “willdefinitelydie” presupposes serious expressions of faithlessness such as Ezekiel will go on to portray when he describes what is happening in the Jerusalem temple. The death will be an unexplained early death like that of Pelatyahu (11:13). But Yahweh does not punish people who turn from their faithlessness. He can remit punishments. Someone who warns faithless people can thereby keepthemalive. But if the lookout fails to issue the warning, “his blood I will require from your hand”: that is, you are responsible for the death, and I will see to your execution, again presumably by an unexplained early death. Hananiah in Jer 28 might be an example. But lookouts who issue the warning will save their own life, even if the faithless person takes no notice. A literal lookout issues the warnings to the community as a whole, and it is then the whole community but also each individual head of a household and each individual household and even each individual person who has to respond. Ezekiel will address his warnings to the entire community, but it is the household head or household and eventually the individual that has to respond. The community as a whole is a household of rebellion, but people have to make their own decisions. Yahweh’s message to Ezekiel about all this is important to Ezekiel himself because his response to it will decide whether he loses his life, but it appears in his testimony and in the scroll because it’s important to his community. It’s unlikely that Yahweh is really bothered about the theoretical possibility of Ezekiel not fulfilling his commission. The real point in these verses lies in what they say to the community. They are not concerned at this point to justify Yahweh for a catastrophe that he has not yet brought about, which might be part of their significance when the passage recurs in 33:1–9 and when the Ezekiel scroll comes into being. Here, they are concerned with forestalling the catastrophe, not with theodicy. Which may now be fortuitous, as read in terms of theodicy after the Holocaust, they would be fiendishly misleading (Sweeney, 38).

**3:20–21** As past faithlessness does not doom someone who turns (back), unfortunately past faithfulness no more saves someone who turns (away) and does “wrong” (עָוֶל), a general term for doing the wrong thing by another person in some way. In the context of subsequent wrongdoing, past faithfulness will not “stayinmind” or come to remembrance for Yahweh (זָכַרniphal). “Something that causes his downfall” (מִכְשׁוׄל)is another word that occurs most often in Ezekiel. Obviously one should not wantonly or viciously put such a “stumbling block” (the traditional translation) or lethal obstacle in front of someone (Lev 19:14), but Ezekiel uses the image as a way of picturing a deserved falling to an early death. It signifies “a concrete equivalent to the death sentence” (Block, 1:147).

Yahweh also adds yet another key term for wrongdoing,“offense”(חַטָּאת), traditionally translated “sin.” The word suggests offending against the standards society or God lays down, failing to conform to them. Once again, not warning people makes the lookout liable for their death. The lookout should have issued a warning before the faithful person went wrong. Once again, then, if Ezekiel issues his warning, he will have saved his life. There is no implication that Ezekiel is seeking to work with individuals rather than the community, as if the community has become broken down into individuals (Greenberg, 1:96). The verses about the faithful person who might turn away further nuance the commission in 2:1–3:15, where Yahweh had portrayed the community as incorrigibly and universally faithless. Despite this judgment, he had allowed for the theoretical possibly that the community might listen and not refuse to do turn back. It’s never over until it’s over. And here he allows for the possibility that there are individually faithful people in the community, who therefore need to stay the way they are.

**3:22–24a** Ezekiel’s report picks up now from 3:16a and he relates an experience that replicates features from his earlier one (1:1–3:15): Yahweh’shand came on me,Yahweh’smagnificence was there, Ifellonmyface, aspirit cameintomeandgotmetostandonmyfeet, and Yahwehspoketo me. His words thus combine phrases from the accounts of the vision and of the commission and indicate that they may be separable but they are two parts of one event. Yahweh’s repeat of the appearance and Ezekiel’s reuse of the words also suggest that the event was not simply or wholly a one-time one. There will be further occasions when Yahweh’s hand comes, Yahweh’s magnificence appears, a spirit comes, and Ezekiel falls on his face, and many occasions when Yahweh speaks to him. “Theplain” is a loose term that could apply to the Mesopotamian plain in general but will here refer to the open country around the area where Ezekiel and the community live. Apparently it is natural for an experience of Yahweh coming to him to happen when he is alone, as he was previously.

**3:24b–25** Yahweh’s message essentially tells him to go back home and shut himself up there, which seems to make no sense.[[150]](#footnote-150) It not only clashes with the commission to be a lookout, to warn people, and to be wary about the consequences of failing to do so. It clashes with the commission in 1:28bβ–3:15, whose features have reappeared just now in 3:22–24a. What follows in 3:25–26 both underscores the clash and points towards its explanation. “They are putting cords on you”: the verb (נׇתְנוּ) is anticipatory *qatal*.\* “They will have put cords on you.” Who are “they,” and why do they do it? Are they people who are offended at his message? But why are they not identified? More plausibly, LXX and Vg. take the verbal expression as impersonal and implicitly passive, “cords will be put on you” (though oddly they do not continue this understanding by translating “you will be tied up” in 3:26a). This would imply a recognition that the agents of the binding is not the point.

In 3:26, Yahweh will be the agent of a further aspect of what he announces, so perhaps here he is the implicit agent of the binding. This would fit with his announcement about cords in 4:8, wherehe refers to putting cords on Ezekiel as an aspect of Ezekiel’s representing the coming final siege of Jerusalem. Ezekiel is to go home and confine himself there and not go out into the community, to represent the confinement involved in a siege, which the binding will reinforce. He will also be like someone tied up for transportation (Jer 40:1; Isa 49:9; 61:1).[[151]](#footnote-151) Yahweh is commissioning the first of Ezekiel’s parabolic acts. There continues to be some illogicality, in Yahweh’s giving Ezekiel no explanation of the action he commissions—or if he does, Ezekiel keeps it to himself. Further, as is the case with other parabolic acts, it’s not clear whether Yahweh refers to something that happens in a vision or happens in a way that people can see. Tg. assumes that Ezekiel becomes like someone tied up. While the First Testament sometimes reports prophets undertaking their dramas, it often doesn’t. Perhaps for Ezekiel’s immediate audience, imagining the event is enough. For readers, it is necessarily enough. As a piece of communication, it works by people reading this report and imagining what Yahweh commissions. But Ezekiel does stay home (8:1; 14:1; 20:1; 33:30). And paradoxically, it is by staying home, imposing constraints on himself, and keeping quiet that he will fulfill his commission to issue warnings.

**3:26** The illogic, alongside the tension with his commission, continues as Yahweh also says he intends to make Ezekiel unable to speak to the community. Perhaps he speaks metaphorically—it will be as if…*.* (Qimhi, in MG).[[152]](#footnote-152) It’s almost as if Ezekiel is describing a demonic attack.[[153]](#footnote-153) But Yahweh now explains another aspect of the drama’s significance. While it seems counterintuitive that a lookout cannot go out or speak, Ezekiel’s self-isolation and silence will be an act of judgment on the community. There will be no point a lookout issuing warnings to the people, and therefore Yahweh will stop. In announcing this intention, Yahweh introduces yet another suggestive term, which occurs only here in Ezekiel. Ezekiel is not to act as someone reproving (מוׄכִיַח), which is virtually a way of saying that the prophet cannot function as a prophet. “The person Yahweh loves, he reproves” (Prov 3:12). But the Judahites have already made clear that they will not respond to reproof, so Yahweh is giving up. Yet there is another level of paradox in this message of Yahweh via Ezekiel. The logic of Yahweh’s action compares with the logic of his commission to Isaiah (Isa 6), where part of the point in Isaiah’s telling people that Yahweh doesn’t want them to turn is to get them to turn. The same logic would apply if this reproving is more a matter of protesting or appealing to Yahweh, another aspect of a prophet’s or priest’s responsibility (cf. Job 9:33) (Darr, on the passage).[[154]](#footnote-154) Calvin (1:156) comments:

God seems in some way to play with his Prophet, when he sends him about, and apparently changes his plan. For the duty of teaching was previously imposed upon the holy man, but now he is commanded to go abroad, and afterwards God orders him to shut himself up at home…*.* But it is by no means doubtful that, by this method, the authority of the Prophet was confirmed, when God evidently governed his tongue, whether for speech or silence.

**3:27** Evidently, one should again not interpret Yahweh or Ezekiel too absolutely (as is the case in Isa 6). Although Yahweh will open his mouth in particular when Jerusalem actually falls (24:27; 33:22), there might be no implication that Ezekiel has nothing to say until then. His silence may mean not claiming to say what Yahweh has said except when he actually does say something, unlike some prophets Ezekiel could name. “The theme of dumbness is used to underline the point that the word which the prophet speaks is God’s, not his own” (Carley, 29). "Prophetic speech is tied speech.”[[155]](#footnote-155) In addition, it is possible for Yahweh both to say that corporately they are a rebellious household, yet also affirm that individually they will be responsible to decide whether or not to listen to Ezekiel. The urging goes to the community, and the response may be that of the community, but individuals are responsible for their response (Brownlee*,* 50).

### Biblical Theology Comments

Like other prophets, Ezekiel again says that “Yahweh’s message came to me,” and in case we have not taken the claim seriously enough, adds that Ezekiel “will hear a message from my mouth.” He has a sense of actual words coming from somewhere outside himself. While it’s easy and appropriate to think in terms of Ezekiel himself having distinctive perspectives that he expresses, it’s also thereby easy but inappropriate to sideline the fact that his message comes from Yahweh’s mouth. We are not just reading Ezekiel’s insights. Ezekiel may even be inviting people to see that he is the real image of God, not the lifeless and voiceless images that Babylonians were familiar with.[[156]](#footnote-156)

His first implication here is that Yahweh does not want faithless people to die, as he will make explicit later (33:11). The aim of sending them a lookout is to keep them alive. Yahweh is not bound like a human judge to punish someone for wrongdoing even if they repent. He is more like a president who has the power to pardon. But he entrusts to human beings the task of urging people to turn, and if there is no turning, there is no pardon.

There is a further solemn aspect to this dynamic. As the faithless can turn and live, the faithful can fall away and die. Both Testaments declare that God does not cast away or let go of his people (e.g., Isa 41:8–13; John 10:28–30), but also that people can fatally turn away from God (e.g., Jer 19:1–13; Heb 10:26–31). The stress in Yahweh’s commission to Ezekiel lies on the importance of human responsibility. This troubles people who are more inclined to emphasize divine commitment (see Calvin, 1:150–52) and are inclined to think that only the not-truly-righteous can fall away (see Greenhill, 116). The Scriptures emphasize both that God is faithfully and irrevocably committed to his people and that his people’s faithful commitment to him is integral to their position as his people. Talk in terms of conditional and unconditional does not clarify the relationship of God and his people, and the same is true of setting up an antithesis between God’s faithfulness or human faithfulness as the consideration that finally counts in this relationship. Both are integral. The challenge here in Ezekiel is, are we living a righteous, covenantal life? (Taylor,72).

### Application and Devotional Implications

“There is a time for silence and a time for speaking” (Eccl 3:7) (quoted in this connection by Gregory, 215). “The Prophet is now taught how difficult and dangerous an office he has now to undertake” (Calvin, 1:144). If Ezekiel’s prophetic commission has implications for someone who is not a prophet, then the warnings in 3:16–21 are scary. Jesus issues an even scarier converse threat than the one here, that on the assumption that prophets fulfill their vocation as lookouts and actually get slaughtered for it, the blood of all the martyred prophets will be required of his generation (Luke 22:49–51). Mayer (379) notes that the New Testament equivalent to a lookout is a bishop, an ἐπίσκοπος, someone looking over their flock. And in post-New Testament terms, ἐπίσκοποιare people who look over congregations. They are pastors. Yet pastors cannot live by the principle in 3:27. They have to speak Sunday by Sunday. And if they are paid by their congregations, it is all the harder for them to be people who focus on issuing warnings, on reproving. Being a pastor is really dangerous.

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## Yahweh Orders Signs Concerning Jerusalem (4:1–5:4)

### Outline

In 3:24–27 Yahweh had in effect commissioned Ezekiel to undertake a symbolic act. In 4:1–5:4 he does so more explicitly and more systematically. His instructions to Ezekiel thus continue seamlessly, with another “andyou*,* my man”following up 3:25 that leads into commissioning a series of actions. They portray or enact the threat hanging over Jerusalem, in broad chronological sequence:

1. The siege of Jerusalem as a sign for Israel’s household (4:1–2)
2. The attack on the city by Yahweh himself (4:3)
3. The chastisement of Israel and Judah (4:4–8)
4. The constraints of the siege in connection with people’s food and drink (4:9–11)
5. The repugnant straights to which people will be reduced (4:12–15)
6. The desolation and wasting away in the city (4:16–17)
7. The slaughter as the siege comes to its end, and afterwards (5:1–4)

A symbolic act or sign act is a dramatic action that symbolizes and represents another action or event, which is the one that really matters. Putting a ring on someone’s finger when one gets married is an example. It represents and puts into effect a marital commitment. Sticking pins in a model of an enemy in the hope that harm to them will follow may represent the assumption that there can be invisible and untraceable “natural” links between such events, or it may implicitly or explicitly presuppose the involvement of supernatural forces, or of some human being’s having extraordinary, “magical” powers. In the Scriptures, reference to sign acts presupposes the involvement of God in the link between sign and event. Anointing, expiatory sacrifices, circumcision, and baptism are examples of sign acts. In Christian faith, sacraments are sign acts. Sign acts may not picture what they represent in any obvious way. There is no evident link between the acts involved in anointing, circumcision, expiatory sacrifice, and what they represent. Nor is this the case even with baptism in the muddy Jordan, as Naaman implicitly points out (2 Kgs 5:12), though one can make links between baptism and cleansing or death/resurrection, as Christians do.

Commanded by God, sign acts or symbolic acts or dramas may have a number of significances.

* They can be God’s means of implementing what they represent. Anointing is part of what makes someone a priest or king.
* In picturing what they symbolize, and if necessary being accompanied by an account of their significance, sign acts bring some reality home to people.[[157]](#footnote-157)
* In bringing home that reality, they may change the attitude of people who witness them.
* They may have these effects (bringing home an event and changing attitudes) for people who do not witness them but only hear or read about them through the report of them appealing to people’s imagination, as is the case with Jesus’ parables
* Paradoxically, they may thereby parallel the verbal prophetic message with which they link, in aiming to be self-frustrating. Witnessing them or hearing of them makes people take action that ensures they do not happen.
* Also paradoxically, they may continue to be effective retrospectively in bringing an event home. Passover and Eucharist are sign acts that relate to long-ago events.

The further paradox about the sign acts in Ezek 4:1–5:4 and about many of Ezekiel’s subsequent sign acts is that they relate to the coming fall of Jerusalem but they are to be performed in Kebar. Are they still Yahweh’s means of implementing what they represent? In 593 they would bring home that reality to the Kebarites and they might change people’s attitude in Kebar. After 587, they could still function retrospectively in bringing home the reality of Yahweh’s involvement in what happened.

After 4:1–3, the simpler preface וְאַתׇּה, “andnow,” introduces 4:4–8 and 4:9–17. Then another “andyou*,* my man” introduces 5:1–4 and another sign act. I thus treat 5:1–4 with 4:1–17. After 5:1–4, the preface “the Lord Yahweh has said this”(5:5) marks a new turn, as it introduces a message for the people explaining the rationale for the sign acts. The section thus unfolds:

Get yourself a tile and model a siege (4:1–2)

Get yourself a griddle and model a barrier (4:3)

Lie down and model the carrying of waywardness (4:4–8)

Get supplies and make bread (4:9–17)

Get yourself a sword, cut your hair and beard, and dispose of the cuttings (5:1–4)

The complex logic and dynamic of 3:25–27 continue in 4:1–5:4:

1. Ezekiel is to perform sign acts of a kind that play a role in implementing Yahweh’s intention to bring calamity on Jerusalem. He performs the “theatre of the doomed” (Wright, 64), the “prophetic theater of the absurd” (Blenkinsopp, 45). “Pantomime” (Lind, e.g., 51) might not be such a wise term.
2. The acts themselves would need no audience. But the report of a sign and its enactment could implicitly be designed to forestall its implementing if people turn back to Yahweh. To this end a sign would have to be seen, and it will not be seen by people in Jerusalem, whose turning would make possible the averting.
3. A sign act performed or simply described in Babylonia would rather be designed to communicate with a Judahite audience there, to show them that the calamity to Jerusalem is going to happen and discourage them if they are fooling themselves that Yahweh is done with bringing calamity to Jerusalem and that they can therefore think in terms of going home soon.
4. In addition, Ezekiel’s references to the waywardness of Israel’s household and Judah’s household imply that he is not referring to the waywardness of Jerusalem alone, as if the Judahites in Babylonia could think of themselves as the good figs as opposed to the bad Jerusalem figs (see Jer 24). There is no moral and spiritual difference between the Judahites in either location.
5. There is therefore potentially no difference in their prospective fates. We had some hints that Yahweh’s appearing in the storm was not good news for Ezekiel’s community, and here Ezekiel implicitly spells out the significance of the storm event.
6. Performing or describing the sign act is thus designed to provoke a reaction from the Judahites in Kebar, one that disproves Yahweh’s gloomy assessment of them as an incorrigibly rebellious house (3:26), and/or to provoke some of them to respond to Yahweh even if the community as a whole doesn’t (3:27).
7. To achieve the aim in (1), Ezekiel would need actually to perform the drama, but to achieve the aims in (2) or (3), performing it would not be essential. Reporting the commission could be all that is needed.
8. While giving this report might have been the opening of mouth to which 3:27 refers, there is no “the Lord Yahweh has said this” here. It will come in 5:5, 7, 8. Yahweh commissions no words here, only the performance. If Ezekiel performed the acts, would people have to work out what they meant? Or would 5:5–17 reveal it?
9. If Ezekiel performed the acts, we get no report of it, only a report of the commission. It was presumably put into writing for inclusion in a scroll covering events and words from Yahweh beginning in 593 that would provide evidence in 587 that Ezekiel had said what was going to happen and thus prove that he had spoken prophetically. It would also provide a basis for encouraging people to turn back to Yahweh after 587 and for believing the more hopeful message he brings after 587. Or it might have been written down in that connection after 587.

Voltaire comments:

Here, my brethren, is one of those lovely and striking prophecies: the great prophet Ezekiel saw the northern gale, and four animals, and wheels of chrysolite all full of eyes, and the Eternal said to him: “Arise, eat a book, and then go off.” The Eternal orders him to sleep for three hundred and ninety days on his left side, and then forty on the right side. The Eternal ties him up with ropes. Certainly this prophet was a man who should have been tied up—but we are not yet finished. Can I repeat without vomiting what God commands Ezekiel to do? I must do it. God commands him to eat barley bread cooked with shit. Is it credible that the filthiest scoundrel of our time could imagine such excremental rubbish? Yes, my brethren, the prophet eats his barley bread with his own excrement: he complains that this breakfast disgusts him a little and God, as a conciliatory gesture, permits him to mix his bread with cow dung instead. Here then is a prototype, a prefiguration of the church of Jesus Christ.[[158]](#footnote-158)

### Translation

1And you, my man, get yourself a tile, put it in front of you, and etch a city on it—Jerusalem. 2Put a blockade against it, build a siege tower against it, throw up a ramp against it, put camps against it, and place battering rams against it around.

3And you, get yourself an iron griddle, put it [as] an iron wall between you and the city, and set your face towards it. It will be under a siege and you will besiege it, as it will be a sign for Israel’s household.

4And you, lie on your left side, and place the waywardness of Israel’s household on it, as for the number of the days that you lie on it, you will carry their waywardness. 5As I am giving you the years of their waywardness by a number of days, for 390 days you will carry the waywardness of Israel’s household. 6You will complete these, then lie on your right side, a second time, and carry the waywardness of Judah’s household for forty day as I am giving you a day for each year. 7So towards the siege of Jerusalem you will set your face, with bared arm, and prophesy against it. 8And there, I am putting cords on you, and you will not turn from one side to the other until you complete your days of siege.

9And you, get yourself wheat, barley, beans, lentils, millet, and spelt, and put them into a single container and make them into bread for yourself, as you will eat it for the number of days that you are lying on your side, 390 days. 10Your food that you will eat by weight, twenty sheqels per day: at a set time[[159]](#footnote-159) you will eat it. 11And water by measure you will drink, a sixth of a *hin*:at a set time you will drink it.

12While you will eat it as a barley loaf, you will eat it, in balls of human feces you will bake it in front of their eyes.[[160]](#footnote-160) 13And Yahweh said: In this way the Israelites will eat their bread, defiled,[[161]](#footnote-161) among the nations where I will drive them. 14I said: Aagh, Lord Yahweh, there, my appetite[[162]](#footnote-162) has not been defiled, and carcasses or prey I have not eaten, from my youth until now. Abominable meat has not come into my mouth. 15He said to me: See, I am giving you cows’ dung instead of human feces, and you will make your bread on it.

16And he said to me: My man, here am I, breaking the bread pole in Jerusalem. They will eat bread by weight and with worry, and water they will drink by measure, with desolation, 17in order that they may lack bread and water and look with desolation at one another, and waste away in their waywardness.

5:1 And you, my man, get yourself a sharp sword, getting it as a barbers’ razor for yourself, and pass it over your head and over your beard. And get yourself measuring scales and divide them.[[163]](#footnote-163) 2A third you will burn in fire in the middle of the city, when the days of the siege are complete. You will get a third, striking with the sword around it. A third you will scatter to the wind, in that I will draw a sword after them. 3And get a few in number from there and bind them in your hems. 4From them you will get some more, throw them into the middle of the fire, and burn them in the fire, as fire will go out from it to Israel’s entire household.

### Textual Notes

MT has markers\* after 4:3, 12, 14, 15, 17 and 5:4.

**4:3** For בֵּית, “household,” LXX “sons” implies בְּנֵי, the reverse of the difference in 2:3 (see the textual note there).

**4:4–5** In 4:4 LXX specifies 150 days, which might represent 150 years of deportation for Ephraim to last from about 700 to 550, and in 4:5 LXX reads 190 for MT’s 390, though Syr. has 390.[[164]](#footnote-164)

**4:5** LXX “two” misunderstands MT שְׁנֵי, “years of.”

**4:12** LXX “ash-baked barley loaf ” is a “contextually sensitive rendering” (Allen, 1:51).

**4:13** For “andYahwehsaid,” LXX has “and you will say, The Lord God of Israel says this,” which repeats from 3:27 and indicates that Ezekiel is to explain what he is doing. In 5:4b there is a similar extra clause. LXX then lacks “theirbread” and “where I willdrivethem.”

**4:14** Whereas LXX normally has simple “the Lord” for MT’s “theLordYahweh,” here it has “the Lord God of Israel” as in 4:13.

LXX “day-old” explains MT’s פִּגּוּל (see the verse-by-verse commentary).

**5:2** LXX has quarters for MT’s thirds, perhaps because fourfold-ness is more usual (e.g., 14:21) (Allen, 1:51–52), and partially repeats the description of the first third to make the math work.

**5:4** LXX links “to Israel’sentirehousehold”with the beginning of 5:5, preceding it with “and you will say.”

### Verse-by-Verse Commentary

**4:1–2** Yahweh bids Ezekiel etch a complex picture on what would need to be a large tile, or perhaps to inscribe the city’s outline on the tile and add models of the things involved in a siege. The word for a tile or mud-brick “refers to an air-dried brick and not one that has been fired” (Zimmerli, 1:161). Etching on it would therefore be feasible. We know of examples of such inscribing of town plans and sieges.[[165]](#footnote-165) Only at the very end of 4:1 is Jerusalem named, and up to that point Ezekiel’s audience might imagine he was promising the fall of Babylon.[[166]](#footnote-166) The nature of a sign act could mean that etching and model-making at Yahweh’s bidding initiate the actual process of siege. A siege implies the city’s population withdrawing behind its walls and barring its gates, and the attackers blockading it, allaround. The term “blockade” (מָצוֹר) is defined in terms of four features, listed in somewhat random order. Their nature involves some guesswork. But they might involve a “siege tower” (דָּיֵק) from which archers would fire at the city’s defenders, especially when the defenders were themselves seeking to fire at the attackers. “Camps” (מַחֲנֶה) in this context is a term for the army, which would erect an earthen “ramp” (סֹלְלָה) for “battering rams” (כָּר), to make breaches in the wall. Ezekiel could know what the city was to expect, having seen the siege of 597 (Brownlee, 64). A wall sculpture from Nineveh portraying Sennacherib’s storming of Lachish pictures bowmen and soldiers throwing stones and firebrands at the attackers and a track of logs over which the Assyrians have pushed a siege engine with a spear-like beam, with which they aim to destroy a tower.[[167]](#footnote-167) A city under siege is a common theme of Assyrian wall sculptures, often with the implication that the city’s king had rebelled (Odell, 60, has a portrayal of a relief from the palace of Sargon II at Khorsabad, from 710 BC). One aim of the portrayal would be to warn other kings of the consequences of rebellion.

**4:3** Even more frighteningly, Yahweh bids Ezekiel get an iron pan (the word otherwise occurs only in relation to baking in connection with sacrifices), to symbolize and enact Yahweh’s turning an inflexible, hard face towards the city during the siege. Ezekiel represents Yahweh in this sign act, acting out its horror by looking towards the city but not seeing and therefore taking any notice of it, because he has put the iron plate in the way. Setting one’s face thus suggests a deliberate hostile act (Eichrodt, 83). Ezekiel’s phrase recurs in 4:7 and similar phrases occurs later (e.g., 6:2; 13:17), as they do inJeremiah (21:10; 44:11). They also recur especially in Leviticus, not least in 26:17 in a chapter with which this section of Ezekiel has further parallels. Ezekiel’s action would be “a signforIsrael’shousehold”in Jerusalem if it saw it, but the people who will actually see it are the Kebarites. It embodies a message for that partial embodiment of Israel in whose company Ezekiel lives in Babylonia and for which he has been commissioned to be a lookout. In enacting this sign, he is fulfilling his lookout role. Only here does Ezekiel or any prophet use the word sign (אוׄת) in connection with a symbolic act. In general, a sign is an object or act that in some way represents something bigger and more significant than it is in itself (14:8; 20:12, 20). As a sign act, it guarantees the reality of the thing it represents. In connection with the siege portrayed in 4:1–2, Ezekiel’s community needs to recognize that Yahweh has turned his back on Jerusalem, so that its fall is inevitable, which has horrifying implications for the expectations of the community in Babylonia. The agent of the siege in 4:1–2 is not merely the Babylonian army, as it had not just been Nebuchadrezzar who besieged Jerusalem in 597. “Ezekiel represents to his audience that YHWH wages war against them.” He had done so in 597 and is going to do so again (Bowen, 21). He has not “simply abandoned Jerusalem to its fate.” He “has become the enemy, laying siege to his own city” (Block, 1:173).

**4:4** The next action Yahweh commissions makes Ezekiel a sign in another sense, though Yahweh does not use the word אוׄת (he will call Ezekiel a מוׄפֵתin 12:6, 11; 24:24, 27). Waywardness (עׇוֹן)[[168]](#footnote-168) can refer to action that constitutes turning into a wrong path, to the culpability or guilt that attaches to such action, and to the trouble or penalty that follows from it. The word’s meaning “spans the entire range of the sin-consequence spectrum, revolving around its foundational notion of twistedness, or perversion.”[[169]](#footnote-169) The inseparable connection between these aspects of the same reality is presupposed by the expression “carrywaywardness,” which denotes wrongdoing as something holding onto wrongdoers, the responsibility for wrongdoing that attaches to them, and its exacting a toll of them. Normally, then, people carry their own waywardness—they live with the consequences of their wrongdoing (e.g., 14:10; 44:10). And normally, at least, someone else must not carry another person’s waywardness (18:19–20). But in a sense a priest may carry the waywardness of people (e.g., Exod 28:38), and this responsibility constitutes one background to the way Ezekiel speaks in these verses (and in the sections on either side) in connection with Yahweh’s inducting him into the role of a prophetic priest or a priestly prophet.[[170]](#footnote-170) In another, complex extended sense, Yahweh’s servant carries the waywardness of his people (Isa 53:11). Yahweh here uses the expression in a further extension of such usage. Ezekiel will symbolically carry the waywardness of Israel’s household as he enacts upon himself symbolically the carrying of that waywardness, in the form of the responsibility for it and the consequences of it. It will be a vicarious carrying like that of a priest, not one that achieves forgiveness or makes atonement, but a symbolic one (Calvin, 1:175).

**4.5–6** In many contexts, Yahweh’s speaking of Israel and then of Judah would suggest reference to the northern and southern nations, but in Ezekiel the two terms are not used in this way. Ezek 37:16–19 is particularly suggestive in this connection. Although the “Israel’s household” to which Ezekiel has previously referred was its embodiment in Kebar (3:1, 4, 5, 7, 17; 4:3), the “Israel’s household”I whose waywardness Ezekiel is here to carry is the Israelite people as a whole. The 390 years would then cover the entire lifetime of Israel, and of the temple with its (commonly apostate) worship, up until the imminent fall of Jerusalem and destruction of the temple. “Judah” will then refer to the southern nation with its shady history over the forty years leading up to that imminent fall of Jerusalem.[[171]](#footnote-171) The forty days—forty years formula in connection with waywardness compares (in reverse) with Num 14:34. It is not evident that there is any specific significance in left and right. A heretic said to Rabbi Abbahu, “Your God is a jester, in that he said to Ezekiel, ‘Lie on your left side, then on the right side’” (*b. Sanh.* 39a); Greenberg (1:122) comments that the heretic was probably a Christian. There are various ways of making the arithmetic of 390 and 40 work in detail, but the likelihood is that these are more symbolic than chronological figures, like the three sequences of fourteen generations in Matt 1:2–17. In the background is then the 430 years of Exod 12:40–41, with the period of Jerusalem being the city where Yahweh dwelt then paralleling the period of Egypt being the country where Israel dwelt. So Ezekiel is to embody the way Israel’s household and the city of Jerusalem have been carrying waywardness (that is, have been characterized by waywardness) for four centuries, and in particular for recent decades, at the end of which Yahweh is finally terminating the city’s life. Some while later, the Damascus Rule (1:5–11), a body of teaching from around the second century BC, has the 390 years starting in 587 and thus coming to an end in the author(s) own time,[[172]](#footnote-172) so that the Rule illustrates the process whereby Jewish theologians applied the Scriptures to their own time—as Matthew does, and as Rabbi Eleazar subsequently does.[[173]](#footnote-173)

**4:7** Yahweh’s requiring Ezekiel to set his face towards the siege restates the commission in 4:3. Ezekiel is to do so withbaredarm, the equivalent of rolled-up sleeves, from which encumbrance has been removed so as to be ready for action. The expression recurs only in Isa 52:10 in the reverse connection of Yahweh taking action *for* Israel *against* Babylon. Ezekiel again embodies Yahweh taking action against Jerusalem. And on Yahweh’s behalf Ezekiel will prophesyagainstit. “Prophesy” (נׇבׇא niphal) suggests a powerful, effective form of speech through which God takes action. Thus 4:7 expands on 4:3 while reformulating it.

**4:8** Yahweh goes on to reformulate and expand on 4:4–6. First, he comes back to the ropes of 3:25. While he does not clarify who will literally tie Ezekiel up, he does make more specific the point of the ropes. In 3:25 their apparent function was to prevent Ezekiel leaving home, and the reason now becomes more explicit. He is immobile at home, carrying Israel’s waywardness. More specifically, the ropes will prevent his turning over and thereby compromising the effect and effectiveness of the sign. Presumably he could turn in order to make the move required by 4:6. While Yahweh may have had Ezekiel lie on his side 24/7 for 390 days and then forty days, the sign does not need this in order to work. Jewish and Christian sacraments and festivals do not involve a literal representation of the practice they embody. Ezekiel might lie down for a set time each day, or lie down with the equivalent of a tear-off calendar and tear off one day every moment or two until the 390 are over. Yet we should be wary of reducing the commission to something manageable, which would compromise its point. Given that these verses are a set of instructions and we are told nothing of their being implemented, they function as an appeal to the imagination of people hearing or reading them, and the imagination needs to let itself go. They resemble Jesus’ parables (e.g., the prodigal son) with their implausibility.

**4:9–11** Yahweh moves on to something intensely practical about a siege. Once it starts, people will have no opportunity to leave the city to get food. So Yahweh commissions Ezekiel to get enough of people’s staples to last the 390 days. The implication of the list of supplies may be that people will eventually have only scraps of the best things such as wheat and barley, so that their breadmaking will have to involve ingredients that are make-do (Qimhi, in MG). A rabbinic experiment suggested that even a dog would not be keen on this kind of bread (*b. Erubim* 81a) (Greenberg, 1:106). Even barley bread is rather inferior (Rashi, in MG). But poorer people have regularly combined wheat with other ingredients, and possibly thereby made it more nutritious. There are various estimates of the weight of a sheqel, but the assumption that twenty sheqels amounts to about eight ounces may not be far wrong. There is more uncertainly about a *hin*, though something like two pints as the ration might be right. “According to a famous orator, this amount of food and drink does not bestow strength but keeps death away” (Jerome, 54: we do not know who the orator was). The amount to last for 390 days would be colossal, a point underlined by the reference to “a single container”(unless the expression simply means “a container”),[[174]](#footnote-174) and some of the supplies would surely rot before the 390 days were up (Zimmerli, 1:168). Such considerations increase the likelihood that readers should not take the sign act too literally. Once again, then, the instructions are designed to appeal to their imagination. Just think of the quantity of grain and legumes, the instructions urge! But a blockade really will raise questions such as the ones that the sign act points to. Presumably even in imagination the readers are not expected to think of a year’s supply of actual loaves. During the siege, people would bake bread every few days.

**4:12** But cooking requires fuel—hence the indispensable role of the Gibeonites (Josh 9:23) or other “temple servants” in fetching wood, which the temple would need in connection with its fires. In normal times, a family would get its junior members or servants to collect wood for its cooking fire. Maybe cities also had a trade in supplying wood. But what will the family do during a blockade? Yahweh has a practical answer. In principle, it would be quite possible and not noxious to collect human feces, dry it, and turn it into ballsto use as fuel. But using human feces seems not to have been a common practice, and speaking in terms of baking the bread *in* them underscores the unsavoriness of the idea. Further, the reference to “balls”(the construct גֶּלְלֵי)nicely parallels the word for idolatrous “lumps” in Ezekiel (גִּלּוּלֵיin the construct; e.g., 8:10).

**4:13** Yahweh’s next words are a surprise, given that they refer to the situation of people whom the Babylonians will transport away from Jerusalem as they did the people now in Kebar (though Yahweh speaks of himself not the Babylonians driving them out, as with the siege). Yahweh might have made an ironic comparison between his expelling the Jerusalemites and his dispossessing the Canaanites centuries previously, but he uses a different verb (נָדַחnot גָּרַשׁ). Yet he thus indeed looks beyond the siege to its aftermath. The passage would proceed more smoothly from 4:12 to 4:14 without 4:13, which might be a later supplement to Ezekiel’s words, added in light of events. But the sequence within the passage as we have it increases suspense by the contents of this note. Further, the shocking declaration in 4:12 makes one expect something to follow, and we wait to discover what it will be. The verse articulates the theological problem about Yahweh’s intention as stated in 4:12. What Yahweh commissions will not merely be unsavory. Its result will be that the bread people bake will be defiled. The background is a common human awareness that underlies many rules in the Torah, that anything coming out from the body compromises the distinction between inside and outside and imperils the integrity of the person. Human beings are commonly uneasy about spit, vomit, nasal secretions—and feces. This principle finds expression in the Deuteronomic rules to cover nocturnal emissions and defecation, which must not be allowed to compromise the camp’s sacredness (Deut 23:10–14). Num 5:1–4 specifically refers to avoiding the camp’s defilement though the presence of people with a skin ailment (“leprosy”) or a discharge, and this principle underlies rules in Leviticus about semen and bleeding. There is no suggestion that living among the nations is itself defiling, though in connection with food, defilement might then be hard to avoid (Hos 9:3; Dan 1), with the link between food and serving other deities (which also might be the background of Amos 7:17) being a factor.

**4:14** Whereas Ezekiel did not raise objections to his original commission, now he does protest,[[175]](#footnote-175) in a way worthy of a priest, though it is a protest that a layperson might make. Ezekiel knows that “we are what we eat.”[[176]](#footnote-176) To eat something defiled is defiling. Ezekiel has never done such a thing. He has not eaten the carcass of an animal that died “naturally” or was killed by another animal (cf. 44:31; 22:8; Deut 14:31) and thus did not have its blood drained. Abominablemeat refers more narrowly in Lev 7:18; 19:7 to meat left over from a sacrifice and eaten casually as if it were not sacred. In Isa 65:4 it has a broader reference to eating forbidden food such as pork. Here any of these references would fit.

**4:15** Okay, says Yahweh: you can use animal dung. Cooking on animal dung is common in traditional societies (especially in the absence of wood as fuel), in the Middle East and elsewhere.[[177]](#footnote-177) And putting dough in the fire to bake it could then be the practice (Greenberg, 1*:*107). Being in the fire is apparently not noxious and does not have a negative effect on the food’s taste. But Yahweh also changes prepositions, speaking now in terms of cooking *on* dung as opposed to *in* feces. The more usual practice is indeed that the food sits in a pot on the fire and is thus not in contact with the dung. The exchange between Yahweh and Ezekiel suggests how severe Yahweh is prepared to be in picturing the siege for the Judahite exiles, how free a prophet (or anyone else?) can be in protesting at Yahweh’s biddings, and how flexible Yahweh is prepared to be. He has, after all, made his point to the exiles in causing them to imagine what he bade Ezekiel to do.

**4:16–17** A new introduction suggests that Yahweh is now making a different point, or is rather restating and extending the point in 4:10–11 about the rationing of bread and water. He here formulates his threats in ways that suggest implementing warnings in the Torah: “When I break for you the bread pole,… they will deliver your bread again by weight” (Lev 26:26). The bread pole is the rod on which a baker hangs bread rings, and breaking it is a metaphor for striking the city’s bread supply. There will be no bakers flourishing their sweet-smelling wares. If people will eat breadbyweight (cf. 4:10; also in Lev 26:26) and drinkwaterbymeasure (cf. 4:11), breaking the pole does not imply terminating the bread supply. It does suggest troubling the supply. Lev 26 makes no reference to water, so Yahweh is warning of something worse than the Torah’s threats. Further, what people have for food and drink, they will consume with worry and desolation(**שִׁמָּמוׄן**;Lev 26:33 refers to the country becoming a **שְׁמָמָה**) as they contemplate eventually running out of resources and experiencing the city’s fall. That worry and desolation is Yahweh’s aim. “Wasteaway” (**מָקַק**)can usefully refer both to emotional distress (Lev 26:39; cf. Ezek 24:23; 33:10) and physical distress (Psa 38:5 [6]; Zech 14:12). And “intheirwaywardness” can usefully refer both to people’s carryingtheirwaywardness, as Ezekiel will in symbolism, and being sick over their waywardness. They will indeed waste away in exile (Lev 26:39), which could lead to their confessing their waywardness, humbling themselves, and making amends, and to Yahweh’s being mindful of his covenant with their ancestors… (Lev 26:40–45). But Yahweh makes no reference to that possibility here (he does in a rather sardonic way in Ezek 16:59–63).

**5:1–2** Yahweh moves to a further instruction relating to the city’s siege and fall, and the aftermath. Its presupposition is that a man normally lets his hair and beard grow long. If it is cut for some reason (perhaps as a sign of mourning, though there is no pointer to this idea here), then there might be enough of it to measure, weigh, and divide. A sword is nevertheless an odd instrument to use instead of a razor, but the significance of mentioning a sword (and of specifying that it should be sharp) becomes clear in 5:2b. The completing of the days of the siege suggests an action that Ezekiel undertakes when the 390 days symbolizing the siege are over. Burning a third of the hair then threatens the death of a third of the city’s people, which is the toll that the siege will exact. The second third who die by the more literal sword are people who will meet their death during the taking of the city. The final third are the people who will escape one way or another, after whom Yahweh will send another sword. Yahweh again picks up his threat in the Torah: “I will scatter you among the nations, but draw a sword after you” (Lev 26:33).

**5:3–4** Even that is not the end. Once again, Yahweh is tougher than his threat in Leviticus. Ezekiel is to keep safe a few of that last third, which might suggest some survivors who will be the nucleus of a body that has a future. Not so, says Yahweh. His words constitute only “an ironic toying with the notion of hope for survival for a remnant” (Allen, 1:72). From those few Ezekiel is to take some and throw them into the fire of 5:2. Instead of the survivors of Jerusalem’s fall (such as Zedekiah)[[178]](#footnote-178) being the nucleus of a future Israel, they become fuel for the fire that will burn “Israel’s entire household.” In Ezekiel’s context, this fire will thus consume the Judahites with whom Ezekiel is to share this message—though Jerome (59) sees the threat as looking forward to the descendants of these survivors who will set Israel’s household on fire in the crises in the time of Antiochus Epiphanes, of Pompey, of Titus, and of Hadrian.

### Application and Devotional Implications

The people of God is one through the ages, and the stain that affects it in one generation continues to affect it through generations that follow, until something dissolves it. The “household of faith” (Gal 6:10) may be a household of rebellion and thus be in continuity with the household of Israel. “An *unclean church* is a contradiction in terms,”[[179]](#footnote-179) but the church has to allow for the possibility that God may set going against it a siege from hostile forces such as Ezekiel describes, forces consciously or subconsciously opposed to the living God that may be unconsciously serving the living God. So if it finds itself under such siege, it has to ask whether these forces are the agents of the living God. There is no presumption that they are, but it has to ask the question. After 587 BC, Jerusalem lamented that “*Thou hast covered thy self with a cloud, that our prayers should not pass through*”(Lam 3:44) (Greenhill*,* 127). And after AD 70, Rabbi Eleazar lamented that “From the days of the temple’s destruction, an iron wall has separated Israel and their Father in heaven” (*b. Berakot* 32b), though he allows for the possibility that prayer and especially tears may break through the wall when sacrifice cannot.[[180]](#footnote-180)

### Biblical Theology Comments

God works through dramatic acts that are undertaken at his bidding by his servants and put his purpose into effect or bring home his truth. Circumcision and baptism, sacrifice and eucharist do both those things (Greenhill, 128). So do foot-washing and ordination. Like Ezekiel’s sign acts, sacraments are implausible sign acts that might seem not worth taking seriously, yet they are acts by means of which God does something powerfully effective through something feebly material (Mayer, 381). How implausible is it that circumcision makes someone a member of the covenant people, that sacrifice cleanses, that baptism brings a transition to a new life, that consuming a morsel of bread and a mouthful of wine is the means whereby the benefits of Jesus’ death come to apply to people who believe in him? Yet further, as Ezekiel’s sign acts can suggest hope as well as calamity (see 37:15–23), so sacraments can suggest disaster as well as hope. Baptism suggests submitting to death through drowning before rising to new life, and eucharist draws attention to the breaking of Jesus and his bleeding.

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## Yahweh Issues Threats Concerning Jerusalem (5:5–17)

### Outline

If we are reading the scroll sequentially, Yahweh’s commission to Ezekiel (3:16–27) left him and us in a state of suspense. Yahweh had commissioned him to speak, and to act in strange ways, but also not to speak unless spoken to and thus not to explain his strange actions. Some of the suspense then got deeper (4:1–5:4) as Yahweh commissioned a series of signs that extended the strange original sign about being tied up, but didn’t incorporate any explanation of the sign acts beyond a repeated comment on the waywardnessof Israel and Judah. Suspense and tension now find some resolution, though not in a way that will please many readers. While the sign acts didn’t need much explanation to indicate what they referred to, this new section complements 4:1–5:4 by providing some explanation in terms of rationale for the action by Yahweh that they represent.

In giving him his role as lookout, Yahweh had spoken of Ezekiel opening his mouth when he spoke to him, so that he was in a position to say, “the Lord Yahwehhassaidthis.” Here he indeed says, “theLordYahwehhassaidthis” (5:5, 7, 8), and later uses further parallel formulations (5:11, 15, 17). He also says more about the concrete nature of Israel’s waywardness and about the trouble that will follow. Further, as 4:1–5:4 picked up the motif of ropes from 3:16–27, this section picks up the focus on Jerusalem and the motif of thirds from 4:1–5:4, so that 4:1–5:4 and 5:5–17 complement each other in commissioning visible signs and verbal warnings. Ezek 6–7 will take the verbal warnings further, so that 5:5–17 also forms a hinge between 4:1–5:4 and 6:1–7:27 (Häner, 141).

Read in light of the fall of Jerusalem, the section could function as a “theodicy” articulated “in light of the very present horrors of siege and exile” (Joyce, 90). But at this point in Ezekiel’s ministry, the horrors of siege and exile are still future. Yet even the community in Babylonia needs to prepare itself for them mentally, and face their implications. Ezekiel’s aim is “to save the community from death (cf. 3:21)” (Lind, 56). The community he has to seek to deliver is not the Jerusalem community (that is Jeremiah’s job) but the Kebar community.

What lies behind the explanation Yahweh gives here? There is overlap with his threats about the consequences of ignoring his expectations, expressed in warnings in Lev 26. In Ezek 4:16 and 5:2 there were links with Lev 26:26, 33. The first link recurs in another reference to the bread pole (Ezek 5:16). The section also makes further links:

It has rebelled at my rulings … and at my laws (Ezek 5:6)

If you reject my laws and your spirit spurns my rulings (Lev 26:15)

Parents will eat children (Ezek 5:10)

You will eat your children’s flesh (Lev 26:29)

I will make you into a waste (Ezek 5:14)

I will make your towns a waste (Lev 26:31)

I will send off dire animals against and they will bereave you (Ezek 5:17)

I will send off animals of the wild against you and they will bereave you (Lev 26:22)

Epidemic and bloodshed, they will pass through you, and I will bring a sword against you

(Ezek 5:17)

I will bring a sword against you … and send epidemic among you (Lev 26:25)

Further, in Lev 26 Yahweh makes three references to “thenations”among whom the Israelites will be scattered, among whom they will perish, and before whose eyes he will bear in mind that he originally brought them out of Egypt (Lev 26:33, 38, 45). In Ezek 5:5–17 he refers seven times to the nations among whom Jerusalem is set, whose faithlessness it has exceeded, before whose eyes Yahweh will now act in bringing calamity and thus turn Jerusalem into an object of contempt and an embodiment of desolation.

Through Ezekiel, Yahweh is declaring: “You know those threats in Leviticus? I intend to implement them.” His sequence of warnings here is briefer, but it covers a cross section of the same areas. A difference is that he makes no reference to Jerusalem’s action involving a breach of covenant, and neither does he refer to the possibility of Jerusalem turning back to him, nor to the prospect of his subsequently restoring Jerusalem in fulfillment of his covenant relationship with its people (contrast 16:59–63).

There is another connection in which the grim threats in 5:5–17 are not novel ones that Yahweh inspired Ezekiel to think up in this context. Both Ezekiel and Leviticus also recall accounts Ashurbanipal gave of military victories (just a few decades before the 590s), in which he refers to famine, epidemic, slaughter, and parents eating children (see *ANET*, 299–300; cf. Greenberg, 1:124). In Leviticus and in Ezekiel, then, Yahweh threatens to act in the way a warrior king does act when his underlings fail to keep their commitments to him. Both in Leviticus and in Ezekiel, at these points the nations gain new prominence (Wright, 93).

As 4:1–5:4 is a jerky sequence of biddings, 5:5–17 is a jerky block of messages. One can think of 5:5–17 as a collage (Block, 1:196) derived from separate messages that Yahweh gave to Ezekiel in connection with his acting out the signs. In other words, Yahweh might not have commissioned all those sign acts end to end, Ezekiel might not have enacted them one after each other, and 5:5–17 might not represent a warning that Yahweh gave in one go. Rather, Ezekiel has turned a sequence of commissions and messages into a pair of coherent wholes in 4:1–5:4 and 5:5–17. In the context of the Ezekiel scroll they have thus come to comprise a rhetorically structured whole that works in staircase fashion. It initially emphasizes Yahweh’s having spoken these words (which links with that command not to speak until he is told to), goes on to indict Jerusalem for what it has done, and works towards a focus on what Yahweh will do as a consequence. It then restates the emphasis on Yahweh’s having spoken these words by appending that note to the threats:

5aαYahweh has said

5aβ–6What Jerusalem has done

7aαYahweh has therefore said

7aβbWhat Jerusalem has done

8aαYahweh has therefore said

8aβb–10What Yahweh will therefore do

11aαTherefore (Yahweh’s affirmation)

11aβWhat Jerusalem has done

11b–13aWhat Yahweh will do

13bYahweh has spoken

14–15bαWhat Yahweh will do

15bβYahweh has spoken

16–17bαWhat Yahweh will do

17bβYahweh has spoken

To analyze Yahweh’s declaration of intent in 5:11b–17 in a complementary way:

11b–12. Yahweh will cut Jerusalem down

13a. Behind that action: his fury

13b. In front of that action: their acknowledgment that Yahweh has spoken

14–15a. Yahweh will make Jerusalem a waste in front of the nations

15bα. Behind that action: his fury

15bβ. Yahweh has spoken

16–17bα Yahweh will send off famine, destruction, death, and epidemic

17bβ. Yahweh has spoken

The chapter and the first five chapters of the book thus come to an end in “wave upon wave of fury” (Greenberg, 1:120).

We do not know when when Leviticus reached the form in which we have it, but the usual scholarly view is that it was approaching this form in Ezekiel’s time. It’s then possible that Lev 26 builds on Ezekiel rather than the other way around or that both are semi-independent recensions of things Yahweh was saying in this period. The mutual reinforcement of Ezekiel and Leviticus would then have worked in a different way from the one presupposed above, though the principle of what Yahweh was doing would not be so different.

### Translation

5The Lord Yahweh has said this: Whereas I set this Jerusalem among the nations, with countries around it, 6it has rebelled at my rulings with faithlessness above the nations, and at my laws above the countries, around it, because people have baulked at my rulings, and my laws, they have not walked by them. 7Therefore the Lord Yahweh has said this: On account of your wildness[[181]](#footnote-181) above the nations, around you, as you have not walked by my laws and not acted on my rulings, and not acted in accordance with the rulings of the nations, around you, 8therefore the Lord Yahweh has said this. Here am I, against you [Jerusalem], yes, I myself will act on rulings within you in front of the nations’ eyes. 9I will do in you what I have not done, and the like of what I will not do again, on account of all your outrages. 10Therefore parents, they will eat children within you, and children, they will eat their parents, and I will act on rulings against you and scatter all that remains of you to every wind.

11Therefore, I am alive (an affirmation of the Lord Yahweh), if I do not…. Since you have defiled my sanctuary with all your abhorrent things and with all your outrages, yes, I for my part will cut back. Yes, my eye will not pity, yes, I for my part will not show concern, 12as a third of you will die by an epidemic or come to an end by a famine within you, a third will fall by a sword around you, and a third I will scatter off[[182]](#footnote-182) to every wind, and draw a sword after them. 13So my anger will expend itself and I will settle my fury on them and find relief, and they will acknowledge that I, Yahweh, have spoken in my passion, in expending my fury on them. 14I will make you into a waste and into a focus of disdain among the nations, around you, in front of the eyes of every passerby. 15So it will become a focus of disdain, of reviling, of correction, and of desolation for the nations, around you, through my acting on rulings against you in anger, in fury, and in furious chastisements (I, Yahweh, have spoken). 16In my sending off dire famine arrows against them, people who have become liable for destruction, which I will send off to destroy you people, I will add famine upon you and break the bread pole for you. 17I will send off against you famine and dire creatures and they will bereave you as epidemic and bloodshed pass through you, and I will bring a sword against you (I Yahweh have spoken).

### Textual Notes

MT has markers\* after 5:6, 7, 9, and 10.

**5:6** LXX “and you will speak” derives וַתֶּמֶר (“it has rebelled”) from אָמַר rather than מָרָה. More plausibly Tg., Sym., Theod. “and they exchanged” derive it from מוּר, suggesting “changed my rulings into faithlessness” (cf. Rashi, in MG; KJV).

For the unique expression לְרִשְׁעָה, “with faithlessness,” LXX “to the lawless [one]” implies לָרְשָׁעָה, referring to Jerusalem.

**5:7** At the end of the verse, NRSV omits “not,” with a few late medieval Hebrew and other manuscripts (cf. 11:12).

**5:11** For מׅקְדׇּשׁ, “sanctuary,” LXX regularly has pl. “sacred things.”

**5:12** For שְׁלִשִׁתֵיךְ and subsequent variants, “athird,” LXXhas “a quarter,” as in 5:2.

LXX regularly translates דֶּבֶר, “epidemic,” as “death.”

**5:13** LXX lacks וַהֲנִחוֹתִי “I will settle” and וְהִנֶּחׇמְתִּי “and find relief.”

For וְיׇדְעוּ, “and they will acknowledge,” LXX has “you” [Jerusalem] will acknowledge.”

**5:14** For בַּגּוֹיִם, “among the nations,” LXX “and your daughters” implies בּנוֹתַיִךְ.

For לְחׇרבׇּה וּלחֶרְפׇּה, “into a waste and into a focus of disdain” with the paronomasia,\* LXX has only the first noun.

**5:15** LXX has only two nouns instead of four in 5:15a, “an object of mourning and misery.” It then lacks “inangerandinfuryand.” 4QEzekb lacks the ו “and” in וּבְתֹכְחוֹת “and in chastisements.”

**5:17** For וְשׁׅכְלֻךְ, “and they will bereave you, “ LXX has “and I will take vengeance on you” (cf. 14:15).

### Verse-by-Verse Commentary

**5:5** Yahweh’s opening two words, “This Jerusalem,”make explicit the subject of what has preceded. “The terse phrase … cuts off at a single stroke all the hopes that the menacing symbolic acts must be aimed against the tyrant city of Babylon” (Eichrodt, 87–88). Yahweh’s recollecting that he set Jerusalem “amongthenations”is a commonplace form of expression that in itself simply points to something down to earth, that Jerusalem is not an island. The double expression “amongthenations, withcountriesaroundit,” recurs in Ezekiel (e.g., 6:8; 11:16; 12:15) and underlines its point (Zimmerli, 1:174). Yet the expression is pregnant but tantalizing in light of later statements. Jerusalem earned fame with the nations (16:14) and sits at earth’s center or height (טַבּוּר; 38:12). It is the place where the God of all the earth deigns to dwell and from which his teaching is destined to go out to all the world. The note might make some readers think of Jerusalem’s geographical location at the crossover point between Africa, Turkey/Europe, and Asia, or reflect on the theological or vocational point that the geography could symbolize (Isa 2:2–4). What nation has rulings as impressive as Israel’s? (Deut 4:6–8). Yahweh’s recollection might also remind people of the city’s situation of temptation, of the danger that nations and countries could lead the city astray and of the way their temptations needed to be resisted (e.g., Lev 18:3–4; 20:22–23; Deut 12:30–31).

**5:6** Yahweh goes on to make his allusion explicitly humiliating. If Jerusalem was supposed to resist the nations’ temptation or to witness to the impressiveness of Yahweh’s revelation, it has failed cataclysmically. People such as the Philistines (!) will be appalled at Jerusalem’s behavior (16:27). Yahweh here picks up his description of Israel as a “householdofrebellion”(2:5, 6, 8; 3:9, 26, 27; see also 2:7) and his references to “faithlessness”(3:18–19). Perhaps this link explains the odd form of expression for “withfaithlessness,” לְרִשְׁעׇה, which then suggests “as regards faithlessness." Jerusalem “hasrebelledatmyrulings” and “mylaws”instead of living by them, and has done worse than the nations and countries in this respect rather than modeling the right way for them (cf. Rom 2:17; Mayer, 383).[[183]](#footnote-183) Yahweh’s rulings (מִשְׁפָּטִים) are his authoritative judgments about what people must do. His laws (חֻקּוׄת) are his quasi-legal enactments as king. The two nouns, along with the statement that the people have “baulked”at them and “not walked”by them, recall warnings in the Torah, not least, again, Lev 26 (e.g., 26:3, 15, 43). What rulings and laws are these? Yahweh’s indictment raises suspense—5:11 will explain further. For the moment, the expression simply makes the point that “Jerusalem’s sin is not something vague but an affront to the clear, revealed law of God” (Zimmerli, 1:175). The idea that Jerusalem’s waywardness exceeds that of other nations recurs in Ezek 16 and in accounts of the reign of Manasseh (2 Kgs 21:9; 2 Chr 33:9). It is at least hinted in Amos (2:4–5; 2:6–3:2) in the implication that both Judah and Ephraim had ignored the special revelation that Yahweh had given them.

**5:7** Yahweh continues with the first of the four therefores (לָכֵן) in this section. Twenty-four times in Ezekiel the particle introduces “Yahwehhassaidthis,” and it occurs a further thirty-seven time in other connections. It suggests, “Here comes what follows: Get ready!” (Greenberg, 1:111).[[184]](#footnote-184) The introductory phrase as a whole, “theLordYahwehhassaidthis,” makes one expect that a fearsome threat will follow, but initially Yahweh and Ezekiel maintain suspense by restating the indictment in 5:5–6. First, there is “your wildness” (הֲמׇנְכֶם; see the translation footnote), a vivid alternative description of the Jerusalemites’ waywardness. And the comment on the people’s capacity to be more wayward than the nations is nuanced by describing them as not only failing to live by Yahweh’s laws and rulings, but not even acting in accordance with the nations’ own rulings. Yahweh’s accusation might make people think of Judah’s history of failing to keep its political commitments to peoples such as Babylon and Egypt in the decades leading up to 587.

**5:8** After yet another repetition of the introductory phrase and a further tightening of suspense (when will Ezekiel tell us what Yahweh is implying?), Yahweh at last declares what the consequence of Jerusalem’s faithlessness will be. First, there is the frightening “heream I [coming]againstyou.” Yahweh says it elsewhere in Ezekiel only to Tyre, Sidon, and Pharaoh (26:3; 28:22; 29:3; in Jer 23:30, 31, 32 to the deceptive prophets), though he does issue a slightly different version of the threat elsewhere (אֶל instead of עַל, e.g., 13:8; 21:3 [8]), and he can use that version with positive implications (36:9). “The Philistines are on you, Samson,” says Delilah, using Ezekiel’s expression here (Greenberg, 1:113). NJPS’s paraphrase, “I am going to deal with you,” fits well with Yahweh’s following formulation, “Imyselfwillactonrulingswithinyouin front ofthenations’eyes.” There is double poetic justice there. They have not acted on Yahweh’s rulings, which incorporated sanctions, so he will act on his rulings. And they are surrounded by nations whose faithlessness they have exceeded, so he will take this action in front of the nations’ eyes. The “chilling” phrase makes for a contrast with the “more familiar and comforting” expression “I am with you” (which also implies action and not merely an inner sense of presence) and reinforces the message that Jerusalem’s really dangerous adversary is not Babylon but Yahweh (Wright, 90–91).

**5:9** What will Yahweh being against Jerusalem mean? Continuing to heighten suspense, Yahweh asserts the uniqueness of what he will do in relation to what he has done in the past. Indeed, 587 will be more devastating than 597. To underscore the point, he asserts this uniqueness in relation to what he will ever do in the future. It implies a decision about which he evidently changes his mind in AD 70, or it involves a hyperbole.\* Either way, Matt 24:21 sits interestingly alongside it. Perhaps Ezekiel’s hearers would think it must be a hyperbole: how could Yahweh discredit himself before the nations by an action of this kind? (Ganzel 2020, 39). Yahweh justifies his plan by Jerusalem’s “outrages” (תּוׄעֵבָה, traditionally “abomination*”*). The term recurs in Leviticus, Deuteronomy, and Proverbs, but nowhere more often than in Ezekiel. It suggests something contrary to and conflicting with who Yahweh is. Yahweh will shortly specify that these outrages are things that defile the sanctuary (5:11), and will later spell out that they lie in people’s so-called worship with their images, lumps and whorings (e.g., 6:9; 7:20; 8:7–17; 16:1–58).

**5:10** At last Yahweh resolves the suspense over what his being against them will mean. He casts around for a way of giving concrete expression to the horror of what he will do in acting against and within Jerusalem in its coming final siege. A treaty imposed on one of the city rulers within the empire by Ashurbanipal’s predecessor, Esarhaddon, incorporates many prayers for the gods to punish the city ruler if he breaks any of his commitments, and they include, ”May a pregnant mother (and) her daughter eat the flesh of your sons; in your extremity may you eat the flesh of your sons.”[[185]](#footnote-185) The threat also appears in Lev 26:29 and Deut 28:52–57, the experience as a basis for protest in Lam 2:20; 4:10, and the practice as the subject of a narrative in 2 Kgs 6:24–31. There are further such stories linked to the fall of Jerusalem in AD 70 in (e.g.) Josephus (*J.W.* 6.3) and *b. Yoma* 38b. These various texts may be speaking literally or may be looking for the most horrifying image to describe suffering, but eating human flesh does happen in times of terrible travail, so we cannot rule out literal reference. Ezekiel’s unique complementing of parents eating children with children eating parents does suggest that he speaks hyperbolically. Perhaps he collates the one-way threat of the passages in the Torah with the two-way principle of Deut 24:16 (Greenberg,1:114). Once again Yahweh speaks of implementing his “rulings,” here using the word שְׁפָטׅים which Ezekiel especially likes (see the verse-by-verse commentary on 11:9). Finally, Yahweh picks up an expression from the last sign act, and again develops it: he will himself take the action with which he commissioned Ezekiel, and will “scatterallthatremainsofyoutoeverywind.” As 5:2–4 seemed about to mitigate the threat of disaster and imply the possibility of some people surviving the coming disaster, but then did nothing of the sort, so here Yahweh picks the familiar but ambivalent notion of “allthatremains,” a “remnant” (שְׁאֵרִית), and denies that it contains any hope.

**5:11a** Starting again, Yahweh once more restates his intention and rationale, with more specificity and more force. He begins by strengthening it with a triple avowal. First*,* he declares,“Iamalive”(traditionally, “as I live”). The one who speaks is the living God, the lively God, the God who acts: so watch it (see further the comments on “Who God Is” in the Introduction to this commentary).[[186]](#footnote-186) Second, what follows is the Lord Yahweh’s affirmation: Jeremiah and Ezekiel, in particular, often support their words with this parenthesis. “I am not like those other prophets, this is not merely my affirmation, it’s Yahweh’s, you realize?” (cf. 13:6–7). In Ezekiel the phrase often follows and reinforces “Iamalive”(e.g., 14:15, 16, 18, 20). Third, what comes next is an incomplete solemn self-curse by Yahweh, “ifIdonot,…” with uts implication of self-punishment.

Here, even the declaration of intent is delayed by another restatement of the rationale for the unspecified action. For the first time, it gives some specificity to the the “outrages,” though still in rather general terms. They are “detestableobjects”(שִׁקּוּץ), another term Ezekiel uses more than anyone. We will discover in due course that it refers to the images of wood and rock used in the temple worship in Jerusalem, which are thus means by which people have “defiledmysanctuary.” This noun (מִקְדָשׁ) is Ezekiel’s favorite term for the temple. It is more frequent than “palace” (הֵיכָל, the word most commonly translated “temple”; e.g., 8:16; 44:1) or “Yahweh’s house” (e.g., 8:14, 16; 10:19—Ezekiel also often refers simply to “thehouse”). The house is a dwelling, the palace is a king’s dwelling, and the sanctuary is the sacred dwelling of the holy one, and it is because of its nature that the verb “defiled” (טָמֵא piel) gives expression to the scandal of Jerusalem’s worship. The “rulings”and “laws,” then, that Yahweh has referred to are ones concerning worship, and thescandal of Jerusalem’s life here lies in the nature of that worship. Elsewhere in Ezekiel the scandal also lies elsewhere, but much of Ezekiel’s focus lies in what happens in the temple. Zion is Yahweh’s sacred mountain (Psa 48:1–2 [2–3]; cf. 87:1–2)? But its people have de-secrated it. Ezekiel never refers to “Zion” (Joyce, 88).[[187]](#footnote-187) It is one of the ways in which he differs from Isaiah[[188]](#footnote-188) and from Jeremiah.[[189]](#footnote-189) He still does not yet indicate exactly what he refers to, how the desecration happens. Readers will have to read on to discover more precisely wherein the scandal lies (cf. 23:37–39).

**5:11b–12** Yahweh comes now to what he swears he will do. Like the English expression, “cutback”(*גָרַע*) can have the general meaning “diminish” (16:27), but it suits here (cf. Isa 15:2; Jer 48:37) because it corresponds to the command about shaving in 5:1–4. The symbolic act becomes a metaphor, but a horrifying one. Three times Yahweh emphasizes his firmness or resolve in a way corresponding to the three affirmations at the beginning of the verse: “Iamalive,” thenanaffirmationoftheLordYahweh*,* then “if Idonot,” he had said. Here he says, “yes*,* Iformypart,”then“yes*,* myeye*,*”then again “yes*,* Iformy part.” He thus further underscores the commitment expressed in 5:11a. “Notpity” (חוּס) and “notshow concern” (חׇמַל) often come together, especially in Ezekiel (7:4, 9; 8:18; 9:5, 10; 16:5). If there is a difference between the two, the first suggests the attitude of mercy, the second the practice . The words are a little similar (תָּחוׄסand אֶחְמוׄל), which adds to the underscoring of their point. There can be a resoluteness about God’s gaze that means he looks steadfastly at something terrible that he is doing, resists the temptation to behave in his normal loving fashion, and declines to look away. It happens when Jesus is being executed. In 5:12 Yahweh spells out the implications of the cutting in a slightly different way from the one that featured in the sign act. During the siege, it will mean epidemic and famine: these are two realistic prospects that go along with a blockade and that Ezekiel (and Jeremiah) often envisage in the context of the threat of Jerusalem’s siege (cf. 5:17). But the attacks on the city and its eventual fall will also mean fighting and people dying by the sword all around the city (cf. 5:2 and Lev 26:33). And during and after the siege some people will escape but will find that they have not thereby escaped Yahweh. “What could have been said more dreadful?” (Greenhill*,* 149).

**5:13** Yahweh’s depiction of his anger provides the link between the description of the city’s outrages and of its slaughter. The slaughter comes about because he is furiously angry and the anger is a reaction to their outrages. He is furiously angry because of people’s defiling his sanctuary with those detestable objects and outrages (5:11). His words suggest that anger at wrongdoing is not something that can properly just evaporate. If someone turns from their wrongdoing, that changes the situation, but unless there is such turning, anger must express itself fully so that it is totally expended (כָּלָה), otherwise waywardness has not been taken seriously. Yahweh has to give his fury chance to settle down and relax (נוַּח hiphil).He himself has thus to find relief and respite (נָחַםhitpael) in “a divine catharsis” (Darr, on the verse). He will thus give expression to his passion(קִנְאָה). This word can imply jealousy (e.g., 31:9), and that connotation also fits here as Ezekiel speaks of the furious resentment that Yahweh feels towards people who act in the temple in a way that suggests despising him as the one who settled his dwelling there. But the result of his horrific action will be that the Jerusalemites “willacknowledgethat I,Yahweh*,* havespokeninmypassion.” Only here does Ezekiel’s favorite verbal aim that people come to acknowledge Yahweh come in combination with reference to passion/jealousy.

**5:14** Yahweh’s anger will express itself on the city itself as well as on its people. “Go around Zion, circle it, count its towers,” Psa 48:12 [13] bids. There will be no such celebrating after Yahweh’s fury has expressed itself. Yahweh piles up ways of describing the consequences of the action he intends. The city will be horrifying: “waste” and a reason for “disdain.” Once again Ezekiel intensifies his point by the similarity of his words (חָרְבָּה, חֶרְפָּה): Jerusalem will become a desolate waste that will earn the contempt and disdain of “thenations.” Yahweh makes an ironic, sardonic, or tragic link with 5:5, 6, 7, 8. It is Yahweh’s own city! But this is what it will follow when Yahweh is against Jerusalem and acts in front of the nations’ eyes (5:8). Don’t think there will be any exceptions. Everypasserbywill look and react that way. Yet again, Ezekiel speaks in hyperbole.

**5:15** In case you haven’t got it, here it is again. The city will become “afocusofdisdain” and “reviling” (גְּדוּפׇה).Then, more interestingly, this restated double warning leads into another different double warning, almost a piece of good news that qualifies the bad news. Paradoxically, through being a “desolation,” the city will become a “correction” (מוּםָר), an embodiment of discipline, chastening, or education. Most occurrences of the word come in Proverbs. Jerusalem will have a teaching role after all, even if as a solemn object lesson (Odell, 71), a warning rather than a witness (Taylor,88). Calvin (1:212) comments:

When, therefore, God chastises his people, if they repent, they are said to profit by his discipline, since they have learnt themselves to be sinners by the punishments which he has inflicted on them. But he says that the Jews *should be a correction to the profane nations,* because they should grow wise by their punishments; for while we apply examples to our use, this is a timely correction, since we do not wait till God strikes us; but when he takes vengeance on the despisers of his law at a distance, if we are moved by such examples, this is, as I said, correction in good time: for the Prophet now applies it to the nations, not without the disgrace of the elect people: as if he had said that their punishment would be so notorious that the very blind would recognize them, and tremble at the perception of their import.

**5:16–17** Finally, Yahweh returns from the city to its people. “Direfaminearrows” presumably implies famine as deadly as arrows or arrows as deadly as famine—the words come together in Yahweh’s threat in Deut 32:23–24, along with other perils such as epidemic, sword, bereavement, and animals (Greenberg, 1:116; see also Block,1:212–14). Additionally, Yahweh again incorporates expressions from Lev 26:21–26.

### Biblical Theology Comments

God’s wrath is revealed from heaven on all impiety and wrongdoing of human beings who hold down the truth through wrongdoing, because what can be known of God is manifest among them” (Rom 1:18–19).

God’s wrath with his people is a prominent theme in both Testaments. Whatever Ezekiel’s subject, he expounds it forcefully, and this chapter makes full use of the several Hebrew words for wrath. In Ezekiel, Romans, and elsewhere, it’s easy to see that the people go radically wrong in their relationship with God. They seem willfully to ignore what he tells them about himself. But why does he get angry, so angry it makes people want to run away as fast as they can (Matt 3:17)?

In bringing calamity on his people, God’s aim is not exactly “judgment.” Hebrew does not really have a word for judgment. The First Testament does not work with a Western-type quasi-judicial or quasi-legal understanding of God’s relationship with his people, but more with something like a familial understanding (see further the section on “Who God Is” in the introduction to this commentary). Likewise the First Testament does not really have a word for punishment or retribution in a Western-type quasi-legal sense. Insofar as it thinks in terms of punishment, it again thinks more in familial terms—in covenantal terms.[[190]](#footnote-190) God’s punishment is more like correction or chastisement, designed to get people to grow and change. Yahweh’s warnings are designed to drive his people to turn back to him so that he can then relent, and they achieve this different aim.

Both Ezekiel and Paul imply that it is because truth matters: the truth about God, and the truth about how humanity should live. If the world or the people of God live in a way that ignores who God is and ignores how they should live, there ceases to be any point in their existence (as Gen 6:5–7 implies). God’s great experiment in creation and in forming a chosen people has failed and may as well be abandoned. Ezekiel and Paul (and Genesis and Deuteronomy) imply a common point about the people of God in particular. As Ezekiel puts it, they are set among the nations, which at least means that they ought to be worshiping God and living a life that makes them stand out, but they do so more in a bad way than in a good way. Ezekiel’s own most dominant distinctive feature is then his stress on the strength of God’s feelings of wrath, fury, and anger. It is possible to assume that there are good personal feelings such as love and compassion, and dubious personal feelings such as fury and anger. Neither Testament takes that view. It assumes that God has the gamut of personal feelings, though it does assume that love and compassion are more dominant in God than wrath and anger (see Exod 34:6–7, to which other parts of the First Testament often allude). While it is possible to think of God as cool and objective or as an abstract force rather than having feelings, neither Testament thinks that way. God has all the feelings of a person, in spades, both the love and compassion and the furious anger. Yes, God really is a person.

It might seem proper for a parent to be furiously angry if someone were to kill their child. Such a reaction would be not merely a moral response to an immoral act. It would reflect a sense that one has been personally wronged. God reacts with vehemence to being personally wronged. Yet in the event he did not act with the vehemence he threatened. When it came to it, in 587 his bark was worse than his bite, as usual. Did he change his mind or was he exaggerating? He had no reason to change his mind or relent, in that there was no relenting or change of mind on Jerusalem’s part. More likely he is here overstating his action and his intention, partly as an indication of how strong his feelings are, and partly because that is what communicators do. Hyperbole is a characteristic of the Scriptures throughout (again, see Gen 6:5; also Col 1:23). Apparently exaggeration does not in principle raise theological or ethical questions.

### Application and Devotional Implications

Greenhill (141) comments:

The Lord sets his Church and people among the wicked, and that for special ends: “I have set thee in the midst of the nations,” and God had peculiar ends in it. The nations and country about was full of ignorance, idolatry and profaneness; God recorded his name at Jerusalem*,* set his worship there, and them in the midst of the nations, that they might make known the true God, the true religion, the true way of worship; that they might by their holy lives, win those that were without, bring them in to serve the God of Israel.

Ezekiel adds the challenging consideration that his people may be slower to see the truth than the nations among whom his people are set. It was not the people of God who first saw the importance of taking action on advancing the position of women or on climate change or on sexual abuse. So Ezekiel’s challenge may be both to consider where the Scriptures confront assumptions in the world (noting ways in which the church in other parts of the world sees things differently from the way Westerners do) and also to consider where the world sees things that we do not. A related consideration is that it is tempting to assume that God’s wrath applies to other people. We assume we would be on Ezekiel’s side, but we will be wiser to assume that we are the people of Jerusalem who need to run away from the coming wrath.

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## Yahweh Issues Threats Concerning Judah’s Shrines (6:1–14)

### Outline

Ezek 6 again follows on from what precedes but also moves in a new direction. Yahweh continues to issue warnings regarding his people’s worship and to take up motifs from his threats in Lev 26—the same threats, and some different ones (see especially Lev 26:30–33). He again speaks of causing the sword to come against the people (cf. 5:17; Lev 26:25), of expending fury (cf. 5:13), of wasting (cf. 5:14; Lev 26:31, 33), of scattering (cf. 5:2, Lev 26:33, though here scattering of bones), and of the unholy trinity of epidemic, famine, and sword (cf. 5:16–17, Lev 26:25, though here in the order sword, famine, and epidemic, then epidemic, sword, famine).

But whereas Ezekiel was previously to set his face towards Jerusalem (4:3, 7) in light of the defiling of Yahweh’s sanctuary (5:11), he is now to direct his face towards the land more broadly, and specifically to issue warning about its shrines, in light of his people’s whoring. Evidently the same issues arise elsewhere in the country as arise in Jerusalem, and Yahweh is now more concrete about ways in which people are turning away from him. Conversely, he takes up the motif of people acknowledging some truth about him (5:13), but for the first time declares tersely that people will “acknowledgethat IamYahweh.” Further, for the first time Ezekiel’s message comes in a formally structured configuration in which such acknowledgment plays a key role. It unfolds:

Introduction to the chapter as a whole (6:1–3a)

The Lord Yahweh has said this (6:3bα):

I will obliterate your shrines, and you will acknowledge who I am (6:3bβ–7)

I will let some people survive, and they will acknowledge who I am (6:8–10)

The Lord Yahweh has said this (6:11aα):

I will slaughter the people, and you will acknowledge who I am (6:11aβ–13)

I will devastate the people, and they will acknowledge who I am (6:14)

MT thus has markers\* after 6:10 and 6:14.

As usual, Ezekiel is addressing his own community because what he has to say is important to them, but he is telling them what Yahweh has to say to people in Judah. He thus both refers to the community in Judah as “them” (6:2, 11–14) and also addresses it as “you”(6:3–8). And sometimes he may be directly addressing the people of Kebar as “you” (6:13), while sometimes they are implicitly included in his “you”or his “them” (6:7b–10). The allusive reference to “thepersonwhoisfaraway”as opposed to “thepersonwhoisnear” might make them think about themselves, too. Addressing Israel’s mountains (and hills, ravines, and canyons) is the scroll’s first example of apostrophe,\* and the chapter uses other literary and rhetorical devices to bring its point home, when he speaks it out or when people read it in written form (Bowen, 31). They include:

* anaphora,\* repetition of key expressions: slain, fall, and lumps (6:4, 7, 11, 13); break (6:4, 6, 9); acknowledge Yahweh (6:7, 10, 13, 14); whoring (6:9); כָל, “all” or “every” (seven times in 6:11–14) (Allen, 1:85).
* synonyms, functioning like parallelism\* in poetry: mountains and hills (6:3); ravines and canyons (6:3); waste and desolate (6:6, 14); leave, survivors (6:8); detestable objects and outrages (6:9, 11); remains and is kept secure (6:12)
* alliteration\* and paronomasia:\* be desolate/accountable (שָׁמַם, אָשַׁם, 6:6); break and quit (נִשְׁבְְּרו, נִשְׁבְְּתוּ*,* 6:6); kept secure/confined (נָצַר, צוּר*,* 6:12); make a sweet aroma (רִיַח נִיחַׄח, 6:13); desolation, something desolate (שְׁמָמָה, מְשַׁמָּה, 6:14).

The effect of such devices is to slow down the message’s delivery and give people more time for assimilating it and make it harder to dismiss, to nuance and underscore key features, and to suggest links between motifs that one might not otherwise have made.

### Translation

1Yahweh’s message came to me: 2My man, set your face to the mountains of Israel. Prophesy to them 3and say: Mountains of Israel, listen to the Lord Yahweh’s message.

The Lord Yahweh has said this to the mountains and to the hills, to the ravines and to the canyons: Here am I, I myself am causing a sword to come against you and obliterating your shrines. 4Your altars will become desolate and your burners will break. I will cause your slain to fall in front of your lumps. 5I will put the carcasses of the Israelites in front of your lumps and scatter your bones around your altars 6in all your settlements, the towns becoming waste, and the shrines becoming desolate, in order that your altars may become waste and become desolate/accountable,[[191]](#footnote-191) your lumps break and quit, your burners be cut down, the things you have made be wiped out, 7and the slain fall among you. And you will acknowledge that I am Yahweh.

8I will leave [some people] through your having some survivors of the sword among the nations, when you scatter in the countries, 9and your survivors will be mindful of me among the nations where they have become captives, that I broke as regards their whoring mind that turned aside from me, and as regards their eyes whoring after their lumps, and they will feel a loathing at the sight of themselves[[192]](#footnote-192) in relation to the dire things that they have done, regarding all their outrages. 10And they will acknowledge that I am Yahweh [who] have not spoken gratuitously about doing this dire thing to them.

11The Lord Yahweh has said this: Bang your fist, stamp your foot, say, “Grr,”[[193]](#footnote-193) regarding all the outrages, dire things,[[194]](#footnote-194) of Israel’s household, who will fall by sword, by famine, and by epidemic. 12The person who is far away will die by epidemic, the person who is near will fall by sword, the person who remains and is kept secure[[195]](#footnote-195) will die by famine. So I will expend my fury on them. 13And you will acknowledge that I am Yahweh when their slain are among their lumps around their altars at every high hill, on all the heads of the mountains, under every flourishing tree, and under every leafy terebinth,[[196]](#footnote-196) the place where they made a sweet aroma for all their lumps.

14So I will stretch out my hand against them and make their country a desolation, something desolate, from wilderness to Diblah, in all their settlements. And they will acknowledge that I am Yahweh.

### Textual Notes

MT has markers\* after 6:10 and 14.

MT’s version of the chapter includes many phrases missing from LXX, some of which I note here. As usual, this may indicate that MT is an expanded version of the text underlying LXX, or that LXX has simplified that underlying version with its repetitions, or a mixture of both.[[197]](#footnote-197)

**6:3** Q גֵּאׇיוֹתandK גאית are different spellings of the word for “canyons.”

**6:5** LXX lacks 6:5a.

**6:8** LXX lacks “Iwillleave[somepeople].”

**6:9** For נִשְׁבַַּרְתִּי,Ibroke*,”* LXX “I swore” implies וִשְׁבַּעְתִּי.

Whereas LXX renders גׅלּוּלׅים “idols” in 6:4, 6, here it has “practices” (see the textual note on 20:7).

**6:10** LXX lacks “notgratuitouslyaboutdoingthisdirethingtothem.”

**6:11** LXX lacks “direthings.”

**6:13** LXX lacks “onalltheheadsofthemountains.”

**6:14** Literally, “from the wilderness of Diblah.” Such a place is unknown, though Diblah occurs instead of Riblah in LXX at (e.g.) 2 Kgs 23:33; 25:20. Riblah might be original here, then, as Heb. ד and רare easily confused. Jerome (71–72) and Qimhi (in MG) imply the assumption that they are the same place.

### Verse-by-Verse Commentary

**6:1–3bα** Ezekiel begins with a fulsome and repetitive introduction that records Yahweh’s reaching out to him, the initiative he is to take, the beginning of the actual words he is to say, and the specific identity of his addressees. This opening testimony (6:1) applies to the chapter as a whole and it will then recur as the introduction to the next chapter (7:1). Even when it goes on to a sequence of words that have not appeared before (mountains*,* hills*,* ravines*,* canyons), this long introduction is still simply preparing us for Ezekiel’s actual message. “Mountains ofIsrael”denotes what he and other people commonly term the “countryofIsrael” and thusdenotes the land from Dan to Beersheba (cf. 6:14; 37:22). The distinctive expression might suggest the distinctiveness of their homeland, for him and his community in Kebar. People might look in the direction of those mountains in anticipation of being able to go home one day (Lind, 62). “Mountains”orhighland is an appropriate term for the bulk of that land. For practical purposes, in the context of Ezekiel it often denotes Judah, as is sometimes specific (e.g., 19:9). But in the context of Yahweh’s commitment and purpose, ultimately “mountains of Israel” really does mean Israel, even if Judah stands for Israel at the moment (cf. 37:15–38). The other three terms enrich the point in a way that will recur: e.g., 36:4, 6.[[198]](#footnote-198) Canaan is a country of hills and valleys, a country that Yahweh looks after and keeps his eye on (Deut 11:11–12). But Ezekiel is about to declare that Yahweh now intends to devastate it. “Imagine God saying to Ezekiel, ‘Prophesy to the Rocky Mountains, to the Appalachians, and the Sierras.’” The command to confront the mountains is a command to confront the people who identify with them (Bowen, 31–32). Origen (478–79) thinks of the mountains as standing for the country’s leaders.

Yahweh is commissioning another sign act. In fulfilling the commission (though as usual we are not told that he did so), one might assume that he would literally direct his face towards the mountains, though he would not be able to see them. The same would apply in connection with other commands to “setyourface”(e.g., 13:17; 20:46 [21:2]; 21:2 [7]; 25:2; 28:21; 29:2; 35:2; 38:2), which usually relates to Yahweh’s taking action against other peoples. It characteristically leads into a command to prophesy against the object in whose direction one looks. Ezekiel had been appointed a lookout against invasion, attack and siege. Here he is commissioned to set that invasion, attack, and siege going (Brownlee, 96).

**6:3bβ–4** Yahweh is not actually taking aim at Israel’s natural topography but at the religious topography and its creators. The highland has many “shrines” (בָּמוׄת). They are traditionally termed “high places,” and many were in elevated positions like churches in English villages. This might be another resonance of the expression “mountainsofIsrael,”though insofar as the shrines actually were high places they might simply have been platforms. Given that they needed to be accessible to people, they were spread throughout the country’s settlements. Integral to them are the altarson which sacrificial offerings would be made. The burners (חַמָּנִים; Lev 26:30; 2 Chr 14:5 [4]; 34:4; Isa 17:8; 27:9) might then be stands on which incense could be set and which themselves stand in the shrines. Why does Yahweh intend to destroy shrines, altars, and burners? The clue comes in the following reference to “lumps”(גִּלּוּלִים, traditionally “idols”; see the section on “Who God Is” in the introduction to this commentary). They are aids to worship that symbolize a deity’s presence for people, but they are not ones that can be used with Yahweh’s approval. Ezekiel shares the word “lumps” with Lev 26:30, but he uses thirty-nine times. While etymologically it may suggest lumps (of wood, or rock, or feces?), its spelling brings in the vowels of the term “detestableobjects”(שִׁקּוּצִים; see 5:11), and thus adds a further explicit pejorative connotation to the word. Ezekiel’s introduction of this term indicates why Yahweh will want to obliterate shrines, destroy altars, and smash burners: the deity in whose honor people offer their worship cannot be Yahweh, whether or not they think it is. It thus indicates why he will slaughter the people who worship these lumps in the shrines, as he will slaughter people in Jerusalem whose worship has parallel devastating characteristics.

**6:5–7** It will be appropriate to bring about such calamity when people are in the very midst of worship, when they are “infrontofyourlumps,” and to scatter their bones around their altars (cf. Jer 7:2—8:2). In an act of poetic justice, it will expose the emptiness of these so-called representations of deity. The trouble with any idols is that they are no more than “thingsyouhavemade” (Pss 115:4; 135:15), like the altars, burners, and carved pillars (Isa 17:7–8). Yahweh will put the people’s carcasses on the carcasses of their lumps (Lev 26:30) and thus defile the locations of their so-called worship. Josiah acted thus not so long ago (2 Kgs 23), but the action needs taking again (see 2 Kgs 23:31–24:20). It is also appropriate that the altars will thus become “waste” and “desolate” and will also be treated as accountable for the wrongdoing they facilitate (אָשַׁם).[[199]](#footnote-199) An altar is after all, among other things, the place where people make offerings designed to put things right with Yahweh by making restitution when they are accountable for wrongdoing (the noun אׇשׇׁם, traditionally, “guilt offerings” or “trespass offerings”).[[200]](#footnote-200) But these altars have become means of wrongdoing rather than means of putting wrongdoing right. So they will be given recognition for their guilt (Rashi, in MG). And one consequence will be that people “willacknowledgethatIamYahweh.” InEzekielYahweh has so far used the verb יׇדַע, “acknowledge,” twice (2:5—see the verse-by-verse commentary; and 5:13). Here for the first time he uses it in this more technical and important context (cf. 6:13, 14; also 6:10; and see the section on “What It Means that Yahweh is God” in the introduction to this commentary).

**6:8** Twice Yahweh has spoken as if he might allow a group of people to survive his act of devastation but has then turned it into a false hope (5:4, 12). Here he again sounds as if he is offering some hope but the “promise” turns out to be sardonic. He will “leave” some people (יׇתַר hiphil, a word that might seem to have positive “remnant” connotations), exempting them from the slaughter and letting them live on when they have been scattered. But it will turn out that their prospect there is not very positive. In 6:8–10, Yahweh moves in a potentially confusing way between “you” and “they,” between the people in Kebar and the people still in Judah. Strictly according to the grammar of this chapter, “you” is still the mountains that Ezekiel has been commissioned to address, but it stands for the people who live in these highlands. This “you” will themselves have some survivors after the fall of Jerusalem, Ezekiel implies, and in due course these survivors will be reading Ezekiel’s chapters as messages that relate to them. But in the meantime, Ezekiel is going to deliver this message to a “you” comprising his own community in Kebar.

**6:9** So Yahweh pictures survivors of the catastrophe coming to be mindful of Yahweh, but his words also imply a challenge to the present “you”inKebar, who need to see that their surviving the 597 calamity constitutes a call to be mindful of Yahweh now. If either of the groups called “you”are to “be mindful”of Yahweh (זָכַר, traditionally “remember”), it implies more than an accidental reminiscence. It denotes a deliberate calling to mind and holding in mind, and the taking of appropriate action. The verb is another that combines mental activity and the decision of the will, like knowing, loving, or hating, as it works on the assumption that thinking and acting naturally go together. If Ezekiel is covertly inviting the Kebarites to think about themselves, then he is also inviting them to think about that truth concerning Yahweh, which might generate some mindfulness on their part.

The reference to the people’s mindfulness contains further surprises. Yahweh has been tough so far in the Ezekiel scroll. He has spoken as one who is furiously angry, relentlessly devastating, and mercilessly unsparing, in light of people’s faithlessness. He has declared that he himself will not be mindful (3:20), and in his allusions to Lev 26 he has made no reference to the possibility of being mindful of his covenant (Lev 26:42). It is doubtful whether here law might become prophecy in the context of exile.[[201]](#footnote-201) But he does here speak of how he himself “broke” (שָׁבַר niphal) as a result of their unfaithfulness to him, their “whoring.” A woman whose husband is promiscuous may well get both furiously angry and desperately hurt. Yahweh is both. He uses the same verb for “broke”with regard to his hurt as he used in 6:4, 6. There was a link between the burners breaking, the lumps breaking, and him breaking (Vg. has “I broke their heart,” which is a “great difference”; Greenhill, 157). Like the English verb “whore,” the verb זָנָה suggests sexual looseness more generally than involvement in the sex trade. Such sexual looseness involves both the mind, physiologically the heart (לֵב), and the eyes (cf. Num 15:39; Brownlee, 99). In Israelite conceptuality, the heart suggests thinking, forming attitudes, and making decisions.[[202]](#footnote-202) So Yahweh is concerned about the way the Israelites’ mind had worked. But whoring is also an activity of the eyes, with which people look to visual aids to worship such as images (cf. 18:6). Jewish and Christian worship has thus commonly been hesitant about the visual that can be an aid but can also a deception. Yahweh’s intention is that the survivors of the coming catastrophe will come to see themselves, come to recognize that they cannot complain at what Yahweh has done in bringing calamity to his people, because they deserved it. They will thus come to “feel aloathingatthesightofthemselvesinrelationtothedirethingstheyhavedone.” The verb “feel a loathing” (קוּט niphal) occurs only in Ezekiel and can have a semi-positive connotation (20:43; 36:31), but there are no pointers to that connotation here. This is more the kind of loathing that Yahweh himself had for Israel in the wilderness (Psa 95:10).

**6:10** Nevertheless, in another respect “the death brought about by Yahweh with the sword on the mountains of Israel is not his final goal” (Zimmerli,1:190). The first half of the two messages from Yahweh that comprise Ezek 6 comes to an end with another act of acknowledgment of Yahweh, qualified by another description of Yahweh. He will ensure that some of the community in Judah survive, but he implies no inappropriateness in the action he will take. They will deserve it. His act of destruction will not be undertaken “gratuitously” (חִנׇּם). In due course it will become more explicit that his act will be non-gratuitous not only in the sense that there was reason for it (cf. 14:23) but also in the sense that it was not leading nowhere (cf. Vg. here; and Prov 1:17). His act of mercy will be undertaken gratuitously in the sense that it emerges from his covenant commitment, not from their deserve (to use the Leviticus terminology). It will not be undertaken gratuitously in that other sense: it will not fail to lead somewhere, in provoking their necessary response. But in Ezek 6, such connotations are not present.

**6:11–12** The second, shorter unit within the chapter thus continues with an atmosphere of threat and warning. Yahweh commissions another sign act that involves not merely looks that are threatening but physical expressions of hostility and anger that would be associated with action (cf. 25:6). Ezekiel is again the means of implementing Yahweh’s intention by means of his gestures. Once more, “sword,” “famine,” and “epidemic” imply implementing the threat in Lev 26:25–26, though they are also a threat that recurs in Jeremiah (e.g., 14:12). There is no consistent pattern in the association of these three scourges with different locations, within the city, outside the city, or far away (see, e.g., 5:12, 17; 7:15). The pattern could be a random way of distributing the scourges and it may simply mean that all three will be known in all three locations. But maybe it’s no coincidence that Yahweh starts with the people who are far away from the city, which is a description of the Kebarites, and starts with epidemic, which might be the scourge that is more likely to affect them than sword or famine, before going on to the people who fall in the battle for Jerusalem and the people who remain in the city, think they are safe and secure, but forget they are under siege.

**6:13** Such an implication in the order in 6:12 would fit with the further move from third-person references in 6:11–12 to second-person address, as Yahweh speaks for the third time of people acknowledging him. But he then moves back again to speaking of “their”slain, “their”altars, and “their”lumps. Switching between rhetorical addressees and “real” addressees contributes to the communicative effect of his words.[[203]](#footnote-203) The note about the location of the altars, where people die (“high hill,” “heads of the mountains,” “flourishing tree,” “leafy terebinth”), takes up the language of Deut 12:2, the beginning of Moses’ detailed commands in Deuteronomy. They were the locations where the Israelites were supposed to demolish the altars, also taken up by other prophets (e.g., Hos 4:13; Jer 17:2 and incorporated in the story of Israel (e.g., 1 Kgs 14:23; 2 Kgs 16:4; 17:10). Ezekiel finally goes back to Lev 26:31 for his allusion to their sweet aroma, but he does so with a twist, as he refers to such offerings made to their lumps (all of them), not to Yahweh. The many references to such sweet aromas in the Torah imply how much Yahweh loves the smell of barbecue. Only in Ezekiel does he slate these sweet aromas as offered to idols rather than to him.

**14.** Yahweh continues to declare that he intends to fulfill his warnings, specifically and repeatedly about desolation (cf. Lev 26:31–33). He further underlines the declaration with the reference to desolation stretching from wilderness to Diblah. The double reference suggests a comprehensive devastation, from far south to far north, even further than from Beersheba to Dan if Diblah is the same place as Riblah (see Num 34:11; and the textual note). And “for the ancient reader, Riblah was fraught with horrific associations” (Darr, on the passage): see, e.g., 2 Kgs 23:33; 25:6–7, 18–21. The First Testament often refers to Yahweh stretching out his hand against Israel’s oppressors and against Israel itself (e.g., Isa 5:25; Jer 51:25; Zeph 1:4). But in the present context with the chapter’s final reference to Israel’s acknowledging him, particular irony would attach to any Israelite recollection of his long-ago declaration that “the Egyptians will acknowledge that I am Yahweh when I stretch out my hand against Egypt and get the Israelites out from among them” (Exod 7:5). It doubles the tragedy of such references to Yahweh’s action against his own people.

### Biblical Theology Comments

Like parish churches, the shrines were local centers of worship, sacrifice, prayer, and festival that were accessible to people living all over Judah, to complement the Jerusalem sanctuary that was too far away for most people to visit except on special occasions. In different contexts the First Testament accepts or repudiates local shrines. They are a practical necessity if people are to be able to worship, but they can easily be the site of worship that is alien to Yahweh’s nature and instructions, and be worse than useless. It is the second consideration that arises here. The people’s worship is associated with idols. The word that Ezekiel uses in this chapter to describe them, “lumps”(גִלּוּלִים), is just one of the words traditionally translated “idols.” Others are אֶלִילִים (which etymologically suggests empty godlets; 30:13), תְּרָפִים (which likely denotes effigies; 21:21 [26]), צְלָמִים(images, which supposedly resemble the deity; 7:20), סֵמֶל(statue; 8:3, 5), and מַשְֹכִּית (figure, icon; 8:12).[[204]](#footnote-204) The First Testament commonly critiques but sometimes accepts some of its words for statues and totem poles, like the shrines themselves. They can evidently be used in a way that coheres with faithfulness to Yahweh or that clashes with it.

This is one factor that can make Ezekiel and other parts of the First Testament (and Christian thinking) confusing in the way they speak of idolatry, though the ambiguity can be illuminating. Aids in worship such as shrines, altars, columns, incense, and sacrifice can be aids to true worship of God. They can be aids to worship that imply an understanding of God that has become skewed. They can be aids to worship of other deities. Either the second or the third of these uses of such aids can be termed idolatry, both frequently featured in Israel, both might be called whoring (especially as a skewed understanding of God entered into people’s political policies), and both might be the subject of Ezekiel’s critique. Is an image of Yahweh an idol? Yes and no.

Although the First Testament can characterize worship at the shrines as involving unfaithfulness to Yahweh or whoring, neither the First Testament nor ancient Near Eastern documents point towards a literally sexual element in the worship there. Worship was concerned about fertility in the sense that people would pray for the necessary fertility of their womenfolk and of the ground, but there is no indication that in worship they acted out a concern with fertility.

### Application and Devotional Implications

Why would people worship in the way Ezekiel describes them worshiping in the shrines, with the aids they use there? In a sense, the Scriptures are rather rigid in the worship they commend. They allow worship of only one God, because there is only one God who deserves the title. They allow no aids such as images of God, because this God cannot be imaged. They require a focus on some things that God did a long time ago. Now in a traditional society, people know that they must talk to God about their need for children or for healing or for the crops to grow. The country’s political leaders feel the need to look for political resources if the country is to survive and they find it hard to avoid making some religious compromises if they are to find these resources. In the modern Western world, the need people feel is for peace of heart. So people need such concerns to be God’s focus. While God is interested in those things, the Scriptures give the impression that they are not as central for God as they often are for his people, who can thus to end up with a longing for a God who is quite other than the picture the Scriptures give. The question is whether we will settle for God as the Scriptures portray him or whether we prefer gods we make. “All worship is perverse and rejected by God when men bring anything forward of themselves” (Calvin, 1:228). And if we are going to turn from gods we manufacture to God as he is, loathing or disgust may become important (Bowen, 35–36).

“Idolatry is a permanent fact of human history, and at a deeper level than the homiletical cliché that we can “make an idol” of money or prestige or whatever, though this is of course true” (Jenson, 82).

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## Yahweh Declares that the End Is Here (7:1–27)

### Outline

“An end—the end is coming!” Ezek 7 pairs with Ezek 1 in being vivid, concrete, stimulating, thought-provoking, puzzling in many of its details, challenging in it use of rare words, hapaxes\* and other conundrums in the meaning of words and phrases, jerky and lurching (Block, 1:241) in its use of gender, person, and number, and repetitive. In these respects both chapters contrast with the ones in between and constitute a frame around them, a significance corroborated by the chronological note in 8:1 (the first date since 1:1–3) that marks a new beginning. Other innovative expressions in this chapter combine with the jerkiness to make for more uncertainty about understanding some individual words and phrases than has been characteristic of chapters 2–6.

Alongside the similarities and complementarity of Ezek 1 and 7 are differences. Ezek 1 is rhythmic, full of imagery, and characterized by parallelism,\* but it cannot be laid out as poetry. While Ezek 7 is not as tightly poetic as some later chapters in Ezekiel and it has some prose features, it is full of “divine rhetoric, asyndeton, anadiplosis, epanalepsis, metaphors, paronomasia, apostrophe” (Greenhill, 166), and laying it out as poetry works.[[205]](#footnote-205) While Ezek 1 hints that it introduces a solemn message, but only hints at it, Ezek 7 “voices an insistent announcement of doomsday.”[[206]](#footnote-206) In a hard-hitting, forceful, terse, yet repetitive warning, Yahweh declares that the end is coming upon Judah, and chapter 7 brings Ezekiel 1–7 to a close with this warning. Its language also picks up motifs from other previous chapters, which contributes further to its functioning as a climax to Ezek 1–7: outrages and detestable objects, Yahweh will not pity and not show concern, his expending anger and fury, the people’s wildness as a horde, sword, epidemic, and famine, and Yahweh’s signature expression in Ezekiel, “they/you will acknowledge that I am Yahweh.” Further, it continues the process of explaining the sign acts commissioned in 4:1–5:4 (Häner, 147–50).

Its formal framework suggests that it brings together two short messages and one longer one that were originally independent. The first third of the chapter unfolds:

Ezekiel’s introduction to the entire chapter (7:1)

Yahweh’s introduction to a message (7:2aα)

The message: the end is coming (7:2aβ–4abα)

Yahweh’s expectation regarding the result: you will acknowledge (7:4bβ)

Yahweh’s introduction to a message (7:5a)

The message: a dire event, the end, is coming (7:5b–9abα)

Yahweh’s expectation regarding the result: you will acknowledge (7:9bβ)

Once more, Ezekiel pictures disaster coming on Jerusalem as if it is happening right now. Once more he moves between speaking as if he is addressing the city and speaking to the Kebarites whom he is directly addressing and who also need to know what Yahweh is threatening. As well as corresponding in form, the two messages overlap in content, and complement each other (cf. Allen,1:105, 107). There are a number of possible explanations for the chapter’s including two versions of similar messages, but the two versions function in the manner of parallelism (Darr, on 7:5–9). They suggest, “first, the zeal, intention, and speed of the speaker; secondly, the evidence, certainty, and weight of the thing spoken of: thirdly, they serve to make the deeper impression” (Greenhill, 163). And they hint that people need to hear repetitions, because they are deaf (Calvin, 1:253). The repetitions underscore features of the message: the motif of the end that is imminent, its being an expression of Yahweh’s anger at the outrageous nature of the roads that Jerusalem walks, his unsparing and unpitying resolve, his intent that the message should bring his hearers (in Kebar) to recognize Yahweh. The differences in the second version make other motifs explicit: the end as an expression of doom, the certainty that the end is waking up, and its nature as tumult and not something to celebrate.

After the opening two overlapping messages, the main bulk of the chapter in 7:10–27 has no introduction. It just continues from 7:5–9 (cf. Sweeney, 48). Like 7:1–9, it starts from the fact that doom is coming, that the end is coming, that the day is coming, and it closes with people acknowledging Yahweh. It includes no formal markers indicating where units might have begun and ended before being put together here. It does incorporate notes that may signify transitions from one unit to another, as well as motifs in common between the units that suggest they are integrally parts of this longer piece rather than an assemblage of originally separate messages. One might outline it:

The day that is coming (7:10–13)

Following 7:9, there is a new beginning

The last colon\* in 7:13 may be a dramatic conclusion

The totality of the calamity (7:14–18)

The new imagery may suggest a beginning

The fourfold “all” may suggest an ending

The silver and gold and the object it makes (7:19–22)

The new imagery may again suggest a beginning

The tricolon in 7:22 may suggest an ending

The rationale for the calamity (23–27)

Again, the new image, the imperative and the tricolon may suggest a beginning

There is no doubt that 7:27 is a conclusion.

As well as having points of connection with preceding messages in the scroll, Ezek 7 makes connections with the messages of earlier prophets. Amos had long ago declared that “the end is coming” for Ephraim (8:2), as it was, and that Yahweh’s day was arriving for Ephraim as a day of ultimate calamity (5:18–20), as it was. Ezek 7 does not use the expression “Yahweh’s day” (at least, MT does not; LXX does, in 7:10), but it speaks four times of “theday.”Ezekiel shows more detailed and systematic awareness of Zephaniah’s more recent declarations that the threat to Ephraim applied to Judah (1:1–18), and the calamity in 597 as it had affected the Judahites now in Kebar could have seemed the vindication of this warning. If it did, Ezekiel declares that nevertheless the threat still hangs over Judah. Ezekiel’s other significant links are harder to interpret. He has many detailed verbal points of connection with the declaration in Isa 13 that Yahweh’s day has come for (Assyria and) Babylon, but the question of the origin of that chapter is convoluted. Ezekiel might be implying that the day that has come for Assyria and is coming for Babylon has also come for Judah, or Isa 13 might be declaring that the day that has come for Judah is coming for Babylon. In turn, this parallel suggests a point of contact with Gen 6:13: “an end of all flesh is coming.” The action that Yahweh took at the beginning is being repeated in Judah. Conversely, Dan 8–12 will declare that the end of which Ezekiel and these other prophets spoke is coming for the world powers in the context of the Maccabean crisis.

Ezekiel was surely aware of taking up the message that Yahweh had earlier issued through some of his predecessors, and perhaps had a sense that this link was one consideration that gave authority to his message, though one cannot know how far people in Kebar would be aware of this background to his message.

### Translation

1Yahweh’s message came to me: 2So you, my man. The Lord Yahweh has said this to Israel’s land.

An end—the end is coming,

upon the four corners of the earth.

3The end is now upon you,

and I will send off my anger against you.

I will rule in accordance with your paths,

and lay your outrages upon you.

4My eye will not be pitying over you,

and I will not show concern.

Because I will lay your paths upon you,

and your outrages [that] happen within you,

and you people will acknowledge that I am Yahweh.

5The Lord Yahweh has said this.

One dire event, a dire event,

there, it is coming.

6An end is coming,

the end is coming.

It is waking up for you,

there, it is coming.[[207]](#footnote-207)

7Doom is coming for you,[[208]](#footnote-208)

one who lives in the country.

The time is coming, the day is imminent,

Tumult, and not shouting on the mountains.

8I will now, imminently, pour out my fury upon you,

and expend my anger against you.

I will rule in accordance with your paths,

and lay upon you all your outrages.

9My eye will not be pitying

and I will not show concern,

As I lay it upon you in accordance with your paths.

and your outrages [that] happen within you,

and you people will acknowledge that I am Yahweh, the one who strikes down.

10There is the day, there it is coming,

doom is going out.

The scepter has blossomed, arrogance has budded,

11in that violence has risen up to be faithless scepter.

Nothing of them, nothing of the horde of them,

nothing of their tumult,

Nothing by way of eminence in them:

12the time is coming, the day is arriving.

[When] the buyer is not to celebrate, the seller is not to mourn,

because wrath applies to their entire horde.

13Because the seller will not turn back to what was sold,

even as long as they are alive.[[209]](#footnote-209)

Because the revelation applies to its entire horde—

it will not turn back.

An individual with his waywardness [in] his life—

they will not stand firm.

14People are blowing the horn,

yes, getting everything ready.

But there is no one going out to battle,

because my wrath applies to its entire horde.

15The sword outside,

epidemic and famine inside:

While one who is in the open country will die by the sword,

one famine and epidemic will consume one who is in the city.

16Their survivors will survive

and will be into the mountains,

Like the pigeons of the ravines, all of them,

moaningeach in their waywardness.

17As all hands will become feeble,

all knees will run with water.

18They will wrap on sack,

and horror will cover them.

Towards all faces, shame,

on all their heads, shornness.

19As they throw their silver into the streets,

and their gold becomes something to be shunned,[[210]](#footnote-210)

As their silver and their gold will not be able to rescue them

on the day of Yahweh’s wrath,

As they will not satisfy their appetite,

and they will not fill their stomachs,

Because their waywardness was their downfall,

20and his ornate object of splendor it made into an object of pride.

In that they made their outrageous images, their abhorrent things,[[211]](#footnote-211) in it,

therefore I am giving it to them as something to be shunned.

21I will give it into the hand of foreigners as loot,

and to the most faithless of the earth[[212]](#footnote-212) as plunder.

They will treat it as something ordinary[[213]](#footnote-213) 22and I will turn my face from them,

they will treat as something ordinary what I treasured away—

and violent people will come into it and treat it as something ordinary.

23Make the fetter,

because the country is full of bloody ruling,[[214]](#footnote-214)

the city is full of violence.

24I will get the direst of the nations to come,

and enter into possession of their houses.

I will terminate the pride of the strong,

and their sanctifiers will be treated as ordinary.

25As closing up[[215]](#footnote-215) is coming,

they will seek well-being, but there will be none,

26As disaster upon disaster comes,

and report follows report.

They will look for a vision from a prophet,

but instruction will perish from priest,

and counsel from elders.

27Though the king mourns,

the prince clothes himself in desolation,

And the hands of the citizenry tremble,

as I deal with them because of their paths,

And rule for them with their rulings,

and they will acknowledge that I am Yahweh.

### Textual Notes

MT has markers\* after 7:4, 22, and 27.

As is the case with 1:4–28bα with its jerkiness, repetitiveness, and other puzzles, LXX differs considerably from MT in Ezek 7 and is considerably shorter. These differences might mean the two forms of the chapter go back to different earlier versions, or MT developed the version that also underlies LXX,[[216]](#footnote-216) or LXX developed the version that also underlies MT or sought to clarify it or simplify it, or either version accidentally shortened or otherwise altered the one it was starting from—or some combination of these possibilities.. The translation above follows MT, but here I note many of the differences from LXX.

**7:2** MT’s mid-verse accent links קֵץ, “anend,” with the first half of the verse.

**7:3**In LXX, 7:3–5 follow 7:6–9.

**7:4** Whereas 7:3–4abα addressed the land as f. sg., this last colon has the m. pl. (but LXX continues the f. sg.). The dynamic repeats in 7:9.

**7:5** LXX lacks 7:5b.

**7:6** LXX lacks “theendiscoming,” the rest of 7:6, and “doomiscoming”in 7:7—in other words, after “anendiscoming”it goes straight to “foryou*,* onewholivesinthecountry.” Jumping from one בׇּא to another בׇּא would be an easy slip.

**7:7** For מְהוּמׇה וְלֹא־הֵד הׇרִים, “tumult, and not shouting on the mountains,” LXX has “not with wildness nor with anguish.” הֵד is a hapax; it might be an alternative for הֵידָד. Neither need imply a positive shouting, as LXX presupposes for MT’s word. Theod. “glory” suggests הוׄד(*HUB*).

**7:10** For the first two cola, LXX has “Behold, the end is coming, behold a day of the Lord,” which might reflect puzzlement at the word צְפִירָה (“doom”).

**7:11** LXX’s brief paraphrase of the middle two colareflects the difficulty of their briskness, and in particular of מֶהֱמֵהֶם, “oftheirtumult,”which I take to be הֵמָה from the root הָמָה and thus an alternative for הָמוׄן (*DCH* 2:568; *CTAT*, 49).

**7:12** LXX lacks the final colon and the similar cola in 7:13 and 14, which suggests they are part of the distinctively MT version of the text (Allen, 1:101).

**7:13** LXX lacks most of 7:13 after the first colon, and the third and fourth cola in 7:14.

**7:14** For *qatal*\* תׇּקְעוּ, “people are blowing” (cf. Sym.), LXX and Vg. have impv., implying תִּקְעוּ (cf. Jer 6:1), and another impv. in the parallel colon where MT has inf. continuing the *qatal*.

**7:16** For הׄמוׄת, “moaning,”LXX “I will kill” suggests a form from מוׄת (Greenberg, 1:143).

**7:17** For תֵּלַכְנׇה, literally, “go water” (people will wet themselves), LXX has “will be sullied by moisture” (*NETS*).

**7:19** LXX lacks the third and fourth cola.

**7:23**רַתּוׄק , “fetter,” is another hapax, though similar words have this meaning. LXX has “they will make disorder,” introducing the cola that follow (Olley, 282).

LXX “full of peoples” then perhaps implies עַמִּים for דָמִים.[[217]](#footnote-217)

**7:24** LXX lacks 7:24a, perhaps by a slip, as 7:24a and 24b begin with similar hiphil verbs (Cooke, 83).Then for מְקַדְשֵׁיהֶם, “their sanctifiers,” a piel ptc., LXX and Vg. imply the more expected pointing מִקְדְשֵׁיהֶם, “their sanctuaries.”

**7:27** LXX lacks the first colon.

### Verse-by-Verse Commentary

**7:1–2** Yahweh begins with a “so you” (וְאַתׇּה) suggesting a continuation from what precedes (cf. 22:2; 27:2; 37:15). His introductory words to Ezekiel also repeat some phrases from 6:1–2, though they are shorter, and he moves away from the unusual address “mountainsofIsrael” to another unusual address, אַדְמַת יִשְֹרָאֵל, “Israel’s land,” in the sense of “soil.” Because “land of Israel” is the default English translation of אֶרֶץ יִשְֹרָאֵל,it is not obvious to people reading the Scriptures in English that Ezekiel’s expression is novel. It is peculiar to him, and it is one he makes much use of. As with “mountains” (6:2–3), some poignancy could attach to it for people separated from the soil of the promised land, though here (like “mountains”) it stands for its people. The novelty of the expression arouses attention, but before readers have had chance to wonder about it, Yahweh hits them with theword קֵץ, “end,” then repeats it as “theend” and with further questions raised by the word, then with the question of the identity of אַרְבַּע כַּנְפוֹת הׇאׇרֶץ, “thefourcorners of the earth/country.” As MT understands 7:2, “YahwehhassaidthistoIsrael’sland*:* Anend!” (see the textual note), adding further to the impact.

Whose end is Yahweh referring to? “Fourcorners”(כָּנָף, literally, “wings”) otherwise appear only in Deut 22:12, applying to a garment, and Isa 11:12, where they are the four corners of the earth (Job 37:3; 38:13 also refers to earth’s corners). This meaning fits here, especially when the phrase follows “landofIsrael.” Yahweh is declaring that the end is coming on the earth, as Gen 6:13 once declared. One can imagine the Israelites welcoming this good news. An end coming on the earth would mean bringing catastrophe on the nations in their waywardness and thus fulfilling God’s purpose for his people who are oppressed by them. After 587, people living in the desolate wastes of “thelandofIsrael”will be assuring themselves that they will regain possession of the country (33:24), and the Kebarites will be giving themselves assurances on those lines (Odell, 88). But Ezekiel’s rhetoric works like that of other prophets (e.g., Amos 1–3): first issue a declaration concerning calamity for other peoples, then turn it on Israel.

**7:3–4**. They would be deceiving themselves. “Theendiscoming,” בׇּא הַקֵּץ, were Amos’s words to Ephraim (Amos 8:2). In that context, and here in 7:2, and in 7:5–7 where they explicitly apply to Judah, בָּאor f. בָּאָה can be parsed either as a participle or as a *qatal*. On the latter hypothesis, the word more literally signifies “has come.” In either context, the prophet is speaking of something that is on its way. It has not literally arrived. The situation is different from the one that will hold just a few years later, when Lam 4:18 uses the same word to lament that “our end has come.” If “anend” did arrive thus for Ephraim in 722, as Amos said, “anend”is now imminent for Judah. It is עׇלַיִךְ, “uponyou,”upontheland of Israel. Yahweh will use the preposition six more times in 7:3–9 in different ways. It’s on you, all right. So the corners are the corners of the land. Yahweh goes on to explain the event and its rationale in familiar terms: Iwill sendoff (שׇׁלַחח piel; cf. 5:17) myanger (אַפִּי; cf. 5:13) at people’s outrages (תּוֹעֵבוֹת; 5:9, 11; 6:9, 11) in light of which “myeyewillnotbepitying overyouand Iwillnotshow concern” (cf. 5:11). He also has newer ways of making the point. He intends to “rule,”to exercise authority and make decisions about Israel (שָׁפַט, traditionally “judge”) in a way that takes account of the “paths” (דֶּרֶךְ) that Israel has been walking. “I will layyouroutragesuponyou” suggests making Israel carry them, bear the practical burden of them, pay the price for them. Thus he will “layyourpathsuponyou,” make you bear the practical burden of them and of “your outragesthathappenwithinyou,” the ones that characterize Israel’s life.Paradoxically, all this will mean that people acknowledge Yahweh. “The greatest consolation for those being punished is the knowledge of the God who punishes” (Theodoret, 66). But Ezekiel’s more immediate point here is that the Kebar community will come to acknowledge Yahweh, as a result of the action he takes against Israel.

**7:5–6** Ezekiel adds another version of the same message with a new introduction. Perhaps it was originally delivered on another occasion. It incorporates many repetitions when compared with 7:2–4 but it also provides readers with other ways of thinking about the “end,” which is “onedireevent.” Yahweh thus picks up a word used to describe individual dire things (5:16, 17). It thus becomes a bigger word to characterize the end as a total, special calamity (Rashi, in MG), though it also thereby surreptitiously scales down the significance of theend (NJPS does the same by translating קֵץ “doom”). That end “iswakingupforyou”(הֵקִיץ)*.* This verb neatly looks as if it is specially related to the “end” (קֵץ). It conveys a negative equivalent to the idea of Yahweh’s arm stirring itself to deliver his people (Isa 51:9). Whereas the end has been looking sleepy, it is waking up, and not in a good way.

**7:7–9** “Still the Prophet ringeth this doleful knell in their eares” in light of their being afflicted by such “dead lethargy” (Trapp,409). He now puts it yet in yet other terms, “doomiscomingforyou.” This noun (צְפִירָה)occurs only here and in 7:10 and its meaning is a matter of guesswork. It might make people think of the Babylonian king in his diadem (also צְפִירָה; Isa 28:5) or of that king as a goat (צָפִיר), or later make people see Antiochus IV as the goat that is a reincarnation of the Babylonian king (cf. Dan 8:5, 8, 21).[[218]](#footnote-218) Anyway, “thetimeiscoming,” the time for things to happen. “Theday”is imminent. The motif of “Yahweh’s day” or “that day” is so familiar in the prophets, and Ezekiel picks up so many associated motifs from the prophets, that one can assume that by “thatday”he refers to Yahweh’s day and that his readers would pick up the allusion (he uses the actual expression in 13:5; 30:3). His use of it matches Amos’s (5:18): if people thought it would be a great day when Yahweh would put down his foes and fulfill his promises (another way of talking about “theend”), then they have another think coming—or rather, they are right, but they have to redesignate themselves as the foes. The likelihood that Ezekiel refers to Yahweh’s day is increased by the next colon. It was reasonable for people to assume that Yahweh’s day would be a time of triumphant “shoutingonthemountains”(e.g., Isa 16:9–10; 22:1–5; Jer 25:30). Ezekiel also seeks to disabuse them of this aspect of their expectation. As In Amos, the reason is the necessity for Yahweh to “pouroutfury,” to “expendanger” on the people (5:13, 15; 6:12), to “rule”or exercise authority in keeping with their “paths.” But this talk of Yahweh’s day and of the end is not at all concrete (7:10–27 will complement it). End, dire event, time, day: seeking to arouse people, Ezekiel just portrays a situation that is hopeless (Jenson, 69–72). Yahweh’s closing statement regarding the intent of his action qualifies the description of who Yahweh is in light of 7:2–9 and receives emphasis through the description of him as “the one who strikes down” (מַכֶּה) turns the colon into one with five words, one more than the usual maximum, and thus one with unusual emphasis. Yet perhaps the recipients of striking down are entitled to recall that this is the action of a father who is aiming at discipline and correction (Prov 23:13–15; cf. Heb 12:6) (Jerome, 76).

**7:10–12aα** Again beginning afresh, Yahweh goes on to describe further the necessity for “theday”that is “coming,” for the “doom”that is going out, in Jerusalem. The necessity lies in the ceremonial “scepter,” or the real club with physical force (מַטֶּהcould denote either), that has “blossomed”(צוּץ) or flourished in Jerusalem. Yes, leadership is being exercised there. The trouble is the usual one: in the exercise of leadership “arrogance”(זׇדוֹן) or presumption “has budded.” There is something deeply sad about this combination of the language of budding and blossoming and the noun arrogance. Arrogance especially denotes presumption in relation to God, the besetting temptation of leadership. But it also finds expression in the way leaders treat their people. Both are implicit in “violence”towards people being a violation of Yahweh’s expectations about people’s welfare (LXX takes חָמָס to signify “lawlessness”; Vg. has *iniquitas*, unfairness/injustice). So the exercise of the scepter or club is “faithless” (the noun רֶשַׁע,another word combining wrongdoing in relation to God and to people). The four laconic “nothing” phrases then describe the way doom will pan out for these leaders as “thetimeiscoming” and “thedayisarriving.” While the end is going to affect the entire community, it is going to be especially devastating for its leadership because of the special responsibility it bears for the roads along which it conducts the city, for the city’s outrages. In 597 the leadership especially suffered, and it will do so again in 587.

**7:12aβ** Yahweh now describes some concrete implications that will issue from the time coming and the day arriving. These imminent realities will make it inappropriate to carry on with life as if everything were normal. Imagine an everyday situation in which people celebrate or mourn. Farmers come to town with their produce and then “celebrate”or “mourn”according to how their transactions went, how good was the price they got and how far they were also able to barter for the things they themselves needed. All that will be stupid in light of the day of “wrath”that is coming on the “entirehorde” in the city. In the market in a traditional society, “buying and selling are colorful signs of life” and “an occasion of calculated play,” but “the day of God breaks up the natural course of things” (Zimmerli,1:208). To speak of Yahweh’s “wrath” is another way of referring to his fury (e.g., 5:13, 15), another way of pointing to the ferocity of what will issue from his acting. The effect of using this other word is to make a connection with two words linked by alliteration, “wrath” and “horde” (חָרוׄןand הָמוׄן) (Block, 1:259). The horde, the city’s entire people, is overcome by wrath.

**7:13** Ezekiel may go on to point to a more serious form of transaction. Suppose a family has got into difficulties and has had to sell some of its property. It will hope one day to come back to redeem it, as the Torah lays down should happen after fifty years if it doesn’t happen before (cf. Lev 25:28). It’s not going to happen during anybody’s lifetime. Actually, Yahweh did tell Jeremiah to act along these lines in a way that no one in their right mind would (Jer 32), and it would be a sign of hope at the darkest moment. But meanwhile, this “revelation”that Yahweh is giving Ezekiel again applies to the entire “horde”of Israel. In calling it a revelation, Ezekiel uses a different word (חָזוׄן) from the one with which he described his “vision” in 1:1 (מַרְאָה). It is another word linked by alliteration to the terms for “horde”and “wrath,” so it further heightens the solemnity of his declaration, tying together revelation, city, and wrath. “Vision” and “revelation” both suggest something a person sees, but “revelation” makes more explicit the reference to the person seeing it through its being revealed. The word underlines how seriously people need to take the message Ezekiel gives them. God has revealed what he intends to do, and Ezekiel is telling them. And it doesn’t just apply to particular individuals who get into economic trouble. It applies to the entire community.

The “revelation”says that “wrath”is on its way to“theentirehordeofthem” and “itwillnotturnback.” To Amos Yahweh kept saying, “I will not turn it back”: the threat originally concerned other peoples, but it eventually concerned Judah and Ephraim (Amos 2:4, 6). Ironically, Ezekiel is also neatly picking up the expression he himself used of the seller who “willnotturnback.” No “individual” within this horde will escape the wrath that is coming, because of their “waywardness.” The modern Western reader wants to know whether there are no faithful individuals within this horde and to know what happens to them, but Ezekiel’s focus lies on the waywardness of the community as a whole and on the fact that no one who has “hiswaywardness” is going to escape. They will not be able to “standfirm”(חָזַקhitpael). This significant verb expresses the idea of strengthening yourself and showing yourself strong (e.g., 1 Sam 4:9; 30:6). People will know that this is what they need to do, but they will not be able to do it. The two cola comprising the last line in 7:13 are particularly jerky and the last colon is unusually short (לֹא יִתְחַזָּקוּ,just a negative and is verb) and punchy. It makes for a forceful conclusion to 7:10–13.

**7:14–15** Ezekiel begins with a*qatal* verb that makes for a vivid description of something that is going to happen, as if it has already happened, and the transition marks the beginning of another section in the message. He pictures the blowing of a horn, which would in this situation summon the fighters to assemble to defend the city because an attack is imminent. But no one is responding. Are they too scared? Are they paralyzed? It’s again because of Yahweh’s “wrath,” the term that makes for a link with the horde—"theentirehorde.” Ezekiel thus underlines his point by using familiar forms of expression in this new section of the message, and continues to do so as he speaks of sword, epidemic, and famine, the means whereby Yahweh implements his fury and the reason there is no one to respond to the blowing of a horn.

**7:16–18** Yahweh again takes up the idea that some people might “survive” the calamity (cf. 6:8–9). Maybe he literally means they will be taking refuge in the mountains, away from Jerusalem. It could be a natural thing for fugitives to do. But the reference to the survivors fleeing there becomes a metaphor. They are like helpless little birds, vulnerable to being caught by hunters, hiding in the ravines in the mountains, cooing as pigeonsdo. Their apparently plaintive cooing can earn these birds the name “mourning doves.” These survivors will be “moaning” like that, because of “theirwaywardness.” The idea of some people escaping the disaster in this fashion is another way of seeking to get home its magnitude, and the reference to their waywardness explains why they have experienced this catastrophe. Might they also be acknowledging that waywardness, turning back from it, and becoming mindful of Yahweh in a creative way (cf. 6:8–9)? What follows rather underlines once more the magnitude of the calamity: allhands, allknees, allfaces, all heads. People are putting on the garb appropriate to mourners, who are horrified by what they have experienced. What kind of mourning and horroris it? In due course, at least, people in Jerusalem and in Kebar might think about that question, and engage in mourning and horror, in turning and mindfulness, at the waywardness that led to the calamity.

**7:19–20** For a third section of the message, Ezekiel switches to yet another image. People do not normally throw away their silver or renounce their gold as if it is “somethingtobeshunned” (נִדָּה, from נָדַד meaning “depart” or “flee”). This noun is especially used of a woman’s separating herself during menstruation, and some modern translations assume that reference. It would suggest the powerful idea that wealth has become a source of defilement and shame rather than honor.[[219]](#footnote-219) But LXX “disdained/disregarded” and Vg. “dung” (cf. KJV) fit the context better, as this understanding leads into the next line. Given that money has not been invented, silver and gold are like cash. No, they are not normally thrown away or repudiated: Ezekiel’s declaration is a litotes.\* But “onthedayofYahweh’swrath”they will be useless. Ezekiel recalls virtually word for word a line from Zeph 1:18 and nuances it: there will be no food to buy, and you can’t eat gold or silver. He again restates the cause of their downfall by combining expressions he has used before: “waywardness” is their “downfall,” the obstacle they fall over (מׅכְשׄוׄל), the thing that makes Yahweh’s wrath fall(see 3:20). The compound expression will recur (14:3, 4, 7; 18:30; 44:12). Ezekiel then moves to a different way of describing the dynamic of this downfall, though the sentence is allusive. In 24:21, Yahweh speaks of the temple as an object of pride to the people (גָאוֹן), and that reference makes sense in 7:20 (Rashi and Qimhi, in MG). The temple is Yahweh’s own “ornate object of splendor” (צְבִי עֶדְיוֹ). But the waywardness (that is, the wayward people) that caused people’s downfall turned it into “anobjectof pride”or majesty (גָאוֹן) in some new and terrible sense for them. It happened through their introducing into it a collection of “outrageous images” that are thus “detestableobjects.” These are familiar value judgments in Ezekiel except for the noun “images”(צֶלֶם), which Ezekiel uses of “idols” only here.[[220]](#footnote-220) The result of their action is to make the temple into a place Yahweh has given up on and surrendered to them “assomethingtobeshunned”—with irony, he repeats the word from 7:19.

**7:21–22** Thus, whereas the temple had been his gift to them, they have turned it into something he might as well pass on as a gift to foreigners and to “themostfaithlessoftheearth” and thus “treat it as something ordinary,” profane it (חָלַל piel). There are two levels of seriousness about profaning. It can mean simply treating something or someone as ordinary rather than special and separate. Or it can mean substantively polluting or defiling something or someone sacred. Both sorts of profanation will happen when the Babylonians arrive and take the temple as “plunder”and “spoil.” Really, it is defiled and profaned already, but these pagan feet will profane it further.[[221]](#footnote-221) In Ezekiel, “the past, present and future of Israel as a whole are defined by using the categories of profanation and sanctification.”[[222]](#footnote-222) Yahweh will later note that he did indeed bring about a profanation by pagan feet (Isa 47:6). “Iwill turn my face from them” is a further shocking threat: when someone turns their face to you, it signifies their favor and blessing, but when they turn it away, this signifies abandonment. Yahweh makes the point again in yet another shocking formulation: his action will mean “theywilltreat as something ordinarywhat Itreasuredaway,” a unique expression for the temple itself that suggests its importance to him. He will enable the invaders to treat it as something they can just trample about in, as people of violence(פְרִיצִים). It is appropriate in terms of poetic justice (Jer 7:11). The “it” in this last colon is feminine, which suggests something broader than the temple—the city or the land.

**7:23** The jump to another kind of verbal expression, another imperative, marks the beginning to a final new section. If we fill in the gaps in 7:23, Yahweh is urging someone metaphorically to make the chainswith which an invader will take action on Yahweh’s behalf, on account of the “bloodyruling”and “violence” (see 7:11) in the city*.* The someone might be the king of Babylon in succession to the king of Assyria in Isa 7, or one of Yahweh’s supernatural aides, as in Isa 40:3–5. But this “fetter”also recalls the cords of 3:22–27 and 4:8, so maybe the commission suggests another sign act (Odell, 87). One way or another, Ezekiel is again talking about Yahweh’s action against the country’s corrupt leadership. It has ignored his rulings (5:6–7) and preferred its own, wantonly shedding people’s blood through encouraging exploitation in economic policies and fraud in decision-making (cf. 9:9; 11:6; 22:6, 12, 25, 27).

**7:24** Yahweh has no compunction about bringing “thedirestofnations,” another expression for “thefaithlessoftheearth,” to come to do his dirty work, though Ezekiel will in due course note that he will deal with them, too, in time. To connect some more dots, the poetic justice corresponding to the corruption whereby the leaders have acquired nice homes for themselves will involve these invaders taking over those homes. There will be further irony involved when they “enterintopossession” of them (יׇרַשׁ), because that is the First Testament’s word for the Israelites’ entering into possession of Canaan. “The pride of the strong” could be their impressiveness, a majesty about the “mighty,” the formidable, the fiercepeople in Jerusalem. Or it could denote the thing they are proud of—the temple: cf. 7:20. But that earlier comment about pridereferred to the impressiveaids to worship that the powerful people introduced into the temple, and the parallelism suggests the same reference here. The arrival of the invaders will be Yahweh’s means of stopping the worship that is facilitated by those aids. Tellingly, Yahweh speaks of “theirsanctifiers,” which are “their sanctuaries” (see the textual note), a doubly or triply pejorative expression. Yahweh disowns the sanctuaries as theirs rather than his, and as plural rather than singular (cf. Lev 26:31 and contrast “mysanctuary” in Ezek 5:11), and turns them into their self-made sanctifiers rather than real sanctuaries. To make it worse, even if they are sacred places, the arrival of the nations will mean they “willbetreated as ordinary” (נִחֲלוּ). This verb occurred in the piel (transitive) three times in 7:21–22, but this time it is niphal (intransitive). Vg. translates it in the same way as the verb in 7:24a: the nations will “enter into possession” of the sanctuaries,” as if the verb is נָחַל rather than חׇלַל niphal. It at least suggests a paronomasia as it points to the First Testament’s other verb for receiving Canaan as an endowment (נָחַל; cf. 47:14).

**7:25–26** “Closingup”(קְדָפָה) is another hapax, but it is likely somehow another expression for things coming to an end (see the translation footnote). In the context of that threat, some people will at last turn to God, but once more the apparent note of hope is nothing of the kind. The following cola suggest that Ezekiel refers especially to the city’s leadership who have to make the decisions about how Judah should try to cope with the coming invasion. They will turn to Yahweh, but they will find he is not listening. He has turned his face away. As people were indeed saying in Jerusalem, or soon will be, there is no well-being to be had (Jer 8:15). This is Ezekiel’s first reference to *shalom*, and he will not make many more (13:10, 16; 34:25; 37:26).[[223]](#footnote-223) The news will get worse and worse. The combination of prophet, priest, and elder (or wise person or official) recurs (see especially Jer 18:18). Here Ezekiel tweaks it. He could have been neat and had three cola about seeking insight or three about failing to find it, or even three of each. Instead, he has one about seeking and two about not finding. His threat about a prophetic word again reformulates one that appears in Amos (8:11–12). It also recalls another moment in Jerusalem soon after this, when Zedekiah sends to seek counsel from Jeremiah and gets a dusty response (Jer 38:14–15).

**7:27** When Yahweh mentioned just a single fetter (7:23), he may have indicated that he had the king in mind, and this threat fits that possibility. It coheres with 2 Kgs 23–24 holding the king responsible for policies in Jerusalem, in Ezekiel’s lifetime. Nations commonly hold their president or prime minister responsible for their destiny. Ezekiel usually avoids describing the Israelite king as “king,” preferring to call him “prince” (נָשִֹיא), andin the parallelism here, “prince” will refer to the king (cf. Qimhi, in MG). The term occurs most often in Numbers to refer to the heads or chiefs of the clans, so Ezekiel’s use of the word for the head of the entire nation is innovative. He is taking up a title from Israel’s history, but his use of it simultaneously enhances its meaning and downgrades the significance of the person to whom it applies. Ezekiel also never names Zedekiah or Jehoiachin, even while referring to them several times (the curator names Jehoiachin in 1:2). Likewise in the parallelism, “clothehimselfindesolation”makes for a vivid restatement of “mourn.” LXX’s term for “desolation” is ảφανισμóς: “Where one might expect a ruler to ‘be clothed’ in royal garments, taking a lead, here he is clothed in ‘disappearance’”(Olley, 283). The third verbal expression about handsthat willtremble constitutes another vivid restatement, though the identity of “thecitizenry”is trickier. The expression עַם הָאָרֶץ is literally “the people of the country” and the immediately obvious interpretation of it is that it refers to Judahites in general. But in some contexts it looks more like a term for something like landowners, heads of households,[[224]](#footnote-224) and that understanding mostly works for Ezekiel. It would fit with Yahweh’s closing declaration. “Becauseoftheirpaths,” the roads they have been walking, “Iwilldealwiththem,” could apply to everyone. But “theirrulings” are the decisions of decision-makers, and Yahweh’s decision is to treat them as toughly as they treat their people. Thus, “Iwillruleinaccordancewithyourpaths” is where the chapter almost started, and “their paths” and “their rulings” is almost where it ends (Olley, 283). Necessarily it actually finishes with *“*theywillacknowledgethat IamYahweh.” It appliesnot only to the people in Kebar but also to the people in Jerusalem. Yahweh has the power and the will to do as he says.

### Biblical Theology Comments

The Scriptures as a whole, and Ezekiel’s message in particular, presuppose that there are various ways of describing the causality whereby things happen in the world and of describing God’s involvement in the world. In describing human actions, I can say (for instance), “I decided to write this commentary,” or “my hormones made me do it” or “my upbringing made it happen,” or “the working of the educational system in my culture made it happen,” or “God led me to do it.” All may be true and illuminating. None is complete on its own. The account of the building of the wilderness sanctuary in Exodus 25–40 describes Yahweh’s desire, leadership initiatives, and ordinary people’s generosity combining to bring a sanctuary into being. In Jerusalem, socio-economic policies that benefit the powerful go together with religious initiatives that issue in impressive aids to worship. Ezekiel is concerned both for worship that honors Yahweh and for socio-economic policies that honor his people. And Ezek 7 can describe events that are going to happen in various ways.

* The end is coming.
* I will send off my anger.
* I will lay your outrages upon you.
* The end is waking up for you.
* Your outrages happen within you.
* The scepter has blossomed, arrogance has budded, violence has risen up.
* Wrath applies to their entire horde.
* Their waywardness was their downfall.

An understanding of events in the world needs to work with the inherent links between human acts and consequences and also between God’s decisions and events. “Sins boomerang, bringing doom upon the perpetrators” (Brownlee, 106). In addition, God is involved, and involved in the violence of history (Jenson, 77). God sometimes works through those inherent links and sometimes independently of them.

### Application and Devotional Implications

“An end is coming, the end is coming” (7:6). Both these statements are important and their interrelationship is important, in a broader sense than Ezekiel means them but in a way that coheres with his message, especially when it is set in the context of the Scriptures as a whole. Using the word *eschatology* is always a bad idea because it can mean so many different things, but if I were going to use it, here are the two things that I would mean by it. On one hand, integral to scriptural faith is the fact that there is a beginning and an end to God’s total purpose in the world. God’s action in the world began with creation, and it will end with the fulfillment of creation. It began with a Beginning (a רֵאשִׁית in Hebrew,an ảρχήin Greek)and it will end with an End (a קֵץ in Hebrew, an ἔσχατον in Greek). On the way between these two, God’s activity sees many new beginnings and many interim ends. There are many points where God starts again and many points when he brings about a provisional or partial fulfillment. In speaking of the end as about to happen, he often sounds as if he is promising or threatening the final End, and it may be only afterwards that people discover that it was only an interim end. Maybe things will never be the same after this end, but things will go on.

The people of God live in light of the possibility that they will see an end in their lifetime. They live in light of the certainty that eventually God will bring about the final End. “Kingdoms and churches have their periods; they may continue for some hundreds of years, but at length they expire” (Greenhill, 163). “While Ezekiel was not proclaiming the end of the world, he was proclaiming to his contemporaries that *their* world was coming to an end.” They need to take account of that fact, but Ezekiel has a hard time getting them to do so, and for the church, the problem is that belief that Jesus is coming doesn’t make a difference to Christians (Blenkinsopp, 50). There is another solemn fact that Ezekiel brings home to us. We think of the end (the kingdom) in a positive way. But there cannot be a new kingdom without the destruction of the old (Jenson, 69–72). There has to be an end if there is to be something eternal.[[225]](#footnote-225)

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## Part Two: Yahweh’s Messages to Ezekiel, Year Six (8:1–19:14)

The date in 8:1 marks a new beginning, introducing Ezek 8–19. Part One has announced the further catastrophe that is coming on Jerusalem and the rationale for it, but it has done so mostly in general terms. More concrete critique and threat now follow in Part Two of the scroll. The next date, in 20:1, is another year later, and it will introduce Part Three, 20:1–23:49, and take readers to the siege of Jerusalem (24:1). The contents of Parts One, Two, and Three thus mark the initiation, the main body, and the end of Ezekiel’s work before the siege. They suggest increasing tension as they put increasing stress on the waywardness that makes the catastrophe necessary and on the unmitigated disaster it will be, though they also allow some possibilities for a more positive future because of who Yahweh is and because of his commitments. While the chronological framework of the parts may imply that all the material in chapters 8–19 basically issued from that same year, Part Two is as long as Parts One and Three put together, and at least as significant is the thematic organization of the chapters, which means we cannot necessarily make that inference.

Ezek 1–7 comprised a sequence of visions, symbolic acts, explanations of the symbolic acts, and rationales for them, and Ezek 8–11 begins a parallel sequence:

1:1–3 A date 8:1

1:4–3:15/3:27 Visions 8:2–11:25

3:16/4:1–5:4 Symbolic acts 12:1–20

5:5–7:27 Explanations, indictments, and threats 12:21–14:11

The sequence continues with further explanations, indictments, and threats in the form of מְשָׁלׅים— parables,\* sayings, and allegories:

14:12–23 A saying about Noah, Daniel, and Job

15:1–8 A tree consigned to the fire

16:1–63 The story of a foundling and of covenantal outrages (with a note of hope)

17:1–24 An eagle, a cedar, and a vine (with a note of hope)

18:1–32 A saying about responsibility and turning (with a note of hope)

19:1–14 A requiem about a mother and her offspring

In 5:11 Ezekiel reported Yahweh’s declaration, “youhave defiled my sanctuary with all your abhorrent things and with all your outrages,” but he did not describe what these outrages were. He now does so in an account of a visionary journey to Jerusalem that “provides for the elders… the Lord’s indictment of Jerusalem’s leadership” and thus makes clear “why the exiles’ immediate future cannot lie back there” (Lind,76). The basic shape of Ezek 8–11 is that of one extended “two-part prophetic oracle” (Zimmerli,1:235), but they also form a continuous narrative, in four acts.

* Act 1: Ezekiel relates how Yahweh takes him in spirit to Jerusalem to see the idolatrous things happening in the temple (8:1–18)
* Act 2: He hears Yahweh commissioning executioners and also commissioning someone to mark people exempted from execution (9:1–11)
* Act 3: He has a repeat of his first vision, the entourage now being over the temple, and hears Yahweh commissioning the sprinkling of fire over Jerusalem (10:1–22)
* Act 4: He receives messages of trouble and promise for both communities, the entourage moves off, and Yahweh takes him back to Kebar (11:1–25)

In the opening verses (8:1–4), then, Ezekiel describes a spirit taking him in a vision to Jerusalem while he remains bodily in the company of some Judahite elders in Kebar. Yahweh in his magnificence is also there in Jerusalem. In the closing verses (11:22–25) he describes Yahweh moving away from the city, the spirit bringing him back to Kebar in the vision, the vision then ceasing, and his telling the exile community what Yahweh had shown him in Jerusalem. These two paragraphs thus open and close the four chapters. In 12:1, Ezekiel then relates a new commission, not with a new date but beginning again with “Yahweh’smessagecametome” as in 6:1 and 7:1. The medieval chapter divisions mark semi-complete units within Ezekiel 8–11, and for convenience we will treat the four chapters separately.

Ezekiel’s visionary experiences are unique to him among First Testament prophets, though accounts of such experiences recur in apocalypses from the Second Temple period and from subsequent centuries.[[226]](#footnote-226) As the experiences God will give John on Patmos are one way whereby God seeks to get a message home to Christian communities in Western Turkey, these experiences that God gives Ezekiel are one way whereby God seeks to get a message home to the Kebar community. It is a spectacular means whereby he seeks to get home the perspective that also appears in Ezekiel’s more straightforward prophetic messages concerning God’s assessment of Judah and his threats concerning its future, though it is also more concrete in the picture it paints. The chapters, then, seek to communicate vividly to people in Kebar what is happening in Jerusalem and what Yahweh intends to do about it. While they must not hope for the restoration of the city or their own return there in the near future, Yahweh will take them back there is due course.

The four chapters make sense as they stand as a composition designed to communicate in the Kebarites, though as usual the form in which we have them may reflect later compositional work dating from before or after the fall of Jerusalem in 587. Actually, “The literary integrity of these chapters has consumed copious amounts of scholarly ink”[[227]](#footnote-227) and they may indeed have “a complex redactional history,” though many of their “tensions and gaps” may relate to the fact that they “are presented as a vision. A dreamworld is not the same as the waking world” (Bowen, 44). As usual, the variety in accounts of their possible redactional history raises the question whether this redactional history cannot be traced. And on any theory, the Jewish community saw the form of the chapters that we have as one that would be good for people to study, whether or not it corresponded to what Ezekiel read to people in 592.

The two Testaments include a few accounts of visions that give straightforward revelations of something to which a person did not have access, and information that they would not otherwise have (e.g., 2 Kgs 5:26, though Elisha does not speak in terms of a “vision” or of “seeing”). But generally visions do not communicate straightforward information in a straightforward way. Ezek 1 conveyed information that in a sense can be expressed in a straightforward way, about matters such as God’s awesomeness and God’s capacity to appear anywhere, but it conveyed it by means of images that bring home truths in a less prosaic fashion. Ezek 37 and 40–48 convey information about God’s future intentions whose practical implications are harder to state. While God did within a few decades bring about the renewal of the nation, its land, and its temple, his action did not entail a straightforward implementing of those visons. They are more like statements of his ultimate intentions, expressed in figurative terms such as may inspire people with hope. And they involve hyperbole.\*

Ezekiel and his readers might initially take the vision in Ezek 8 as representing things that were actually taking place in Jerusalem, though the second of the scenes is harder to understand in that way. Chapters 9–11 are more like Ezek 37 and 40–48: they express God’s intentions but not in a way that found fulfillment in the lifetime of Ezekiel and his readers, or anyone else so far. They, too, involve hyperbole. It seems likely that Ezek 8 likewise does not describe something that anyone could have actually seen in Jerusalem. It interprets the significance of what was going on, in figurative terms and in hyperbole.

The aim of Ezek 37 and 40–48 is to encourage through the use of symbolism and hyperbole, and to inspire faith and hope of the kind that will be needed when Judahites seek to rebuild the nation. They will be able to do so in the knowledge that their ventures are in keeping with God’s ultimate vision, even though they may look implausible if not hopeless (see Ezra-Nehemiah). The aim of Ezek 8–11 is to shock through the use of symbolism and hyperbole, to horrify the Kebar community with its picture of current reality in Jerusalem, to prepare it for the grim future that hangs over the city, and to inspire it to turn to God. Visions such as Ezekiel’s function like science fiction and other imaginative literature, some of which is dystopian, some utopian. It may thus inspire action or inspire hope (the principles applying to Ezekiel also apply to Revelation).

Ezekiel’s hearers might want urgently to know how they are to think literally about the future. Yahweh does not tell them. He wants them to live in light of the hyperbole, both dystopian and utopian, and to react accordingly. It is Ezekiel’s location in the context of the rest of the Scriptures that helps answer the question of how to think literally about events in the 590s and 580s. In connection with the vision in Ezek 8–11, the narrative and more straightforward preaching in Jeremiah, 2 Kgs 22–25, and 2 Chr 33–36 do so. Without Ezek 8–11, however, readers of the Scriptures get less impression of the horror of what was happening and what would happen in Jerusalem. Read after 587, the chapters would function as an explanation of why things had happened as they did—they would function as theodicy. They would explain the necessity for Yahweh to take action, and confirm that it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God (Heb 10:31). Yet they would also make it surprising that events in 587 were nowhere near as bad as this vision threatens. As usual, Yahweh cannot bring himself to implement his threats.

## Outrages in the Temple (8:1–18)

### Outline

In the four-act drama comprising Ezek 8–11, Act 1 outlines how:

Yahweh transports Ezekiel to Jerusalem (8:1–4)

Yahweh shows him the outrages in the temple area:

the statue north of the temple (8:5–6)

the image rooms (8:7–13)

the women crying for Tammuz (8:14–15)

the men bowing to the sun (8:16)

Yahweh declares his decision to act in fury (8:17–18)

In each of the four little scenes, Ezekiel follows approximately the same pattern:

Yahweh had me move to a particular place

I looked at what people were doing and I noted, “There …”

This is something of what I saw

This is what Yahweh said about its offensive nature

This is what he declared about me seeing further outrages.

The four accounts relate to separate scenes within a vision. They are not a sequence of events following each other as part of one chronological sequence in Jerusalem history, like (say) 2 Kgs 25. There is no indication that they describe something Ezekiel had seen when he lived in Jerusalem or that he could have seen if he paid a bodily visit there or that a visitor from Jerusalem could have been reported to him. The vision will build on some knowledge of Jerusalem that he has, but it raises puzzles about the location as well as the nature of the events it relates. While 1 Kgs 6–7 describes Solomon’s building of the temple, it says little about the courtyards around the main temple building or its environs, which are important in this vision. Indeed, the vision hardly invites readers to relate it to such geographical or material realities any more than (say) Gen 1 (or Gen 1–11 as a whole) invites readers to relate it to geographical or chronological realities. As Gen 1 concerns real facts about God creating the world (it was made in a purposeful fashion, it was made by the exercise of God’s uncontested sovereignty, it was made good), so Ezek 8 concerns real facts about Jerusalem’s religion and worship (they were influenced by other peoples’ religion and worship in a way that contested Yahweh’s sovereignty). It fits with some of Jeremiah’s scathing accounts of religion and worship in Jerusalem (e.g., Jer 7:17; 44:17–19). But Ezekiel has a more vivid imagination than Jeremiah. And it is an account of a sequence of imaginary scenes that Yahweh enabled him to see in his vision, like the Valley of the Bones in 37:1–14.[[228]](#footnote-228)

### Translation

1Then, in the sixth year, in the sixth [month], on the fifth of the month, I was sitting in my house, with the Judahite elders sitting in front of me, and the hand of the Lord Yahweh fell on me there. 2I saw,[[229]](#footnote-229) and there, a form something like the appearance of fire. From the appearance of its waist and downward, fire, and from its waist and upward, something like the appearance of brightness, something like the look of *hashmal*. 3He put out the shape of a hand and got me by a tuft of the hair on my head, and a spirit[[230]](#footnote-230) lifted me between the earth and the heavens and had me come to Jerusalem in a divine vision,[[231]](#footnote-231) to the entrance of the inner gateway that faces northward, where was the seat of the creation statue that arouses passion.[[232]](#footnote-232) 4And there, the magnificence of the God of Israel was there, like the vision that I saw in the plain.

5He said to me, My man, lift your eyes in a northward direction, will you. So I lifted my eyes in a northward direction, and there, to the north of the altar gateway was this statue that arouses passion, in the entrance. 6He said to me, My man, do you see what those people are doing, the great outrages that Israel’s household are doing here, so as to be distant from my sanctuary![[233]](#footnote-233) But you will yet see more big outrages.

7He had me come to the entrance of the courtyard, and I saw, and there, a hole in the wall. 8He said to me, My man, break through the wall, will you. I broke through the wall, and there, an[[234]](#footnote-234) entrance. 9He said to me, Come, see the dire outrages that those people are doing here. 10I came and saw, and there, every shape of reptile and animal, something abhorrent, and all the lumps of Israel’s household, engraved on the wall, all around. 11And seventy individuals from the elders of Israel’s household (and Yaʾazaniah ben Shaphan standing among them) standing in front of them, with an individual his censor in his hand, and the lavishness[[235]](#footnote-235) of an incense cloud going up. 12He said to me, My man, have you seen what the elders of Israel’s household are doing in the dark, an individual in his icon rooms! Because they are saying, Yahweh is not seeing us, given that Yahweh has abandoned the country. 13And he said to me, You will yet see more big outrages that those people are doing.

14He had me come to the entrance of the gateway of Yahweh’s house that is to the north, and there, the women were sitting there crying for the Tammuz. 15He said to me, My man, have you seen! You will yet further see bigger outrages than these.

16He had me come to the inner courtyard of Yahweh’s house, and there, at the entrance of Yahweh’s palace, between the foyer and the altar, some[[236]](#footnote-236) twenty-five individuals, their backs to Yahweh’s palace and their faces eastward, and they were bowing down[[237]](#footnote-237) eastward, to the sun.

17He said to me, Have you seen, my man! Is it trivial for Judah’s household from performing the outrages that they have performed here, because they have filled the country with violence and further enraged me, and there they are, putting the shoot to their nose? 18So I myself for my part will perform with fury. In that my eye will not pity and I will not show concern, they will call out into my ears in a loud voice but I will not listen to them.

### Textual Notes

MT has markers\* after 8:6 and 14.

**8:1** LXX has “eighth year” and “fifth month.”

**8:2** For אֵשׁ, LXX “a man” implies אִישׁ. It would be a unique comparison for Yahweh in Ezekiel, who elsewhere uses אָדָם in describing God and uses אִישׁ to describe a supernatural figure who is less than God.

**8:3** LXX lacks “inner” (הַפְּנׅימׅית) which precedes the similar word “facing,” הַפּוֺנֶה.

**8:5** For המִּזְבֵּחַ, “altar,” LXX “east” implies הַמִּזְרׇח.

LXX lacks the reference to the creation statue.

**8:6** Q has מָה הֵם, K has מהם without the vowel letter. At the end of the verse, LXX has “see bigger” (cf. also 8:13, 15).

**8:7–8** LXX has a shorter version of 8:7b–8, where there is some overlap in MT.

**8:10** For “everyformofreptileandanimal,something abhorrent,” LXX has “empty outrages.”

**8:12** For בְּחַדְרֵי מַשְֹכִּיתוֺ LXX has “in their hidden bedroom,” which suggests מִשְׁכָּבוֺ rather than מַשְֹכִּיתוֹ.

**8:16** For “twenty*-*five,”LXX has “twenty.”

**8:17** LXX lacks “andfurtherenragedme.”

**8:18** LXX lacks 8:18b, which overlaps with 9:1aα.

### Verse-by-Verse Commentary

**8:1a** A year has passed since the date in 1:2. It is now late summer 592, and the sixth year after the fall of Jerusalem that had led to the forced migration of the Kebarites. Perhaps Ezekiel has been sitting at home all the time, as he is here, in keeping with 3:24–27, or perhaps he has been out preaching. Either way, Yahweh now reaches out to him afresh. Rhetorically, the provision of a date signifies to readers that they are about to read something new. Ezekiel has made a sequence of references to outrages in Jerusalem and has passed on a number of threats of death coming there. More concrete pictures of critique and threat will now follow. “Elders” denotes not a formally qualified group like priests, or a charismatically qualified group like prophets, but senior members of the community, the heads of households. Presumably they are with him seeking a message, or claiming to do so (cf. 14:1–3; 20:1), which implies some background in his having been functioning as a prophet along lines adumbrated by Ezekiel 1–7, and in their recognizing they need to pay attention to him. Does it imply a crisis in leadership in the community (Bowen, 43)? That would provide further background to the vision that follows. But Ezekiel says nothing about their reason for being there or what they asked him. Their initiative isn’t the point. Indeed, Yahweh’s words in 7:26 do not augur well for them. Even if they do come to consult with him, they don’t then do what Yahweh tells them (33:30–33) (Olley, 284). And “the prophet could proclaim naught for their comfort” (Allen, 1:137).[[238]](#footnote-238)

**8:1b–2** ButYahweh’s hand “fell” on him in their presence, which in this context means he saw something that only Yahweh could enable him to see. It was what happened a year earlier (see 1:3; also 3:14, 22). But “fell” is a stronger expression than “came,” the verb there(literally, “was/became,” though 3:14 had Yahweh’s hand being “strong on me”). Ezekiel had a powerful sense of being gripped by God. Commentators sometimes apply the word “ecstasy”to his experience (e.g., Blenkinsopp, 52). While words such as “trance” may not be helpful, his testimony does imply a separating of his sense of mind and body. His description of what happens to him recalls 1:4–28, though he doesn’t make the comparison at this point. He again sees “aform” (the word occurred nine times in 1:4–28) like “theappearance”(fifteen times in 1:4–28) of “fire” (six times). In effect, his account focuses on the figure on the throne from the earlier vision. There is apparently no need of the living creatures now (Theodoret, 70). The description broadly repeats the one in 1:27 except that it puts things in a different order, and replaces “brightness”(**נֹגַה**) by “radiance”(**זֹהַר**).

**8:3–4** Ezekiel’s account of Yahweh’s hand reaching out to him and taking him by the hair, and of a spirit/wind lifting him into midair, is also more concrete and forceful than the one in 3:14, 22–24. On the other hand, there the spirit/wind carried him bodily about, as Yahweh’s spirit did Elijah and Elisha (1 Kgs 18:12; 2 Kgs 2:1–18). Here, Yahweh takes him on an imaginary journey “ina divinevision”(cf. 1:1). His experience does parallels Elisha’s on another occasion (2 Kgs 5:26) and anticipates Paul’s (1 Cor 5:3; 2 Cor 12:1–4). Ezekiel would be familiar with the temple, and this familiarity will provide background to his vision and to its broad intelligibility, but his other visions go beyond present realities such as anyone could actually see, so there’s no presupposition that what he sees here was literally happening. Rather, Yahweh was bringing home the implications of what was happening there so that Ezekiel could describe it to people in Kebar.

His initial allusion to “thestatue”at “theinnergateway”introduces this first outrage. He will shortly describe how Yahweh draws attention to it and comments on it. “Theinnergatewaythatfacesnorthward” was a gateway leading into the city and thus into the temple. Solomon’s temple was at the northern extent of the city, the direction from which someone would usually arrive from Babylonia unless they were flying across the desert. “Statue” (**סֵמֶֶל**) is yet another word for an idol. LXX calls it a stela, a commemorative inscription, and there could have been one there, but the other occurrences of **סֵמֶֶל** suggest something more outrageous. These other occurrences are in Deut 4:16, which is significant in light of the description Ezekiel will give in 8:10, and in 2 Chr 33:7, 15 in a later description of Manasseh’s image which Josiah removed. That parallel coheres with the general implication in 2 Kings and Jeremiah that the decades leading up to 587 saw a reversion to the religious practices that Josiah outlawed. The traditional translation “image of jealousy” suggests an image of a deity other than Yahweh, though an image of Yahweh would also be enough to cause Yahweh passionate fury. But if it was a “creation statue,” an image of a creator deity with its seator throne (see the translation footnote), this would fit with the nature orientation of the other three outrages in Ezekiel’s vision. Whatever the visionary statue was,[[239]](#footnote-239) the visionary presence of “themagnificenceoftheGodofIsrael” there, as “Yahweh’smagnificence” had been “intheplain” (3:22–23), confronts this monstrosity. It exposes it and further nuances the scandal of what Ezekiel sees (“not that he enjoyed being so close”; Jerome, 92).[[240]](#footnote-240) In Ezekiel as in the Torah, an essential quality of Yahweh’s magnificence is its mobility and transitoriness,[[241]](#footnote-241) which means that Yahweh’s magnificence, which had previously made its presence felt in the plain and by the Kebar, can now be in Jerusalem.

**8:5–6** InhisvisionEzekiel is apparently in the environs of the temple itself, which is just south of the city wall and gateway. He can see the image from there, from a gateway that leads into the temple enclosure. Only here does the First Testament refer to an “altargateway,” which might mean a gateway on the northern side of the temple area that therefore led towards the sacrificial altar, or might imply an altar north of the temple court that was associated with the creation statue and was therefore near the northern gateway to the city (so respectively Rashi and Qimhi, in MG). Jer 11:13 refers to there being a number of altars in Jerusalem. The people worshiping at this image perhaps think they can get away with their worship that is “distantfrommysanctuary” (a general term for the entire temple area) in the sense of outside it. They behave as if they think Yahweh cannot see there! Prophets can berate Israel for the implications of their actions and not just for what they explicitly say, and Yahweh may be doing so here.

**8:7–10** The second scene in the vision is much the most complex. While Solomon’s palace had courtyards (e.g., 1 Kgs 7:8–12), elsewhere Ezekiel’s references are to the temple courtyards, and so it would be here. It is not clear what the “wall” or the “entrance”would refer to, but these may exist only in the vision, as would more evidently be true of “everyformofreptileandanimal*,* somethingabhorrentportrayedonthewall.” Reptiles appear with quite neutral significance in Genesis and elsewhere as part of God’s creation, but here the context gives them negative connotations. Likewise there was nothing wrong with engravings in themselves. The temple had them (1 Kgs 6). The issue was what engravings represented. The idea of portraying these creatures compares with the prohibitions in Deut 4:16–24, a chapter with which Ezek 8–11 has a number of links (Ganzel 2020, 65–70). while Lev 11 speaks of “abhorrent”creatures that are forbidden to Israelites (Ezekiel uses the Leviticus word שֶׁקֶץ instead of his usual שׁׅקּּוּץ). Lions and dragons feature on the Ishtar Gate in Babylon (Greenberg, 1:169), and images of deities in animal form feature on the walls of tombs in Egypt, Judah’s key ally (Blenkinsopp, 55; Wright, 102–3). So the portrayal of these engravings might combine references to Deuteronomy, Leviticus, Babylon, and Egypt, and suggest turning away from Yahweh and implicitly rejecting the distinctiveness of Yahweh’s expectations of Israelites. This could be an issue both in Kebar and in Jerusalem. Once again, the portrayal of people acting in hole-and-corner locations suggests an ingenuous assumption that they can evade Yahweh’s knowledge of what they are doing and thinking.

**8:11–13** The “seventyelders” are a parody of the seventy elders in the Torah (Exod 24:1, 9; Num 11:16–30). Yaʾazaniah ben Shaphan is thus distinguishable from the other four Yaʾazaniahs in the First Testament in this period. Perhaps he was well-known as a senior figure among the elders, but it is also noteworthy that Shaphan (e.g., 2 Kgs 22:8; 25:22) was the head of an important family, and that this man’s name means “Yahweh will give ear” (see 8:18). Both facts suggest some irony. Burning incense is a symbol of worship going up to God, and particularly of prayers going up to God (Rev 8:3–4). So these people are leaders who are praying in a way that suggests they know they need to so in light of an actual or potential crisis. Offering incense was generally the business of priests, but when the First Testament critiques the offering of incense, as Jeremiah often does, its critiques generally relate not to unqualified people making the offering but to the incense being offered to the wrong deities. That’s the problem here: “my people, your leaders lead you astray” (Isa 3:12) (Qimhi, in MG). Yahweh’s additional point is that the elders are offering this worship “inthedark, intheiriconrooms,” which might imply rooms in their own homes or rooms they had in the temple complex—either way, these rooms, too, may exist only in Ezekiel’s vision. It also again means they are “distantfrommysanctuary” (8:6), and think that Yahweh “isnotseeingus.” The reason is not that he is only present in the sanctuary or only cares about what happens there or cannot see them in their secret locations. It is the poignant and ironic one that he “hasabandonedthecountry” (cf. 9:9). One can properly say such things in prayer (e.g., Psa 22:1 [2]). Their action is an expression of despair rather than defiance. Perhaps Yahweh has renounced any ownership of the country.[[242]](#footnote-242) But what if their words become “a self-fulfilling prophecy”?[[243]](#footnote-243)

**8:14–15** In contrast to the second scene in the vision, the third account is the simplest. The variation seems to be simply for variety’s sake, in that this third sight is not less troublesome than the second. But Yahweh now takes Ezekiel nearer the actual sanctuary, “Yahweh’shouse,” and there are “womencryingfortheTammuz”there, as there were men offering incense in 8:7–13. Tammuz, the Hebrew equivalent of Dumu-zi, may have been a long-ago Sumerian king, but he is better known as the god who in some stories descends to the underworld and then returns each year, in a way mirrored in or mirroring the death of nature in the dry season and the earth’s subsequent resuscitation.[[244]](#footnote-244) Crying for the Tammuz, then, would be an enacted prayer in late summer for the coming of the rains. This practice, too, would resonate in Kebar.

**8:16** “Every step Ezekiel has taken has brought him nearer to the holiest place of the public temple worship, the open space between the vestibule of the temple and the altar of burnt offering, which he now approaches by way of the inner court” (Eichrodt, 126–27). It is a proper place to pray in a desperate situation (Joel 2:17). The sun has frightening power, which might make it seem appropriate to bow down to the deity represented by it. As with the other outrages, however, the worshipers might not see themselves as bowing down to the sun rather than to Yahweh, but rather as engaged in “solarized Yahweh worship” (Zimmerli,1:244). And possibly “Ezekiel is not so much opposed to the worship of *Yahweh* as the sun, but with the worship of *the* *sun* (that is, a physical object) as Yahweh.”[[245]](#footnote-245) Indeed, “was it an act of apostasy or was it preparation for a standard temple morning service that Ezekiel interprets as corrupt” because of what he has seen earlier? (Sweeney, 59). But these people are at the very “entrancetoYahweh’spalace” and they have turned their backs, metaphorically and literally. The emphasis in Ezekiel’s words lies here. In such worship they have surely turned their backs on Yahweh (Jer 32:33).

**8:17** Yahweh sums up his sense of Jerusalem’s “outrages.” While “violence” could denote violating his expectations regarding worship, the word has previously denoted people’s wrongful violent action towards one another, particularly the strong towards the weak. More likely that is the reference here, as 9:9 and 11:1–12 will confirm. Yahweh thus adds this reference to the comments about worship. Perhaps there is an implication that the social disorder follows from the religious disorder (Sweeney, 59). We can only guess at the significance of “puttingthebranchtotheirnose.” It might bea gesture of commitment like a salute, so that Yahweh’s comment sums up the actions he has drawn attention to in 8:5–16. Or it might be a gesture of contempt like thumbing one’s nose. Or perhaps their incense just seemed like a stench to Yahweh (Qimhi, in MG), which would fit with the Jewish tradition that originally Ezekiel wrote “my nose.”[[246]](#footnote-246)

**18**. The result will be the familiar one. While Yahweh listens to the cry of the needy, this is the cry of the violent, and he doesn’t listen to them (Lind, 80).

### Biblical Theology Comments

Ezekiel enables us to see something of the diversity of statements that need to be made about Yahweh. Yahweh is simply “he,” a person, not a thing or a principle, but someone who acts and speaks. He is “God,” not simply a god. There is only one being like Yahweh. He is “theGodofIsrael.” He associated himself with this people in the course of fulfilling his aims for all peoples. He is a being of majesty, glory, honor, and magnificence. He is not your buddy, though he is your father and mother. He has “the appearance of fire,” powerful and dangerous. He has the dynamic of the “wind.” He is capable of sweeping someone across deserts. He is capable of reaching out and grasping. His touch is not gentle. He cannot be imaged, and therefore he must not be.

He is lord of creation and lord of Israel’s history (Wright, 106–7) and it is possible to underplay one or the other. He is also lord of experience and lord of the history that came to a climax in Jesus. He is the Lord known in his basic nature to all peoples, and the Lord known more fully in that history. The history of what he did in Israel and in Jesus gives crucial information to anyone who otherwise knows only what they learn from creation, from their national culture, and from their own experience. Conversely, people who know that history also learn from creation, culture, and experience, and get to fill out what they already knew in that way. One can see how Israel did so and how the church did so, and how it contributes to the Scriptures. But Ezekiel and the history of the church also show how the crucial nature of what we learn from that history gets overlaid and we end up just with what we know from creation, from culture, and from experience, without realizing what has happened.

### Application and Devotional Implications

The presence of the elders in Kebar coming to see Ezekiel and the prominence of the elders and the women praying in Jerusalem suggest that key questions raised by this chapter are the identity of who you pray to when you are in need and how you pray to Yahweh (Odell, 104). “With respect to us as well, one must pray that the *elders of the house of Israel* …not *stand* in their errors … and that the smoke of *sacrilege* that is in opposition to God may not ‘ascend’” (Jerome, 95). The elders in Kebar go through the motions of seeking to solve their problems by turning to God, and so do the elders in Jerusalem, but the way they do so gets them nowhere or takes them into a worse situation. “Nothing sanctifies a place more than obedience and sincerity of faith” (Calvin, 1:302). But sincerity of faith in itself achieves nothing without the faith being exercised in the right direction and without obedience.

During Sukkot celebrations, the Mishnah recalls, when worshipers reached the gate that leads out to the east, they turned their faces to the west, towards the temple building itself, and they recalled how these people in Ezek 8 turned east and worshiped the sun. And they said, “But us, our eyes are turned towards the Lord.” Or as Rabbi Judah put it, “We are the Lord’s, and our eyes are turned towards the Lord” (*m. Sukkah* 5.4).

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## The Executioners and the Marker (9:1–11)

### Outline

The vision continues without any interruption to describe the implementing of the intention announced in 8:18 in a way that also follows on from 5:5–17 (Häner, 170). It constitutes Act 2 in Ezek 8–11. As well as continuing 8:1–18, its narrative anticipates 10:1–22. But it has “its own narrative plot and style”: it is verbal rather than visual and it takes on “a quasi-legal flavor” (Block,1:302–3). It unfolds:

Yahweh draws attention to the executioners and the scribe he has appointed (9:1–2)

He bids them undertake their work (9:3–7a)

They begin, but Ezekiel protests and Yahweh responds (9:7b–10)

The scribe reports back (9:11)

As was the case in 8:1–18, Yahweh gives Ezekiel a vision of some imaginary scenes in Jerusalem. They do not correspond to anything that was happening or was going to happen. They do correspond to something that Yahweh could contemplate doing, though Ezekiel’s protest indicates why it would be impossible for Yahweh to do what the vision describes. The tension between what Yahweh might properly do in response to the city’s waywardness and what he cannot do because of his commitment to Israel is the same tension that arises in Exod 32–34, and in Jeremiah where Yahweh speaks both of utterly destroying Judah and of letting some people survive the coming calamity. And it corresponds to what happens and doesn’t happen in 587. The significance of the vision for people in Kebar is to recognize these dynamics in Yahweh’s relationship with Israel, and to be people who moan and groan.

### Translation

1He called in a loud voice in my ears: The city’s charges have come near, [each] individual his destruction instrument in his hand. 2And there: six individuals coming from the direction of the upper gateway that faces northward, [each] individual his shattering instrument in his hand, and one individual among them clothed in linen, with a scribe’s equipment at his waist. They came and stood next to the bronze altar.

3Now the magnificence of Israel’s God had gone up[[247]](#footnote-247) from on the griffin that it was on, to the threshold of the house. He called to the individual clothed in linen, with a scribe’s equipment at his waist. 4Yahweh said to him, Pass through the middle of the city, through the middle of Jerusalem, and put a mark on the foreheads of the individuals who are groaning and moaning[[248]](#footnote-248) over the outrages that are performed in the middle of it. 5But to these he said in my ears, Pass through the city behind him, and strike down. Your eye is not to pity and you are not to show concern. 6Elder, youth and girl, baby and women, you are to slay to destruction. But any individual on whom is the mark, do not touch. From my sanctuary you are to start. So they started with the individual elders who were in front of the house. 7He said to them, Defile the house and fill its courtyards with the slain—go out.

They went out and struck down in the city. 8Then, while they were striking down, and I for my part remained, I fell on my face and cried out. I said, Aagh, Lord Yahweh, are you destroying all that remains of Israel, in pouring out your fury on Jerusalem? 9He said to me, The waywardness of the household of Israel and Judah is very, very great. The country is full of bloodshed, with the city full of perversion. Because they have said, Yahweh has abandoned the country. Yahweh is not seeing. 10So I for my part—my eye will not pity and I will not show concern. I am putting their path against their head.[[249]](#footnote-249)

11And there, the individual clothed in linen who had the equipment at his waist brought back word: I have acted in accordance with all that you commanded me.

### Textual Notes

MT has markers\* after 9:3 and 11.

**9:1** For פְּכֻדּוֹת, LXX has ἐκδίκησις(“vengeance”; cf. NIV). Sym. has ἐπισκοπή; see the verse-by-verse commentary. LXX’s translation makes for a first link with the exodus story (see Exod 7:4; 12:12.).[[250]](#footnote-250) With LXX and Vg. I read the verb of which that noun is the subject as קָֽרְבוּ (in MT it lacks the metheg) and I parse it as qal *qatal*\* (so, e.g., Deut 31:14; 1 Kgs 2:7) rather than piel impv. (cf. Isa 41:21), or reading it as קָרְבּוּ (lacking the daghes) and parsing it as an anomalous qal impv. that thus contrasts with the usual קׅרְבּוּ(e.g., Exod 16:9; Lev 10:4) (Allen, 1:122).

**9:2** For סֹפֵר, “scribe,” LXX has “sapphire.”

**9:4** LXX lacks “through the middle of the city.”

**9:5** K עַל (“upon”) is a slip for אַל, “not.” Then for Q sg. עֵינְכֶם, K has pl. עיניכם.

**9:6b** LXX lacks the specification that they were the “elders.”

**9:7** LXX has a shorter and varying form of 9:7.

**9:8** LXX lacks “andImyselfremained,” וֽנֵאשֲׁאַר, a composite form from the niphal and the *waw*-consecutive (Rashi, in MG).

**9:9** For דׇּמִים, “bloodshed,” LXX has “full of many people” (see the textual note on 7:23). It then renders the hapax\* מֻטָּה (see the verse-by-verse commentary) “injustice and defilement.”

**9:11** K, LXX, Vg. lack “all.”

### Verse-by-Verse Commentary

**9:1** An exposure and critique like that in Ezek 8 has to lead into Yahweh declaring the intention to act against the guilty. This is how prophecy works. So Ezekielcarries straight on from 8:17–18, relating Yahweh’s words to him and describing scenes from his vision, though his reports make the transition from one scene to the next in a jumpy way. And as he had introduced without further explanation references in the earlier scenes to the inner gateway, the statue there, and other features, so now he—or rather Yahweh—introduces reference to the city’s “charges,” and in a moment he will allude to “the upper gateway,” “thebronzealtar,”and so on, without explaining them. He and Yahweh likely presuppose that readers know about some of them, but some appear in the vision without Ezekiel understanding any more about them than his readers would, and some feature items that the story will later explain. Yahweh first tells him (and thus the readers) about a process that is in midst of happening. “Charges” (פְּקֻדָּה) are appointments or offices (e.g., Psa 109:8), but the word is commonly used to refer to the people who hold the appointment (e.g., Ezek 44:11). It usually denotes oversight in the temple, and it has positive resonance in Isa 60:17. But the verb from which it comes (פָּקַד), traditionally translated “visit,” often denotes a mafia-style visit. And here, the charges are aides of Yahweh who are like city police, each armed with a lethal weapon. Possessing such a “destruction instrument”(מַשְׁחֵתfrom שָׁחַת) suggests that they are Yahweh’s agents in implementing the “destruction” he threatened in 5:16 (the more common noun מַשְׁחִית). They might grimly remind some readers of the “destruction aide” in 2 Sam 24:16 (מַלְאָךהַ מַּשְֽׁחִית), or the “destruction” of the Egyptians (מַשְׁחִית) from which the Israelites were once protected in Exod 12:13, or the aide who once struck down the Assyrians who had invaded Judah in 2 Kgs 19:35 (נָכָהhiphil, the verb in 9:5 and 8). This vision’s distinctive feature is that Yahweh has a multiplicity of executioners rather than just one.[[251]](#footnote-251) Literally, the executioners suggest the Babylonian military (Ganzel 2014, 1048). “Ezekiel’s vision is the proclamation of an act of judgement” (Zimmerli, 1:247) instead of an act of deliverance. “They have come near” is perhaps an anticipatory *qatal*: Yahweh has set going a process and thus they are coming near. They are involved in implementing the process whereby “theendiscoming…doomiscoming”(7:5–7). Their “destruction instrument”also anticipates the axe of which John the Baptizer speaks (Matt 3:10; Luke 3:9) (Jerome, 100).

**9:2** Possibly there are six of these charges because adding the one clothed in linen makes for seven, a characteristically proper number for a complete team. In KJV the Babylonian officers in Jer 39:3 number seven, but they come to different totals in Vg. and in modern translations. LXX might imply either six or seven. *B. Shabbat* lists them as rage, anger, fury, destruction, breaker, and annihilator. Psa 78:49 has a comparable but shorter list (Greenberg, 1:175). In some way they will indeed stand for the Babylonians, coming from the north as Ezekiel did and as the Babylonians will, and like the enemy from the north in Jeremiah (Calvin, 1:321). The seven could remind some readers of the seven divine executioners in the Babylonian Poem of Erra,[[252]](#footnote-252) and they might be Yahweh’s supernatural aides. “Theuppergatewayfacingnorthward”sounds like a regular access way into the city from the north. It might be the same as “theinnergatewaythatfacesnorthward”(8:3), since the further north one goes in the city, the more “upper”one is. But the difference in the form of expression makes it look as if Ezekiel might be deliberately distinguishing them. The six aides’ weapon is now a “shattering instrument.” We never discover its nature*.* The linen clothing of the seventh aide marks him out.[[253]](#footnote-253) Priests wore linen (e.g., Lev 6:10; 1 Sam 22:18), as later do divine aides (e.g., Dan 10:5; 12:6, 7), and priests functioned as scribes (e.g., Ezra 7:11), but it is not yet clear what is to be a scribe’s role in the scene that may unfold. It would be plausible for the aide to be there just to list people’s wrongdoings (cf. Jerome, 100). But for the moment, all seven take their stand “nexttothebronzealtar,” presumably the burnt offering altar (8:16), which could symbolize the presence of Yahweh.

**9:3** “Griffin” translates כְּרוּב, traditionally transliterated as “cherub.” Elsewhere, a griffin is a being that is part human, part animal, and part bird, can function as a temple guardian, and can be represented in statue form. It thus fits both the כְרוּבׅים above the covenant chest in the temple and the creatures in Ezek 1. While Ezek 1 did not use the word, Ezek 10 will (see the Biblical Theology comments there). Ezekiel moves apparently randomly between singular and plural. The background may be that the covenant chest with the griffins over it lies on a north-south axis, facing east, so that the chest’s poles can be seen from the entrance to the sanctuary (1 Kgs 8:8). Therefore someone entering the sanctuary sees one griffin (Zimmerli,1:250). It seems likely that here in 9:3, in the context of a scene in the temple, Ezekiel is referring to Yahweh’s magnificence as enthroned on the [ים]כְּרוּב (Tg.) there and is describing Yahweh as moving from there to the templethreshold in order to address his agents. Thus his movement is not yet related to the idea of his leaving the temple, which will come later. But anyway, the First Testament recognizes that Yahweh and his magnificence can be simultaneously present in the heavens, present in the temple, and moving about in the world (Ezek 1), as Christians recognize that God is present in the heavens, in the congregation, and in the life of the individual believer.

**9:4** Yahweh bids the scribe move southward from the temple area to the city itself and tells him and thus the readers what he is here for. The word for a “mark”is תָּו, the name of the last letter of the alphabet, t. We know no more of what the mark would be. In the Palaeo-Hebrew script of Ezekiel’s day, תָּו would resemble a plus sign, and it survives in a similar form in Greek as *τ* and in English as *t*. The description of the scribe’s role and of the people who receive the mark suggest its importance in the vision and in the vision’s significance for the people in Kebar. We know about the “outrages” performed in the city (the word has been used fifteen times in Ezekiel 1–8). The new motif here is that there may be people who are“groaningandmoaning” over them. The reference is more promising than the previous allusions to survivors (5:3–4; 6:8–10). In the First Testament, groaning and moaning does not suggest repentance, nor does it suggest that these people are faithful rather than wayward (though it would surely presuppose that). It more commonly suggests a reaction to disaster (21:6–7 [11–12]; 24:17; 26:15). Ezekiel here speaks of groaning and moaning over people’s waywardness (cf. Isa 57:18), with which disasters often link.

**9:5–7a** If the six have instruments of destruction and shattering, their prospective role is obvious enough, while the repeat of the phrase “inmyears” (cf. 9:1) emphasizes their importance to Ezekiel and to people in Kebar. First, then, Yahweh makes sure of exempting people who are distressed, and then he makes sure that everyone else gets struck down. The instruction that there is to be no pitying or showing concern takes up the repeated declaration from earlier. What the six are to do is to reflect Yahweh’s intent, with its “ruthlessness” (5:12; 7:4, 9; 8:18) (Allen, 1:148). Yahweh underscores the point and the horror by specifying the groups of people to whom this ruthlessness applies. One might have thought that it was adult men who determined what happened in the city with its waywardness, and that they would be the people who paid for their waywardness through being the people especially engaged in battle (Block, 1:308). It is thus both surprising and not surprising that Yahweh specifically includes the other groups. The entire city is culpable and the entire city is doomed. The requirement to “startfrommysanctuary” links with the instruction to “defilethehouse,” though it implies an attitude contrasting with that in 2 Kgs 11:15 (Greenberg, 1:177). Itt may seem a surprising requirement in light of Yahweh’s earlier declarations that the people have themselves already defiled the sanctuary (5:11). Perhaps there is a defilement that seals the earlier one.

**9:7b–8** Prophets commonly respond to Yahweh’s declarations of intent by protesting (e.g., Amos 7:1–9). Being a prophet means prayer as well as preaching. Although Ezekiel’s forehead was made as tough as adamant (3:9), his heart was always a heart of flesh (36:26) (Taylor,105). It leads into a protest about Yahweh destroying “allthatremainsofIsrael.” And in addition he says, “Iformypartremained” (ּשׇׁאַר niphal), using the verb with a related noun that signifies the “remains,” traditionally translated “remnant” (שְׁאֵרִית). His words recall Elijah’s “I for my part alone am left as a prophet for Yahweh” (1 Kgs 18:22). Is he implying that there is no one else groaning and moaning? Is he the remnant? His sequencing Israeland Jerusalem, and then in 9:9 “*the* householdofIsrael” and “Judah,” makes the same point as the sequencing does in 4:4–8: the odd phraseology means he covers both the people of Yahweh as a whole and Judah in particular.

**9:9** Yahweh’s reasoning takes up a series of motifs from preceding chapters. They have referred to waywardness eleven times (e.g., 7:13, 16, 19), which supports the “very*,* verygreat.” They have referred tothe city being “fullofbloodyruling,” full of ruling that was characterized bybloodshed and thus “full of violence” (7:23; also compare and contrast Isa 1:15, 21) (Qimhi, in MG). They have referred just now to what some people have said about Yahweh’s abandonment and his not seeing (8:12). The exception proves the rule: the hapax “perversion”(מֻטָּה) is but one vowel different from the faithless *“*scepter” (מַטָּה) that is an expression of violence and arrogance (7:10). Etymologically it suggests something stretched (from the verb נָטָה) and thus “the unjust extension of the ruler's staff” in “the exploitative perversion of the office” (Block, 1:302; cf. Zimmerli, 1:196, 225).The implication is, everything you have been saying so far provides the rationale for the action I am taking, does it not. In addition, “does this hint that here also Yahweh will take the sinners with their own words?” (Zimmerli, 1:249). Further, in the context of the references to bloodshed and exploitation, the conviction that “YahwehhasabandonedthecountryandYahwehisnotseeing” more clearly carries the implication “we can get away with anything” than it did in 8:12 (cf. Psa 94:5–7) (Allen, 1:150).

**9:10** The recollection continues with the declaration of intent that follows from those assertions about the people: “Iformypart*—*myeyewillnotpityandIwillnotshow concern” (cf. 5:11; 7:4, 9; 8:18) and with the description of what Yahweh describes himself as doing even now, “puttingtheirpathagainsttheirhead” (cf. 11:21; 16:43; 17:19; 22:31). It is a more concrete image than the expression earlier(see 7:3–4) in referring to their head, but the head, as such a vital part of the body, stands for the person. It contains the means of seeing, hearing, and speaking, its being harmed is especially devastating, it is vulnerable, and an attack will especially go for it (e.g., Jer 23:19; Amos 9:1; Jon 4:8).[[254]](#footnote-254) The converse of hurt to the head is therefore blessing. But here, Yahweh speaks of making the people live under the practical burden of the sober consequences that will follow from the route they have been walking. Their path has been characterized by bloodshed, and in effect Yahweh is declaring the intention to bring their bloodshed back against their own head, their own person, so that they experience bloodshed affecting them (cf. 1 Kgs 2:32–33). He will put the point more succinctly later: their blood will be against their head (33:4; cf. Josh 2:19; 1 Kgs 2:37). Indeed, a guilty person’s blood can be against them in the sense that they can bring about their own death even when their wrongdoing did not involve bloodshed (18:13). The use of this expression in Lev 20:9–16 suggests that it may have its background in the Torah, though it more likely found its way into the Torah from everyday life and everyday metaphor, rather than starting off as a technical legal expression. Its point here is that they cannot complain if bloodshed comes to them. They can “cause [their own] gray hair to go down in blood to Sheol” (1 Kgs 2:9).

**9:11** The end of this scene in the vision is brisk, and leaves Ezekiel and his people with a series of questions. The scribe returns, and perhaps the scene thus comes to a close that is not too gloomy, though Ezekiel does not say they had found anyone to put the mark on (see Jer 5:1–5; Darr, on 9:4). There is no mention of the executioners’ return. Have they simply struck down the entire city, in keeping with Yahweh’s implicit confirmation of their commission? Or has Yahweh been convinced by Ezekiel’s argument even though he points out the logic of his own decision? He did not actually have everyone in Jerusalem killed off. Here, the movie simply stops and everyone freezes. We do not know how the story will end. In the meantime, Greenhill 229 suggests that Yahweh’s aim might be:

1. To let us understand that the Lord is more solicitous about the welfare of the godly then the ruin of the wicked; he had a tender care of his mourners and marked ones, he was desirous to hear of their safety, and acceptance of his love, and therefore Christ hastens to make report of what was done; they are all sealed, and so secured.  
2. To revive the drooping spirit of Ezekiel, who was perplexed and greatly cast down at the bloody slaughter of his people. He was yet in the temple, and the report was made in his presence, that so he, hearing it was well with all the godly, mourning party, might be comforted. Had the other six come in and told how many thousands they had slain, this would have added affliction to him that was afflicted.

### Biblical Theology Comments

Theodicy, the justification of God, is not as important in the Scriptures as it has become in present-day theology and present-day study of the First Testament. The Scriptures are more inclined to focus on anthropodicy, the justification of humanity, and to take for granted the justification of God. A prophet such as Ezekiel would recognize that not every Judahite who had been taken off to Kebar in 597 was thereby shown to be more wayward than every Judahite who escaped that fate. Nor, for that matter, was every Judahite who had been taken off to Kebar thereby shown to be a more promising fig than every Judahite left in Jerusalem, notwithstanding Jeremiah’s parable (Jer 24). And when Jerusalem finally falls in 587, things will no more work out in that fair way. Yet Ezekiel encourages his people to live on the assumption that things do work out in a fair way, because God is fair. When they do not, we just have to live with the fact, to live by trust in Yahweh as the powerful and fair one, even when we cannot understand what happens (as the Job story says).

### Application and Devotional Implications

The cross shape of the scribe’s mark encouraged church fathers to see it as an anticipation of the sign of the cross. So Christ signed the apostles and the faithful “with that very seal of which Ezekiel spoke… which he predicted would be the sign on our foreheads.”[[255]](#footnote-255) And “it is impossible not to notice: the angel is told to perform the very gesture of baptismal chrism and of Ash Wednesday’s marking with ashes” (Jenson, 84). Whether or not we are convinced by such arguments, we will note that Jesus declared a blessing on people who mourn (Matt 5:4; Greenhill, 219). And in focusing on people who groan and moan about the outrages committed by his people, God here shows what he wishes his people to be. So when we are light-hearted about waywardness and the affliction of the church and the slighting of God’s name, we are failing to be such people. “He does not reckon any among his own who do not groan at abominations” (Calvin,1:327). But given his concern about outrages committed among his people, it is not surprising if God determines that catastrophe begins from the sanctuary, that judgment begins from God’s household (1 Peter 4:17) (Jerome, 103).[[256]](#footnote-256)

On the other hand, Blenkinsopp (59) comments:

Amos, who saw in a series of visions the disasters awaiting Israel, also interceded in moving language that by some means they might be averted (Amos 7:16). The experience of failed intercession, which Ezekiel shared with Jeremiah (Jer. 14:11–12; 15:1), produced in him, as it did in Jeremiah, a profound sense of the reality of sin, of the desperate sickness of the human heart (see, e.g., Jer. 13:23; 17:9). This is something which is very difficult for us to share today. We are more comfortable with the categories of psychological illness and therapy than with those of sin and salvation, and for us it is never too late. And, correspondingly, it is much easier to think of ministry as a form of social service rather than as prophetic in the sense just indicated. So Ezekiel prays, but the answer is, in effect: Too late! Sin has reached its full measure, the land is full of bloodshed, the city is filled with impurity.

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## The Magnificence of Yahweh Lifts (10:1–22)

### Outline

The vision again continues, but jumps in another different direction for Act 3 after the incomplete ending to Act 2 and its unanswered questions. The chapter unfolds:

Ezekiel sees the throne above the heads of the griffins (10:1)

Yahweh commissions the individual clothed in linen to get some fire (10:2)

A summary of the background situation (10:3–5)

The individual clothed in linen gets the fire from the griffin (10:6–8)

Ezekiel notes further the nature of griffins, as already described in chapter 1 (10:9–17)

Yahweh’s magnificence rises from the temple threshold (10:18–19)

Ezekiel notes further some features of the griffins described in chapter 1 (10:20–22)

Without announcement, Ezekiel tells us that he now sees something that repeats the sight he described in chapter 1. At point after point the wording is the same. The extensive repetition slows the narrative down and might heighten its suspense, enable the penny to drop for his readers, underscore the link for them, and indicate how the penny was dropping for him.[[257]](#footnote-257) Ezekiel will eventually note the link with chapter 1, though he hints that he does not immediately make the connection. He now describes the creatures as “griffins” and they have a different role from before, as the repository of fire. The introduction of the word “roller”(גַּלְגַל) alongside the word for “wheels” is a parallel development,[[258]](#footnote-258) and the object of the vision now appears in the temple area. Further, the new vision incorporates the individual clothed in linen from chapter 9, but he receives a different role, as dispenser of fire—though the dispensing does not actually happen, like the destruction in chapter 9. So Act 3 again ends in the middle of things, like Act 2. Further, it closes with Yahweh’s making a move from the temple threshold, but it does not indicate where it is going.

The chapter is jerky, and the usual scholarly view is that it originally comprised something much briefer that has been expanded by a process with several stages. A typical view sees the original version as comprising slightly shorter versions of 10:2, 4, 17, 18a, 19b (Zimmerli, especially1:234; see also, e.g., Allen, 1:133–36; Pohlmann, 1:151–55).

### Translation

1Then I saw, and there, at[[259]](#footnote-259) the platform that was over the head of the griffins, there was something like sapphire stone, in that something like the appearance of the form of a throne could be seen over them.

2He said to the individual clothed in linen—he said,[[260]](#footnote-260) Come inside[[261]](#footnote-261) the roller under the griffin, fill your fists with coals of fire from between the griffins, and sprinkle them on the city. He came, in front of my eyes.

3Now the griffins were standing on the right of the house when he (the individual) came in, and the cloud was filling the inner courtyard. 4Yahweh’s magnificence had risen from above the griffin onto the threshold of the house and the house had filled with the cloud, while he courtyard filled with the brightness of Yahweh’s magnificence, 5and the sound of the griffins’ wings could be heard as far as the outer courtyard, like the sound of El Shadday when he speaks.

6Then, when he commanded the individual clothed in linen: Get fire from between the roller, from between the griffins, he came and stood beside the wheel. 7The griffin put out its hand from between the griffins to the fire that was between the griffins, and took up and put [some] into the fists of the person clothed in linen. So he got it and went out. 8The griffins seemed to have the shape of a human hand under their wings.

9I saw, and there, four wheels beside the griffins, one wheel beside each griffin, with the wheels’ appearance something like the look of beryl stone, 10and their appearance: the four of them, each had the same form, as a wheel would be in the middle of a wheel. 11When they went, as they would go to their four quarters, they would not turn when they went, because they would go to the place that the head would face, after it, not turning when they went, 12their entire body, their back, their hands, their wings, and the wheels, the four of them having their wheels full of eyes around. 13The wheels, someone was calling them “the roller” in my ears. 14Each had four faces, one face a griffin’s face, the second face a human face, the third a lion’s face, and the fourth an eagle’s face.

15The griffins rose, it being the living being that I saw by the Kebar Waterway. 16When the griffins went, the wheels would go beside them, and when the griffins lifted their wings to rise from on the earth, the wheels, they too, would not turn from beside them. 17When they stood, they would stand, and when they rose, they would rise with them, because the spirit of the living being was in them.

18And Yahweh’s magnificence went out from on the house’s threshold and stood above the griffins. 19The griffins lifted their wings and went up from the earth in front of my eyes when they went out, with the wheels alongside them. It stood at the entrance of the eastern gateway of Yahweh’s house, with the magnificence of the God of Israel over them, above.

20It was the living being that I saw under the God of Israel at the Kebar Waterway. I acknowledged that they were griffins. 21Each had four faces and each had four wings, and the appearance of human hands under their wings. 22And the form of their faces: they were the faces that I saw at the Kebar Waterway. Their appearance and they themselves, individually, straight forward they would go.

### Textual Notes

**10:7** LXX lacks “the griffin” and “from between the griffins.”

**10:8** For יַד, “hand,” 4QEzekbhas pl. ידי.

**10:12** LXX lacks “their entire body.”

**10:14** LXX lacks 10:14.[[262]](#footnote-262)

**10:17** For רוַּח הַחַיָּה, LXX, Vg., Aq. have “the spirit of life.”

**10:18** For מֵעַל מִפְתַּן הַבָּיִת, “from on the house’s threshold,”LXX has “from the house.”

**10:21** For MT “four wings,” LXX has “eight wings.”

**10:22** After “Isaw,”LXX also has “below the glory of the God of Israel.” LXX then lacks “their appearance and they themselves,” perhaps anticipating the judgment in GK 117m that it is “unintelligible” (contrast *TTH* 197 observation 2; DG 94 remark 6).

### Verse-by-Verse Commentary

**10:1** Ezekiel begins Act 3 resumptively, reminding his hearers of where he is in his vision and of the setting of the events that are unfolding in front of him, and providing some background to what will follow in 10:2–8. In part one might thus see this verse as a footnote to Act 2. It doesn’t answer the questions that were left unresolved at the end of Act 2, but it does make explicit the answer to another question that Ezekiel’s readers might have in mind. They know about the symbolic griffins in the temple on which Yahweh in his magnificence was enthroned (cf. 9:3) and they know something about Yahweh’s appearances to Ezekiel, the living creatures, the sapphire stone, the platform, and the throne (cf. 1:4–28; 8:1–4). In case they had not been sure, Ezekiel now identifies the two, while by no means satisfying every question the hearers might have had about them—indeed, his words add to the questions. The living creatures in Ezek 1–3 were visionary equivalents of the wooden griffins in the temple, and both pointed to the reality of Yahweh the God of Israel as the Lord enthroned in his supernatural realm outside the heavens and the earth but also present for his people and able to make his presence felt anywhere in the heavens and the earth. Yet the creatures in Ezekiel’s vision were quite different from the griffins in the temple: there were four instead of two, with four wings and four heads instead of two, and with the likeness of eagle, bull, lion, and human being. So it’s not surprising if Ezekiel did not make the connection immediately, and if he did not assume his people would (Block, 1:319–20).[[263]](#footnote-263)

**10:2** He begins as he did in 8:5 and 9:1, simply with “he said”: there is hardly need to identify who *he* is. But in effect Ezekiel picks up the “he”from 9:9–11 and Yahweh resumes his conversation with “theindividualclothedinlinen” from there, and gives him another commission in which he speaks of a “roller”(גַּלְגַל), a corporate term for the wheels, and of a “griffin”in the singular, which Ezekiel also uses as a corporate term for the griffin arrangement as a whole. Interpreters usually assume that Yahweh’s commission then entails torching the city, a commission that would be fulfilled in 587—more literally than the fulfilling of the commission to the other six aides (see 2 Kgs 25:9). But a series of considerations make this an implausible interpretation of the commission to the person clothed in linen.

First, such a task would compare with the task of the other six aides, of bringing destruction. It would not compare with the task given to the person in linen, to ensure that the moaners and groaners survived. Second, while זָרַק is traditionally translated “scatter” here, elsewhere it is regularly translated “sprinkle.” It is mostly a Torah word, and it almost always refers to sprinkling blood or water in worship rites and other acts of purification. Itfeatures, for instance, in the burnt offering, well-being, and expiation sacrifices (e.g., Lev 1:5; 3:2; 7:2). It never elsewhere refers to fire or to bringing destruction.

Third, fire is in general a symbol of the presence of Yahweh, and here in Ezekiel it gains concrete embodiment. Ezekiel speaks almost as if there is a brazier under the griffins. Fire does suggest danger, but while it can suggest wrath (e.g., 21:31 [36]; 22:21), it need not do so. The sacrificial altar has a firethat never goes out (6:8–13 [1–6]), and there was such altar fire not far from the temple of which Ezekiel here has visionary perception. “Coalsoffire”appear in the Day of Atonement service in a pan brought by Aaron, clothed in linen,from the altar of sacrifice to the incense altar (Lev 16:4, 12). Sprinkling does feature, but there the verb is נָזָה hiphil, though Ezekiel uses זָרַק in this connection in 43:18. In speaking of sprinkling, then, Yahweh accompanies his warnings of disaster with a note of promise. And fourth, purification issuing from the temple in a figurative form features in Isaiah’s account of his commission as a prophet (Isa 6:5–6) (Jerome, 106). Yahweh’s visionary commission here, then, is that the individual clothed in linen should follow up his identification of the moaners and groaners (though we still do not know for certain that there are any) by taking on a quasi-priestly commission to sprinkle purifying fire on the city that will cleanse it from its defilement and idolatry (cf. 36:25, Ezekiel’s other use of this verb “sprinkle”).[[264]](#footnote-264) It could be a way of marking the moaners and groaners.[[265]](#footnote-265)

**10:3–5** Ezekiel again interrupts his vision account and creates suspense by describing further the griffins and Yahweh’s magnificence, reprising and expanding on 9:3 in terms that largely repeat elements from chapter 1. The location of the griffins to the right (south) of the temple makes for a contrast with the location of the creation statue, the people crying for the Tammuz, and the six executioners (8:5, 14; 9:2). The cloud (עָנָן) looks like a different one from the storm cloud in 1:4. It is the cloud that simultaneously reveals and conceals Yahweh’s presence, especially at great moments in Israel’s story and thus in connection with the construction of the wilderness sanctuary and the building of the temple (cf. Exod 13:21–22; Num 9:15–23; 1 Kgs 8:10–11). So it fits in a vision of this kind, though Ezekiel mentions it only here.

**10:6–8** The individual clothed in linen does as Yahweh says. This is surely a dramatic moment and something monumental is about to happen…*.* But it doesn’t, as in chapter 9. Perhaps Judahites would not have been sure whether to see Yahweh as envisaging the torching of Jerusalem or its purifying. Both will happen, but not for some years. Freezing the story at this point encourages them to think about the different possibilities, and to work on the assumption that nothing is yet fixed. Everything depends on their action.

**10:9–17** Instead of giving an account of what happened next, Ezekiel gives people another detailed account of the griffins, beginning the same way as he did in 10:1, with the confirmation that thiswas“thelivingbeingthatIsawbytheKebarWaterway.” The first griffin now has the actual face of a griffin rather than an ox (contrast 1:10). *B. Hagigah 13b* suggests it was appropriate here to avoid the animal that had been the means of rebellion at Sinai (Exod 32:4, though strictly, that was a bullock).

**10:18–22.** Now there is some movement. Yahweh’s magnificence had already moved from the griffin (that is, the griffin above the covenant chest in the temple) to the temple threshold, apparently in connection with commissioning the seven aides (9:3–11). Now it moves further, and stands still over the griffins (that is, the supernatural griffins) attheentranceoftheeasterngatewayto the temple—apparently in the sky, though Ezekiel does not make this explicit. Why does it make that move? It is a worrying move in that it implies something that has the opposite significance to the Day of Atonement observances that ensured that Yahweh stayed in the sanctuary after it had been cleansed (Sweeney,63).[[266]](#footnote-266) Is Yahweh on his way to abandoning the temple and the city altogether? Instead of resolving our suspense, Ezekiel again makes explicit the identity of what he sees here with what he saw earlier. Meanwhile, he will keep us in suspense until Act 4.

### Biblical Theology Comments

Ezek 10 uses the word כְּרוּבׅים more often than any other chapter, and does so in two of the word’s several significant connections in the First Testament. Like צְרָפׅים (Isa 6:2, 6),the word is traditionally transliterated rather than being translated, but one disadvantage is that “cherub” in English is inclined to suggest a chubby baby angel, which thus gives a misleading impression. Hence, in part, the translation “griffin,” which in turn transliterates a Greek word that may ultimately be Egyptian. כְּרוב has no related words in Hebrew or in other languages that might help an understanding of its meaning, so we are dependent on considering the way the word is used.[[267]](#footnote-267) Most often it refers to carved figures or carvings or weavings on the curtains or walls in the wilderness dwelling and the temple, especially in Ezek 10 and 41:18–25, and in Exod 25–40; 1 Kgs 6–8; and 2 Chr 3–5. Two gold or gold-plated griffins faced one another at either end of the cover on the covenant chest, spreading their wings over it. Between and above them Yahweh commits himself to meeting with the Israelites and speaking to them.

In Ezek 10 the word also occurs to refer to the living creatures that support and transport Yahweh’s throne, creatures that the chapter identified with the beings in Ezekiel’s vision in chapter 1. In both connections the word denotes beings that have some human features, some animal features, and have wings. The visionary beings thus have features of more than one animal. The word “griffin” strictly refers to analogous beings that appear in Greek and Egyptian texts and as statues. Ancient Near Eastern texts also refer to creatures with some animal, some bird, and some human features.[[268]](#footnote-268) Within the First Testament and between Ezek 1 and 10 they are variously described (not least in number, whether two or four) and between Israel and other peoples (see Allen, 1:152–54). It seems, then, that such creatures are a standard aspect of the way peoples in Israel’s context pictured the gods’ relationship with the world. They functioned to serve the gods and to keep guard over things. In the First Testament, their guardian role is the first role they receive (Gen 3:24). Perhaps an element in the background to this picture is the guards, attendants, and carriers who would serve a king. Creatures such as griffins represent an enhanced version of a king’s servants (see further Ezek 28:14–16 and the verse-by-verse commentary).

Metaphysically, then, Yahweh sits enthroned on the griffins and rides on them through the heavens (2 Sam 22:11; Psa 18:10 [11]). They suggest his magnificence and his capacity to appear and act wherever he wishes. And spatially, though invisibly, he sits enthroned on them in the sanctuary or the temple (1 Sam 4:4; 2 Sam 6:2; 1 Chr 13:6). To describe him as seated on the griffins and urged to act (2 Kgs 19:15; Pss 80:1 [2]; 99:1; Isa 37:16) could refer to both the metaphysical and the spatial, and one should hardly attempt to separate the two (in 1 Chr 28:18 the griffins explicitly gain a chariot, which suggests the influence of Ezekiel even though Ezekiel does not use that word). Something parallel applies in Ezek 10. The pair of statue griffins and the four visionary griffins equally serve Yahweh and both draw attention to him as the one who is truly present but cannot be looked upon. The pair implicitly draw attention to the requirements of the covenant expressed on the tablets in the covenant chest and to requirements Yahweh might further issue from above it. The four draw attention to Yahweh’s resolve to come to take action in his relationship with Israel, not to deliver but to take action against Israel in a context when it has flouted those requirements.

### Application and Devotional implications

Greenhill (243) comments:

How unwilling the Lord is to depart, and leave that people he hath dwelt amongst, and been engaged unto; he had taken in this people to be his, and now though they had provoked him bitterly by their Idolatry in his worship, and by oppression in the state, and he had great cause to have left them utterly at once, yet see how he goes away in a gradual manner.… No visible Church but may fall, and cease to be; here was the only visible church in the world, and the glory departed from it, and quickly it became no church. The seven churches of Asia were famous visible churches, and is not their glory long since departed from them? No visible church but may cease its being.… God is not tied to any place, to any people; but if they corrupt his worship, he may withdraw.

Jenson (89) adds:

The fire of the Lord’s glory certainly can destroy, as when it burst from the desert tabernacle to consume Korah and his followers (Num. 16:35). But there is another possibility: that the fire, while indeed it burns away old Jerusalem, is nevertheless cleansing, preparing for a new Jerusalem. This better fits the angel’s office in the previous scene and better carries through the conclusion of the apocalyptic scenario in which he functions.

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## A Threat and a Promise (11:1–25)

### Outline

In due course, 11:22–25 brings Act 4 of the vision to a conclusion. But first, 11:1–12 reports a further visionary experience by Ezekiel of worship in Jerusalem (implicitly continuing the one in Acts 1–3). It follows that with another message from Yahweh that takes things in another new direction in its critique of Jerusalem for the deaths it is unwittingly about to cause there when Yahweh takes action against it. Then 11:13–31 reports another visionary experience, of a death in Jerusalem that Ezekiel realizes might signal the implementing of that (final) justice. But it follows that with another message from Yahweh that declares his intention to take the Kebarites back home to clean things up in Jerusalem.

These two sets of verses (11:1–12 and 13–21) can be removed without leaving a sense that there is something missing from Ezek 8–11. So either Yahweh made the total vision eventually unfold in a novel fashion, or Ezekiel incorporated some later vision and message material into the broader vision framework of chapters 8–11. Either way, the result is to give concrete expression to the critique, threat, and promise in Acts 1–3.

The offensive in 11:1–12 takes a different form from the ones in chapters 8–10, and reads more like a regular prophetic confrontation. It pictures things in a down-to-earth way rather than portraying a scene involving supernatural aides, and it does not presuppose that any of the events that were announced and apparently initiated in chapter 9–10 have happened. It thus parallels Ezekiel 8–10 rather than succeeding it. It has a proper beginning and a proper ending and it could stand on its own. Following it, 11:13 could likewise stand on its own, in that Ezekiel did receive a response on the previous two occasions when he protested as he does here, but Jeremiah did not always receive one to his protests, and nothing can be taken for granted. Then 11:14–20 could also stand on its own. But as the chapter is, 11:13 follows from 11:1–12, and 11:14–21 follows from 11:13.[[269]](#footnote-269) The promise of restoration in 11:16–20 goes way beyond anything hinted in chapters 8–10, while also anticipating promises in chapters 36–37. And one might wonder whether Yahweh would want to be so positive to the Kebar community in a situation when he seems to think that it needs some more disillusioning. This argument would support the idea that these promises belong after 587 and that Ezekiel has brought them back here to give the chapter more balance in a later reading context. In the whole of 11:2–12 and 14–21 Yahweh speaks to Ezekiel, but via Ezekiel he addresses his words to the Jerusalemites in 11:5b–9, 16 and to the Kebarites in 11:17. He speaks about the Kebarites in 11:18–20 and about the Jerusalemites in 11:21. But the whole prophecy is meant for the Kebar community to hear—at least, 11:25 implies that all of it reaches them. And maybe it would be less risky for Yahweh to make promises to them than to the Jerusalemites, even before 587.

The syntax and other aspects of the language of 11:16–21 is as prosaic as that of the rest of the chapter. It uses the relative particles and the sign of the object (*ʾăšer* and *ʾet*). But it manifests the parallelism\* and rhythm of verse and it can be seen as comprising a series of bicola\* (with the main message framed by two tricola\* in 11:17–21), which heightens the rhetorical force. Laying it out as verse makes it possible to appreciate more of its significance.

The chapter unfolds:

A spirit takes Ezekiel to the eastern gateway where leaders gather (11:1–4)

A spirit falls on Ezekiel and Yahweh gives him a threatening message (11:5–12)

One of the leaders drops dead (11:13)

Yahweh gives Ezekiel a message of promise (11:14–21)

Yahweh’s magnificence moves to a mountain to the east, a spirit takes Ezekiel back to Kebar, and he tells the Kebarites everything he has seen (11:22–25)

But MT’s large number of markers,\* do not correspond at all to this outline.

### Translation

1A spirit lifted me and got me to come to the eastern gateway of Yahweh’s house, which faces east. There, at the gateway entrance: twenty-five individuals. I saw among them Yaʾazanyah ben ʿAzzur and Pelatyahu ben Benayahu, officials among the people. 2He said to me, My man, these are the individuals who are planning trouble[[270]](#footnote-270) and formulating dire counsel in this city, 3and saying, “Building houses: not near.[[271]](#footnote-271) This is the pot and we are the meat.” 4Therefore prophesy against them. Prophesy, my man.

5And Yahweh’s spirit fell on me. He said to me: Say, Yahweh has said this: So you have said, Israel’s household. What goes up into your spirit: I myself know it. 6You are making many your slain in this city, filling its streets with slain. 7Therefore the Lord Yahweh has said this. Your slain that you are placing inside it, they are the flesh, and it is the pot, whereas someone is taking you out from inside it. 8In that you have been afraid of the sword, the sword I will make come against you (an affirmation of the Lord Yahweh). 9I will take you out from inside it and put you into the hand of foreigners and act on rulings against you. 10As you fall by the sword on Israel’s territory,[[272]](#footnote-272) I will rule for you. And you will acknowledge that I am Yahweh. 11In that it will not be a pot for you or you be the meat in it, at Israel’s territory I will rule for you. 12And you will acknowledge that I am Yahweh, by whose laws you have not walked and on whose rulings you have not acted. In accordance with the rulings of the nations, around you, you have acted.

13Then, while I prophesied, Pelatyahu ben Benayahu—he died. I fell on my face and cried out in a loud voice: Aagh, Lord Yahweh, [it’s] a complete end you’re making of[[273]](#footnote-273) what remains of Israel!

14But Yahweh’s message came to me: 15My man, all your relatives,[[274]](#footnote-274) your restoration people, and Israel’s entire household , all of it, about whom the people who live in Jerusalem have said, Keep far away from Yahweh, in that it has been given to us, the country, as a possession:[[275]](#footnote-275) 16Therefore say, The Lord Yahweh has said this.

Because[[276]](#footnote-276) I have made them go far away among the nations,

and because I have scattered them among the peoples,

But I have become for them a sanctuary for a little while

among the countries where I have made them come:

17Therefore say, The Lord Yahweh has said this.

But I will gather you from the peoples

and collect you from the countries

in which you have been scattered.

I will give you Israel’s land,

18and they will come there.

They will remove all its detestable objects

and all its outrages from it.

19I will give them one mind,

and a new spirit I will put within you.

I will remove the rock mind from within them,

and give them a flesh mind,

20In order that by my laws they will walk,

and my rulings they will keep, and act on them.

And they will be a people for me,

and I will be God for them.

21But as for [people with] a mind on their detestable objects,[[277]](#footnote-277)

and on outrages their mind goes,

their path against their head[[278]](#footnote-278) I am putting (an affirmation of the Lord Yahweh).

22The griffins lifted their wings, and the wheels beside them, with the magnificence of the God of Israel over them, above. 23So Yahweh’s magnificence went up from over the inside of the city and stood on the mountain, east of the city, 24while a spirit carried me and enabled me to come to Chaldea to the exile community, in the vision by God’s spirit. The vision that I saw went up from me, 25and I told the exile community all Yahweh’s things that he had shown me.

### Textual Notes

In contrast to its lack of markers\* in Ezek 10, MT has markers after 11:1, 3, 6, 13, 15, 16, 25.

**11:2** LXX has “the Lord” at the beginning of the verse.

**11:5** LXX has “a spirit” for “Yahweh’s spirit.”

**11:7** For MT’s odd third person הוֹצׅיא (“someone is taking you out”), LXX, Vg., Tg. have first-person future, implying אוֹצׅיא.

**11:12** LXX lacks the verse apart from the opening “and you will acknowledge that I am Yahweh.”

**11:13** LXX takes the exclamation as a question.

**11:15** For גְאֻלֶּתֶךָָ, “yourrestorationpeople,” LXX “your exile community” implies גָּלוּתֶךָ.

For רַחֲקוּ, “keepfaraway,”NRSV “they have gone far” implies רָחֲקוּ (cf. Rashi, in MG).

**11:16** LXX translates the *qatal\** and *wayyiqtol*\* verbs as future.

**11:17** For MT’s second-person forms, LXX has third person as in 11:18–21.

**11:19** For אֶחָד, “one,”LXX “another” implies אַחֵר (Theod., Aq., Sym. have “one”).

**11:21** For וְאֶל לֵב,“but as for [people with] a mind,” NRSV “but as for those… after” implies וְאֵלֶּה אַחֲרֵי (Cornill, 239).

### Verse-by-Verse Commentary

**11:1** Ezekiel’s opening words repeat the ones at the beginning of this vision (8:3), and might thus have implied that this is a significant new moment at the beginning of Act 4, but actually the spirit is simply making it possible for Ezekiel to catch up with the movement of the griffins and Yahweh (10:18–21). The entrance to the gateway implies a place on the edge of the temple courtyards where a group of people could have an informal meeting. The group seems to be different from the “sometwenty*-*five” worshipers in the inner court in 8:16. We don’t know anything else about this Yaʾazanyah (a different Yaʾazanyah from the one in 8:11) or about Pelatyahu, but we will discover in 11:13 why Ezekiel mentions Pelatyahu. Both are common names. “Officials” is a quite general term, but 11:2 offers a pointer to what sort of officials they are: they are something like members of the cabinet in Jerusalem, among whom Yaʾazanyah and Pelatyahu are presumably leading figures whose names Ezekiel thus knows (Eichrodt, 135).

**11:2–3** Once more, Ezekiel begins “he”with the assumption that people can work out who the pronoun refers to. A century previously, Yahweh had proclaimed through Micah:

Hey, people who are planning trouble

and working at something dire on their beds…

Coveting fields and seizing them,

houses, and taking them. (2:1–2)

Now through Ezekiel Yahweh formulates a similar confrontation, perhaps with similar implications. Members of the Kebar community would have been dragged from their houses in Jerusalem when they were taken off as forced migrants, and one might guess that other families are now squatting in those houses. Thus people like these twenty-five might have not done badly out of the events of 597. The housing situation in Jerusalem had likely been difficult for a century, especially as a result of an increase in population through the arrival of refugees before and after the fall of Ephraim. The cynic might therefore see the departure of the forced migrants in 597 as the solution to a problem. It could explain a conviction that there was no need to think about building houses—any comment on this would make for a nice contrast with the exhortation to the exiles in Jer 29:5 (Calvin,1:376). But another possibility is that “planning trouble and formulating dire counsel”refers to these leaders’ political policies. In Micah’s day, the Judahites had been inclined to look to Egypt for help against the Assyrians, and in Ezekiel’s day they were inclined to look to Egypt for help against the Babylonians (17:15). It would eventually contribute to the city’s downfall (Blenkinsopp, 61). Anyway, the Jerusalemite leaders see themselves as like the meat kept in a storage pot secure from insects or animals, or like the meat in the pot as opposed to the scraps thrown to the animals (maybe it’s a saying). But they will find in 11:6–9 that the metaphor can be redirected against them, and in 24:1–5 it will turn out to be a hazardous metaphor in another way.

**11:4–5** Prophesyagainstthe city, Yahweh had said before (4:7), prophesyagainstthe mountains of Israel (6:2). Now he says, prophesyagainst these misleading leaders. “Prophesy” againimplies more than delivering a message. Itdenotes a powerful speaking through which God takes action. Yahweh again underlines the point by adding the prepositional phrase, “prophesyagainstthem.” This is an attack that will hurt. And he repeats the verbto show that he really means it. The Jerusalemites do need to take him seriously. But so do the Kebarites, as he speaks so as to be overheard by them when Ezekiel reports his words. Ezekiel underlines the point in a different way when he tells his readers that Yahweh’s spirit fell on him. He uses the expression “Yahweh’sspirit” otherwise only in 37:1, in association with the phrase “Yahweh’shand” and in connection with taking Ezekiel on another journey in imagination. Elsewhere in the First Testament, Yahweh’s spirit makes people *do* extraordinary things (see especially Judges).

Apparently Yahweh treats the two or the twenty-five as representing Israel’shousehold. Once again the presupposition is that both benefits and troubles come to a people as a whole from the policies of their leadership, wise or unwise, faithful or faithless. And even if this group is having a secret meeting, he knows about it.

**11:6–8** Prophets often follow a sequence whereby accusation (“you are making many your slain”) is followed by sentence (“therefore”). Ezekiel follows the sequence in a typically idiosyncratic way, as hedid in 5:5–11, as the accusation relates to something the accused have not yet finished doing. Jerusalem’s streets are not currently filled with theslain, but the trouble and the dire counsel issuing from these leaders means they are going to be (9:7; cf. also 6:4, 7, 13; 21:14, 29 [19, 34]). The leaders are responsible for what is going to happen, and Yahweh pictures the situation as if it has already come about—as if his executioners have implemented their commission. In doing so, he takes up their own image of the kitchen pot. Yes, they have sentenced their people to life in that pot—or rather to death there. It’s as if they are cooking up a cannibalistic version of a fellowship sacrifice.[[279]](#footnote-279)

**11:9–12** They thought that they themselves would be safe in the pot, in the city, but actually they are going to be pulled out of it by foreigners(cf. 7:21), Babylonian invaders. And they will “fall onIsrael’sterritory”: they won’t even experience the relative mercy of being taken off as forced migrants to Assyria or Babylonia (the Kebarites are invited to a wry smile).If they are afraid of these invaders’ sword, they are not wrong. They are just wrong in thinking that they can solve things by putting all their resources into alliances and defenses (Greenberg, 1:187–88). As a result of their deciding on their own policies, they will indeed pay a penalty. Yahweh the king intends to “rule”over them, to make authoritative decisions about their future (see 7:3). He has formulated “rulings” and he will implement them. Ezekiel further reformulates threats in these terms from 5:5–12, and as there, adds the reinforcing reminder that this is an affirmation of “the Lord Yahweh.” Jeremiah implies that the Jerusalemites saw the Judahites who had been taken off to Babylonia as like figs that were only good for throwing away, whereas they themselves were figs with a future (Jer 24). As Jeremiah turns that image upside down, Ezekiel turns upside down the image of pot and meat. It is not his only piece of grim inversion. While ten of the sixteen occurrences of the word for “rulings” or authoritative decisions(שְׁפָטִים) come in Ezekiel (e.g., 5:10, 15), three come in Exodus (6:6; 7:4; 12:12). All are rulings or decisions for the Israelites, against their oppressors. In Ezekiel, things get turned around. Israel is now Yahweh’s victim.

Yahweh further adds his characteristic “and you will acknowledge that I am Yahweh” so that it becomes another piece of underlining. First, he repeats it, in 11:12 as well as 11:10. There is no comparable repetition in the entire first half of the Ezekiel scroll. Second, when repeating it he develops the description of who he is, in a distinctive way. Elsewhere he occasionally develops the description of himself (e.g., 7:9), but a description in terms of their disobedience to him is unique (Greenberg, 1:188).

**11:13** Again we have to recall that if anyone hears this prophesying, it is the Kebarites. Specifically, Pelatyahu never gets to know about it. And his dying happens in Ezekiel’s vision, like the prophesying. It thus both compares and contrasts with the death of Hananiah (Jer 28:17). We don’t know whether Pelatyahu actually died suddenly, and neither Ezekiel nor Jeremiah indicate how they see the connection between their prophesying and the visionary death of the one or the actual death of the other.[[280]](#footnote-280) While biblical narrators often know more than they could empirically know, about Yahweh’s intentions or about people’s intentions, they do not give the impression of thinking that they are omniscient, as narrators are said to be. Jeremiah and Ezekiel half-imply that it is surely no coincidence that these two deaths happen when they do, but they do not indicate that their prophecies brought them about or that the deaths fulfilled their prophecies[[281]](#footnote-281) or even that Yahweh directly brought them about. The point lies somewhere else. The death of Pelatyahu parallels and exemplifies the deaths brought about by the executioners in 9:1–10. It constitutes an embodiment of the kind of calamity that Yahweh intends to brings about in Jerusalem—the kind of calamity that will actually happen to Judahite leaders in 587. One appropriate response to the story is the one Jesus gives to people who might want to know what caused the collapse of a tower in Siloam (Luke 13:5). Ezekiel would also be capable of making that response, but here his response is the same as the one in 9:8. Maybe he implies that there was nothing distinctively wayward about Pelatyahu (why did he die and Yaʾazanyah apparently did not)? There is no great significance about Pelatyahu. He is a token. His apparently random death makes Ezekiel fear that he is just a sample of what will happen to the entirety of “whatremainsofIsrael.” It’s an omen (Allen, 1:163). As usual, reference to “what remains” of Israel, the “remnant” (שְׁאֵרית) of Israel, does not imply that the remnant survives because it is faithful. It is simply what is left after a catastrophe. And Ezekiel’s reaction is surely appropriate. It echoes his “Aagh*,* LordYahweh” in 9:8 (and in 4:14, at the other end of Ezekiel 4–11) (Häner, 189–91). “The anguished prayer of v 13 echoes down the years” (Allen, 1:163).

**11:14–15** It’s quite possible to imagine Ezekiel’s vision ending with that anguished prayer. But Ezekiel got a response in 9:8–10, and he gets one here, though it differs from the earlier one. There, Yahweh pointed out that he would be quite justified in finishing Israel off. Here, his response is to say that this is not what he intends (even if it would be justified). In 9:8–10 there was some subtlety about the way he spoke of Israel and Judah, and there is some similar subtlety here. In speaking of his “restorationpeople,” Ezekiel takes up a rare word, and uses it in a unique way. “Restoration” (גְּאֻלָּה) derives from a verb traditionally translated “redeem,” which refers to the obligation to restore the freedom or land of someone in the extended family when they have somehow lost them. Jeremiah 32:7–8 has two occurrences of the noun in the same chronological context and with similar theological implications, in terms of Yahweh’s faithfulness to his people (the other occurrences are in Lev 25 and Ruth 4). At first, “allyourrelatives*,* yourrestorationpeople” sounds like people in Kebar, Ezekiel’s family that had been taken off as forced migrants in 597, and perhaps the wider community there. “Israel’s household” could also denote the community there, as it often does. Yet in 11:5 Ezekiel used the phrase of the Jerusalemites, and in general “Israel’sentirehousehold” must denote something broader than the people in one location or the other.

Here, ironically, Ezekiel uses the phrase in connection with the way the Jerusalemites discount the exiles. The Jerusalemites indeed see themselves as the good figs, the figs with a future. The country of Canaan has been given to them “as apossession.” Ezekiel uses another rare word from a familiar root (מוֺרָשָׁה from יָרַשׁ), one that he uses seven times, that appears once elsewhere in a different connection (Deut 33:4), and once in Exod 6:8 to denote the promise of Canaan to the Israelites in Egypt (the related verb commonly refers to Israel possessing the land). So the Jerusalemites are claiming exclusive possession of the land promised to the entire people. The Kebarites don’t count. Yahweh has sent them away from him and they should stay away. The Jerusalemites might have practical reasons for hoping that the people in Babylonia would never come back, if they are occupying their houses (11:3) and farming their land (Zimmerli, 1:261).

While 11:14 incorporates a puzzling sequence of noun expressions, the puzzle is not merely a syntactical one. The syntactical puzzle corresponds to a theological one, the puzzle also assumed in 9:8–10. There is such a thing as Israel’s entire household, which once embraced Ephraim and Judah and now embraces people in Judah and people in Babylonia (Qimhi, in MG, thinks that 11:16 and 17 refer to Ephraim). The people in Judah are inclined to discount the people in Babylonia. The people in Babylonia might be inclined to return the compliment. They have to remember that Israel’sentirehousehold”includes the Jerusalemites (cf. 11:5), as the Jerusalemites have to remember that the Kebarites have a share in Canaan as the entire people’s possessionand that they all belong together as the “restorationpeople.”

**11:16** The Jerusalemites said, “keepfaraway” (רׇחַק; 11:15). Yahweh begins by picking up their verb. Yes, “Ihavemadethemgofaraway” and “scatteredthem.” But he doesn’t say “far away from me,” as the Jerusalemites did, only “farawayamongthenationsand… the peoples*.”* They are not far away from him: “Ihavebecomeforthem asanctuaryfor alittlewhile” (מִקְדׇּשׁ מְעַט). It’s yet another unique Ezekiel expression whose meaning cannot be tied down too precisely. It does imply that Yahweh really is with his people in their worship by the Kebar. They can pray there with a confidence of being heard (Psa 137:7). This is an invaluable gift. But it’s limited both in its present reality and in its temporal duration.[[282]](#footnote-282) One could just as reasonably render the expression “a sanctuary in a small way” (LXX translates “a little sanctuary”). It’s not the same as the temple, where Yahweh had made a special commitment to be present and where the people could make offerings to him, as they could not in Kebar. But it’s not to be despised, and it’s superior to Babylonian claims about their gods’ presence or location.[[283]](#footnote-283) When Tg. sees Ezekiel as referring to synagogues, it’s not historically accurate, but in due course the synagogues will provide the same blessing, as places where people can pray and study Torah (cf. Ganzel 2020, xix). And it’s a sanctuary “for alittlewhile” in that (Yahweh implies)eventually they are going to be able to make their offerings in that special presence again, as Ezekiel 40–48 will promise and Ezra 1–6 will record. Thus, given that God was a sanctuary for a little while or in a small way in Babylonia, “the return of the *kābôd* to the Temple was merely the finale of a long experience of God’s presence.”[[284]](#footnote-284)

**11:17–18a** Yahweh’s subsequent promises support the idea that the qualification primarily denotes “for alittlewhile” rather than “in a small way,” because he goes on to undertakings that relate to the other side of that little while. First, “Iwillgather you” and “collectyou” (קׇבַץ piel, אׇסַף), reversing the way I scatteredyou. It’s possible to think of the deliverance of the forced migrants as a new exodus whereby Yahweh again brings the people out from servitude to a foreign people, but they are not really in servitude, and the prophets do not usually speak in those terms (20:34 is a rare example). It’s more a gathering than a releasing (e.g., 20:41; 34:13; 36:24), like the gathering of a flock. LXX nicely renders the first verb “receive” or “welcome” (εỉσδέχομαι).

Second, “Iwillgiveyou Israel’sland” (אֲדָמָה) and “theywillcometoit.” Yahweh keeps moving between “you” and “they”in 11:16–21. “They” makes sense because he is responding to the words of the Jerusalemites in in 11:15 (though they spoke of the אֶרֶץ), while “you”makes sense because the Kebarites are the people to whom Ezekiel will deliver the message. Whereas “gather” is not exodus language, “give”thecountryand “come”is Deuteronomy and Joshua language. This will be a giving and a coming like the original one. The land will be taken away from the Babylonians and other people such as the Edomites who have taken it over, and given back to the Israelites, as happened long ago at the beginning (though Ezekiel does not make that point). Yahweh’s words also imply a contrast with those of the Jerusalemites in 11:15. They claimed that the country was given to them as opposed to the Kebarites. If anything, Ezekiel is encouraging the Kebarites to believe that the country is given to them rather than to the Jerusalemites. They are the good figs, the figs with a future.[[285]](#footnote-285) But if so, they have a future because Yahweh wills it and for his name’s sake, not because they deserve it and are better figs than the Jerusalemites.[[286]](#footnote-286)

**11:18b–19a** Third, “theywillremoveitsdetestableobjects”and “itsoutrages,” not a surprising expectation in light of Ezekiel’s concern with these things, which also links with the Israelites’ arrival in Canaan and with Deuteronomy. A notable feature of this third promise (if promise is the word) is that it speaks of something that the Israelites will (at last) do. Perhaps Yahweh implies that their removing these things will naturally follow from their being gathered and given the country of Canaan, but in any case his further promises make the dynamics of this process more concrete. “Onemind” (see 6:9) is an open-ended expression. It could embrace a oneness of attitude and thinking between the Jerusalemites and the Kebarites or between Ephraim and Judah. It could imply being of one mind rather than divided mind or being a people that sometimes thought and decided one thing and sometimes thought and decided another. Any of these would also be an expression of the “newspirit” that Yahweh will give them. Either way, the “mind” suggests thinking and attitude. The “spirit” suggests drive and energy.

**11:19b–20a** Yahweh goes on to spell out further what the “one mind” would be like. The problem at present is that they have a mind made of rock. Rock is really good in its place. There is much to be said for being tough-minded, except when you are tough-minded and inflexible in the wrong direction, and impervious to rebuke (Qimhi, in MG). Somewhat paradoxically, a people needs to be capable of both strength and suppleness. It needs to be willing to be malleable when there is need. Such pliability is what a people needs in relation to God. When Yahweh lays down expectations about worship and life, a people needs to yield to them. In this connection Yahweh himself uses the verb *remove*, a removing that will make possible a malleability that will issue in their living by his expectations. Deuteronomy lays down at great length Yahweh’s expectations of Israel, then recognizes that Israel will not fulfill them and will experience curse rather than blessing, and thus promises that Yahweh will circumcise his people’s mind in order to turn them into people who do as he says (Deut 30). Deuteronomy does not simply believe in a retribution theology. Yahweh does act in retribution, but also in grace. Ezekiel (and Jeremiah) work with the same assumptions. All of them leave hazy the relationship between Yahweh’s action and the people’s action, which cannot be unequivocally stated.[[287]](#footnote-287) The people need to turn to Yahweh and Yahweh will transform them into an obedient people. Yahweh needs to transform them and they will turn to him. The Torah works more with the first logic; Ezekiel works more with the second.[[288]](#footnote-288)

**11:20b** The promises (if again “promises” is not too unequivocal a word) come to a climax with Israel being a people for Yahweh and Yahweh being God for Israel. The expression “they*/*youwillbe apeopleforme*,* and IwillbeGodforthem*/*you” occurs four more times in Ezekiel (14:11; 36:28; 37:23, 27), six times in Jeremiah (7:23; 11:4; 24:7; 30:22; 31:33; 32:38), and twice elsewhere (Lev 26:12, in that favorite chapter of Ezekiel’s; Zech 8:8; also 2 Cor 6:16). Of the many other variants on the phrase, an especially close and important one is Yahweh’s promise to Moses in Exod 6:7, and another not quite so close one is God’s promise to Abraham in Gen 17:7–8. In a loose sense one may describe this as a “covenant formula” (e.g., Bowen, 56) though most occurrences of the “formula” do not use the word *covenant* in the context (in Ezekiel, only 37:27 does so). The more consistent emphasis in the use of the formula is that it presupposes Israel’s heeding Yahweh’s rulings, as is the case here (36:26–28 and Jer 32:38–40 also associate the formula with the gift of a new mind, as here).

**11:21** Once again Ezekiel works with the mysterious tension between Yahweh’s action as the one who will give them a new mind, and his people’s responsibility for what they do with their mind. While it’s possible to think of Yahweh as promising a kind of “heart transplant” (Block, 1:353), that analogy falls short. Yahweh works with the mysterious tension between the promise, prediction, or expectation that people will remove the “detestable objects”and “outrages,” and the prospect of people continuing to have their mind on these forms of worship. He thus also works with the tension between working with his people in grace and “puttingtheirpathagainsttheirhead,” letting their way of life rebound on them (again, cf. 9:10). And in case the Kebarites are tempted not to believe it also applies to them, Ezekiel closes with the reminder that this is “anaffirmationoftheLordYahweh,” as he did in 11:8.

**11:22–25** There are many ancient Near Eastern accounts of gods leaving their cities, and the notion appears in the First Testament.[[289]](#footnote-289) But here Yahweh is not leaving. He is simply undertaking the next stage of the movement described in 10:18–19 that is related to watching what is going on in Jerusalem in the context of this vision. And the narrative comes to a close in the middle of things when “thevisionthat Isawwentupfromme.” We do not know how the Jerusalemites will respond to what it has revealed, and therefore what Yahweh will do next. The fact that Ezek 8–11 closes with the spirit conveying Ezekiel’s spirit back to join his body in Kebar, and with his giving the Kebarites an account of the vision, reminds us that the question is not so much how the Jerusalemites will respond but how the Kebarites will respond. The actual vision is for them. “For God appeared to his Prophet… and showed him the temple, and there erected a theater, as it were, in which he beheld the whole state of the city Jerusalem” (Calvin, 1:415). And within the framework of the vision and of this narrative in Ezek 8–11, Yahweh does not know how the people will respond, and nor does Ezekiel. Would it be those responses in Kebar or in Jerusalem that decide whether Yahweh actually leaves the city and the temple? But Ezekiel has not portrayed Yahweh as living in the temple. Yahweh’s holy palace and throne are in the heavens. He can quite adequately keep an eye on things from there (Psa 11:4), though he sometimes pays the world a visit to check on things in person (Gen 18:21). Ezekiel has portrayed him as paying city and temple a visit to exercise authority and bring about a catastrophe. He does not exactly live there and if he is now leaving, he is not leaving as if he had been living there, but only as bringing this visit to an end.[[290]](#footnote-290) If his entourage did leave, it went back to the heavens, where 1:1 implied it was before (Qimhi, in MG). *B. Rosh Hashana 31a* elaborates:

Ten journeys the Presence traveled: From cover [of the chest] to griffin [Ezek 9:3]; from griffin to griffin [2 Sam 22:11); from griffin to threshold [Exod 25:22); from threshold to courtyard [Ezek 10:4]; from courtyard to altar [Amos 9:1]; from altar to roof [Prov 21:9]; from roof to wall [Amos 7:7]; from wall to the city [Micah 6:9]; from city to mountain [Ezek 11:23]; from mountain to wilderness [Prov 21:19]; and from wilderness it went up and stayed in its place [in the heavens], as it says: “I will go and return to My place” [Hos 5:15] (cf. Greenberg, 1:201).

The fact that Daniel still prayed in this direction (Dan 6:10) might imply the assumption that Yahweh did not leave (Mayer, 399). But there is a string danger that “although the Temple is still standing, it is effectively empty and insignificant” (Ganzel 2020, 63).

### Biblical Theology Comments

Yahweh’s undertakings in 11:14–20 are the first unequivocal promises of new life for Judah, articulated and given to the community that has already gone through its own calamity. In Jerusalem in the years following 597, Yahweh’s aim continues to be to get the city to turn back to him, and he would then be able to cancel his threat of catastrophe. Origen (476–77) comments: “It is better to be corrected by hearing about the threatened affliction, and not to experience the fact of the correction itself. For some are corrected by the words threatening punishment, and others, by the punishment itself.” But Yahweh professes little hope that this turning will happen, and if it happens, he offers the city no indication that the catastrophe will be less than complete. A number of passages in Parts One and Two of the Ezekiel scroll may seem to hint at such a possibility, but they generally do not do so in any unalloyed sense.

* 5:1–3 envisages Ezekiel preserving a small quantity of the hair that symbolizes Jerusalem’s population, but he does so only to burn it up.
* 6:8–10 envisages Yahweh letting some people survive, but only to loathe themselves and admit that Yahweh was justified in his action.
* 10:6–7 pictures a person clothed in linen sprinkling fire over Jerusalem, which would purify it, but there is no declaration that this will benefit its people.
* 12:16 envisages a few people surviving as forced migrants, but they do so in order that they may testify to their outrages.
* 14:22–23 envisages survivors of the catastrophe, but the point of the prospect is their giving evidence that Yahweh’s action was warranted.
* 16:53–58 envisages a restoration of Jerusalem along with Sodom and Samaria so that Jerusalem may feel disgrace.
* 16:54–58 promises a renewal of the covenant between Yahweh and Jerusalem so that Jerusalem may feel shame over violating the covenant.

Yahweh’s promises in 11:14–20 are thus rare as unalloyed promises (17:22–23 is another), and they relate to the victims of the 597 calamity whom the purification in 10:6–7 could then benefit. For the Kebarites, they express “the gospel according to Ezekiel” (Block, 1:341).

Greenhill (274) asks, *“*wasthispromisefulfilledamongtheJews*,* orintimesofthegospel?”

Many of the Fathers refer the fulfilling of it unto the times of the gospel; but it being primarily made unto the Jews, we have just cause to think that it was in part fulfilled amongst them, after their return from Babylon; so gracious a promise being given out by God, made known by *Ezekiel,* it is not likely they would neglect, having been so sorely afflicted in Babylon; but would improve, and press the Lord for the accomplishment of it, and without dispute, many of them had this new spirit, for after they came again to Jerusalem, they had such a hatred of Idols, and love to truth, that they stood out to death for the law, and religion of their God, as is recorded in the *Maccabees*.

He adds (283):

That *they will be a people for me and I will be God for them* is a key promise. One might spell out its implications in the Scriptures as implying that as my people they will acknowledge me alone; they will worship me alone; they will trust and rely on me alone; they will be sacred to me alone; they will listen to me alone; they will love me alone; and they will stand for me alone. As their God he will be one who pardons them, who is present with them, who cares for them, who delivers them, who comforts them, who pleads for them, who exalts them, who teaches them, who delights in them, and who blesses them.

### Application and Devotional Implications

It is quite likely that the leaders gathered at the eastern gateway were seeking to be responsible and honorable in their leadership, and it would be dangerous to infer that they were self-important and smug. Perhaps these “great ones” (Mark 10:42) were high-handed in relation to their people, though they likely did not see it that way. But “are not too many of the great ones among us corrupt, loose and enemies to Christ and his kingdom?” (Greenhill, 247). Alter all, leadership is a danger to leaders and to their people (Calvin, 1:374–75). It is a danger to leaders because they come to trust in their position, and to people if they assume they may safely follow their leaders. Calvin (1:378) suggests a prayer:

Grant, Almighty God, that as we know from thine ancient people how great our hardness is, unless we are inclined by thy Holy Spirit, nay, totally renewed into obedience to thy doctrine: that as often as we hear thy threatening, we may be seriously frightened, and that we may desire to return to true and perfect obedience, not by momentary but by permanent repentance, till at length we are gathered into that happy rest, which has been obtained for us through the blood of thine only-begotten Son.

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1. Javier Marías, *Dark Back of Time*, trans. Esther Allen (reprinted London: Penguin, 2013), 47, 48. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Cf. Betts, *Ezekiel*; also, Sweeney, “Zadokite”; Mein, “Priest.” [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. See Joyce, “Rebirth”; Vieweger, *Beziehungen*. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. For different views, see, e.g., Lyons, “Transformation”; Lyons, *Law* *to* *Prophecy*, 61–67, 76–145; Lyons, “Persuasion”; Gile, *Deuteronomy*; Hossfeld, "Bewegung“; Nihan, *Priestly* *Torah*, esp. 543–45; Nihan, “Holiness Code”; Grünwaldt, *Heiligkeitsgesetz*, 349–51, 365–66; Zimmerli*, Ezekiel 1,* 46–52; Cook and Patton, *Hierarchical World*, 73–89. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. See Strong, “Reading.” [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Haran, “Observations.” [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Cf. Häner, “Zeichen.” [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Cf. Renz, *Rhetorical Function*. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Renz, *Rhetorical Function*, 133–35. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Dale Launderville, *Spirit and Reason*, 1. In “Rhetorical Strategies in the Book o Ezekiel” in *OHE* he analysis Ezekiel in the terms of Aristotelian rhetoric. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Ezekiel spells the name thus with ר rather than נ, the usual First Testament convention. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. I follow the dates in Allen’s commentary, which themselves follow thestandard system in Parker and Dubberstein, *Chronology*. See also Kutsch, *Daten*. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. While Mayfield (*Structure*)takes the dates as key to the scroll’s structure, he also surveys some of the many other views of it. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Davis, *Swallowing*, 133. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. See Timothy P. Mackie, “Text-Critical Issues in Ezekiel,” in *OHE*, and Mackie, *Expanding Ezekiel*. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. Turner, “Translator(s).” [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. Cf. Levitt Kohn, *New Heart*:LevittKohn*,* “Prophet Like Moses”; Patton, “Pan-Deuteronomism.” [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. Kutsko, *Between Heaven*, 75. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. Middelmas, “Transformation,” 136. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. See Newsom, “Moral ‘Recipes.’” [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. Diesel, *Ich bin Jahwe*, 369–89. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. See Evans, *“You Shall Know.”* [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. Wiesel, “Ezekiel,” 167. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. Martens, “Ezekiel’s Contribution.” [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. See further Joyce, *Divine* *Initiative*, 89–105. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. Joyce, “Moral Transformation.” [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. Wu, *Honor*, 166. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. Cf. Mein, *Ethics*. [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. Among the surveys, the typologies, and the critiques are those of Pohlman (”Question”) and Rom-Shiloni (“Prophetic Words”).. [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. See Boyd, *Language Contact*, 229–303. [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. Rom-Shiloni, “Ezekiel among the Exiles”; cf. Pearce, “Continuity”; Peterson, *Ezekiel in Context*; Stökl, “ Youth”; Stökl, “Schoolboy”; Yang, “Presence”; Vanderhooft, “Ezekiel”; Winitzer,, "Assyriology”; Daniel Bodi, “The Mesopotamian Context of Ezekiel,” in *OHE*. But see the questions raised by Nissinen, “Context.” [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. Lewis, “Biblical Criticism.” [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. Pohlmann, “Synchrone.” [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
34. See, e.g., *HUB*, xi–xlviii; Lust “Ezekiel Text”; Timothy P. Mackie, “Text-Critical Issues,” in *OHE*. [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
35. Hendel, “Oxford Hebrew Bible.” [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
36. Olley, 46–60, lists the equivalent LXX section breaks. [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
37. The Qumran fragments are conveniently accessible in Ulrich, *Biblical Qumran Scrolls*. [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
38. See Talmon, “Fragments”; Tigchelaar, “Notes”; Patmore, “Shorter.” [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
39. See Lilly *Two Books*; briefly, Würthwein, *Text*, 268–69. [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
40. See Wevers and Fraenkel, *Studies*. [↑](#footnote-ref-40)
41. See, e.g., Finsterbusch, “Vorlage”; Finsterbusch, “Textual Criticism”; Tov, “Nature”; Lust, “Divergences.” [↑](#footnote-ref-41)
42. Fabry, “Ezechiel.” [↑](#footnote-ref-42)
43. See Mushayabasa, “Utility”; van Rooy, “Agreement.” [↑](#footnote-ref-43)
44. Eugene H. Peterson, *The Message: The Bible in Contemporary Language*. Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2003. [↑](#footnote-ref-44)
45. See the discussion in Maierhofer, “Holistic Interpretation”; she refers to Greenberg’s commentary and to Greenberg, *Studies*. [↑](#footnote-ref-45)
46. Uehlinger and Müller Trufaut, "Ezekiel 1,” 142, 145. [↑](#footnote-ref-46)
47. Davis (*Swallowing*) infers from the prominence of prose that he formulated his messages in writing [↑](#footnote-ref-47)
48. Cf. Middlemas, “Divine Presence.” [↑](#footnote-ref-48)
49. See, e.g., Hendel and Joosten, *How Old.* [↑](#footnote-ref-49)
50. See Hurvitz, *Linguistic Study*; Rooker, *Biblical Hebrew*; Kim, *Early Biblical Hebrew*. [↑](#footnote-ref-50)
51. See Joyce, “Ezekiel”; Joyce and Mein, *After Ezekiel*; Joyce et al., *Ezekiel*; Mein, “Awkward God”; Darr, “Critics”; Levitt Kohn, “Turn of the Century” and “Update." [↑](#footnote-ref-51)
52. See, e.g., García Martínez, "Apocalyptic Interpretation.” [↑](#footnote-ref-52)
53. See Kaplan, *Inner Space*. [↑](#footnote-ref-53)
54. See further Joyce, *Encyclopedia*.8:583–618; Olley, “Trajectories,” 53–80. [↑](#footnote-ref-54)
55. Guillaume, “Limits.” Cf. Signer, “Vision,” who surveys of Christian interpretation over the millennium leading up to Nicholas of Lyra, whom Luther (“New Preface,” 419) encourages people to read. [↑](#footnote-ref-55)
56. Hieke, “Seher”; see further Kowalski, *Rezeption*; Kowalski, “Transformation”; Moyise, *Old* *Testament*, 64–84; Presser, “Escatología”; Ruiz, *Apocalypse*. [↑](#footnote-ref-56)
57. Manning, *Echoes*; Peterson, *John’s Use*; Deeley, “Ezekiel's Shepherd”; Fowler and Strickland, *Influence*. [↑](#footnote-ref-57)
58. See Pikor, *Land*. [↑](#footnote-ref-58)
59. E.g., Murray, *Puritan Hope*; Gros, *Origins*; Church, *Gospel*;Chapman, *Prophecy*; Lindsey, *Late Great Planet*. [↑](#footnote-ref-59)
60. See von Däniken, *Chariots*; Blumrich, *Spaceships*; Liebe, *Children*. [↑](#footnote-ref-60)
61. J. Reumann, “*Oikonomia*-terms in Paul in Comparison with Lucan *Heilsgeschichte*,” *New Testament Studies* 13 (1966–67): 147–67 (147). [↑](#footnote-ref-61)
62. Cf. Joyce, “Synchonic and Diachronic.” [↑](#footnote-ref-62)
63. Konkel, “Biographie.” [↑](#footnote-ref-63)
64. Halperin, *Seeking,* 217, 220. [↑](#footnote-ref-64)
65. Ellens and Rollins, *Psychology and the Bible*, 2:185–235; Tuell, “Madness”; Smith-Christopher, *Biblical Theology*, 83–89; Stiebert, *Prophet’s Wife*, 84–108; Cook, “Psychiatry”; Pilch, “Ezekiel.” [↑](#footnote-ref-65)
66. Sweeney, “Eschatology,” 279. Cf. Rom-Sholoni, *Voices;* Tiemeyer, “To Read”; Waschke. "Theodizee-Problem.” [↑](#footnote-ref-66)
67. Fishbane, “Sin,” 147–48. [↑](#footnote-ref-67)
68. See Poser, *Ezechielbuch*; Poser, “No Words”; Kelle, “Dealing”; Kelle, “Creation and Trauma”; Garber, “Vocabulary”; Garber, “Bitterness”; Smith-Christopher, “Fanon’s Couch”; Stulman, “Disaster.” [↑](#footnote-ref-68)
69. Cf. Darr, “God Ezekiel Envisions.” [↑](#footnote-ref-69)
70. Poser, “No Words,” 236. [↑](#footnote-ref-70)
71. Parul Sehgal, “The Case against the Trauma Plot,” *The New Yorker* January 3 and 10, 2022, 62–67. [↑](#footnote-ref-71)
72. Carvalho, “Sex,” 242. See also Jost and Seifert. “Ezekiel”; Meyers, “Engendering” 287. [↑](#footnote-ref-72)
73. E.g., Joo, “Off-centering”; Ruiz, “Exile’s Baggage: [↑](#footnote-ref-73)
74. Davidson, “Geographies.” [↑](#footnote-ref-74)
75. Crouch, *Israel and Judah*. [↑](#footnote-ref-75)
76. E.g., Ahn and Middlemas, *Irrigation Canals*;Rom-Shiloni (“Forced/Involuntary Migration”) particularly presses the issues of method in this study. [↑](#footnote-ref-76)
77. Furman, “Trauma”; Strine, “Anthropology.” [↑](#footnote-ref-77)
78. Smith-Christopher, “Abu Ghraib”; Strine, “Exile.” [↑](#footnote-ref-78)
79. Crouch, “Before and After,” 356. [↑](#footnote-ref-79)
80. Carley, “Ezekiel’s Formula,” 43. See further Carley, “Harshness”; Cook and Patton, *Hierarchical World*, 19–20, 91–140. [↑](#footnote-ref-80)
81. E.g., Galambush, “Land.” [↑](#footnote-ref-81)
82. E.g., Darr, in her commentary; Dempsey, “Hope Amid Crisis,” 274. See further Lyons, “Environmental Ethics.” [↑](#footnote-ref-82)
83. כַשְׂדִּים (the switch from *ś* to *l* sometimes happens in Akkadian) is anarthrous in Ezekiel. It is the term both for the country and for the Chaldeans, the people. [↑](#footnote-ref-83)
84. See Phinney, “Life Writing”; Phinney, “Portraying.” [↑](#footnote-ref-84)
85. York, “Ezekiel 1.” [↑](#footnote-ref-85)
86. Hilbrecht and Clay, “Murashu.” [↑](#footnote-ref-86)
87. Strine, “Refugee Camp.” [↑](#footnote-ref-87)
88. See further Pearce, “Continuity.” [↑](#footnote-ref-88)
89. But Koch (*Wohnstatt*, 133–89) sees Ezekiel as an important stage in this awareness. [↑](#footnote-ref-89)
90. Barth, *CD* 3,1: 141. [↑](#footnote-ref-90)
91. William Shakespeare, *Romeo and Juliet*, Act III, Scene 1. [↑](#footnote-ref-91)
92. On the motif of Ezekiel’s body, see Graybill, *Are We Not Men?* 97–120; also Mills, *Alterity*, 65–85. [↑](#footnote-ref-92)
93. MT accents בָּאָה on the second syllable and thus as a ptc. rather than *qatal*, in keeping with the subject’s preceding the verb (contrast LXX, Vg.). There are virtually no *qatals* in the passage. [↑](#footnote-ref-93)
94. Hitpael of לָקַח, literally “taking itself.” [↑](#footnote-ref-94)
95. Here and subsequently, “something like” is simply the preposition כְּ, which occurs sixteen times in the passage, attached to several words with overlapping meaning. [↑](#footnote-ref-95)
96. עֵין, literally “eye of” (cf. 1:7, 16, 22, 27). [↑](#footnote-ref-96)
97. חַשְׁמַלoccurs only here and in 1:27; 8:2; we do not know its meaning. It is the Modern Hebrew word for electricity (Ganzel 2014, 1038). LXX has ἤλεκτρον, Vg. *electrum*, an alloy of gold and silver known from Egypt and Turkey. [↑](#footnote-ref-97)
98. לָהֶם (literally, “to them”) is m., the default gender, whereas חַיּוֺת, “living beings,” was f. The genders mix through the report. [↑](#footnote-ref-98)
99. אֶל עֵבֶר פָּניו, literally, “to the direction of its face[s]”: see BDB, 719. So also 1:12. [↑](#footnote-ref-99)
100. אִישׁ, literally “[as an] individual.” The usage recurs through the chapter. [↑](#footnote-ref-100)
101. בָּזָק, a hapax\* of uncertain meaning. [↑](#footnote-ref-101)
102. Wagner, "Was haben sie,“ sees LXX as a reworking of an MT-type text. Van De Water, “Early Rabbinic Judaism,” sees it as a reworking of an earlier Hebrew text that turned it into something more like MT’s text. [↑](#footnote-ref-102)
103. See Block, “Text”; Fredericks, “Diglossia,” 194. [↑](#footnote-ref-103)
104. Emanuel Tov, “Recensional Differences between the Masoretic Text and the Septuagint of Ezekiel,” reprinted in Tov, *The Greek and Hebrew Bible: Collected Essays on the Septuagint*, VTSup 72 (Leiden: Brill, 1999), 397–410 (407). [↑](#footnote-ref-104)
105. Cf. Allen, “Structure.” [↑](#footnote-ref-105)
106. See the textual note, and, e.g., Gruenwald, *Apocalyptic*;Scholem, *Major Trends*; Halperin, *Faces*; Rowland, “Influence”; Rowland, *“Wheels.”* [↑](#footnote-ref-106)
107. Odell, “Ezekiel Saw,” 163. [↑](#footnote-ref-107)
108. See Keel, *Jahwe-Visionen*, 125–273; Allen, 1:27–37, has a summary and illustrations. [↑](#footnote-ref-108)
109. Grelot, “L’imagerie.” [↑](#footnote-ref-109)
110. Rochester, “Grief,” 355. [↑](#footnote-ref-110)
111. See, e.g., Slotemaker, “Fuisse.” [↑](#footnote-ref-111)
112. See, e.g., Aster, “Ezekiel’s Adaptation.” [↑](#footnote-ref-112)
113. Van Wolde, “Ezekiel 1,” 99–104. [↑](#footnote-ref-113)
114. See de Vries, *Kābôd*. [↑](#footnote-ref-114)
115. See McCall, “Body.” [↑](#footnote-ref-115)
116. Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catechetical Lectures* 9 (cf. Stevenson, 4). [↑](#footnote-ref-116)
117. On the possible redactional development of the passage, see Janina M. Hiebel, *Ezekiel's Vision Accounts as Interrelated Narratives: A Redaction-Critical and Theological Study*, BZAW 475 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2015), 53–93; Hiebel, “Redaction.” [↑](#footnote-ref-117)
118. Anarthrous רוַּח rather than הׇרוַּח is usual henceforth in Ezekiel. [↑](#footnote-ref-118)
119. Hitpael מִדַּבֵּר hints at “speaking to himself” (cf. Rashi, in MG),a “reverential reservation respecting the directness of God’s speech” (Greenberg, 1:62). [↑](#footnote-ref-119)
120. One would usually translate בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל “Israelites,” but the expression is rare in Ezekiel and here leads into the reference to *ancestors* and *descendants*. [↑](#footnote-ref-120)
121. On the form אֲדׄנָי, frequent in Ezekiel in this compound name for God, see the translation footnote on 29:16. [↑](#footnote-ref-121)
122. Here, later in the verse, and in 3:9 (also 11:16; 12:3; 29:13; 32:27, 32) NIV translates כִּי “[al]though” or “yet,” but see BDB, 473–74 for the “subtle” sense in which כִּי can mean “because.” [↑](#footnote-ref-122)
123. Given Ezekiel’s inclination to treat אֶל and עַל as synonyms, one might naturally translate אֶל “on.” [↑](#footnote-ref-123)
124. All three nouns in this line are of unknown origin and uncertain meaning. סָרָב, “brier,” is a hapax.\* סַלּוׄן, “thorn,” occurs otherwise only at 28:24. עַקְרָב, “scorpion,” occurs otherwise at Deut 8:15; 1 Kgs 12:11, 14; 1 Chr 10:11, 14 and may denote a plant rather than a creature (Greenhill*,* 86). [↑](#footnote-ref-124)
125. מְרִי; literally, “they are rebellion” (and in the next line, “don’t be rebellion”). [↑](#footnote-ref-125)
126. דֶּבַשׁalso covers honey, but syrup made from fruit such as figs and dates is Israel’s more common source of sweetness. [↑](#footnote-ref-126)
127. עָמֵק, literally, “deep,” unfathomable. [↑](#footnote-ref-127)
128. Literally, “if it was not,” an idiomatic emphatic expression with a background in oaths (e.g., 17:16; 34:8); cf. GK 149ab. [↑](#footnote-ref-128)
129. Literally, “the sons of your people” (בְּנֵי עַמֶּךָ), a rare expression (cf. 33:2, 12, 17, 30; 37:18; Lev 19:18; Dan 12:1), though apparently not one with special significance. [↑](#footnote-ref-129)
130. The ו on וְקוֺל is explicative (Greenberg, 1:71). [↑](#footnote-ref-130)
131. מַשִּׁיקוׄתfromנָשַׁק II (*HALOT*, 731; see further *DCH* 5: 780–81). [↑](#footnote-ref-131)
132. An “inwardly transitive” hiphil ptc. from שָָׁמַם “make desolate” (GK 53e). [↑](#footnote-ref-132)
133. See Christman, *“What Did Ezekiel See?”* [↑](#footnote-ref-133)
134. E.g., Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 3.11.7-8 (cf. Stevenson, 4–5)*.* [↑](#footnote-ref-134)
135. *The Homilies of Saint Jerome Volume 1* on the Psalms (Washington: Catholic University of America, 1964), 75 (cf. Stevenson,11). [↑](#footnote-ref-135)
136. A comment on Exod 20:19–20 in his *Questionum in Heptateuchum Libri VII*, 2:73. [↑](#footnote-ref-136)
137. E.g., Martin Luther King, Jr., “‘I Sat Where They Sat,’” in *The Papers of Martin Luther King Jr.* (Berkeley: University of California, 2007), 6:581. [↑](#footnote-ref-137)
138. Heckl, “Anrede.” [↑](#footnote-ref-138)
139. Delorme, “בית ישראל.” [↑](#footnote-ref-139)
140. See Garfinkel, “Thistles”; Odell, “Particle.” [↑](#footnote-ref-140)
141. See, e.g., Clyde E. Fant and Mitchell G. Reddish, *Lost Treasures of the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 217–20. The tablets are commonly referred to as the Weidner tablets, after E. F. Weidner who deciphered them. [↑](#footnote-ref-141)
142. Allison, “Acts”. Allison notes many other possible allusions to Ezekiel in Paul’s three accounts of the Lord’s appearing to him. [↑](#footnote-ref-142)
143. Willimon, “Ezekiel 3,” 326. [↑](#footnote-ref-143)
144. Tiemeyer, “Compromised Prophet,” 177. [↑](#footnote-ref-144)
145. Cf. Myers, Obscure Preaching.” [↑](#footnote-ref-145)
146. *Ezekiel*, 7–8. [↑](#footnote-ref-146)
147. MT’s setumah\* here uncouples clauses that follow each other oddly. It may also draw attention to the link of substance with 33:1–9 and to the availability there of further information on the matter dealt with here (Greenberg, 1:83). [↑](#footnote-ref-147)
148. **Deselaers***, “*Wächteramt,” 37. [↑](#footnote-ref-148)
149. BDB and *DCH* think there are two verbs עָוָה. *HALOT* recognizes only one, which is less complicated. [↑](#footnote-ref-149)
150. Gehrig studies approaches to the puzzles in 3:22–27 (and 4:1–5:17) in *Leserlenkung*, 179–303. [↑](#footnote-ref-150)
151. Odell, “You Are What You Eat,” 245. [↑](#footnote-ref-151)
152. See the discussion in Glazov, *Bridling*, 220–74. [↑](#footnote-ref-152)
153. Garfinkel, “Another Model.” [↑](#footnote-ref-153)
154. Cf. Wilson, “Interpretation.” [↑](#footnote-ref-154)
155. Tromp, “Paradox,” 213. [↑](#footnote-ref-155)
156. See Strine,”Image Problem”; Kutsko, “*Ṣelem ′ělōhîm*.” [↑](#footnote-ref-156)
157. See Friebel, *Sign-Acts*. [↑](#footnote-ref-157)
158. Voltaire, “Sermon of the Fifty,” in *Deism: An Anthology* (ed. Peter Gay; Princeton: Van Nostrand, 1968), 152–53 (cf. Odell, 73). [↑](#footnote-ref-158)
159. מֵעֵת עַד־עֵת, literally, “from a time to a time.” So also in 4:11. [↑](#footnote-ref-159)
160. On the construction in this sentence, see Lyons, “Barley Cake.” [↑](#footnote-ref-160)
161. DG 42, remark 2, sees טָמֵא (lacking the article) as quasi-adverbial, *IBHS* 14.3.3c as “accusative of specification.” [↑](#footnote-ref-161)
162. My נֶפֶשׁ, which more broadly means “person,” can denote the throat or physical desire. Readers might think of both connotations. [↑](#footnote-ref-162)
163. That is, the head hair and beard hair. [↑](#footnote-ref-163)
164. See the discussion in Lust, Hauspie, and Ternier, “Ezekiel 4 and 5,” 132–35. [↑](#footnote-ref-164)
165. See Uehlinger, “Zeichne”; Uehlinger, “Vision.” [↑](#footnote-ref-165)
166. Uehlinger, “Zeichne,” 188–90. [↑](#footnote-ref-166)
167. See *ANEP*, 373. [↑](#footnote-ref-167)
168. See the verse-by-verse commentary on 3:18–19. [↑](#footnote-ref-168)
169. Wu, *Honor*, 166. [↑](#footnote-ref-169)
170. See Compton, “Sign-Acts,” 67–70. [↑](#footnote-ref-170)
171. So Crouch, “Immobility.” [↑](#footnote-ref-171)
172. See, e.g., *DSS* 1:550–51. “Damascus” may stand for Babylon (see Amos 5:27) or for Qumran. [↑](#footnote-ref-172)
173. See the “Application and Devotional Implications” below. [↑](#footnote-ref-173)
174. Cf. אֶחָד in (e.g.) 8:7, 8. [↑](#footnote-ref-174)
175. See Phinney, “Prophetic Objection.” [↑](#footnote-ref-175)
176. Ludwig Feuerbach: see, e.g., Cherno, “Man Is What He Eats.” [↑](#footnote-ref-176)
177. See, e.g., Marta Portillo et al., “Early Neolithic Household Behavior at Tell Seker al-Aheimar (Upper Khabur, Syria),” *Journal of Archaeological Science* 42 (2014): 107–18; Wendy Smith, “Fuel for Thought: Archaeobotanical Evidence for the Use of Alternatives to Wood Fuel in Late Antique North Africa,” *Journal of Mediterranean Archaeology* 11 (1998): 191–205. [↑](#footnote-ref-177)
178. Lyons, “(Model) City,” 619–22. [↑](#footnote-ref-178)
179. Beach, “Actions.” 210. [↑](#footnote-ref-179)
180. On the interpretation of *b. Berakot* 32b, see Bokser, “Wall.” [↑](#footnote-ref-180)
181. הֲמָנְכֶם might be a form of the noun הָמוׄן or might be inf. from a verb הָמַן, abyform\* of הָמָה, suggesting “be boisterous.” The noun is a favorite in Ezekiel, usually denoting “horde” (e.g., 7:11–14). LXX “starting point” paraphrases in light of the context, with the implication that Jerusalem followed the nations rather than Yahweh’s laws and rulings. “Your” is plural, here and in 5:7. [↑](#footnote-ref-181)
182. In 5:2 the verb was qal, here it is piel, which perhaps suggests an emphasis on the end result or reflects the more metaphorical sense of the verb (see *IBHS* 24.3.2b). [↑](#footnote-ref-182)
183. Rom-Shiloni (e.g., “Shifts,” 139) argues that Ezekiel is more negative about the rebellious Jerusalem community than about the rebellious Kebarite community [↑](#footnote-ref-183)
184. Cf. W. Eugene March, “Lākēn: Its Functions and Meanings,” in J. Jared Jackson and Martin Kessler, ed., *Rhetorical Criticism: Essays in Honor of James Muilenburg*, 256–84. Pittsburgh: Pickwick, 1974), 256–84 (274). [↑](#footnote-ref-184)
185. Lines 448–49; Donald J. Wiseman, “The Vassal Treaties of Esarhaddon,” *Iraq* 20 (1958): 1–99 (62; *ANET*, 538, has another translation. [↑](#footnote-ref-185)
186. And see Strine, *Sworn Enemies.* [↑](#footnote-ref-186)
187. Cf. Renz, “Zion Tradition,” 86. [↑](#footnote-ref-187)
188. See further Sweeney, “Ezekiel’s Debate.” [↑](#footnote-ref-188)
189. Cf. Fischer, “Pro and Contra.” [↑](#footnote-ref-189)
190. See Wong, *Retribution*. [↑](#footnote-ref-190)
191. יֶאְשְׁמוּ combines forms from or allusions to שָׁמַםand אָשַׁם (*CTAT*, 28–30). [↑](#footnote-ref-191)
192. בִּפְנֵיהֶם, literally, “at their faces.” [↑](#footnote-ref-192)
193. Like English “Ah,” an exclamation such as אָח has to be interpreted from the context, which here suggests appalment at something and/or determination to take action against it. [↑](#footnote-ref-193)
194. Between the construct noun and the noun on which it depends, רָאוׄת is ungrammatical. It functions to complete the link between outrages/dire things here and in 6:9. [↑](#footnote-ref-194)
195. נָצוּר is a ptc. from נָצַר“watch, keep,” but it is close to the form נָצוׄר which would be the ptc. from צוּר(confine, besiege): cf. מָצוׄרin 4:2, 3, 7, 8; 5:2. [↑](#footnote-ref-195)
196. אֵלׇה, traditionally “oak,” but it is hard to correlate Israelite tree names with species in other parts of the world. The qualifier עֲבֻתׇּה, “leafy,” suggests that “oak” will not give a misleading impression. [↑](#footnote-ref-196)
197. See Lust, Hauspie, and Ternier, “Ezekiel 6”; Mushayabasa, “Shorter or Longer Text”; Mushayabasa, “שׁמם.” [↑](#footnote-ref-197)
198. Wojciech Pikor, *The Land of Israel in the Book of Ezekiel,* LHBOTS 667 (London: T&T Clark, 2018), 10. [↑](#footnote-ref-198)
199. See the translation footnote. [↑](#footnote-ref-199)
200. On the involved questions raised by אָשַׁם/אׇשׇׁם, see D. Kellermann, *TDOT* 1:429–37; R. Knierim, *TLOT* 1:191–95. [↑](#footnote-ref-200)
201. See Lyons, *From Law to Prophecy*. [↑](#footnote-ref-201)
202. On the heart in Ezekiel, see Markter, *Transformationen*. [↑](#footnote-ref-202)
203. See Compton, “Deixis.” He also studies Ezek 13; 20; 23. [↑](#footnote-ref-203)
204. See further Ganzel, “Transformation.” [↑](#footnote-ref-204)
205. See further the comments on “The Prose and the Poetry” in the Introduction to this commentary. [↑](#footnote-ref-205)
206. Lust, Hauspie, and Ternier, “Ezekiel 7,” 384. [↑](#footnote-ref-206)
207. F. בָּאָה corresponds to the gender of “doom” at the beginning of the next colon (cf. 7:10). [↑](#footnote-ref-207)
208. Whereas “you” in 7:6 was f. sg. and referred to the city, as in 7:3–4abα and 8–9abα, in 7:7 it is m. sg. and refers to the individual(s) living in Judah. [↑](#footnote-ref-208)
209. וְעוֹד בְּחַיִּים חַיׇּתׇם, literally, “even yet their life [is] in life,” which “sounds as strange in Hebrew as in English” (Greenberg, 1:150). [↑](#footnote-ref-209)
210. In this neat example of parallelism, the second colon reworks and heightens the point in the first. “Gold”enhances and complements “silver.”A sg. intransitive verb complements a pl. transitive verb. And “somethingtobeshunned” explains and heightens “intothestreets.” [↑](#footnote-ref-210)
211. Sym. nicely translates שִׁקּוּצֵיהֶם “things that are sickening, that make them throw up (σίκχος).” [↑](#footnote-ref-211)
212. רִשְׁעֵי הׇאׇרֶץ, literally, “the faithless ones of the earth.” An adjective in the construct can signify a superlative (GK 133g)—cf. “the dire ones of the nations” in 7:24. [↑](#footnote-ref-212)
213. After two cola that form another neatly parallel pair comprising 7:21a, וְחִלְּלוּהוּ, “theywilltreatit as something ordinary,” looks like the beginning of the next line rather than an appendage to 7:21. Although MT treats this word as belonging to 7:20, it distances it from it by the accentuation that makes it the sole word in 7:21b. K has a f. suffix, which anticipatorily fits with 7:22. [↑](#footnote-ref-213)
214. מִשְׁפַּט דׇּמִים, literally, “ruling of bloods.” Pl. דָמִיםregularly denotes bloodshed. [↑](#footnote-ref-214)
215. קְפָדָהis another hapax, but the verb קָפַד (Isa 38:11) uses rolling up as an image for death (cf. *HUB*). LXX “atonement” might imply that it links the word with כפר (*HUB*). [↑](#footnote-ref-215)
216. See Klein, “Das Ende” [↑](#footnote-ref-216)
217. Lust, Hauspie, and Ternier, “Ezekiel 7,” 393–94. [↑](#footnote-ref-217)
218. Cf. Joyce, 94; Lust, Hauspie, and Ternier, “Ezekiel 7”; Mackie, “Transformation.” [↑](#footnote-ref-218)
219. Cf. Stiebert, “Riches,” 38. [↑](#footnote-ref-219)
220. See the biblical theology comments on 6:1–14, on idols. [↑](#footnote-ref-220)
221. See further Ganzel, “Defilement.” [↑](#footnote-ref-221)
222. Wong, “Profanation,” 232. [↑](#footnote-ref-222)
223. Van Rooy, “Vrede.” [↑](#footnote-ref-223)
224. See E. Lipiński, *TDOT* 11:1174–75. [↑](#footnote-ref-224)
225. Deselaers, ”Wächteramt.“ [↑](#footnote-ref-225)
226. Cf. Eichrodt, 120; Joyce, 93;andsee, e.g., *OTP* Vol. 1. [↑](#footnote-ref-226)
227. See, e.g., Zimmerli, 1:230–34; Allen, 1:129–36; Pohlmann, 1:123–34; Janina M. Hiebel, *Ezekiel's Vision Accounts as Interrelated Narratives: A Redaction-Critical and Theological Study*, BZAW 475 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2015), 94–138. [↑](#footnote-ref-227)
228. Cf. Nihan, “Ezechiel 8,” 107–18. [↑](#footnote-ref-228)
229. Here and elsewhere, translations vary over translating רָאָה “see” (which draws more attention to the object of the seeing) or “look” (which draws more attention to the looker’s activity). “Liftyoureyes”(8:5) puts the emphasis on the latter. Seeing is a great theme in this chapter (Häner, 169). [↑](#footnote-ref-229)
230. See the translation footnote on 2:2. [↑](#footnote-ref-230)
231. See the verse-by-verse commentary on 1:1. [↑](#footnote-ref-231)
232. In the phrase סֵמֶל הַקִּנְאָה הַמַּקְנֶה, Vg. sees two forms from קָנָא meaning passion or jealousy (cf. EVV), while LXX simply has “the pillar of the buyer,” seeing a form from קָנָה. That verb can also mean “(pro)create,” which makes sense here, the phrase as a whole involving paronomasia\* (see Lutzky, “Image”; Middlemas, “Transformation,” 117). Amzallag, “Revisiting,” suggests a reference to the bronze altar of 2 Kgs 16:14. [↑](#footnote-ref-232)
233. Vg. translates “so that I might be distant,” which suggests the theme of Yahweh leaving, but there is no indication that Yahweh is the verb’s subject here (see Wong, “Note”). [↑](#footnote-ref-233)
234. LXX translates “one entrance,” but אֶחָד can simply mean “a,” as in 8:7 (see 4:9; 37:16). [↑](#footnote-ref-234)
235. LXX, Vg. have “vapor” for the hapax\* עָָתָר, but Aramaic עׇתַר is a byform\* of עׇשַׁר, “be rich.” [↑](#footnote-ref-235)
236. LXX, Vg. have “about,” but כְּ can mean something more like “actual.” [↑](#footnote-ref-236)
237. The odd form מִשְׁתַּחֲוׅיתֶם looks like a composite from הׅשְׁתַּחֲוָה (on which see the translation comment on 46:2) and שָׁחַת: they were bowing to the sun and thereby bringing destruction on the temple (Rashi and Qimchi, in MG). [↑](#footnote-ref-237)
238. The phrase is is the title of a book about South Africa by Trevor Huddleston (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1956), adapted from G. K. Chesterton, *The Ballad of the White Horse* (London: Methuen, 1911). [↑](#footnote-ref-238)
239. See further Odell, “Image.” [↑](#footnote-ref-239)
240. Jerome adds that he writes this part of his commentary after delaying in the aftermath of the fall of Rome in 410. [↑](#footnote-ref-240)
241. Tooman, “Inviolability,” 510. [↑](#footnote-ref-241)
242. Cf. Kemp, “Renounced.” [↑](#footnote-ref-242)
243. Block, “Abandonment,” 36. [↑](#footnote-ref-243)
244. See, e.g., “The Descent of Ishtar to the Underworld,” in Stephanie Dalley, *Myths from Mesopotamia: Creation, the Flood, Gilgamesh, and Others* (revised ed. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 154–64; “The Epic of Gilgamesh” and “Adapa” in *ANET*, 84, 101–2. [↑](#footnote-ref-244)
245. J. Glen Taylor, *Yahweh and the Sun: Biblical and Archaeological Evidence for Sun Worship in Ancient Israel*, JSOTSup 111 (Sheffield: JSOT, 1993), 150. [↑](#footnote-ref-245)
246. See Carmel McCarthy*, The Tiqqune Sopherim and Other Theological Corrections in the Masoretic Text of the Old Testamen*t, OBO 36 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck, 1981), 91–97. [↑](#footnote-ref-246)
247. The sentence puts the subject before the verb, suggesting here that the cause is circumstantial. In turn, this implies that the circumstantial clause describes an event that has already happened and forms background to what follows. [↑](#footnote-ref-247)
248. The assonance\* and rhyme in the translation correspond to the Heb., הָאֲנָשׁׅיםand הַנֶּאֱנָקׅים. [↑](#footnote-ref-248)
249. Vg. translates בְּרֹאשָׁם “onto their head,” but “onto” is hard to justify as a translation of בְּ. LXX has εỉς. In Acts 18:6 Paul has ẻπὶ τὴν κεφαλὴν when he wishes for someone’s blood to be on their head. Other passages do have “on” the head (עַל; 2 Sam 1:16). [↑](#footnote-ref-249)
250. Olley, “Ezekiel LXX.” [↑](#footnote-ref-250)
251. Schöpflin, “YHWH’s Agents.” [↑](#footnote-ref-251)
252. Daniel Bodi, *The Book of Ezekiel and the Poem of Erra*, OBO 104 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck, 1991), 95–110. [↑](#footnote-ref-252)
253. Keister, for instance (“Man in Linen“), identifies him as Christ. [↑](#footnote-ref-253)
254. See W. Beuken, *TDOT* 13:258. [↑](#footnote-ref-254)
255. Tertullian, *Against Marcion* III, 22. On the “afterlife” of Ezekiel’s reference to a sign, see Block, 1:310–14; further Jack Finegan, “Crosses in the Dead Sea Scrolls: A Waystation on the Road to the Christian Cross,” *Biblical Archaeological Review* 5/6 (1979): 41–48. [↑](#footnote-ref-255)
256. See Rueda, “Breve análise.” [↑](#footnote-ref-256)
257. So Sherlock, “Ezekiel 10.” [↑](#footnote-ref-257)
258. Evans, “Wheels,” sees a divinatory significance in this word. [↑](#footnote-ref-258)
259. At 1:26 Ezekiel had מִמַּעַל, whereas here he has אֶל, which he often uses as effectively a synonym of עַל. [↑](#footnote-ref-259)
260. The repetition of “hesaid” emphasizes what follows and/or slows the narrative down (Greenberg, 1:180), though it might issue from glossing (Dijkstra, “Glosses,” 66). [↑](#footnote-ref-260)
261. Through this chapter and almost confined to it, “inside” is what looks like a f. pl. בֵּינוֹת,rather than the regular בֵּן, which was used in 1:13. [↑](#footnote-ref-261)
262. See Evans, “Angelology”; Evans, “Living Beings.” [↑](#footnote-ref-262)
263. See further Wood, *Wings*, 95–140. [↑](#footnote-ref-263)
264. See further Goldingay, “Ezekiel 10:2.” [↑](#footnote-ref-264)
265. So Houk (“Redaction,” 53), in association with a distinctive suggestion about these chapters’ redaction. [↑](#footnote-ref-265)
266. See further Sweeney, “Destruction.” [↑](#footnote-ref-266)
267. See Wood, *Wings*. [↑](#footnote-ref-267)
268. See, e.g., D. N. Freeman and M. P. O’Connor, *TDOT* 7:314–19. [↑](#footnote-ref-268)
269. See Sedlmeier, “Brüder.” Lust (“Exile and Diaspora”) sees such a passage as a later promise of return from a wider dispersion than the sixth century exile. [↑](#footnote-ref-269)
270. Trouble (אָוֶן) can denote troublesome deeds (wrongful ones) or troublesome experiences that may issue from troublesome deeds. [↑](#footnote-ref-270)
271. This elliptical\* verbless sentence can be read in a number of ways: “We have just been building houses” (so LXX and Vg., who also take it as an unmarked rhetorical question), or “We have been building houses in it“ (Syr: see Mushayabasa, “Utility,” 46–52), or “This is no time to build houses,” or “It’s not near [the trouble that Ezekiel threatens], build houses” (taking the inf. in an imperatival sense; Rashi in MG). It would also be possible to take houses to denote households. [↑](#footnote-ref-271)
272. גְּבוּלliterally means “border,” but often denotes the land enclosed by the border (see BDB). [↑](#footnote-ref-272)
273. אֵת, literally “with” (BDB, 478; cf. Allen, 1:128). [↑](#footnote-ref-273)
274. Literally, “your relatives, your relatives” (cf. Zimmerli, 1:229; also GK 123c). [↑](#footnote-ref-274)
275. LXX makes a sentence out of 11:15 and MT has a setumah at the end of the verse, but 11:15 is extraposed\* and the suffixes in 11:16 pick it up. [↑](#footnote-ref-275)
276. See the translation footnote on 2:6. [↑](#footnote-ref-276)
277. The colon\* is elliptical. Cf. Jer 51:3, another line with a (double) ellipsis after אֶל. [↑](#footnote-ref-277)
278. See the translation footnote on 9:10. [↑](#footnote-ref-278)
279. Warren, “Cannibal Feast.” [↑](#footnote-ref-279)
280. Brownlee, 159–61, notes eight “attempts at comprehension” of the verse. [↑](#footnote-ref-280)
281. See Sedlmeier, “Brüder,” 307–11. [↑](#footnote-ref-281)
282. De Vries, “Presence.” [↑](#footnote-ref-282)
283. See Strine, “Imitation.” [↑](#footnote-ref-283)
284. John F. Kutsko, *Between Heaven and Earth: Divine Presence and Absence in the Book of Ezekiel* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2000), 100. [↑](#footnote-ref-284)
285. Cf. Rom-Shiloni, “Voice”; Rom-Shiloni, “Jerusalem”; Rothenbusch, “Stimme.” [↑](#footnote-ref-285)
286. Cf Schwartz, “Ultimate Aim,” 309. [↑](#footnote-ref-286)
287. Cf. Mitchell, “Ezekiel’s Presentation.” [↑](#footnote-ref-287)
288. Cf. Schwartz, “Dim View,” 47. [↑](#footnote-ref-288)
289. See, e.g., Block, “Divine Abandonment”; Daniel Bodi, *The Book of Ezekiel and the Poem of Erra*, OBO 104 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck, 1991), 183–218. [↑](#footnote-ref-289)
290. Toonan, “Inviolability.” [↑](#footnote-ref-290)