## Getting Ready to Flee (12:1–20)

### Outline

Yahweh commissions Ezekiel to undertake another symbolic act, or a sequence of symbolic acts, embodying the experience of someone forced to flee from his city in forced migration or “exile.” The drama stands for the coming fate of king and people in Jerusalem.

Like the commission and the action in 3:16/4:1–5:4, this one is more complex than that simple description indicates. It involves more than one commission and also an explanation of the act. Both acts in 12:1–20, or both stages of the act, parallel the earlier one in representing aspects of the coming siege and fall of Jerusalem and its aftermath. This account unfolds:

“Yahweh’s word came to me” (12:1–7)

Yahweh commissions an act, and Ezekiel undertakes it

“Yahweh’s word came to me” (12:8–16)[[1]](#footnote-1)

Yahweh explains the act for the benefit of the Kebarites

“Yahweh’s word came to me” (12:17–20)

Yahweh commissions a related symbolic act

The account compares with the account in 3:16/4:1–5:4 in that:

* the background is Yahweh‘s declaration that Ezekiel’s people is a “rebellioushousehold”
* Yahweh commissions Ezekiel to undertake acts related to a siege of Jerusalem
* he gives an explanation of them
* he speaks about scattering and about drawing a sword
* he refers to the effect on eating bread and drinking water
* he speaks about a few people escaping the sword

Differences are that:

* Ezekiel here relates his actually performing the first symbolic act
* Yahweh instructs him to explain the acts to the people
* Ezekiel himself is the “portent” here, whereas in the first drama, the act was the “sign”
* these actions and explanations relate more to exile than to death and destruction
* Yahweh here speaks about the Judahites’ leader in particular

In the manner of parallelism\* these symbolic acts go beyond the first set in some other ways:

* Israel’s being ”a rebellious household” is spelled out as involving their having eyes and ears that they don’t use
* Ezekiel mentions Chaldea (cf. 11:24) and names Babylon for the first time
* He takes up other motifs from intervening chapters: sword, famine, and epidemic; outrages; acknowledging that I am Yahweh; the people of the country; violation; towns laid waste; desolation

There is overlap and difference between the symbolic acts that Yahweh commissions, the interpretation he gives, and the actual fate of Zedekiah as 2 Kgs 25 describes it (see the verse-by-verse commentary). It is typical of First Testament warnings and promises that the fulfillment overlaps with the warning or promise but that there is more in the warning or promise than in the fulfillment and more in the fulfillment than in the warning or promise (Jesus, too, did not fulfill all “messianic promises” and did things that “messianic promises” did not promise). The vision in 8:1–11:25 has illustrated the first aspects of the variance: Ezekiel’s vision of execution in Jerusalem (9:1–10) was way grimmer than the reality in 587, and his vision of Israel’s restoration (11:17–20) was way more wonderful than the reality in 539 and the years that followed. It is likewise typical of First Testament symbolic visions that there is more in the vision than in the interpretation and more in the interpretation than in the vision (the visions in Daniel provide illustrations). The combination of overlaps and differences suggests on one hand that Ezek 12 does recount a message from Ezekiel that antedates 587, otherwise one would expect a closer match between fulfillment and message. It also suggests that the account of Ezekiel’s sign act could have been reworked in light of 587, as part of the process whereby the Ezekiel scroll came into being. One might compare the difference between the pre-AD 70 version of Jesus’ teaching on the coming “days” (Mark 13) and the post-70 versions (Matt 24; Luke 21). But it is not feasible simply to peel off post-587 additions from Ezek 12 and thus identify a 592 version.

### Translation

1Yahweh’s message came to me: 2My man, you are living among the rebellious household, that has eyes for seeing but hasn’t seen, has ears for listening but hasn’t listened, because they are a rebellious household. 3So you, my man, prepare for yourself things for exile and go into exile during the day before their eyes. Go into exile from your place to another place before their eyes—perhaps they will see, because[[2]](#footnote-2) they are a rebellious household—4and take your things out like things for exile during the day in front of their eyes, and you yourself will go out in the evening in front of their eyes like someone going out in exile—5in front of their eyes, break through the wall for yourself and get [them] out through it. 6Lifting [them] on your shoulder in front of their eyes, at dusk you will get [them] out, covering your face so you don’t see the country, because I am making you a portent for Israel’s household.

7I did so, as I was ordered, getting my things out as things for exile during the day, and in the evening I broke through the wall for myself by hand, at dusk getting [them] out on my shoulder, lifting [them] in front of their eyes.

8Yahweh’s message came to me in the morning: 9My man, Israel’s household, the rebellious household, said to you, “What are you doing?” didn’t they. 10Say to them, the Lord Yahweh has said this. This lifting is the prince, in Jerusalem, and Israel’s entire household that are among them.[[3]](#footnote-3) 11Say, I am your portent—as I did, so it will be done for them, in that in exile, in captivity, they will go. 12The prince who is among them, at his shoulder he will lift [them] at dusk and he will go out as they break through the wall so as to get [him] out through it, him covering his face because that man will not see the country with his eye.

13I will spread my net over him and he will be caught in my trap. I will have him come to Babylonia, the country of Chaldea, but it he will not see, and there he will die, 14 while I will scatter to every wind all the people who are around him, his support and all his divisions,[[4]](#footnote-4) and draw a sword after them. 15And they will acknowledge that I am Yahweh through my dispersing them among the nations and scattering them though the countries. 16But I will leave a small number of them from sword, from famine, and from epidemic, in order that they may recount all their outrages among the nations where they come. And they will acknowledge that I am Yahweh.

17Yahweh’s message came to me:

18My man, your bread: with quaking you will eat,

and your water: with trembling and with anxiety you will drink.

19And you are to say to the citizenry, The Lord Yahweh has said this about the people who live in Jerusalem, concerning[[5]](#footnote-5) Israel’s land.

Their bread, with anxiety they will eat,

and their water, with desolation they will drink,

In order that its country will be desolate of what fills it,

of the violence[[6]](#footnote-6) of all the people who live in it.

20As the towns that are lived in become waste,

and the country becomes a desolation,

and you will acknowledge that I am Yahweh.

### Textual Notes

MT has markers\* after 12:7, 16, 20.

**12:2** For בְּתוֹךְ בֵּית־הַמֶּרׅי, “amongtherebellioushousehold,LXX has “among their injustices.”

**12:5** Here and in 12:6, 7, and 12 MT has a number of transitive verbs whose objects have to be understood, for which LXX and Vg. have intransitive or passive verbs.

**12:7** LXX lacks “byhand.”

**12:10** In the tricky 12:10b (see the translation footnote), for הַמַּשָֹּא הַזֶּה, “thislifting,”LXX has “and the prince,” apparently interpreting מַשָֹּא etymologically in light of the meaning of נָשֹׅיא (*HUB*).

**12:19** For יושְׁבַי יְרוּשָׁלַיׅם, “the people who live in Jerusalem,” LXX has “the people of the country of Israel.”

Instead of דְּאגָה, “anxiety,”and שׁׅמָּמוֹן, “desolation, LXX has “need” and “disappearance,” denoting the shortage associated with siege rather than people’s fear.

### Verse-by-Verse Commentary

**12:1–2** Ezekiel’s introduction in 12:1 marks a new beginning, while his comment about “therebellioushousehold”takes readers back to his original commission (2:5–8; 3:9) and to the background to his first symbolic acts (3:26–27). Here it is more explicit that it is their being a rebellious household that issues in the symbolic acts. They will not listen to straightforward words, but maybe symbolic acts will get through to them. Ezekiel spells out what makes a rebellious household: it means having eyes and ears that they don’t use. In Jer 5:21 Yahweh describes the Jerusalemites in these terms, and here he says it about the Kebarites. It’s a paradoxical comment, given that the sequence of material in the scroll has just had Ezekiel sharing his vision of Jerusalem with this household that is willfully blind (11:25).

**12:3** Yahweh’s description of the Kebarites is also paradoxical against the background of Yahweh’s now commissioning a drama that will appeal to the eyes that people don’t use, and subsequently adding a message that will appeal to the ears that they don’t use. Ezekiel is to perform another drama that seeks to bring home to the Kebarites the reality of what Yahweh intends to do in Jerusalem and seeks to change their expectations of the future. They had themselves gone through the experience of forced migration in 597, so they knew about preparing a pack for exile. *B. Nedarim* 40b–41a defines the things that Ezekiel would pack as a lamp, a bowl, and a rug, while *Lamentations Rabbah* (on Lam 1:22) has a skin bottle instead of a lamp. The drama would thus ring painful bells for the Kebarites. But “those to whom this prophecy is addressed have experienced the first catastrophe in 597, have heard of events in Jerusalem since, have heard the prophets, and have learned nothing” (Jenson, 100). A further element in the tragic nature of the portrayal is that the drama will also suggests a repeat of the exodus story in a negative form: see Exod 12 (Sweeney, 70–72).[[7]](#footnote-7)

Given that sign acts can be the means of Yahweh’s initiating the implementation of something he intends (see the Outline to 4:1–5:4, on sign acts), one might wonder whether that is the significance of this drama. But God goes on to make the drama’s significance more explicit, with his “perhaps.” Although the drama may initiate the forced exile that will come in 587, the actuality of that event is not fixed. Yet when Yahweh fulfills his threats and the 587 forced migration has happened, people will see that Yahweh had indeed begun the implementing of his threats by having Ezekiel enact this drama.

**12:4** Ezekiel’s sign act does not simply duplicate or anticipate any of those other migrations. Yahweh divides the drama into a sequence of acts spread over a daytime—evening—dusk—morning sequence that suggests a developing drama, an “escalating crisis followed by calm explanation” (Joyce, 118). Stage one taking place during the day would correspond to the Kebarites’ actual departure from Jerusalem in 597 and similar such events such as Judahite refugees’ carrying their stuff as they left Lachish a century after Sennacherib conquered it in 701, which was portrayed on wall sculptures in Nineveh (see *ANEP*, 373; Odell, 137). It would also mean that people in Kebar could see the drama, and might keep an eye open for what happens next. It’s not explicitly a forced migration. Eventually it’s something like a night flight, though there’s no direct suggestion of a secret escape. Its involving evening and dusk symbolizes its gloomy nature (see, e.g., Jer 13:16).

**12:5–6** Breaking through the wall would imply a mud-brick house wall of the kind that a Babylonian house would have—the word for “wall” (קׅיר) is more a term for a house wall or internal wall (e.g., 8:7–10) than a city wall (חוׄמָה; e.g., 26:4–10). Ezekiel is to cover his face so he doesn’t look at the country during the drama as he leaves the town. He will not look back. His action is a portent for the Kebarites concerning the Jerusalemites—or rather, he himself is the portent, whereas in 4:3 the griddle and Ezekiel’s action were the sign. Portent (מוׄפֵח) and sign (אוׄת) are more or less synonyms: both can refer to an event or a person and both can represent something good or something bad. In the context of the drama, covering his eyes would fit with the implication that he is not going to see the country any more. The migrants’ leaving Jerusalem will mean they will never see the country again. An eighth-century treaty expresses the wish that, if the king of Arpad in Syria offends against his treaty with the Assyrians, may he and his people “not return to his country, and not behold his country again” (*ANET*, 532; Greenberg, 1:211).

**12:7–9** Unusually, Ezekiel reports the fulfilling of Yahweh’s commission, though his doing so draws attention to his not directly reporting the Kebarites’ reaction. We learn of it only through Yahweh’s reference back to it. “Byhand”perhaps makes explicit that he had no opportunity to get some tools. Once again, the Kebarites themselves are here “Israel’shousehold*,* therebellioushousehold.” They are no better than the Jerusalemites. While it would be obvious that the drama represented someone leaving the town and doing so under pressure, it would not be obvious who or why.

**12:10** The explanation is surprising. Nothing in the drama suggested that the migrant was anything other than a lone ordinary Judahite leaving somewhere. But it turns out that the individual represents a “prince” (see the commentary on 7:27). It will be Zedekiah. Ezekiel makes the point in a quadruply clever way, though the multiple cleverness also makes him enigmatic. He uses the word “lifting”(מַשָֹּא) one other time (24:25), but here it links not only with the word “prince” (נָשֹׅיא), which suggests someone lifted up, but also with the motif of lifting one’s stuff (12:6, 7, 12). The prince is the person who will have to set about lifting his stuff, which is more than a little humiliating. Then there are two other resonances of this word for lifting. It has a homonym\* meaning a “message” that other prophets use (e.g., Isa 13:1; Nah 1:1). So “thisliftingistheprince” could equally denote that “thesubjectofthismessageistheprince” in Jerusalem. Further, Jer 23:33–40 works cleverly with these homonyms in pointing out that thesubjectof a message can be a burden that people have to lift up and carry. Jeremiah doesn’t quite say this about Zedekiah, but it would fit with things he does say. Josephus relates that Ezekiel sent this message to Zedekiah, who saw a conflict between Jeremiah’s warning that he would be taken to Babylon and Ezekiel’s declaration that he would not see it, and decided to take no notice of either of them (*Ant*. 10.7; Fairbairn, 120). The Kebarites themselves might not be enthusiastic about Zedekiah. As king they might favor Jehoiachin, who had been forced off to Babylon with them. But they might not be enthusiastic about Zedekiah having to abandon the city, either. Further, the individual representing a leader also represents the people*,* “Israel’sentirehousehold.” Ezekiel here applies this description to the Jerusalemites as opposed to the Kebarites, who might also not be very enthusiastic about the Jerusalemites. Even the Jerusalemites were poor figs (Jer 24), but the Kebarites might not be enthusiastic about them having to abandon the city, either*.*

**12:11–12** So Ezekiel is a portent for the Kebarites. He stands for Zedekiah and for the Jerusalemites, to open the Kebarites’ eyes to the fate that hangs over the Jerusalemites and their prince. The script for the drama and the message that interprets it overlaps with how things actually happened according to 2 Kgs 25:4–7. It does not precisely correspond in the way one might expect if either Yahweh was simply giving the Kebarites an advance video of what would happen or if the message had been composed in light of events. Zedekiah and his staff exited the city through a gate, and the elliptical\* description in 2 Kings implies that the Babylonians made a breach in the city wall rather than that Zedekiah did. Zedekiah’s covering his eyes fits with the fact that he is not going to see the country again, though in his own mind at the time, it could be an expression of shame and grief.

**12:13–16** The second half of Yahweh’s message goes beyond anything indicated by the drama, which included no suggestion that the migration would end in disaster. “Spreadmynet” is a familiar image (Ps 140:5 [6]) that Ms. Jerusalem uses to describe Yahweh’s action in 587 (Lam 1:13). Ezkekiel uses it later to describe the fates of Zedekiah (Ezek 17:20; 19:8) and Pharaoh (32:3). “Caughtinmytrap”is an alternative version of the same metaphor that is more or less peculiar to Ezekiel (also 17:20). The picture is of a game hunter digging a pit and disguising it with netting or foliage, or a bird-hunter simply spreading netting or foliage. A successful warrior king is a successful hunter.[[8]](#footnote-8) Zedekiah will end up in Babylon, like his nephew Jehoiachin, and his fate will correspond to this threat, except that it will be more gruesome and it will give further significance to the slightly enigmatic “hewillnotseeit,” which will cover more than his not seeing his home country anymore (2 Kgs 25:7).

The warnings about the fate of his staff correspond to Ezekiel’s earlier warnings and promises (Ezek 5:2–3, 12; 6:8–10), though he now adds Deuteronomy’s verb “disperse” to Leviicus’s verb “scatter,”[[9]](#footnote-9) and nuance them with the important declaration that the survivors will “recountalltheiroutragesamongthenationswheretheycome*.*”Thus “they will say, ‘Through our acts of waywardness we have suffered, because we acted in this way and in that way,’ and I shall cause it to be acknowledged that it was not for nothing that I made an end of you” (Rashi, in MG). Perhaps the Judahites will now “acknowledgethat IamYahweh” (Qimhi, in MG). Perhaps even the nations will (as Altschuler, in MG, seems to imply).

**12:17–18 “**Yahweh’smessagecametome” marks the beginning of a separate commissioning regarding another drama, in which Ezekiel eats and drinks in anxious fashion to communicate to the Kebarites something about the experience that is coming to the Jerusalemites. This unit can thus be naturally placed to follow 12:1–16. Yahweh’s instruction to Ezekiel comes in a line comprising two parallel cola. Its implication is not that Ezekiel is himself afflicted by quaking and trembling, so that his shaking and fearfulness become an adjunct to his drama and his preaching. The section puts things the other way around. “The prophet has submerged his private feelings and personality in his message” (Clements, 57). The message came first and the private feelings and personality become the servants of the message. Being the Kebarites’ portent (12:11) means focusing on Yahweh rather than on himself, and we learn little about Ezekiel in himself. It’s not that he and what he is he becomes the message. It’s that the message has to determine who he is. Here, he is to make an exhibition of himself by eating and drinking in front of people, in what might be his normal fashion, but manifesting this quaking and trembling for no apparent reason.

**12:19–20** He is to go on to explain what his drama signifies. Three lines comprise further parallel cola and a final colon expresses Yahweh’s characteristic aim, that people come to acknowledge him. Ezekiel is to give his explanation to “thecitizenry,” which might mean the Kebarites in general, or might mean heads of households in Kebar (again, see 7:27, where Ezekiel already spoke of things being fearful and desolatein Jerusalem). His drama constitutes another attempt to get the Kebarites to acknowledge how things in Jerusalem are going to get much grimmer, not better. Yahweh makes clear to Ezekiel that there is going to be “quaking” and “trembling” in Jerusalem that signify a proper “anxiety” about the city’s jeopardy. In explaining his drama to the Kebarites, he is to add “desolation” (שֹׅמָּמוׄן) to “anxiety.”

He then works with the double meaning that attaches to words for desolation in Hebrew, as in English. Being desolate means having a sense of wretchedness, of things being bleak and hopeless, but Yahweh moves from such a sense of desolation to things actually being bleak and hopeless. He moves to speak of the physical reality of “its country,” the land that surrounds Jerusalem, itself becoming desolate(יָשַׄם). Physical desolation could issue in a sense of desolation, but the sense of desolation can also anticipate it. In a strange way it leads to it. It happens “inorderthat”thecountry may be desolate. The לְמַעַן refers to “the divine purpose” (Brownlee, 177) and to the significance of the anxiety and desolation in the context of Yahweh’s intention to have the city fall. Jerusalem will thus “bedesolateofwhatfillsit,” another neatly open-ended expression. What fills it is its population, and the city will become desolate because of this people’s “violence.” But the parallelism in the two cola suggests that the violence is what actually fills the city. Yes, the Judahites indeed “havefilledthecountrywithviolence”(8:17). In a strange way, then, there is good news in the fact that the city will be emptied of what fills it. The declaration recalls the image of the city being purified by the fire that will come to it (10:2).

Yahweh begins the closing tricolon by putting further emphasis on the negative. Yes, the towns will become “waste” and the country “adesolation”(שְׄמָמָה): a third form from that root. But Yahweh closes with “and youwillacknowledgethatIamYahweh.” Noteworthy here is another switch from “they” to “you.” Ezekiel keeps emphasizing the importance of the fate of Jerusalem to the Kebarites, some of whom might be so keen to go “home,” while others might be settling down in Babylonia, than you very much.

### Biblical Theology Comments

Modern thinking would raise questions about the idea that Yahweh could enable a scriptural author to speak of things that are future. Premodern thinking would raise questions about the idea that a scriptural author could retrospectively rework such speaking so that it more closely matches what actually happened. The Scriptures overlap with premodern and modern thinking, allowing that God can and does enable prophets to speak of the future and also showing how God enables prophets and narrators to bring their messages up to date in light of events. One factor behind the difference behind message and event is suggested in 12:3 by Ezekiel’s “perhaps” (אוּלַי). Prophets speak of Yahweh having decided on something he intends to bring about (it might be blessing or trouble) without implying that circumstances or people’s response to his declaration of intent will make no difference (see especially Jer 18:1–11). Yahweh plans things and can picture how things are going to work out, but neither his determining nor his knowledge fixes things independently of circumstances and of people’s response. “Perhaps” is a key word in the Scriptures (Exod 32:30; Num 23:3; Josh 14:12; 1 Sam 6:5; 2 Kgs 19:4; Jonah 1:6; Zeph 2:3; Acts 8:22; 2 Tim 2:25). “‘Perhaps’ is God’s sigh” here (Allen 1:178). It is also an invitation to his servant. Calvin (1:420) reflects:

When God imposes on us any duty, we dispute with ourselves as to its result, and thus all energy flags…. Because, therefore, we are always too attentive to the fruit of our labor, hence this passage should be diligently regarded, when God sends his Prophet and yet adds, *if by chance they should listen.*

### Application and Devotional Implications

The people of God are or can be a rebellious household that has ears to listen but doesn’t see, and ears to see but hasn’t looked. Deut 29:4 [3] traces the problem back to Israel’s beginnings, and comments that it was Yahweh who had not given Israel a mind to understand, eyes to see, or ears to hear. In Isaiah’s day he had threatened that it would be so for Judah (Isa 6:9–10), and it is so in Ezekiel’s day. So it will be in Jesus’ day, when people are in that position and do not acknowledge it (John 9:41; Jerome, 118). It is a situation to be feared, but the temptation for readers is to think that blindness and deafness is other people’s problem. Jesus will presuppose these dynamics in telling parables (see Matt 13:10–15, with an appeal to Isa 6:9–10). He will also presuppose them in performing miracles, which are symbolic acts like Ezekiel’s, though in another sense. Yet in telling parables and performing miracles for people who decline to use their eyes or ears, Jesus operates with parallel logic to Ezekiel. The people are deaf and blind, but perhaps….

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## Prophecy and Imagination (12:21–14:11)

### Outline

A sequence of messages concern themselves with prophets and prophecy:

* with people who are sceptical towards prophetic message that are true but that they think are empty (12:21–28)
* with people who prophesy from their own imaginations, speak deceptively, and do deliver empty messages (13:1–23)
* with people consulting a prophet when they are simultaneously consulting idols (14:1–11)

First, then, 12:21–28 sets out two pieces of argument that parallel each other in the way they work. In 12:21–25 Yahweh declares that he will certainly do what he says, and soon. In 12:26–28 he focuses on the “soon,” speaking more briefly and simply while also adding punch. It unfolds:

12:21 introduction 12:26

12:22 a saying to be disputed 12:27

12:23aα a double introduction to Yahweh’s riposte 12:28aα

12:23aβ Yahweh’s negative rejoinder 12:28aβ

12:23b–25bα Yahweh’s counter-statement 12:28bα

12:25bβ a concluding reinforcement 12:28bβ

Second, 13:1–23 concerns “not a lack of prophetic vision but competing prophetic visions,” in that there are other prophets than Ezekiel who will also be people who want to serve Yahweh faithfully and encourage their people in exile, but Ezekiel declares that they are wrong in the way they do it (Bowen, 66, 67). An introduction covers the chapter as whole, which then comprises two confrontations in 13:2–16 and 17–23. Both divide into two accusations followed by threats, and both have classic markers of prophet accusations and threats and also incorporate Ezekiel’s trademark “and you will acknowledge that I am Yahweh”:

13:1 introduction to 13:1–23

13:2–16: prophets who fail their people with false declarations that things are well

13:2–7 oh, villainous prophets

13:8–9 therefore…

on account of…

(Yahweh’s affirmation)

and you will acknowledge…

13:10–16 on account of…

therefore…

and you will acknowledge…

(Yahweh’s affirmation)

13:17–23: women who prophesy but who deceive people with their devices

13:17–19 oh, women who prophesy

13:20–21 therefore…

and you will acknowledge…

13:22–23 on account of…

therefore…

and you will acknowledge…

The chapter has an above average number of unusual or puzzling expressions. In 13:10–16 the effect is to underscore the jerky content of the confrontation and threat. In 13:17–20 the effect is to underline the alien nature of what the verses describe. Whereas Ezekiel can sometimes express himself in poetic rhythm but prosaic terms (as he does in 13:9), sometimes he expresses himself in prosaic rhythm but with poetic creativity and challenge, and this feature along with the jerkiness of the effect makes the section compare in these respects with 1:4–28. The unusual or puzzling features include:

* 13:10: the repetition “onaccount*,* yes*,* onaccount” otherwise occurs only in Lev 26:43 (also once without the וְ, in Ezek 36:3)
* הׅטְעוּ (“theyhavemisled”)is a hapax\* alternative for a form from תָעָה
* חַיׅץ (“partition”) is a hapax
* 13:11: תָּפֵל וְיׅפּׄל (“plastersoitwillfall”) makes for a paronomasia\*
* beginning direct speech with וְ, וְיׅפּׄל (“soitwillfall”) is unusual
* the *qatal\** הָיָה (“iscoming,” literally “has come/happened”) is unusual
* the form אַנְתָּה (“you”) is odd (see BDB, 61), though it recurs in 13:20
* the jump to apostrophe\* in addressing hailstones (or granite rock)[[10]](#footnote-10) and wind is abrupt
* אֶלְגָּבׅישׁ (“hail”) occurs only here and in 13:13; 38:22
* the piel תְּבַקֵּעַ (“youwilltearapart”) without an object is unusual
* 13:12: the *qatal* נָפַל (“isfalling,” literally “has fallen”) applying to the future is unusual
* 13:13: וּבׅקַּעְתּׅי is another unusual instance of direct speech beginning ו
* ּבּׅקַּעְתּׅי (causative, “Iwillhavestormwindstearitapart”) is another unusual piel
* the threefold shifting syntactical sequence (first-person verb, third-person verb, noun clause) has a jerky effect
* 13:13–15: the use of varying forms from the root כָּלָה “finish” makes for paronomasia
* 13:16: the phrase “Israel’sprophets” otherwise occurs only in 13:2 and 37:18
* 13:17: the combination of hitpael and niphal forms from נָבָא (“prophesy”) creates ambiguity
* the expression “act as prophets, out of their mind” is elliptical\*
* 13:18: כֶּסֶת (“band”) occurs only here and in 13:20
* אַצּׅיל (“joint”) occurs only here, perhaps in 41:8, and in Jer 38:12
* the first-person or perhaps dual (GK 87f) יָדַי (“hands”) is unexpected and puzzling
* מׅסְפָּחָה (“veil”) occurs only here and in 13:21
* the expression רֹאשֹ כׇּל קוֹמָה (“headofeveryheight”) is unusual
* 13:18–20: the repeated occurrence of נְפָשׄוֺת (“individuals” is unusual
* 13:20: the verb פָּרַח (“fly”) occurs only here, and the preposition לְ is puzzling

Third, 14:1–11 then has its own distinctive introduction, so that the medieval chapter division corresponds to a shift from 12:21–28 and 13:1–23. But Ezekiel here deal with another question (or two) about prophets and their relationship with their people. The distinctive introduction leads into a section that is also distinctive over against familiar forms of prophetic speech, though like 12:21–28 and 13:1–23 it divides into two, and it has some of the same markers as 13:1–23:

14:1 introduction

14:2–11 elders who consult a prophet while also worshiping by means of images

14:2–8 when people come to consult Ezekiel

therefore…

therefore…

and you will acknowledge…

14:9–11 when a prophet lets himself be misled

then they will be my people…

(Yahweh’s affirmation)

Instead of working with familiar forms of prophetic speech, in his reply to the elders Ezekiel here speaks more like the priest that he is. He works with priestly idioms and language that parallel features of the Torah, especially of Leviticus:

* 14:4, 7: the expression “any individual” (אׅישׄ אׅישׄ) recurs especially in Leviticus (e.g., 17:3)
* 14:4, 7, 8: the expressions “I Yahweh” and “I am Yahweh” that recur throughout Ezekiel are also typical of Leviticus, which uses the phrase “I am Yahweh” far more than any other book apart from Ezekiel
* 14:7: reference to rules applying also to the alien residing in Israel recurs in Leviticus (e.g., 17:10–13) and Numbers
* 14:7: the verb “dedicates himself” (נָזַר) occurs mainly in Leviticus (e.g., 22:2) and Numbers
* 14:8: the expression “I will set my face” recurs in passages such as Lev 20:3–6
* 14:8: the verb “cut off from among his/their people” (כָּרַת hiphil) recurs especially in Leviticus (e.g., 20:3–6), in association with the preceding expression
* 14:9: the use of כּׅי (when) after the subject recurs in rules in Leviticus (e.g., 1:2; 2:1)
* 14:10: the expression “carry waywardness” recurs especially in Leviticus (e.g., 5:1, 17)

As with his reflecting prophetic forms of speech, Ezekiel uses priestly forms in a distinctive way. He also uses his own characteristic expressions such as “lumps,” “downfall,” “Lord Yahweh,” “Israel’s household,” “outrages,” “acknowledge that I am Yahweh,” “they may be my people and I may be God for them.” And the passage has other distinctive expressions such as “take up onto their mind,” “let myself be consulted” (with the repetition of that verb), “letting myself respond” (an anticipatory *qatal\**), “seize by their mind,” “estranged themselves” (נָזֺרוּ, with the paronomasia with “dedicates himself” from the verb נָזַר), “all of them” (appended to the end of the sentence), “turn” and “turn back” (qal then hiphil), “make a response,” and “make him a sign and sayings.”

Like 12:1–20, these three units speak to the situation in the period before 587, but they could have been written for listening and reading after 587. On one hand, there are many *yiqtol\** verbs, Yahweh’s day is still future, and prophets and people need to heed Ezekiel in order that the final calamity might be averted. On the other hand, the *qatal* verbs (such as “have not gone up,” “have misled”) could easily be translated as aorist (“did not go up,” “misled”). The necessity to turn was urgent both before and after 587. In 592 or after 587, keeping Torah is key to Israel’s destiny, to the possibility of escape from catastrophe or of restoration after catastrophe.

### Translation

21Yahweh’s message came to me: 22My man, what is this saying that you people have, on Israel’s land:[[11]](#footnote-11)

Days lengthen, but every revelation perishes.

23Therefore say to them, The Lord Yahweh has said this. I am putting an end to this saying. They will not pronounce it any longer in Israel—rather speak to them,

Days are drawing near—every revelation, fact.

24Because no longer will there be any empty revelation or facile divination within Israel’s household. 25Because I Yahweh, I speak the message that I speak, and it will happen—it will not delay any longer, because in your days, rebellious household, I speak a message and I will make it happen[[12]](#footnote-12) (an affirmation of the Lord Yahweh).

26Yahweh’s message came to me: 27My man, there, Israel’s household are saying,

The revelation that he sees is for many days,

and for far off times he prophesies.

28Therefore say to them, The Lord Yahweh has said this. No longer will any message of mine delay, in that I will speak a message and it will happen (an affirmation of the Lord Yahweh).

13:1Yahweh’s message came to me: 2My man, prophesy concerning[[13]](#footnote-13) the prophets of Israel who are prophesying, and say to the prophets [prophesying] out of their mind, :Listen to Yahweh’s message.” 3The Lord Yahweh has said this. Hey:[[14]](#footnote-14) about the villainous prophets who walk after their spirit, and so that they might not have seen,[[15]](#footnote-15) 4your prophets being like jackals in the ruins, Israel! 5You have not gone up into the breaches and built a fence for Israel’s household, for it to stand in the battle on Yahweh’s day. 6They have had a revelation of emptiness and of lying divination, the people saying “Yahweh’s affirmation” when Yahweh has not sent them, and waiting for the confirming of a message. 7It has been an empty revelation you have had and lying divination you have uttered, hasn’t it, when saying “Yahweh’s affirmation” and I had not spoken.

8Therefore the Lord Yahweh has said this. On account of your speaking emptiness and your having a revelation of lies, therefore, here am I, towards you (an affirmation of the Lord Yahweh). 9My hand will be towards the prophets who have a revelation of emptiness and who divine lies:

In my people’s council they will not be present,

in the document of Israel’s household they will not be inscribed,

and into Israel’s land they will not come.

And you will acknowledge that I am Yahweh.

10On account, yes, on account of how they have misled my people, in saying “Things are well” but they are not well, with it[[16]](#footnote-16) building a partition and there are they, coating it with plaster, 11say to the people coating with plaster: “It will fall—driving rain is coming, and you, hailstones, you will fall, and storm wind, you will tear apart.” 12So, there, the wall is falling—it will be said to you, “Where is the coating that you put on?,” won’t it.

13Therefore the Lord Yahweh has said this. So I will have storm wind tear it apart in my fury, and driving rain in my anger will come, and hailstones in fury to a finish. 14I will throw down the wall that you have coated with plaster and make it hit the earth so that its foundation becomes bare. So it will fall,[[17]](#footnote-17) and you will come to a finish in the middle of it. And you will acknowledge that I am Yahweh. 15So I will express my fury to the finish on the wall and on the people coating it with plaster. And I will say to you, “There is no wall and there are no people coating it—16Israel’s prophets regarding Jerusalem, yes, the people having for it a revelation of things being well, but things are not well” (an affirmation of the Lord Yahweh).

17And you, My man, set your face to the women of your people who act as prophets, out of their mind. Prophesy against them 18and say, the Lord Yahweh has said this. Hey: you who sew bands on all the wrists[[18]](#footnote-18) and make veils for the head of every height, to prey on individuals! Do you prey on the individuals belonging to my people, but the individuals belonging to you,[[19]](#footnote-19) you keep alive? 19You have treated me as ordinary for my people, for handfuls of barley and for pieces of bread, putting to death individuals who would not die and keeping alive individuals who would not live, through your lying to my people who listen to a lie.

20Therefore the Lord Yahweh has said this. Here am I, towards your bands, where you are preying on individuals, as flying things.[[20]](#footnote-20) I will tear them from on your arms and send off the individuals on whose lives you are preying, as flying things. 21I will tear off your veils and save my people from your hand, and no longer will they will be in your hand as prey. And you will acknowledge that I am Yahweh. 22On account of your saddening the heart of the faithful person falsely when I did not sadden him, and strengthening the hands of the faithless person so that he does not turn from his dire path so as to keep him alive, 23therefore you will not have empty revelation and no longer will you practice divination. I will save my people from your hand. And you will acknowledge that I am Yahweh.

14:1Some individuals from Israel’s elders came to me and sat in front of me. 2And Yahweh’s message came to me: 3My man, in that these individuals have taken up their lumps onto their mind and put their downfall, their waywardness,[[21]](#footnote-21) before their faces, shall I actually let myself be inquired of[[22]](#footnote-22) for them? 4Therefore speak with them and say to them: The Lord Yahweh has said this. Any individual from Israel’s household who takes up his lumps into his mind and puts his downfall, his waywardness, before his face, but comes to the prophet, I Yahweh am letting myself respond to him, coming with his profusion of lumps, 5in order to seize Israel’s household by their mind, in that they have estranged themselves from me with their lumps, all of them.

6Therefore say to Israel’s household, The Lord Yahweh has said this. Turn back, turn yourselves back[[23]](#footnote-23) from attachment to[[24]](#footnote-24) your lumps. From attachment to all your outrages, turn your face. 7Because any individual from Israel’s household or from the alien who resides in Israel who dedicates himself away from following me so that he should take up[[25]](#footnote-25) his lumps into his mind, and puts his downfall, his waywardness, before his face, but comes to the prophet to consult me for himself, I Yahweh am going to let myself respond to him, myself.[[26]](#footnote-26) 8I will set my face against that individual and make him a sign and sayings, and cut him off from among my people. And you will acknowledge that I am Yahweh.

9And when a prophet is taken in and speaks a message, as I Yahweh have taken in that prophet, I will stretch out my hand against him and destroy him from among my people Israel, 10and they will carry their waywardness, in that as the waywardness of the person consulting, so the waywardness of the prophet will be, 11in order that Israel’s household may no longer wander from following me and they may no longer defile themselves by all their acts of rebellion, and may be a people for me and I may be God for them (an affirmation of the Lord Yahweh).

### Textual Notes

MT has markers\* after 12:26, 28; 13:7, 12, 16, 19; 14:1, 3, 5, 8, and 11.

**12:24** LXX “gracious” puts a positive spin on חָלָק (“facile”).

For בֵּית (“houseof”), LXX “sons of” implies בְּנֵי.

**12.25** LXX lacks “(anaffirmationoftheLordYahweh).”

**12:26–28** is not present in P 967.[[27]](#footnote-27)

**12:27** LXX also has “that embitters” to describe the household, its rendering of מְרׅי “rebellion” in (e.g.) 12:25.

**13:2–3** LXX has a shorter version of these verses.

**13:4** LXX “they did not stand in a firm place and gather flocks to Israel’s household” paraphrases MT.

**13:6** LXX lacks “peoplewhosay‘Yahweh’saffirmation.’”

**13:7** LXX lacks“whensaying‘Yahweh’saffirmation,’ and I hadnotspoken.”

**13:9** For סוֹד, “council,” LXX “teaching” perhaps implies a form from יָסַר (Cornill, 248).

**13:10** For תָּפֵל, which occurs only in this chapter and in 22:28, LXX “it will fall” implies תּׅפּׄל.

**13:11** וְְאַתֵּנָה (“andyou”) is an odd form. LXX, Vg. “and I will give” imply וְאֶתְּנָה. One would then translate what follows “hailstones that will fall and a storm wind that will tear apart.”

**13:14** For בְּתוֹכָהּ (“in the middle of it”), LXX “with reproach” implies בְּתוֹכַחַת (Cornill, 249).

**13:20** LXX lacks the first לְפֹרְחוֹת, “as flying things.”

**14:3** For גּׅלּוּלֵיהֶם (“their lumps”), LXX has “their notions.” So also in 14:4, 5, 7, while in 14:6 it has “practices” (see further the textual note on 20:7).

**14:4** For Q בָּא, “coming,” K בה “with it” anticipates the phrase that follows.

For “comingwithhisprofusionoflumps,” LXX has “by which his mind is held fast.”

**14:7** At the end of the verse LXX also has “that by which he is held fast.”

**14:8** For “asignandsayings,”LXX has “a wilderness and annihilation” (cf. 6:14).

**14:9** For יְפֻתֶּה, “is taken in,” LXX “takes in” implies יְפַתֶּה.

### Verse-by-Verse Commentary

**12:21–23** The introduction once more marks the beginning of an originally separate message, with a new subject, though the message can again be naturally attached to what precedes. It relates not to a symbolic act but to something people are saying. When Yahweh says “youpeople”he is addressing people “on Israel’s land,” but as usual it is the Kebarites who will hear his words. He ia speaking about Israel’sאֲדָמָה, the soil to which the Kebarites would like to get back.

One can imagine Jerusalemites lamenting the fact that prophets like Hananiah made promises about Israel’s blessing and restoration that never come true (see 13:6–7). Ezekiel will make such promises in due course, and may eventually be the subject of such complaints. If people did have promises in mind rather than threats, he turns their lament on its head. He responds to their brisk aphorism, “Days lengthen, but every revelation perishes,” their מָשָׄל, with a saying of his own that is also characterized by a “four-worded pungency” (Taylor, 120), “Days near—every revelation, fact.”[[28]](#footnote-28) It is the threats that they need to think about. They are right that the threats often get delayed, but they will soon come about (2 Pet 3 will argue in the same way). People could be scornful about whether gloomy prophetic prognostications would come true: after all, is Yahweh not a God of love, faithfulness, and mercy? (see Isa 5:19; Jer 5:12; 17:15). “The reaction to Ezekiel's prophecy was then, in effect, a shrug of the shoulders” (Blenkinsopp, 68). They are immunized against the prophetic word (Sedlmeier 1:173). In a strange way, “the Lord hath an admiring indignation at the wickedness of his people” (Greenhill, 293).

**12:24–25** Yahweh’s continuation in prose expounds the significance of his epigram, though he also continues to be convoluted for a while. The initial problem is the oxymoron “emptyrevelation.” If something is a revelation, it can’t be empty. If it’s empty, it can’t be a revelation. So Yahweh is either talking about a so-called revelation that is empty (like the revelations that come from the prophets who make promises) or about an actual revelation that people accuse of being empty (like the messages that come through people like Jeremiah, Uriah, and Ezekiel).

The parallel expression “faciledivination”more or less decides which way to read the first expression, because nobody could call Jeremiah, Uriah, or Ezekiel “facile,” and it would be unusual to call them “divination.” Yahweh is declaring that there will be no more prophets bringing messages characterized by emptiness (שָׄוְא) in the sense that they contain nothing real and do not come true, or messages that are facile (חָלָק), smooth or reassuring. The reason is that the messages delivered by people like Jeremiah, Uriah, and Ezekiel will have come true and will have shown that other prophets’ facile messages were empty. “Because IYahweh*,* Ispeakthemessagethat Ispeak*,* anditwillhappen.” I speak whatever message I wish. Yahweh uses the idiom that he uses in Exod 3:14 when he says “I am who I am” or “I will be what I will be.” Because I am the one who speaks it, it comes true. And that coming true is going to happen now. There will be no more delay. Well, there will be the five years between 592 and 587, but what is that, except half a decade to give the Jerusalemites one last chance and to give time to get Babylon’s ducks in a row? It’s “anaffirmationoftheLordYahweh,” so you had better believe it.

**12:26–28** Yet another new introduction marks yet another separate message, with similar implications to the one in 12:21–25. The people can speak in poetic parallelism, too—at least as Ezekiel sums up Yahweh summing them up. Here, too, Ezekiel might be referring to promises of restoration that don’t come true or threats of disaster that don’t come true. And either Yahweh turns upside down the kind of prophecies they need to think about, or says that the warnings will now come true. A difference is that 12:21–25 spoke more generally about prophets whose messages were full of threats, whereas here Yahweh is speaking about Ezekiel in particular. Another difference is that the skepticism in 12:21–25 concerned whether Yahweh’s alleged threats would ever come true, whereas 12:26–28 concern the conviction that they won’t come true in the near future (cf. Amos 6:3; Isa 39:5–8). Wrong again, says Yahweh, in familiar terms.

**13:1–3** In this second, separate message about prophets, Yahweh commissions Ezekiel to speak “concerning the prophets of Israel.” It is a distressing expression, given who these prophets are (the phrase otherwise occurs only in 13:16; 38:17). To describe them as “prophets… who are prophesying” underscores the grievous point. So does the paradoxical phrase “prophesy concerning the prophets” (Joyce, 120, even more so as Joyce translates “againstthe prophets”). In 12:21–26 it wasn’t explicit whether the prophets who uttered the “empty revelation” and “facile divination” were in Jerusalem or Babylonia or both. There are prophets in both settings (see, e.g., Jer 23 and 29). Here Yahweh does commission Ezekiel not only to speak “concerning the prophets” but to speak “to the prophets,” to tell them to “listen.” But speaking “to the prophets” need no more imply being in their presence than speaking to Jerusalem does. Through 13:1–11 Ezekiel switches between rhetorically addressing the prophets and rhetorically addressing the community as a whole. It’s a message the prophets need to hear, but it’s also a message that the community needs to hear.

Initially, Yahweh analyzes the basic problem about the prophets, in Ezekiel’s terse phrase, as that they are “prophets out of their mind” (cf. 13:17), out of their heart, out of their imagination, out from inside them rather than from some external, supernatural source. Ezekiel might recognize that his words involved his mind and imagination, but not just those. Yahweh has three other points to make about them. First, they are “villainous” (נָבָל), like Nabal, a term especially for someone “foolish, senseless,” who “has no perception of ethical and religious claims, and with collat.[eral] idea of ignoble*,* disgraceful” (BDB). It is strong language to apply to prophets, but it compares with Jer 23:14; 29:23 (Taylor, 121). It would link with their being people who “walk after their spirit,” who live their lives in a way that suits their urges and instincts. Thirdly, and paradoxically, they think they want to be able to see and thus to speak prophetically. But without realizing it, they have lived thus “in order that they might not have seen.”

**13:4–5** The result is that their prophesying does Israel no good. While the 597 siege will have caused damage to Jerusalem, it didn’t turn it into wasteland or into ruins in which jackals or foxes would freely rummage. The 587 siege will have something more like that result (Lam 5:18). But in 592, Israel as a nation is like a city whose moral or religious defenses are in a perilous state. “Ezekiel… invites the hearers to imagine Israel as a society in ruins” (Block, 1:401). In this sense it is a waste, or like a sheepfold or vineyard with no protective fence. The job of prophets is to facilitate the building of such a fence, to identify the holes in Israel’s protective moral and religious barricade. “A fox makes a comfortable den among fallen ruins, and is in his element there,” maybe adding to the damage through its rummaging (Neh 4:3 [3:35]), which is how these prophets are as they feel perfectly at ease in this disastrous situation. “They enjoy it and even make themselves at home in it and exploit it!” (Eichrodt, 163). The literal “breaches” (פֶּרֶץ) would be the holes made by a battering ram. Tg. assumes that standing in the breach is a way of referring to prayer: “you did not stand in prayer to prevent the retribution” (Altschuler, in MG), which is a neat idea. But here the context suggests that standing in the breach denotes the prophet’s vocation to try to get the people to change. That was the way to enable them to escape devastation, like Jonah in Nineveh (Zimmerli, 1:293). Eichrodt (164–65) explains:

When the besieger has succeeded in making breaches in the wall of the city which he is attacking, then everything depends on whether the besieged will be able to close the gap in their defences by an extemporized wall, to keep the enemy from breaking in, and whether they will succeed in doing so before the storming party mounts the breach. Such a duty calls for soldiers who have realized in time the danger which threatens and are determined at all costs to keep it out. In drawing this picture of the most perilous moment of a siege in order to show what it is a prophet's duty to do, and what these prophets ought to have done and have failed to do, Ezekiel makes it clear what a high regard he has for a prophet's calling. But what he really means can only be understood when one tries to see what the prophet thought was the danger which threatened Israel. The attacker by whom Israel seems about to be stormed and brought to ruin is not one of those earthly powers whom the people prepare to repel, and upon whom their eyes are wholly fixed, but Yahweh himself in person. To parry his threatened attack, repeated declarations that all will be well, made in imitation of the example given by the anti-Assyrian prophecies of the great Isaiah, are not enough. What is more urgently needed is, first, a clear eye to see what the present peril is, and then, a readiness to provide the people with the only means by which they can hold their ground in face of this particular danger. The day of Yahweh, the great day of judgment, is about to dawn. In this final settling of the account between the holy God and his sinful people, Israel's fate is already sealed, unless at this last moment it can be shown the way in which it can be delivered. But that can happen only if prophecy itself is ready to confess Yahweh's great fundamental demands, and to impress them once more upon the hearts and consciences of the people.

Because “Yahweh’s day” is coming, as it will in 587. Only here and in 30:3 does Ezekiel use this actual expression, though Ezekiel and other First Testament books often refer to Yahweh’s day using expressions such as “that day” and “the day of Yahweh’s wrath” (e.g., 7:7, 10, 12, 19). The idea of Yahweh’s day includes the idea of Yahweh engaging in the ultimate battle against forces that resist him. Israel needs to be able to count itself as on his side when that battle comes.

**13:6–9** The trouble is that the prophets bring “a revelation of emptiness and of lying divination” (on divination*,* see the verse-by-verse commentary on 13:23). Hebrew does not have a word for “false prophet,” as Greek does (LXX uses it in passages such as Jer 6:13), but Ezekiel’s phraseology here indicates the nature of what a false prophet would say. The prophets Ezekiel is critiquing proclaim revelations about the future that are not God-given, will not correspond to reality, and deceive people with disastrous consequences. The vocation of prophets is to stand between Yahweh and the people, identifying with both. These prophets identify with neither.[[29]](#footnote-29) They will pay a price. Ezekiel has three ways of describing essentially the same fate, in a tricolon of three parallel cola. First, they will lose their place in “my people’s council,” the assembly of Israel (Ps 111:1), or perhaps the body of senior members of the community that makes its decisions. There is also an irony in the comparison with the different way Jeremiah uses the word “council” (סוֺד) in connection with prophets (Jer 23:18, 22). Second, and worse, they will lose their place in the body of the community in a more general sense. Third, they will not be among the people who come (back) to Israel’s land, of whom there will indeed be a register (see Ezra 2:62). The point would have even more force after 587 and for the bigger Judahite community that now lived in Babylonia.

**13:10–12** More specifically, the lying in their so-called revelation consists in saying that things are well, that things are good, that there is *shalom*, when actually there is not. Saying שָׁלוׄם וְאֵין שָׁלוׄם was Jeremiah’s critique of the prophets (Jer 6:14). He doubles up the שָׁלוׄם and repeats the charge later (Jer 8:11). It is one of the passages where LXX ses the word ψευδοπροφήτης. It’s not clear whether these prophets were denying that things in the present are so bad or affirming that things in the future are going to be good. Ezekiel is trying to get people to face the facts about the future. Either way, *shalom* is an important word: it suggests everything going well, the community flourishing, the farm having good harvests, the family thriving, and the nation being at peace. To say, then, that there will be no *shalom* is as daring a reversal as Amos applies to Yahweh’s day when he says it will be not light and happiness but darkness and gloom (Amos 5:18–20; Jenson, 113).

How lovely are the feet of people who announce *shalom* (Isa 52:7)! Not at the moment (Calvin, 2:18). These people are misleading “mypeople”: the occurrences in 13:9 and 10 are the first in Ezekiel, and in 13:10 “‘my people’ has a ring of outrage” (Allen, 1:202). “Mypeople”are going through the motions of taking action to strengthen the city’s defenses, but the action they are taking would be laughable if it were not tragic. They are building a wall, but it’s the kind of wall that might separate one bit of the house from another, a “partition”(חַיׅץ: see *DTT*). And the prophets are like people applying plaster (תָּפֵל)[[30]](#footnote-30) to this wall, which is okay for an internal wall or a vineyard wall, but not for the wall the city needs in light of the storm that is going to come upon it. Yahweh bids Ezekiel to bid the storm to do its work, in something like another sign act.

**13:12–16.** He then speaks to the prophets as if the storm has already responded to this bidding and the wall has fallen (נָפַל is *qatal*). Not much good your plaster, then, was it? Here, the word for a “wall”קׅיר)) is different from the word for a partition,but it’s not much of an improvement. It’s the word for the internal wall that Ezekiel once dug through in a vision (8:7–10) and then for the house wall that he dug through in his sign act (12:5, 7). What Yahweh adds in his closing threat is “anger,”threefold “fury,” and a threefold underlining of the devastating nature of the storm that he threatens: “to a finish,” “you will come to a finish,” “I will express… to the finish”(the noun כָּלָה, the qal of the verb כָּלָה, and the piel of the verb כָּלָה). The stress on devastation suggests that the references to wrath point to the furious nature of the storm and the destruction. No, things are not going to be well. Just as well that the actual devastation in 587 was not so total.

**13:17 “**Setyourface**”** is a solemn new beginning to this new message (see 6:2). The subjects of 13:17–23 are the female equivalents of the men in 13:1–16, so that critiquing some women as well as some men in 13:1–23 compares with 8:5–18. While “God raised up women prophets to honour that sex, and to help his People,” as well as raising up men, the devil can do the same (Greenhill, 311–12). And perhaps Ezekiel “had rather have contended with men then women, and more honour it had been for him; but he must do as bidden” (Trapp, 426). He presumably knew of women prophets such as Miriam, Deborah, and Huldah, but he doesn’t apply the term “prophets” or “prophetesses” to the women here. His subsequent description of their role might mean they did not see themselves this way. They were people who “actasprophets.” That form of the verb (נָבָא hitpael) can apply to a prophet of whom the text approves (e.g., Jer 26:20), but it could be a put down, like the English expression. Actually, the male prophets in 13:1–16 were merely “acting as prophets,” since they were not bringing Yahweh’s word. If the women focused their ministry on the practices Ezekiel will go on to describe, then his point here may be that they acted as prophets in that they brought people messages through their ministry to them. The noun “prophet” might imply more a public and political ministry, whereas the ministry of women was more individual or familial. Ezekiel’s point is that these women had in common with the men that when they spoke, their message came out of their own minds.

**13:18** We don’t know the nature of the practices Ezekiel refers to. The “bands” or pads (כְּסָתוׄת) might not be so different from the bands required by the Torah (e.g., Exod 13:9, 16), later called tefillin or phylacteries.[[31]](#footnote-31) They might be amulets, sacramental means of protection from evil and danger.[[32]](#footnote-32) The veils or shawls (מׅסְפָּחוׄת) might be not so different from the veil that Moses put on (Exod 34:33–35). In using these devices, the women would be aiming to bring people healing, protection, or release. We have examples of Hittite rituals used by women ministers that seek to counteract impotence and domestic quarrels, and of Assyrian and Babylonian texts that seek to counteract the witchcraft that might lie behind such problems and others.[[33]](#footnote-33) Other Hebrew words than “prophet” might indeed then better fit the role of these women, words such as charmer, chanter, exorcist, expert, and diviner, as might other English words such therapist, healer, and counsellor.

Most religious practices and aids to worship (images, sacrifice, pilgrimage, fasting, singing) are religiously neutral, and the First Testament can be positive or negative about them. Everything depends on the understanding of God that they serve. Both Testaments show how prophecy, prayer, healing, and sacramental acts can combine in positive ways (e.g., 1 Kgs 17:17–24; 2 Kgs 5; 20:1–11; Mark 7:33; 8:23; John 9:6) (Odell, 152). So how are the bands and veils means whereby the women “prey*”* onpeople (צוּד polel) like people trying to catch birds? English words such as witch or sorcerer again likely read alien implications into Ezekiel and into the Hebrew words and the roles they refer to. But bands on the arms might suggest binding people, and veils over them might have a similar implication. The women capture people into serving gods other than Yahweh, and through their ministry maintain their own lives and the lives of the people who belong to them.

**13:19** As is the case with other religious figures whom prophets attack, the women of whom Ezekiel speaks might or might not be overtly seeking to serve other gods and thus drawing their clients into that service. Speaking of them prophesying and (paradoxically) of them treating Yahweh as ordinary or profaning him suggests that they see themselves as seeking to serve Yahweh in their ministry. But they are doing so in a way that turns Yahweh into another god. Either implication of profaning (חָלׅל piel), treating something special as ordinary or polluting something sacred, might apply here, and either implication suggests that their action has the same effect as foreigners trampling in the temple (see 7:21–22). Either way, reference to prophesying and profaning doesn’t suggest that they worked within the framework of magical thinking, if magic implies believing that one can make things happen independently of “natural” or “supernatural” forces. The women are not even seeking to use white magic to counteract black magic. Nevertheless, they have “treated me as ordinary for my people” in the effect they have had on Israelites’ understanding of Yahweh.

They have done so “forhandfulsofbarleyandforpiecesofbread,” for the gifts they receive in return for their ministry. Being given such offerings is again something religiously neutral. Both Testaments validate the financial support of ministers. But the combination of profanation and payment adds to the scandal Ezekiel critiques. It is through receiving such offerings that they keep themselves alive. That hints at a grim irony: the offerings that serve their life imperil their clients’ lives. Through the ministry that supports their own livelihood, they are “keepingaliveindividualswhowouldnotlive”or should not live, themselves and their families. And they are “puttingtodeathindividualswhowouldnotdie”or should not die, because facilitating their serving a god who isn’t really Yahweh traps them in a snare that means death (e.g., Exod 23:13; 34:12; Deut 7:18). The women’s action parallels that of the men who mislead Israelites in failing to make them think about the holes in their moral and religious defenses (13:1–16). Or perhaps they had a role in deciding capital cases and made pronouncments on the basis of who paid them most (Ganzel 2014, 1054). These ministers, too, are “lyingtomypeople” and colluding with their willingness to be “listeningto alie” that gives them a more comfortable idea of who God is and how he relates to them. They cause death by speaking only of *shalom* and seeking to release people who needed to repent.[[34]](#footnote-34) Calvin (2:10) reflects:

When true prophets exhort sinners to hope and predict God’s freeness to pardon, they likewise discourse about penitence; they do not indulge sinners, but rouse them, nay, wound them sharply with a sense of God’s anger, so as in some way to stir them up, since God’s mercy is set before us for that end, that by it we may seek life.… False prophets… divide God, as it were, in half, since they speak only of his freeness to forgive, and declare his clemency to be set before all, while they are profoundly silent about repentance.

**13:20–23** Ezekiel spoke earlier of hunting and trapping (12:13–16), and there likely referred to trapping game. Here he becomes explicit that these ministers’ metaphorical prey (13:18) are birds, with a hint that they are fledglings (see the translation footnote). Yahweh intends to set them free. Further hint follows regarding the significance of the ministry they receive, which involved “saddening” or “strengthening.” Strengthening the hands of the faithless would mean encouraging people to continue proceeding along their “dire path.” It’s not obvious what saddening the heart of the faithful would mean, and how do the faithful come to be consulting these ministers, anyway? Perhaps the reference is there only as a makeweight. Or perhaps the faithful are caused grief through the imperiling of what they thought they knew about Yahweh. Ezekiel does close on an unexpected upbeat note. Whereas Yahweh spoke only of trouble for the victims of the prophets (13:1–16), he speaks of rescue for the victims of these ministers. They will not prophesy anymore.

**14:1–3** Like 12:21–28, this further section on prophecy mostly concerns people’s attitude to a prophet such as Ezekiel rather than the activity of the prophets. It again presupposes that people came to Ezekiel, as opposed to him going to them and preaching in worship meetings or other gatherings. It looks as if they have come with some question. Perhaps they concerne whether there was hope of restoration. Such wondering would be natural in 592, and after 587. We don’t get to discover, because Ezekiel’s interest lies not in their question but in Yahweh’s response. It further seems that they have been required to wait, before eventually they receive a response that seems not directly to relate to a question they had asked.

The response implies that they have been hedging their bets, in that they are people who also consult their “lumps,” their images. They have “takenuptheirlumpsontotheirmind.” It is a considered, deliberateaction. They have thus “putbeforetheirfaces”(another expression for careful, deliberate action) “their downfall, their waywardness” (see 3:20; 7:19). Or perhaps the logic is the opposite way around and the lumps are themselves an expression of the falling down that leads to waywardness, especially if the inquiry follows on the fall of 587. The lumps are their wayward obstacle or are the obstacle of their waywardness(see 3:20; 7:19). The elders are presumably coming to consult Ezekiel on the assumption that he doesn’t know they go in for that other consultation. But Yahweh knows, because he knows things, and he is not open to consultation by people who hedge their bets. The situation recalls the imposition of dumbness in 3:26 (Joyce, 123). Yahweh also knows that they don’t take any notice anyway (cf. 33:31–32), though fortunately this doesn’t stop Yahweh speaking. So much of the Scriptures were “given out upon sinful occasions,” as Jonah, Haggai, 1 Corinthians, and Galatians among others illustrate (Greenhill, 314).

**14:4–5 “**Therefore….” They will get a response, but not the kind they were looking for. The response takes a priestly form (see the outline to 12:21–14:11). After all, they were consulting a prophet who was also a priest. “The question of the elders, who expect a prophetic oracle, is surprisingly countered by Yahweh in the detached style of the law” as it applies to Israel as Yahweh’s people (Zimmerli, 1:305). Yahweh intends “toseizeIsrael’shouseholdbytheirmind.” Will it be a painful seizing, like a seizing by the scruff of the neck (BDB renders the verb תָּפַשֹ “terrorize”)? Or will it be a gracious seizing, like someone forcibly saving a person from danger? Either way, it is a response to Israel’s household having “estrangedthemselvesfrommewiththeirlumps.” This form of the verb (זוּר niphal)) occurs only here and in Isa 1:4, both times in a context that talks about the family. The idea of the family deliberately estranging itself from Yahweh is especially grievous.

**14:6** Either way, the declaration of intent leads into a summons to “turn,” to repent. Ezekiel, like other prophets, consistently looks for such turning, otherwise he would not be preaching, though prophets do not explicitly talk about turning as often as one might expect. Here for the first time Ezekiel issues the actual bidding. Indeed, it is a double summons (שׁוּב qal and hiphil together). He then adds another bidding with the summons to “turnyourfacefromuponallyouroutrages”(שׁוּב hiphil again) and thus reverse the attitude of face critiqued in 14:3 and 4. In this context, such turning is what consulting or seeking God (דָרַשׄ) really means (Allen, 1:206). In effect, God has already promised to make turning possible. Israel has to make it actual. Greenhill (317) comments:

God gives what he commands. Chap. xi.19, he had promised to “take the stony heart out of their flesh, and to give them a heart of flesh,” and therefore here might command them to repent. Mark i.15, “Repent ye and believe the gospel”: neither of these were in their power; they might as well create new heavens and new earths as do these acts; but God gives and works them both in the hearts of whom he pleases, 2 Tim*.* ii.25. Phil*.* i.29.

**14:7–8** Ezekiel adds another grim description of the position of someone who has turned to the lumps. It incorporates a paronomasia. He has noted in 14:5 that “theyhaveestrangedthemselves” (נָזֺרוּ, niphal from זוּר). Now he adds that someone turning to his lumps *“*dedicateshimselfawayfromfollowingme” (יׅנָּזֵר, niphal from נָזַר). This rare verb more often refers to the action of dedicating oneself *to* Yahweh (the Nazirite’s dedication). This action is the opposite one, signified by that earlier verb that looks so similar but means something so different.

The call to turn comes in the context of a priestly or quasi-priestly bidding, and the explicit inclusion of the resident alien (גֵּר) whom the Torah also requires to live by it (e.g., Lev 17:10–13) underscores Yahweh’s demand. No one is exempt. Through 14:2–8 Ezekiel keeps switching between the individual’s responsibility and the community’s responsibility, as the Torah does. Yahweh’s expectations do not apply to the community as opposed to the individual, or to the individual as opposed to the community. And as in the Torah, people’s reaction to Yahweh’s biddings will make a difference to what then happens. “I amgoing to letmyselfrespond”then, says Yahweh (עָנָה niphal). It will not be a response in words from the prophet—at least, that is not all. It will be a response in action. Ezekiel has used various expressions for Yahweh’s setting his face, but here for the first time speaks most explicitly of setting his faceagainst someone (בְּ), the expression in Lev 17:10. This action will issue in making him a “sign,” a warning embodiment of what can happen to a person who makes that mistake. And it will issue in making him “sayings” (מְשָׁלׅים). In this expression, “saying” is otherwise consistently singular (e.g., Deut 28:37; 1 Kgs 9:7; Jer 24:9). The plural adds another form of emphasis. More drastically, “Iwillcuthimofffromamongmypeople,” another statement that Ezekiel has in common with Lev 17:10. Both passages use the active form of the verb (כָּרַת hiphil) rather than the much more common passive or reflexive (niphal). The threat denotes losing one’s place in Yahweh ‘s people. The First Testament never gives precision to how that happens, which may be part of the point. It’s not a quasi-legal penalty but an image for life falling apart in a way that is not amenable to calculation. In this formulation it happens indubitably by Yahweh’s action.

**14:9** Yahweh will not let himself be consulted by an idolater. What if a prophet allows himself to be consulted? Eichrodt (183) again comments:

The prophet to whom an idolater addresses an inquiry stands under the same threat as his inquirer. Woe to that prophet, if in such circumstances he lets himself be induced by the wish to please or by a calculated compromise to make any communication in Yahweh's name, treating his client's deadly crime as if it were a venial weakness. He, too, would be destroyed out of the congregation, he would be eliminated as still more dangerous, since his influence gives him additional power to mislead. Indeed, such a lapse on the part of one commissioned to announce the will of God is particularly hard to understand in view of the clear divine prohibition. The only explanation is that it is a blindness caused by God himself, as he punishes sin by sin, and thus makes plain how those who thoughtlessly fall into guilt will have to face the inevitable consequences to which it leads. Deuteronomy 13.3 shows a similar outlook. It explains that if a miraculous sign takes place, by which a prophet tries to win people's faith when he is leading them into idolatry, then that sign has been brought about by God himself to tempt or test his own people.

The judgment does not mean Yahweh manipulating prophets into actions that go against their instincts (“I don’t know why I’m doing this, I’m not really inclined to, but I somehow feel compelled”). Rather, Yahweh commandeers someone whose inclinations he can harness, as he did the Pharaoh in Exodus whose disposition to be tough-minded he can encourage. The prophet will be like any people who are naïve and get themselves into trouble (פָּתַה qal; e.g., Deut 11:16), by letting themselves be treated as naïve (פָּתַה niphal; e.g., Jer 20:7), and thus getting taken in (פָּתַה pual, as here) by the inquirer and also by Yahweh (the verb recurs in the piel in a similar connection in Jer 20:7 and 1 Kgs 22). Yahweh expresses the consequences for the prophet in a more down-earth-way than he did in 14:8: “I willdestroyhimfromamongmypeopleIsrael.” He also expresses the consequences in another figurative way that rings another ironic and unfortunate bell with the exodus story. There, Yahweh stretched out his hand (נָטָה), against Pharaoh and on behalf of Israel (e.g., Exod 7:5). Here, “Iwillstretch outmyhandagainsthim.”

**14:10–11** ButEzekiel’s focus is not the deception of the prophet but the judgment on the prophet’s victims, as it is in 1 Kgs 22 (Fairbairn, 147–48). Theywill carry their waywardness and he willcarryhis. Yet the object of the entire operation is that the community’s carrying its waywardness should not be the end of the story. It is “inorderthatIsrael’shouseholdmaynolongerwanderfromfollowingme.” The commitment will be the reverse of the action of one who “dedicateshimselfawayfromfollowingme” (14:7). Yahweh’s aim is to terminate Israel’s inclination to rebel, which is quite a commitment, given how deep-seated is this inclination (see 2:3–5). His aim is thus that Israel “maynolongerdefilethemselves,” which is also quite a commitment. The two occurrences of “nolonger”join the two in 12:24–28 and the two in 13:21–23 (Allen, 1:209). They are aspects of “a promise lying beyond all human despair and sin, which calls people to return to him and to turn away from all its half-heartedness,” wherein “lies the ultimate purpose of the prophecy of 14:1–11” (Zimmerli, 1:309). “The ultimate purpose of God's silence is to heal the relationship between the Lord and Israel” (Lind, 119).

### Biblical Theology Comments

Ezek 12:21–14:11 is “one of the most important passages of the Old Testament in its treatment of the errors and abuses incident to a dispensation of prophecy” (Skinner, 114).

What makes a true prophet? Their message comes from outside themselves. Their lifestyle matches Yahweh’s expectations. They are realistic and frank about the material and moral state of the people of God, and they seek to draw them on morally and religiously. They tell things straight when that is what is needed. They talk about the wrath of God, and only then offer hope.[[35]](#footnote-35) Conversely, a prophet who has gone astray brings a message from their own mind. Their lifestyle follows their own instincts. They do not acknowledge the state of the people of God and they collude with them in their moral and religious state. They tell people that things are well when they are not. They are thus in a manifoldly dangerous situation as regards their own destiny. Jer 23:23–40 is the Scriptures’ lengthiest disquisition on false prophecy, and it implies that the chief factor distinguishing false prophets from true is that the former have not listened in on the deliberations of Yahweh’s cabinet. But how can one tell that they have not? Jeremiah’s further answer is Ezekiel’s answer: they affirm people who ought to be confronted and thus expose the shortfall in their understanding of God and their understanding of spirituality or ethics.

The people who prophesy falsely in 13:17–23 have been understood to be witches, and In America, in Europe, and in Africa Christians have executed witches. Even if this passage referred to witches, it would provide no basis for executing them. Neither would 14:1–11, where any acts of judgment are God’s business. Exod 22:18 [17] and Lev 20:27 do say that certain sorts of people who might be called witches (the translation of the terms is tricky) should be executed. But the chapters say the same about someone who works on the sabbath, commits adultery, strikes father or mother, or has sex with his step-mother or various other family-members, and it seems unlikely that these are actual rules, for implementing (and we have no evidence that Israel treated them that way, and same dynamic applies in other ancient Near Eastern peoples). They are rather declarations about how important these issues are (see further the Biblical Theology Comments on Ezek 44).

### Application and Devotional Implications

Origen ([Homily 2:1], 70–71).comments:

“Prophesy upon the prophets of Israel who prophesy from their own heart; and you shall say to the prophets…” Just as he who was ordered to say these things had need of the Holy Spirit, so also there is need of the same Spirit for one who wishes to explain their hidden significance, in order to show that the prophecy before us8 is directed against the one who teaches what is contrary to the will of God, against those “who prophesy from their own heart.” Indeed, according to the simple understanding, some of the prophets, since they spoke from the divine Spirit, did not speak “from their own heart,” but from the mind of God; while others, inasmuch as they pretended to be prophets, and said “Thus says the Lord,” when the Lord was not speaking in them, were false prophets. The passage before us, however, can also [be seen as] properly regarding those who teach in the churches, if they teach otherwise than the truth demands.

“Experience shows that the prophet who is committed to the status quo, who is part of the political or religious establishment and dependent on it for his livelihood, cannot easily discharge this task” (Blenkinsopp, 69). That rules out pastors and professors, then. “Pray for us, that our words may not be false” (Origen [Homily 2:2], 86–87). Calvin (2:14) suggests the prayer:

Grant, Almighty God, since we are so torpid in our vices that excitements are daily necessary to rouse us up, first, that our destined pastors may faithfully call us to repentance; then, that we in our turn may be so attentive to their exhortations, and so suffer ourselves to be condemned, that we may be our own judges: Grant also, that when you chastise us severely, the taste of thy paternal goodness may never be so lost to us, so that a way may always be open to us to seek reconciliation in Jesus Christ our Lord.

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## The Utter Desolation of Jerusalem (14:12–15:8)

### Outline

Three messages in 14:12–23, 15:1–8, and 16:1–63 each begin “Yahweh’smessagecametome,” and each concerns Jerusalem. The first declares that no one can rely on another person’s faithfulness for deliverance from the coming disaster. The second declares that Jerusalem has turned out to be useless. The third berates Jerusalem for the unfaithfulness that failed to respond to grace, announces that Yahweh will cast it off, but then that he undertakes to restore its covenant relationship. The three messages mark a transition to messages that might all count in some way as מְשָׁלׅים, allegories\* or parables\* or comments on a saying.[[36]](#footnote-36) The first of the three focuses on a saying about Noah, Daniel, and Job, the second expounds a parable about the wood of the vine, and the third constitutes a long allegory about a foundling. The term מָשָׁל itself does not feature, as it did in 12:22, 23; 14:8 and as it will in 17:2; 18:2, 3, though one see it as applicable to the rest of Part Two of the Ezekiel scroll as a whole (it will also occur in 20:49 [21:5]; 24:3).

It is convenient to deal with the two short messages together and the long one separately. The first two hold back their concern with Jerusalem until near the end (14:21; 15:6), and they belong together by virtue of beginning and ending with a reference to committing a violation or trespass (מָעַל מַעַל; 14:13; 15:8). They unfold:

Introduction (14:12)

How Noah, Daniel, and Job, cannot rescue other people (14:13–20)

If Yahweh sends famine (14:13–14)

If Yahweh sends dire creatures (14:15–16)

If Yahweh sends a sword (14:17–18)

If Yahweh sends an epidemic (14:19–20)

It would have been more economic to enunciate the principle once and incorporate all four perils in the one statement, but enunciating it four times in similar but varying ways (Block, 1:444–45 sets them out in four columns) brings the point home rhetorically

How some people surviving the fourfold disaster could be fruitful for Jerusalem (14:21–23)

Introduction (15:1)

Parabolic questions: what happens to the wood of a vine?

It just gets consumed by fire (15:2–5)

Interpretive answers: what will happen to people in Jerusalem?

It will just get consumed by fire (15:6–8)

### Translation

14:12Yahweh’s message came to me: 13My man, when a country offends in relation to me by committing a violation, and I stretch out my hand against it and break its bread pole for it, and send famine against it and cut off from it human being and animal, 14but there are these three individuals within it, Noah, Daniel, and Job, by their faithfulness those people would save their lives (an affirmation of the Lord Yahweh). 15Supposing I were to get dire creatures[[37]](#footnote-37) to pass through the country and they were to bereave it, and it were to become a desolation with no one passing through in the face of the creatures, 16were these three individuals within it (I am alive—an affirmation of the Lord Yahweh), if either sons or daughters they would save when those people saved themselves alone, and the country became a desolation. 17Or I could cause a sword to come upon this country, and say, A sword is to pass through the country, and I will cut off from it human being and animal, 18with these three individuals within it (I am alive—an affirmation of the Lord Yahweh), they would not save sons or daughters but rather save themselves alone. 19Or I could send off an epidemic to that country and pour my fury on it with blood, cutting off from it human being and animal, 20with Noah, Daniel, and Job within it (I am alive—an affirmation of the Lord Yahweh), if those people would save son or daughter, when those people saved their lives by their faithfulness.

21Because the Lord Yahweh has said this. Definitely, when I have sent off my four dire rulings, sword, famine, dire creatures, and epidemic towards Jerusalem, to cut off from it human being and animal, 22but there, a body of survivors remains in it, sons and daughters who are being taken out, there they will be, going out to you. You will see their path and their deeds, and you will find consolation over the dire thing that I have caused to come on Jerusalem, all that I have caused to come on it. 23They will console you when you see their path and their deeds, and you will acknowledge that it was not gratuitously that I did what I did in it (an affirmation of the Lord Yahweh).

15:1Yahweh’s message came to me: 2My man, what does the wood of the vine from all the trees become, the branch that was among the trees in the forest? 3Is wood taken from it to perform a task? Or do people take a peg taken from it to hang any object on it? 4There, it is put into the fire for consuming, with the fire consuming its two ends and its middle burning. Is it useful for a task? 5There, when it was whole it would not be used for a task. Definitely, when fire has consumed it and it burns, will it be used any longer for a task?

6Therefore the Lord Yahweh has said this. Like the wood of the vine among the trees of the forest, which I gave to fire for consuming, so I am giving the people living in Jerusalem. 7I will set my face against them when they have gone out from the fire, and the fire, it will consume them. And you will acknowledge that I am Yahweh when I set my face against them 8and make the country a desolation, since they committed a violation (an affirmation of the Lord Yahweh).

### Textual Notes

MT has markers\* after 14:20, 23; 15:5, 8.

**14:14** For Q דָּנׅיאֵל, K has דנאל. So also 14:20.

**14:15** For וְשׁׅכְלָתָּה, “and they bereave it” (the subject is collective)\*, LXX has “I take vengeance on it” as at 5:17. Vg. also has a first-person verb, “I ravage it.”

**14:22** For MT’s hophal participle הַמּוּצָאׅים LXX’s active verb implies hiphil הַמּוֺצׅאׅים.

**15:4** LXX “the annual cleansing of it the fire consumes, and it totally passes away” understands the burning of prunings as purification (*HUB*).

### Verse-by-Verse Commentary

**14:12–13** The message again begins like a ruling in the Torah (cf. 14:9), “when acountry*…,*” and proceeds in terms that are familiar in the Torah, with the verb “offends” (חָטָא; see 3:20–21), which is then brought into relationship with the verb and cognate noun “committing aviolation” (מָעַל מַעַל). Whereas the idea of an offense presupposes Yahweh as someone entitled to set standards that human beings then ignore, the idea of committing a violation presupposes Yahweh as someone with quasi-territorial rights that human beings infringe, invade, violate, or trespass on. It is a priestly term—Ezekiel is the only prophet who uses it. The present context does not really require a specifying of the offenses or violations, though the messages of Ezekiel so far have made their nature clear enough: their stress lies on making images and other defiling of Yahweh’s sanctuary. Yahweh’s talk of extending his hand, breaking the bread staff, and sending famine is also familiar (e.g., 5:16; 6:14).

Cutting off human being and animal is a new formulation (though the reality has been implicit). It will recur, but only as a threat regarding other nations (25:13; 29:8). Fortunately, it will also be a formulation due for reversal (36:11). That context in threats regarding other nations fits. Yahweh isn’t talking specifically about Israel, Judah, or Jerusalem here. He deals with other nations on the same basis as he does with Israel, as prophets commonly assume (cf. Ezek 25–32). The Judahites need to see that this works both ways: Yahweh deals with Israel as he does with other nations. His talk about “offense” and “violation” points in that direction. Or perhaps this message speaks about the earth that offends, though at least one can now say that the spreading of the gospel means that “the whole earth shouts with joy to the God of Israel” (Origen [Homily 4:1], 135).

**14:14** The formulation with the reference to cutting off leads into the focus of this message. Noah, Daniel, and Job are apparently familiar to the Kebarites. They are embodiments of “faithfulness”(צְדָקָה), which featured earlier along with the verb “offends”and with talk about saving (3:20–21). Ezekiel’s speaking about salvation (נָצַל niphal, piel, and hiphil) means he again picks up an exodus word (e.g., Exod 3:8; 6:6) and turns its significance on its head (Block, 1:446). Faithfulness is the opposite of offending or violating. Noah was famously faithful (Gen 6:9; 7:1). The story of Job talks much about faithfulness and about the vindication of his faithfulness, and at one point Job declares, “I hold onto my faithfulness” (Job 27:6). The question of Daniel is trickier. While First Testament Daniel manifests the qualities of a faithful person, the book of Daniel never uses the word of him, and in 592 he is but a man in his twenties serving Nebuchadrezzar, so he sits oddly in the company of Noah and Job.[[38]](#footnote-38) Further, the book of Daniel spells his name דָּנׅיֵּאל, whereas Ezek 14:14 Q spells it דָּנׅיאֵל and Ezek 14:14 K spells it דנאל. It would be natural to pronounce the Q spelling as Danel, which is the name of the father of Aqhat in the Aqhat Story from Ugarit. He

Is upright, sitting before the gate,

Beneath a mighty tree on the threshing floor,

Judging the cause of the widow,

Adjudicating the case of the fatherless. (*ANET*, 151).

Danel, then, fits better than Daniel with Noah and Job as a noteworthy non-Israelite characterized by faithfulness. The identification of all three figures as non-Israelites fits the reference in 14:13–20 to nations in general, not Israel in particular.

**14:15–20** Yahweh goes on to describe further the disasters he might bring, now using formulations that take up his earlier threats about Jerusalem (4:1–5:17): send off, dire creatures, pass through, bereave, desolation, sword, epidemic, bloodshed, fury, and the expression “Iamalive.” Wild animals are an addition, but along with the familiar three that are the subects here (sword, epidemic, bloodshed) they have a background in threats in Leviticus (26:22–26, 33). Notwithstanding the pointers towards discussion of the fate of any nation, Yahweh is talking about afflictions he brings to Israel (Allen, 1:217). The more significant feature he adds to his earlier threats is that Noah, Daniel, and Job would save only themselves from these disasters by their faithfulness. He doesn’t speak of the three as praying, like Moses and Samuel (Jer 15:1). But the principle Yahweh utters here needn’t stop an intercessor of some hutzpah like Abraham praying as he does (Gen 18:22–33). There is some irony in Ezekiel’s references to the three. Noah did make possible the survival of his sons and daughters, though Genesis doesn’t say that they were saved on the basis of his faithfulness, and it might as easily have been an expression of God’s mercy and an action to facilitate his restarting creation. While Daniel did save himself through his faithfulness, we don’t know enough about Danel to put flesh on the bones of any statement about him. Our ancient Near Eastern sources sometimes tell several different stories about their heroes, and for all we know, Ezekiel’s hearers might know stories about Danel’s faithfulness. And it was Job’s faithfulness that brought terrible suffering to him along with his sons and daughters, though it also eventually brought him vindication. Anyway, Yahweh’s point here is that no one is going to save their children. “A martyr father cannot deliver a transgressing son, nor will a mother whose life was saintly confer the prize of chastity upon a daughter who is unchaste,” and it’s no good claiming that Abraham is our father (John 8:39) (Jerome, 141, 142).[[39]](#footnote-39)

It sounds as if Ezekiel is disagreeing with somebody (Eichrodt, 186). Perhaps there was an inclination among some Kebarite parents to worry about their children back in Jerusalem (24:21) and to hope that faithful people there like Jeremiah might be the means of their children’s salvation, or to think that they themselves could save their children, or an inclination among the children to think that their parents’ faithfulness could save them. Ezekiel has made much reference to images and other questionable forms of worship among the Judahites. Another implication of Ezekiel’s comments is that the faithless generation among whom he lives cannot expect to gain exemption from calamity on the basis of the faithfulness of their parents’ or grandparents’ generation. Zedekiah cannot expect to be exempt from calamity on the basis of his father’s reforms, or Jehoiachin on the basis of his grandfather’s (Jerome, 141). If anything, it works the other way around. Children can pay the postponed penalty for the wrongdoing of their parents’ generation, as experience indicates and as 2 Kings assumes (and cf. Exod 20:5).

**14:21–22a** A typically Ezekiel jump of logic follows. Yahweh again takes up the language of 5:5–17, now incorporating a description of the threatened “dire” calamities as “rulings” (שְׁפָטׅים), authoritative decisions on Yahweh’s part regarding actions that must properly be taken. Then, in broader keeping with 5:1–6:14, he raises the possibility of there being “agroupofsurvivors”(פְּלֵטָה) from the calamities. It’s the only time Ezekiel uses this collective noun, though he used the singular word “survivor” (פָּלׅיט) in 6:8, 9. Wary listeners to Ezekiel will suspect that there is something dubious here. Who are the body of survivors still alive after human being and animal have been cut off from the city, and who are the “you”to whom they are going out? It is one of Ezekiel’s imaginative pictures. Really, the “you” is his present listeners, who are to use their own imagination and to look not merely at the sons and daughters who survive but (paradoxically) at the reason why they shouldn’t have survived that provides the reasons why the disaster had to happen. He expresses what follows in a palistrophe\* that now places Jerusalem at the center:

you will see their path and their deeds

and find consolation over the dire thing

that I have caused to come

on Jerusalem

all that I have caused to come on it

so they will console you

when you see their path and their deeds. (cf. Häner, 210).

**14:22b–23** In considered this matter, they will, strangely “findconsolation” (נָחַם niphal) for the disaster or find comfort in connection with it, because it will confirm that the calamity was not gratuitous, not arbitrary (see 6:10). The survivors will be the people who console their families in this paradoxical way. The reference to “their pathanddeeds”Indicates that there is no suggestion that they survive because they are faithful people who escape because they deserve it, and the logic of what follows excludes that. It is not because they have been walking a good route. As in 5:1–6:14, the talk of survivors is by no means simply a reassurance that the calamity will not be total. Joyce (128) comments,

Vv. 22-23 take it for granted that any survivors will be undeserving ones (in other words, that there will be no Noahs. Daniels or Jobs), another indication that 14:12–21 is to be understood as an example of hyperbole\* rather than as an anticipation of actual segregation. It is clear that Ezekiel regards his people as sinful virtually "to a person" (cf. 3:7; 9:8-9; 22:30) and anticipates an imminent punishment that will be well-nigh total.

So “‘sons and daughters’ will, against the settled principle of divine retribution, survive Jerusalem’s fall, but only to vindicate God’s judgment” (Greenberg, 1:261). “With a masterly, though desperately cruel, stroke of rhetorical power, Ezekiel tells the exiles that they may indeed see sons and daughters again, but the comfort they provide will not be, as they hoped, the comfort of having their relatives spared, but the cold comfort of coming to recognize the rightness and justice of God’s judgment on the city” (Wright, 179). “Ironically, the very children who had been the focal point of theological hope for their worried parents would turn out to be agents of a different truth, witnesses to divine necessity” (Allen, 1:219). The message would speak to people in 592 to undergird the exhortations to change, and not to think that the faithfulness of parents will avail something for sons and daughters. And it would function as theodicy after 587 to affirm that the eventual calamity was deserved, when the “you” would be the victims of 597 now horrified by the event of 587 but urged to see that it was justified (though we note again that what actually happened was nowhere near as bad as Yahweh implies in issuing his warning).

**15:1–5** A separate message begins, though it will turn out to link with the one that precedes. It starts with what is in effect a parable, a מָשָׁל,[[40]](#footnote-40) or an allegory (Joyce, 129), or a puzzle, or a sign act without the act (Jenson, 124). Calvin (2:91) comments:

It is certain that the vine produces very good fruit, and therefore is preferred to other trees: the very flower of the vine has a most, delicious scent; but the fruit which it produces proves its excellence. For the wood of the vine is without elegance and shapeless: it does not attain to any thickness; it is slender, pliable, and twisted. In looking at a vine, it. seems scarcely worth numbering among shrubs: if compared with trees, it clearly has no value; but in the excellency of trees something is easily acknowledged which surpasses all vines. For when we cast our eyes upon a branching tree, we are struck with admiration, while the vine lies at, our feet. If, therefore, a tree is compared with the wood of the vine, it will be praised for its beauty, while the vine will be despised as a low and insignificant wood.

But Ezekiel “has a habit of seizing upon traditional images and deliberately distorting them for rhetorical effect” (Block, 1:456), and this chapter about the vine’s destiny, its fate (Odell, 173), “tends to nothing else but to aggravate the misery of Jerusalem” (Mayer, 409). “What we have here is a grotesque distortion of the traditional use of the vine as a figure for Israel.”[[41]](#footnote-41) Like Amos, Ezekiel utters a decisive “No” to Israel’s traditions, its God-given insights into the truth.[[42]](#footnote-42) “No biblical prophet is more negative than Ezekiel” (Lind, 123), though he is also monumentally positive in the promises he mediates later.

The parable starts, then, from the fact that the wood of the vine is useless, compared with the wood of other trees that can be used in construction. The term for a “branch” (זְמוֺרָה) implies something that has been cut off in the course of the vine’s pruning (זָמַר), to which LXX refers in its paraphrase of 15:4. A vine’s wood is only useful for burning. The picture of the ends of a vine branch burning and the middle surviving, so as to burn later, doesn’t correspond to anything that literally happens to vine prunings. Perhaps a vine’s roots and branches burn quickly whereas the main trunk doesn’t, and might be useful (Greenhill, 330). But a parable, like a vision, can contain features that really belong only to the thing it pictures (the parable of the sower is the classic example, since no real sower goes about his work with the profligacy that the parabolic sower manifests).

**15:6–8** The listeners would hardly need to be told that the vine stands for Israel or Judah, or specifically Jerusalem. They would be able to work out that Ezekiel was saying that they were useless and that they were due for burning. Perhaps 15:2 implies that they are more useless than the nations (Lind, 124). Isa 5:1–7 had already more or less said that Judah is useless, though Ezekiel resists the temptation to make a point about its not producing any fruit. The novel feature in the way Ezekiel works the parable lies in the feature of the picture that doesn’t obviously correspond to what actually happens to vine branches. Jerusalem has indeed been thrown into the fire but not wholly burned: the burning of the two ends might correspond to its troubles in Jehoiakim’s reign and then those of 597 (2 Kgs 24:1–17; Dan 1:1–2) (Rashi, in MG). But it is going to burn again, and totally. Ezekiel will more than once reuse the image of burning (21:2–4; 22:17–22; 24:3–14).[[43]](#footnote-43) Yahweh ends with reference to violation, as 14:12–23 began, which does after all make the same point as Isa 5:1–7.

### Biblical Theology Comments

“When my four dire authoritative rulings, sword, famine, dire creature, and epidemic, I have sent off towards Jerusalem….”When Yahweh first speaks of “sending” in Ezekiel, it is Ezekiel who is sent (2:3, 4; 3:6), but here he speaks of a different kind of sending (as in 5:16–17; cf. 7:3 and the “Biblical Theology Comments” on 7:1–27). Sometimes God engages in a person-to-person sending, a commissioning, and the person who is sent may in theory decline to go. Sometimes the sending involves the utilization of some impersonal object that by its nature might not seem to have the capacity to cooperate or resist. Yet reflection suggests that this is too sharp a distinction, which is why the model of “sending” may be appropriate to both forms of action on God’s part. On one hand, the First Testament implies that people whom God sends have no option but to go. Yahweh is not asking, but ordering. He acts like a king. Human beings are not his co-workers. In the New Testament, the same applies to someone such as Saul of Tarsus, and perhaps to Jesus’ disciples. Yet Jesus also tells stories about people who resist being sent. Conversely, one may ask whether famine, dire creature, and epidemic lack any mind of their own, and certainly the sword requires someone to wield it. There are famines, epidemics, proliferations, and invasions that are sent, and ones that just happen. Some catastrophes (like some blessings) can seem humanly inexplicable, and one may wonder if God has acted direct, but more often one can see the human causes behind events (Greenhill, 324–25). And when they happen at times that seem random, they may be divinely-sent, but in a way that reflects an interaction between the will of the sender and the will of God.

Further, when Yahweh first speaks of sending in 14:12–23, it relates not to Jerusalem in particular, but to “acountry,” to any country. His declarations compare with Jeremiah’s parable of the potter from about the same decade, which concerns Yahweh’s dealings with “a nation or a kingdom” (Jer 18:7). Perhaps surprisingly, Yahweh works on the assumption that the nations know the basics about relating to him and about relating to one another, even while he also mocks their gods. They are the beneficiaries of something that can be called natural revelation or natural law or a creation covenant. But as Ezekiel sees it, “when a nation sins, whether it be Egypt or Babylon—or, presumably, China or the United States or whoever—the sin is always directly against Israel’s particular Lord (14:13a),” against Yahweh, and it amounts to offense against Yahweh’s standards and violation of his rights (Jenson, 121).

### Application and Devotional Implications

The vine, the olive, the fig tree, and the date palm are all significant images, but the vine is the image with most resonance.

* Yahweh brought a vine out of Egypt, planted it, and nurtured it (Ps 80)
* He nurtured it, protected it, and looked for it to be fruitful, but it wasn’t (Isa 5:1–7).
* The fruit it produced was rotten (Jer 2:21; Hos 10:1)
* It is therefore to be stripped (Jer 6:9)
* Jesus is the embodiment of what it stands for (John 15:1)
* People who want to be safe and fruitful need to stay in it (John 15:4–5)

Paul speaks of Gentiles being grafted into the olive, but one could as easily speak of being grafted into the vine. Calvin (2:93–94) reflects:

As often as we are favored with God’s gifts, by which we approach near him and overcome the world, we ought also to remember what we were before God took us up.… Not only has God’s free grace raised us to such a height, but also sustains us; so that our standing is not founded in ourselves, but depends only on his will. Hence not only the remembrance of our origin ought to humble us, but the sense of our infirmity.… This is the second point: the third is, if God afflicts or chastises us with his rods, we should know that the foolish confidence by which we deceive ourselves is by this means beaten out of us. Here we ought diligently to weigh the meaning of the phrase — *the wood of the vine is useless when it is torn up,* and especially when dry. For although the profane nations perish, yet it is not surprising if God’s judgments are more severe towards the reprobate, who had obtained a place in his Church, and who had been enriched with his spiritual gifts. This ingratitude requires us to become an example to others, so that the whole world may be astonished at beholding in us such dreadful signs of God’s anger.

And Theodoret (97) urges, with allusions to 2 Tim 3:16; Rom 15:4; 1 Cor 3:12: “Since all that is written, therefore, is written for our benefit, ‘so that by steadfastness and by the encouragement of the Scriptures we may have hope,’ let us not prove to be wood or hay or straw, which is fuel for the fire, but gold and precious stones”

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## Jerusalem’s Covenant (16:1–63)

### Outline

The medieval chapter division makes Ezek 16 much the longest chapter in the Ezekiel scroll, and its understanding of the division corresponds to the signals provided by the introductions in 14:12; 15:1; 16:1; and 17:1. This gargantuan chapter implies the outline of a complete narrative biblical theology, from creation, through Yahweh’s establishment of Israel and Israel’s waywardness, to Israel’s waywardness and Yahweh’s taking drastic action against it, to his renewal of it and his renewal of his covenant commitment to it. But following 14:12–15:8, it tells that story by means of another parable\* or מָשָׁל or allegory\* or extended metaphor or sign act without the act. It’s not an allegory in which there is meaning in every element, and unlike some examples of such genres, it announces the thing it signifies at the beginning, as well as announcing the speaker. “We are not concerned with a riddle, whose mystery must be solved, but with the life of a city in relation to Yahweh” (Brownlee, 222). Further, it is a “fractured” allegory, in that the allegorist appears in it, “so that the line between the figure and what is figured is constantly erased”—which fits the nature of Yahweh’s relationship with Israel’s history, which he is inside of and not just outside of (Jenson, 126).

The dynamic of the chapter’s rhetoric thus differs from that of some other parables. Its aim is not to make people think, or to maneuver them into facing something new that will be unwelcome, though it is to get them to face something they have not been wanting to face. Its location following Ezek 15 might make obvious where the allegory is likely to lead, in what it has to say about Jerusalen. Its preamble itself immediately makes it clear, when it refers to Jerusalem’s “outrages.” But it will eventually come to a more positive end than either 14:12–23 or 15:1–8 did. And instead of being a short parable or sign act with a kick in it, it is a monster that overwhelms by its immensity, its prodigious force. It aims to make the audience want to run away, but it hopes that its compelling nature makes it impossible to. It seeks to stun, to stupefy, to paralyze. But it does have that unexpected comfort in its tail. Eventually it offers promise. Rhetorically it functions by its use of emotive language and by the notes of hope.[[44]](#footnote-44)

Whereas Ezek 6 and 7 comprised messages to the mountains of Israel and to the land of Israel, Ezek 16 comprises a message to Israel’s capital city, though its critique and threat are essentially the same as those in Ezek 6 and 7. The address to Jerusalem is really another address to the nation as a whole. Cities are regularly feminine in the ancient Near East (as in other cultures), which facilitates Ezekiel’s employing the metaphor of Yahweh as husband with Jerusalem as unfaithful wife, used earlier by Hosea and Jeremiah. Ezekiel does, however, have a specific concern with Jerusalem, as Ezek 8–11 has shown, and addressing the city in particular has a point relating to Ezekiel’s priestly concern with the temple. It also has a point of connection with his community’s concern with the city from which they came and to which they hope to return. The indictment dominating the chapter aims to get the Kebarites to see that terrible calamity is inevitable and again to persuade them not to nurse hopes of a speedy return to a restored city.

Whereas the Torah’s version of Israel’s history begins with the exodus, building on Yahweh’s promise to Israel’s ancestors as a preamble, and Jeremiah’s version begins with the exodus or its aftermath (Jer 3), a version centering on Jerusalem naturally has a different starting point.

* The focus on Jerusalem opens up the possibility of an alternative account of the people’s origins (16:3–14), perhaps less confrontational than the Torah and the Former Prophets sometimes are, and just as sympathetic as they are at other points. Jerusalem’s life could have lead straight to death, but Yahweh rescued it and encouraged it towards fullness of life.
* The story then becomes an alternative account of the people’s life in Canaan, with a negative tone in its portrayal of the city’s unfaithfulness to Yahweh (16:15–22). Jerusalem serves other gods.
* Ezekiel combines that critique with a second feature (16:23–34). Jerusalem’s unfaithfulness is also a matter of international politics. As the nation’s capital, the city became involved with Egypt, Assyria, and Babylon, compromising its relationship with Yahweh. Ezekiel’s account is “revisionist” (Block, 1: 473), but his account of Yahweh’s confrontation over the two interwoven expressions of unfaithfulness corresponds to Jeremiah’s and also recall Hosea’s.
* Yahweh goes on to threaten to assemble those other nations as means of taking action against Jerusalem for its unfaithfulness and thus giving expression to his passionate fury (16:35–43).

Although this emplotment of Jerusalem’s story is distinctive to Ezekiel, it is not alien to that of Israel’s story in Genesis through Kings. It corresponds to that of the Song of Moses in Deut 32, of which it might be seen as a reworking in light of the metaphor of Jerusalem as Yahweh’s wife instead of Yahweh’s child.[[45]](#footnote-45) It thus differs from Genesis through Kings in using metaphor of Jerusalem as woman and wife, though that metaphor is commonplace elsewhere within the First Testament and among other ancient Near Eastern peoples. Ezekiel’s creativity lies in the way he brings together the uncontroversial metaphor and the uncontroversial perspective on the history to produce a controversial result. The city becomes an unwanted baby girl of dubious parentage whom Yahweh enables to live so that she can grow into a beautiful woman. He makes a covenantal commitment to her (Ezekiel does not quite describe the relationship as marital) but she becomes sexually promiscuous. Yahweh therefore declares the intention to expose her and have her pelted with rocks in keeping with the Torah’s penalty for adultery.

Ezekiel’s further inventiveness lies in the detailed and sexually explicit nature of his telling of this story. Although secular writing in the West is familiar with stories of this kind, religious writing is not. Ancient Near Eastern writings may well have worked this way. Our knowledge of Israelite writing and speech is confined to the works that became Israel’s Scriptures, so we do not know how unusual Ezekiel’s allegory would seem. But the contrast with other works that became Scriptures makes it seem more likely than not that his allegory would shock people, especially men, which would surely be the point (M. A. Taylor, 398, 408). It does so by threatening them with questions about their gender identity.[[46]](#footnote-46) Ezekiel will use any means to try to get through to his people, to get them to see themselves and to see Jerusalem. For different reasons his allegory has continued to shock, as “pornographic writing,” a “voyeuristic exposure of Jerusalem’s sexual depravity.”[[47]](#footnote-47) It does not feature in church lectionaries, though much of Ezekiel doesn’t. It does not feature as a haftarah\* in synagogue lectionaries (Rosenberg, 1:103; cf. *m. Megillah* 4:10). The Tosefta says it can be read as long as it is also translated—that is, read out from the Targum, which cleans up the critique of Jerusalem (*b. Megillah* 25b). The Talmud goes on to add a quotation from Rabbi Eliezer implying that the reason is that one should not be critical of Jerusalem, our mother.

The allegory constitutes an imaginative, original version of the classic prophetic message that fundamentally comprises a critique of Yahweh’s people (16:2–34) and a threat of what Yahweh intends to do (16:35–43), with the word “therefore”(16:35, 37) signaling the link and the transition between the two parts. Verses 6–22 can be read as a palistrophe:\*

Kicking in your bloodiness (16:6)

Stark naked (16:7)

An affirmation of the Lord Yahweh (16:8)

Yahweh’s endowments to her (16:9–13)

Jerusalem’s name (16:14)

Through your loveliness (בְיָפיֵךְ, 16:14)

On your loveliness (בְיָפיֵךְ, 16:15)

Jerusalem’s name (16:15)

Yahweh’s endowments to her (16:16–19)

An affirmation of the Lord Yahweh (16:19)

Stark naked (16:22)

Kicking about in your bloodiness (16:22)[[48]](#footnote-48)

In 16:44–63, the last part of “one of the most startling effusions of the most learned and curious of Israel’s prophets”[[49]](#footnote-49) takes the allegory in a different direction in introducing Jerusalem’s sisters and nieces. It presents some good news, though like earlier good news in this scroll, it is not unalloyed.

* Ezekiel returns to his initial image of mother and daughter to develop it in what initially looks like a digression increasing suspense (16:44–58). He compares the waywardness of Jerusalem, Samaria, and Sodom, then the comparison includes a declaration of intent to restore the fortunes of all three cities. The good news is qualified by the idea that Jerusalem will have a sense of its disgrace in the company of Samaria and Sodom.
* The final section (16:59–63) takes up another image from earlier, the image of covenant in 16:8. These are the two first references to covenant in the Ezekiel scroll. Ezekiel develops this image, too, in a new direction, as the chapter comes to a close with a more far-reaching declaration of Yahweh’s intent to establish a covenant for all time with Jerusalem. This action, too, will be designed to cause Jerusalem to feel shame, though there can be a positive significance about shame.

Thus 16:44–58 takes the allegory’s imagery in one new direction, so that it almost constitutes a different allegory, and 16:59–63 does the same again. Once again it is not an allegory in which there is significance in every element. One cannot ask who were the husbands Samaria and Sodom betrayed or what is the fortune they will go back to.

It is entirely possible to imagine Ezekiel himself tweaking his allegory, and the “shocking imagery, rare vocabulary, obscure forms and usages, and anomalous grammatical forms” give the entire chapter some unity (Block, 1:464–65). It is also possible to imagine him issuing both forms of encouragement in 16:44–63 to the Kebarites, and doing so before 587. And one might then assume that he put the chapter together in written form, though doing so with oral delivery in mind.[[50]](#footnote-50) But a standard scholarly view is that the critique and threat in 16:1–43 basically go back to Ezekiel’s ministry before 587, the moderate encouragement in 16:44–58 basically came from him or from a disciple after 587, and the more radical promise in 16:59–63 came from a later disciple.[[51]](#footnote-51)

### Translation

1Yahweh’s message came to me: 2My man, get Jerusalem to acknowledge its outrages. 3Say, the Lord Yahweh has said this to Jerusalem. Your origins[[52]](#footnote-52) and your birthings: from the country of the Canaanites, your father being the Amorite, your mother a Hittite. 4Your birthings: on the day of your being birthed,[[53]](#footnote-53) your cord was not cut, and in that you were not bathed in water for cleansing,[[54]](#footnote-54) you were not rubbed with salt at all, and you were not wrapped up at all, 5no eye took pity on you to do any of these things for you, to be concerned for you. You were thrown to the face of the open country in disdain for you as a person[[55]](#footnote-55) on the day of your being birthed. 6But I passed by you and saw you kicking about in your bloodiness,[[56]](#footnote-56) and I said to you in your bloodiness, “Live.”

So I said to you in your bloodiness, “Live, 7as I am making you profuse[[57]](#footnote-57) like the growth of the open country,” and you became profuse. You got big and came into full prime, your breasts becoming firm and your hair growing. But you were stark naked.[[58]](#footnote-58) 8So I passed by you and saw you, and there: your time, the time for lovemaking.[[59]](#footnote-59) I spread my hem over you and covered your nakedness, took an oath to you, and came into covenant with you (an affirmation of the Lord Yahweh). You became mine. 9I bathed you in water, washed off your bloodiness from on you, and anointed you with oil. 10I clothed you in color, shoed you with dolphin leather, bound you with linen, covered you with silk, 11and enfolded you in adornment.[[60]](#footnote-60) I put bracelets on your arms and a necklace on your neck, 12and put a ring on your nose, earrings on your ears, and a splendid coronet on your head. 13You adorned yourself with gold and silver, and your clothes were linen, silk, and color, while you ate fine flour, molasses, and oil. You became very, very lovely. You were fit for royalty. 14A name went out for you among the nations through your loveliness, because it was complete through my splendor that I set upon you (an affirmation of the Lord Yahweh).

15But you relied on your loveliness and you whored on the basis of your name, and poured your whorings on every passerby, so they might be his. 16You got some of your clothes and made yourself decorated shrines, and you whored on them (not things that are going to come about, and they should not happen).[[61]](#footnote-61) 17You got your splendid things of gold and silver that I gave you and made yourself male images and whored with them, 18and you got your colorful clothes and covered them. My oil and my incense you put in front of them, 19with my food that I gave you (fine flour, oil, and molasses I fed you with). You put it in front of them as a sweet aroma. So it happened (an affirmation of the Lord Yahweh). 20And you got your sons and your daughters whom you bore for me and sacrificed them to them to eat—was it the least of your whorings? 21You slaughtered my children and gave them, by making them pass to them. 22And with all your outrages and your whorings, you were not mindful of your young days when you were stark naked as you were kicking about in your bloodiness.

23Then, after all your dire behaviour (oh, oh, you—an affirmation of the Lord Yahweh), 24you built yourself a mound and made yourself an elevation in every square, 25building your elevation at the top of every path. You made your loveliness into something outrageous, spread your legs to every passerby, and made your whorings abound. 26You whored with the Egyptians, your big-fleshed[[62]](#footnote-62) neighbors, and made your whoring abound to enrage me.

27So there, I stretched out my hand against you. I cut down your allocation and gave you to the desire of people who were hostile to you, the Philistine women, who were shocked by your path in its willfulness.[[63]](#footnote-63) 28You whored with the Assyrians because of not being full.[[64]](#footnote-64) You whored but you were even then not full. 29You made your whoring abound towards the merchant country, Chaldea,[[65]](#footnote-65) and even by this you were not full.

30How feeble was your mind (an affirmation of the Lord Yahweh) in your doing all these things, the action of a whorish, masterful woman, 31in your building your mound at the head of every path and making your elevation in every square! You were not like a whore in disdaining a “gift,” 32as the adulterous wife, under her husband,[[66]](#footnote-66) receives strangers. 33To all whores men give a present, but you, you gave your donations to all your lovers and bribed them to come to you from all around with your whorings. 34With you it was the opposite to the [other] women, in your whorings. Following after you there was no whoring,[[67]](#footnote-67) and it was with you giving a gift and no gift given to you. It was the opposite.

35Therefore, whore, listen to Yahweh’s message. 36The Lord Yahweh has said this. On account of the pouring out of your moisture[[68]](#footnote-68) and the exposing of your nakedness through your whoring with your lovers and with all your outrageous lumps and in accordance with your children’s shed blood that you gave them, 37therefore here am I, gathering all your lovers with whom you were nice, and everyone whom you loved, with everyone to whom you were hostile. I will gather them with you from all around and expose your nakedness to them. They will see your entire nakedness. 38I will rule for you with the rulings for adulteresses and women pouring out blood, and I will make you bloody [in] fury and passion. 39I will give you into their hand and they will pull down your mound and break down your elevation. They will strip you of your clothes and get your splendid things and leave you stark naked. 40They will bring up an assembly[[69]](#footnote-69) against you, pelt you with rock, cut you down with their swords, 41and burn your houses in fire. They will act on rulings against you before the eyes of many women, and I will stop you from whoring. You will also no more give any gift. 42I will settle my fury on you. And my passion will turn from you, I will be quiet, and I will rage no more. 43Since you have not been mindful of your young days or trembled at me[[70]](#footnote-70) in all these things, so also there, I have put your path against your head (an affirmation of the Lord Yahweh). You have enacted willfulness in all your outrages, haven’t you.[[71]](#footnote-71)

44There, anyone who pronounces sayings will pronounce one about you: “Like mother, like daughter.”[[72]](#footnote-72) 45You are the daughter of your mother, rejecting her husband and her children. And you are the sister of your sisters,[[73]](#footnote-73) who rejected their husbands and their children. The mother of you people, Hittite. The father of you people, Amorite. 46Your big sister, Samaria, she and her daughters who lived to the north of you. Your sister who was smaller than you who lived south of you, Sodom, and her daughters.

47It was not on their paths that you walked, or according to their outrages that you acted, in a very small way. You acted more corruptly[[74]](#footnote-74) than them in all your paths. 48I am alive (an affirmation of the Lord Yahweh) if your sister Sodom, she and her daughters, did as you did, you and your daughters.[[75]](#footnote-75) 49There, this was the waywardness of your sister Sodom: haughtiness, as she and her daughters had fullness of food and quiet tranquility, but she didn’t strengthen the hand of the lowly and needy. 50They were arrogant and they committed outrage in front of me, and I removed them when I saw. 51And in that Samaria did not commit as much as half your offenses, you abounded in your outrages more than them, so that you declared your sisters faithful by all the outrages that you committed. 52You also: carry your disgrace, in that you have advocated for your sisters by your offenses. In that you have acted more outrageously than them, they are more faithful than you. So you also, feel shame and carry your disgrace in accordance with your making your sisters look faithful.

53I will bring about their restoration,[[76]](#footnote-76) the restoration of Sodom and her daughters and the restoration of Samaria and her daughters, and I will bring about your restoration among them, 54in order that you may carry your shame and feel shame because of all that you’ve done in comforting them. 55Your sisters: Sodom and her daughters will go back to what they were before, and Samaria and her daughters will go back to what they were before, and you and your daughters will go back to what you were before. 56Your sister Sodom was a news report in your mouth in the time of your acts of haughtiness, wasn’t she, 57before your dire behavior revealed itself, at the very time of the disdain of the daughters of Aram and all the people around her, the daughters of the Philistines all around who were treating you with contempt, 58when you carried your willfulness and your outrages (an affirmation of Yahweh).

59Because the Lord Yahweh has said this. Yes, I will act with you as you have acted, in that you have despised an oath in violating a covenant. 60But I myself will be mindful of my covenant with you in your young days and I will establish it for you as a covenant for all time. 61And you will be mindful of your paths and feel shame, when you get your sisters who are bigger than you with the ones who are littler than you, and I give them to you as daughters, though not because of your covenant. 62I myself will establish my covenant with you, and you will acknowledge that I am Yahweh, 63in order that you may be mindful and feel shame, and no longer have an opening of the mouth in the face of your disgrace, when I have made expiation for you for all that you have done (an affirmation of the Lord Yahweh).

### Textual Notes

Ezek 16 contains a number of hapaxes\* and other Hebrew oddities that add to the unusual nature of the chapter. While some of the oddities would not seem odd to the original hearers, in some ways the language would seem unusual.

MT has markers\* after 16:35, 50, 58, and 63.

**16:4** שֺׁר “cord” occurs only here and in Prov 3:8. LXX “breast” implies שֺׁד (see *HUB*, Allen, 1:226).

**16:5** LXX has “nor did my eye take pity on you,” assimilating to the use of that expression in (e.g.) 5:11.

**16:6** LXX lacks the repetition “so Isaidtoyouinyourbloodiness.”

**16:7** For רְבָבָה “profusion,” LXX implies imperative רְבׅי “be profuse.”

**16:8** LXX καταλυόντων is a loose and ambiguous rendering of דֺּדׅים “lovemaking” (see *HUB*; Olley, 322–23).

**16:13** For “linen,”Q has שֵׁשׁ as in 16:10. K ששי is a slip.

Then Q has the regular (pausal) verb form אָכָלְתְּ. K אכלתי is the archaic form (cf. 22, 31a, 31b, 43a, 43b, 47, 51).

LXX lacks “Youwerefitforroyalty.” Jerome (161) speculates that the translators didn’t want the Egyptian authorities to think that Jerusalem had pretensions to power. *HUB* notes the resemblance to 15:5.

**16:15** LXX lacks “sotheymightbehis.”

**16:16** For בָּמוֹת “shrines,” LXX has “idols.”

**16:20** For Q מׅתַּזְנוּתָיׅךְ, K has sg. מתזנתך “yֶour whoring.” Throughout the chapter there is variation between pl. and sg. (see Zimmerli, 1:325).

**16:21** At the end of the verse, LXX also has “in your averting trouble through them,” explicating the implications of the offerings.

**16:22** For הָיׅית, “youwere,” LXX “you lived” implies חָיׅית (cf. 16:6).

**16:23** LXX lacks “oh, oh,you.”

**16:28** For בְּנֵי אַשּׁוּּּר, “Assyrians,”LXX has “daughters of Assyria,” assimilating to 16:27 (*HUB*).

**16:30** For מַה אֲמֻלָּה לׅבָּתֵךְ, “How feeble was your mind,” LXX has “How can I deal [covenantally] with my daughter?” God speaks as one at a loss, as he sometimes does (e.g., Hos 6:4) (Jerome, 173). LXX apparently derives the verb from מוּל “circumcise” and the noun from בַּת (Stummer, “אֲמֻלָה”).

LXX then reads שַׁלֶּטֶת “masterful*,*”a hapax (related words are more or less confined to Esther, Ecclesiastes, and Daniel) as if it were שְׁלשֶׁת “three” (Zimmerli, 1:328).

**16:31** For וְלֹא הָיׅית כַּזוֹנָה לְקַלֵּס, “you were notlikeawhoreindisdaining,”LXX has “like a whore, collecting,” apparently as if the verb were (e.g.) לְלַקֵּט instead of the rare לְקַלֵּס (see Cornill, 266).

**16:32** For אֶת זָרׅים “strangers,” LXX has “payments,” suggesting אֶתְנַנּׅים (Zimmerli, 1:329).

**16:36** For כּ, “in accordance with” (Greenberg, 1:272), LXX implies בּ “because of” (NRSV).

**16:38** LXX lacks “andwomenwhopouroutblood” (i.e. murderesses), which recurs in 23:45.

**16:41** For וְהׅשְׁבַּתּׅיךְ, “Iwillstopyou,” LXX “I will turn you back” implies וְהֲשׁׅבֹתּׅיךְ (cf. 34:10; *HUB*).

**16:43** For וַתּׅׅרְגְּזׅי, “trembled” (cf. the related noun in 12:19), LXX “hurt,” Vg. “provoke,” imply hiphil וַתַּרְגּׅזׅי.

**16:50** LXX, Tg. parse רָאׅיתׅי, “I saw,” as first person, Vg., Aq., Sym., Theod. as second person (see the translation footnote on 16:13).

**16:51** Q has אֲחווֹתַיׅךְ, “your sisters.” K אחותך might imply sg. “sister,” just Samaria.

**16:52** For פׅלַּלְתְּ “advocated,” LXX puzzlingly has “ruined.”

**16:53** “AndIwillrestore” presupposes וְשַׁבְתִּי; cf. LXX, Vg., Syr., Tg.. Q has וּשְׁבוּת, K ושבית “and the restoration,” which makes poor sense. Ewald (92) infers that K represents a slip for וְשַׁבְתִּי.

**16:57** For אֲרָם, “Aram,” Syr. “Edom” implies אֱדֺם.

**16:59** For Q וְעָשֹׅיתׅי, “yes, I will act,” K has ועשית, which looks second-person but is presumably a rogue first person form (GK 44i).

For אָלָה, “anoath,” LXX “these things” implies אֵלֶּה.

For בְּרׅית, “a covenant,” C has בְּרׅיתׅי “my covenant” (cf. LXX).

**16:61** For בְּקַחְתֵּךְ, “when you get,” Syr. “when I get” implies בְּקַחְתּׅי (cf. NRSV).

LXX “building” apparently reads MT בָּנוֺת “daughters” as a form from the root בָּנָה.

### Verse-by-Verse Commentary

**16:1–3aα** The chapter opens a little like Ezek 13, with “Yahweh’smessagecametome,” followed by “Say*,* theLordYahwehhassaidthistoJerusalem,” and in between with a slightly more specific statement of the aim Yahweh gives Ezekiel. The First Testament often speaks of getting people to know or acknowledge things (יָדַע hiphil), such as Yahweh’s expectations or Yahweh’s acts of deliverance, but the content of this syllabus is grimly different. It makes for an ironic contrast with Job, who urges Yahweh to enable him to know what are the wrongdoings he has apparently or allegedly committed (Job 10:2; 13:23). The quasi-legal context here matches the quasi-legal context there. And a wise Israelite would want to know (Ps 51:3 [5] (Jerome, 146). Yahweh’s directive parallels 6:1 and 7:1 as a rhetorical bidding in a chapter that presupposes the Kebarites’ need to know how Yahweh looks at Jerusalem and to see how disaster coming to the city is necessary and inevitable. The message for or about Jerusalem will be specifically about its “outrages.” There is no doubt where the message is going. Similar confrontations will feature in 20:4; 22:2 (cf. also 23:36). The introduction to the chapter thus both compares and contrasts with 15:1 and 17:1–2. Communication can work by keeping cards close to one’s chest and getting people to play along until it’s too late, or it can work by being upfront with the need for the hearers to be worried, and daring them to listen to find out why.

**16:3aβb** Yahweh begins, then, with the story of the birth of a baby girl. “Canaanite,” “Amorite,” and “Hittite” are all terms that can be used in several ways, but their use in association with each other may make their meaning clearer here. Canaanite is here a general term for the pre-Israelite population of the area west of the Jordan, while Amurru and Hatti were great empires before Israel’s time (Brownlee, 222). Amorite can also be a synonym of Canaanite, and it can denote in particular a people living in the highland west and east of the Jordan. That meaning makes sense here. Hittite likewise can refer to a people within Canaan: see especially Gen 23. But everyone knew about Uriah the Hittite as an unfortunate Jerusalemite (2 Sam 11). Yahweh is referring to Jerusalem’s distinctly local origins. While the First Testament has a variety of ways of portraying and implicitly evaluating Israel’s origins that are mostly reasonably positive or sympathetic, notably in Genesis, Exodus, Josh 24:2, and Jer 2:2, here it augurs ill to start with the terms Canaanite, Amorite, and Hittite. You think your origins are from Abraham and Sarah? No they aren’t (Theodoret, 98).

**16:4–6** The parents do nothing of what is needed to care for the new-born (salt is perhaps antiseptic). Instead they abandon her and leave her to die. Abandonment and exposure of unwanted infants was a known phenomenon in the ancient world (Odell, 192), though it is hard to know whether it was more common than in the modern world. There are also a number of stories from the ancient world about the abandonment of an infant who gets found and grows up to become someone important (Moses, Sargon of Agade, Cyrus, Romulus and Remus). In the modern world, babies are commonly abandoned where someone will find them, and perhaps the same would be true in the ancient world (Brownlee, 222–24). If so, the implication here is the opposite.

But Yahweh happens to pass by as the baby is “kickingaboutinherbloodiness.” She is not merely lying in some of her blood (sg.) but lying in her bloods (pl., דָּמׅים). This term can denote a mother’s bloodiness that follows her giving birth and requires a cleansing rite (Lev 12:1–8), but it is more often a term for bloodshed or slaughter (5:17; 7:23; 9:9). The multiple potential implications of references to blood(s) made 16:6 a text that Judaism thought much about.[[77]](#footnote-77) Is this baby potentially bleeding to death? Yahweh makes no reference to caring for the baby in the practical ways that her parents neglected, or taking her home as someone who finds a baby might naturally do, or adopting her.[[78]](#footnote-78) His not mothering or adopting her reminds the listeners that this is not an allegory. What he does for her in her potentially fatal bloody state is give the powerful bidding to “live”! (חֲיׅי), a directive that is significant enough to profit from repeating. And if Yahweh says it, it will happen, because he is the source of life.

**16:7** The talk of profusion takes the the place of the literal practical requirements for a newborn. Yahweh might have issued the command “Live” to the first human beings in Gen 1, and he did issue the command “Be fruitful, become profuse” there (Gen 1:28). Here “profusion”(רְבָבָה) features just after the command to live, followed by the verb “youbecameprofuse”(וַתּּרְבּׅי). Gen 2 goes on to describe the way things “grew” in the “open country,” and here Yahweh speaks of “thegrowthoftheopencountry (צֶמַח הַשָֹּדֶה). This young girl and the city of Jerusalem and the creation itself are mirror images of each other as they begin their lives and grow towards maturity.

So the girl “got big,” as children do (e.g., Gen 21:8), and “cameintofullprime,” as girls do. That expression (עֲדׅי עֲדָיׅים) combines the singular and plural of the later word for adornment (16:11), but elsewhere the plural word can mean being in your prime, or can imply the arrival of menstruation (see BDB, 725–26; *DCH* 6:280–81). At this point in the story, and given what immediately follows, such connotations make sense (the blood in 16:9 could then be the girl’s first menstrual blood rather than the blood 16:6 referred to). Given the double expression “fullprime,” Ezekiel’s readers might pick up two sets of connotations: she has grown up to be an attractive girl and she is becoming a woman. The reference to breasts and (pubic) hairwould fit. But why is she naked? Once again Ezekiel recalls how things were at the creation (Gen 2:25; 3:7), when one did not have to be fearful about nakedness. A child’s nakedness can still be innocent, but reaching sexual maturity likely means that time is coming to an end.

**16:8** As happened before, Yahweh passes by chance, when he is on his way somewhere else (Yahweh has a life of his own that we don’t know about). He again happens to see her and realizes something he hadn’t thought about (the word “there” suggests spotting something he wasn’t looking for or expecting). If the girl had grown up and become sexually mature, it was her “time for lovemaking” (see the translation footnote), the time for her to have someone make a marital commitment to her. In a traditional society, a marriage relationship would start when people are much younger than in the modern West. Ezekiel does not here speak of Jerusalem as Yahweh’s wife, as other prophets do, but the action Yahweh takes and his affront at her subsequent behavior implies such a relationship (and cf. 16:30, 32). We don’t know how a marriage was effected in First Testament Israel, but a man’s spreading the hem (of his long garment) over the woman was one of the symbolic expressions of it (cf. Ruth 3:9). The protective spreading of a garment also suggests the protective spreading of wings (Ruth 2:12).

In this circumstance it also covered the girl’s nakedness. The for word “nakedness” (עֶרְוָה) is normally an equivalent to the English expression “private parts,” and that connotation makes sense here. The spreading and covering are a kind of hendiadys.\* So is the statement that Yahweh *“*tookanoath” and “cameintocovenant.” Yahweh is swearing a covenant commitment to the girl. Readers might take this as a quasi-marital commitment, if they thought of marriage in terms of taking an oath and of making a covenant, or they might recall Yahweh’s taking an oath to Israel’s ancestors and making a covenant with them. Either way, this covenant is not like a political treaty or a contract.[[79]](#footnote-79) The commitment is one from which Yahweh forgoes any option of withdrawal. The girl is totally secure.[[80]](#footnote-80) The commitment is two-way. One can make a covenant *to* someone (e.g., 16:60; 34:25; 37:26), which puts the stress one way. But one can also make a covenant *with* someone, which can point towards mutuality. Here Yahweh goes on to make the two-way commitment explicit: “youbecamemine.” When one becomes involved in a covenantal-style quasi-marital commitment, one gives up one’s sexual freedom. Admittedly, Ezekiel does not speak of the woman freely accepting the covenantal commitment. Her position is more like Ezekiel’s own in relationship with Yahweh. If God decides to make a covenantal commitment with you, you are stuck with it, whether you wanted it or not.

**16:9–14** Yahweh continues with a variety of concrete actions. He makes his girl look attractive and impressive. Complementing his action, she makes herself attractive. Also complementing his action in beautifying her is his supplying her with the best in food. She is fit to be a queen. This is Jerusalem, “totality of beauty” (Ps 50:2), “beautiful as a height, the joy of all the earth” (Ps 48:2 [3]). The terms for linen, colored material, and dolphin leather (if that is precisely what it is) are all terms for the furnishings of the wilderness dwelling (e.g., Exod 36:19, 37). On the other hand, flour, molasses, and oil are the constituents of (everyday) bread as opposed to flat bread for offerings (though this adds irony to 16:19). The word for silk (if that is precisely what it is) occurs only here. The text half-implies that Yahweh endows Jerusalem with symbols of his presence and his worship, and when Tg. understands the gifts as an allegory for aspects of the Torah, and Christian commentators do something more (see Jerome, 153–61; Theodoret, 99–103), they are only taking the text itself a step further.

**16:15** But subsuently, terrible things follow. Ezekiel begins with a kind of “thesis statement” (Block, 1:488). Whoring (זָנָה) denotes having sex outside of marriage relationship, whether or not one gets paid for it. It usually refers to a woman’s action, but it can refer to a man’s (e.g., Num 25:1). Here Yahweh will use the expression to describe relationships that do suggest the sex trade, though they are ones that work out in an incongruous way. The girl’s beauty and fame give her something to rely on that could make her attractive to other lovers. Only once elsewhere does Ezekiel use the verb “rely on” or “trust” (בָּטַח; cf. 33:13), which is most common in the Psalms and in Isaiah (especially Isa 36). This link will become more significant in connection with 16:23–29. Initially, Yahweh alludes simply to forms of worship adopted by Israel from local deities. “Everypasserby” might imply the deity or deities worshipped at shrines in and around Jerusalem. And whereas the marriage commitment meant “youbecamemine,” this commitment happened “sothattheymightbehis.”

**16:16–19** Most of the objections that Yahweh raises to the practices of Jerusalem’s neighbors don’t relate to the practices in themselves. The First Testament has no objections in principle to decorated shrines and to the offerings Yahweh here refers to. The problem lies in the recipients of the honor and of the offerings. Jerusalem is using the things that Yahweh gave to honor other deities, and it accepted the common practice of making images of these deities. In the allegory, Jerusalem as a woman makes male images as an expression of her whoring, uses the gold and silver that Yahweh gave her to plate them, and uses the clothes he gave her to clothe the images and make the drapes for their shrines. Ezekiel’s critique of male images puts a question mark by any taking too literally of the portrayal by Ezekiel (or anyone else) of Yahweh as a male god.[[81]](#footnote-81) It’s likely that many Jerusalemites didn’t see their action as Ezekiel and other prophets did, as making offerings to other deities rather than making offerings to Yahweh in a different way. But by following the practices of its neighbors, Jerusalem was turning its back on the distinctive nature of what it knew about Yahweh.

**16:20–22** In the First Testament, human sacrifice is a key concrete objection to the religion of Israel’s neighbors. Human sacrifice may link with a focus on death which is important to Canaanite religion. The question whether Jerusalem’s following this practice was “theleastofyourwhorings” is a gross litotes.\* The sons and daughters need not be small children, though to judge from tombs in Carthage, sacrificing small children was common.[[82]](#footnote-82) In itself, making someone pass through fire to a god (e.g., 2 Kgs 23:10; cf. Lev 19:21; Deut 19:10; Jer 32:35; Ezek 20:26, 31) need not imply their death. They might come out the other side. Ezekiel leaves no loopholes for such watered-down understandings. “Yousacrificedthemtothemtoeat”(cf. 44:16; Lev 21:6). Applied to an animal, there were two stages to the procedure of sacrifice. The first was slaughtering them (שָׁחַט), the second was making them pass to the god (עָכַר hiphil), giving them to the god by burning. In Jerusalem, the sacrifice of human beings took place just below the city wall, in the Valley of Hinnom. The god Molech was the recipient of the sacrifices (e.g., Jer 7:31–32; 32:35). In acting in these various outrageous ways, Yahweh says, you simply declined to think about the mess you were in when I was the one who gave you the chance to live.

**16:23–25** The opening phrases to this new paragraph suggest that Yahweh is moving onto another subject, or another subset of his critique, in which the doubled “oh” underscores the intensiveness. The word for a shrine (בָּמָה, 16:16) is traditionally translated “high place,” and a shrine would usually be in an elevated position (see 6:3–4). Here Ezekiel speaks of a mound (גַּב). This different word not used in religious contexts suggests an elevation with a different significance, more political (Allen, 1:229). Ezekiel is moving from religious unfaithfulness in the narrow sense to political unfaithfulness. One does have to avoid making a false antithesis, which points to Judah’s problem. Politics and religion are interwoven in various ways. Israel has to deal with the tension between political action and action in light of a relationship with Yahweh (Lind, 129).[[83]](#footnote-83) Trust in Yahweh rules out trust in other political and military resources. Here is where the word “trust” (16:15) becomes especially significant. Further, alliances with other nations involve ceremonies in which nations call on each other’s deities, and it’s also hard for subordinate powers to evade recognizing the deities of their overlords. So unfaithfulness is difficult to avoid when one is living in the world. Could people have done anything different from what they did? (Jenson, 131). But it looks as if Jerusalem did it with enthusiasm. Jeremiah laments its having altars to alien deities on every street corner (Jer 11:12–13). Ezekiel makes the same point, but in effect calls them foreign embassies rather than shrines. The flourishing of religion in Jerusalem is a flourishing of political involvements and a flourishing of whoring. And “Jerusalem’s autonomous actions indicate that she suspects Yahweh is an ineffectual and inadequate protector.”[[84]](#footnote-84)

**16:26–27** Ezekiel might have been able to talk in the present tense about Judahite whoring with Egypt, and he will speak more of Egypt in Ezek 20; 23; 29–32. Here he overtly makes a single past reference that implicitly relates to Judahite political policies in Hezekiah’s day (see Isa 30–31). Egypt’s strength was alluring and seemed impressive, but Judah’s giving into the temptation to turn to Egypt earned Yahweh’s anger and led to an Assyrian invasion (Isa 36). Sennacherib’s own account in his Annals looks almost like a deliberate clarification of Ezek 16:27: “His [Hezekiah’s] cities which I had despoiled, I cut off from his land and gave them to Mitinti, king of Ashdod, Padi, king of Ekron, and Sili-Bel, king of Gaza, and thus diminished his land.”[[85]](#footnote-85) Isa 1:8–9 gives a more succinct portrait of the consequences. In Ezekiel’s way of putting it, Yahweh “cutdownyourallocation” (חֹק), cut down the land that he had allocated to you. Ezekiel imagines the Philistine recipients of this reallocation (the Philistine cities are pictured as women the same way as Jerusalem is) shocked by Jerusalem’s politico-religious policies that issued in it. Even they are more loyal to their deities than Jerusalem.

**16:28–29** Although Yahweh saw that Jerusalem and its rump state remained free, it was politically inevitable that It subsequently submitted to Assyria. Second Kings 19 hints at the state’s acceptance of some religious symbols of that submission. Ezekiel views it as a symbol of Judah’s commitment to playing politics. It was as if Jerusalem was not satisfied with the sexual dalliance it had been indulging in. By the time of the events related in 2 Kgs 20, Jerusalem is apparently dallying with Babylon, and the venture that led to Josiah’s death (2 Kgs 23:28–30) was apparently aiming to support Babylon. The takeover of power by Babylon, the great “merchant”power, meant it became the recipient of Judah’s commitment. Judah is still locked into playing politics-religion.

**16:30–34** Ezekiel offers a further summary critique of Jerusalem the whore. She was feeble-minded. She was not mindful (16:22). In paying tribute to the empires she dallied with, couldn’t she have worked out how her behavior contradicted Yahweh’s dealings with her from the beginning? And couldn’t she have worked out that her politico-religious policies didn’t pay? To call her “masterful” (שַׁלֶּטֶת) is not an insult,[[86]](#footnote-86) but maybe it’s sarcastic, and being masterful in her way didn’t pay. Perhaps she was being masterful in being the whore who pays for the privilege of extending her favors instead of receiving payment. After all, the person who pays for sex is nominally the senior partner in the arrangement. Indeed, she was whoring not like an independent woman but like a wife making adultery with lovers because she’s not satisfied with her husband, and therefore not getting paid for it. Clients didn’t come to her, she went to them, and she paid. Literally understood, the metaphor of prostitution thus breaks down here.[[87]](#footnote-87)

**16:35–37** The “therefore” marks the transition from critique to threat, with a double introduction and then in due course a recapitulation of the “therefore*.”* Once again Yahweh summarizes the charge in the terms of the allegory and of the religious unfaithfulness it symbolizes, including the sacrifice of children. Yahweh will gather the lovers, and also the people with whom Jerusalem was not interested in having sex (so she has her boundaries!). That is, he will gather the various nations Jerusalem had been in alliance with or in conflict with. Together, they will expose the city. Exposing yourself by choice to a lover is one thing, being exposed to everyone is another. They will humiliate and shame.

**16:38** Ezekiel presses his allegory further. Yahweh is also like the president of the community elders who has rules to implement, in his responsibility for taking action against an adulteress (responding to the plaint of her husband) and a murderer (she has slaughtered children). Both as father and as the senior man in the community, he is full of passionate fury. Both adultery and murder are capital offenses in the Torah, though as far as we can tell, the capital sanctions in the Torah were not designed for mere literal implementation. Saying that something deserves the death penalty is to designate it as an outrageously wrong (see the Biblical Theology comments on 12:21–14:11 and 44:1–31).

**16:39–42** Like the Torah, then, the allegory speaks figuratively, and the interpretation of it is also in part figurative. Its threats form a sequence of *waw*-consecutives, though not denoting a chronological sequence of events but comprising parallel portrayals of the same event of invasion and devastation. Yahweh’s wrath and passion are real, they antedate this allegory (e.g., 5:13, 15), and they will express themselves in surrendering Jerusalem to its attackers so that they can “pull down your mound and break down your elevation,” the shrines that are like embassies. That is the way they will “strip you of your clothes and get your splendid things and leave you stark naked.” The “assembly” they bring up will thus “pelt you with rock, cut you down with their swords, and burn your houses in fire,” as happens when an army besieges a city (Brownlee, 238). The threat matches the first sign act in 4:1–3. The assembly will thereby “act on rulings against you.” It is the way Yahweh will rule with the rulings for adulteresses and women pouring out blood (16:38) and implement his threats about rulings that followed the first sign act (see 5:8–10, 15). He will again do it “before the eyes of many women,” the many cities assembled against Ms. Jerusalem who have been shocked by Jerusalem’s behavior and will be shocked by its destruction (see 16:27). There will no more whoring with other nations, and no more paying tribute to get their support. So the summary in 16:41aβ–42 follows up from 16:38. Yahweh’s fury, passion, and rage (cf. 16:26), which also long antedate this allegory (8:17), have found the expression they needed. Yahweh will be quiet (שָׁקַט): he will be able to be at peace and relax, with nothing he needs to take action over. Origen comments that “he himself does not have anger.… For in truth, wrathfulness is something different from God, such that it is joined to him as something inherent in him” (Origen [Homily 10:2]. 298–99). That might be an oversimplification, but this context does suggest something similar in its implications. God’s anger is not built-in and eternal.

**16:43** The threat closes with another recapitulation of the charge that she was not mindful of her young days (cf. 16:22), mindful of the story in 16:3–12. The wonder of what Yahweh did for her should surely have made her tremble. While trembling is usually a negative emotion, words for fear can be negative or positive, and the context here suggests a wise and proper awe (cf. Psa 99:1). This aspect of her failure, her failure to tremble, makes the outrages even worse. Yahweh goes on to recapitulate almost finally the threat that follows from that failure, and to speak anticipatorily (in terms of the decision he has taken, whose implications previous verses have been spelling out. “Ihavelaid your path,” the route you have been taking, “againstyourhead” (cf. 9:10). Yet even that recapitulation does not have the final word. Yahweh drolly entrusts that to a rhetorical unmarked question. Go on then, deny it! Or turn.

**16:44–46** Yahweh moves sideways to another way of characterizing Jerusalem’s waywardness, keeping the picture of Jerusalem as wife but abandoning the image of whoring. This might, then, be a separate indictment attached to the previous one, or a development of it. It does go back to the beginning of the preceding allegory. Jerusalem’s rejection of her husband and children (whom she was prepared to slaughter) follows the example of her Hittite mother. Not surprisingly, her sisters behaved the same way. “The depravity of Amorite and Hittite is assumed: ‘they spurn their husbands and commit adultery with other men; they spurn their children and slaughter them for Molech’ (Eliezer of Beaugency; Greenberg, 1:288). It’s easy enough to see Samaria, the capital of northern Israel, Ephraim, as the sister of Jerusalem, the capital of Judah. And it’s easy to see it as the big sister, not in the sense of being older but in the sense of being the capital of a bigger nation. Samaria’s daughters will then be the other towns in Ephraim. It’s not so self-evident that Sodom is Jerusalem’s other sister, though once that point is granted, Sodom is Jerusalem’s little sister in the sense that it is (or was) a less significant town. It could also be viewed as the senior of the towns by the Dead Sea, which could thus be seen as its daughters.

**16:47–52** The charge is that when Jerusalem has behaved like Samaria and Sodom, as other prophets have said, she has done so not merely half-heartedly but zealously, even though these “sisters” were paradigms of waywardness and destruction (Sweeney, 87). Sodom’s offensiveness lay in a “haughtiness*”* expressed in the way she simply enjoyed her life, a picture that coheres with Gen 13:10 and recalls the benefits of Yahweh’s covenantal blessing in Lev 26:6 (Calvin, 2:177). The problem was that she enjoyed her prosperity without using it to care for the lowly and needy. The accusation fits Gen 18:19–21, and the expression “infrontofme” recalls Yahweh’s comment there on what he wants to see with his own eyes (Rashi, in MG). It also matches Isa 1:10–23. It differs from the story of sexual sin in Gen 19, though it may not exclude it.[[88]](#footnote-88) While the comment about Samaria fits the accounts of the prophets, for rhetorical reasons Yahweh is rather soft on Samaria, to judge from those accounts. Jerusalem has made Sodom and Samaria look not too bad compared with her, and has thus accidentally acted as a character witness for them and/or has put Yahweh on the spot—he cannot have mercy on Jerusalem and not on Samaria and Sodom. With regard to Samaria, Ezekiel’s point is the converse of Jer 3:11. With regard to Sodom, “Jerusalem’s intervention succeeds where that of Abraham failed (Gen 18:22–32)” (Brownlee, 249). In this ironic fashion the consequence must be that Jerusalem has to carry her shame.

**16:53–54** Another unexpected transition follows, the reverse of the one in 16:35. There will be restoration. It’s a surprise, though it fits the pattern suggested by 14:1–11. The invasion and destruction of 16:35–43 and the shaming of 16:52 will not be the end. Calling Sodom virtuous compared to Israel is not the climax of this chapter’s shock value.[[89]](#footnote-89) Yet a promise of restoration reflects how the regular aim of bringing catastrophe is to constitute chastisement, corrective, or purging, not merely retribution (Sweeney, 87). Ezekiel’s message contrasts with the story of the unhappy relationship between Inanna and Dumuzi, with which it otherwise has some parallels.[[90]](#footnote-90) Nor is the promise of restoration the end to Ezekiel’s capacity to shock, in that it will be a shared restoration (Wright, 150–55). Nor is that the end: The yet bigger shock is the fact that not merely do Sodom and Samaria share in the restoration, but that even this point has to be put the other way around. As is appropriate given their being the lesser wrongdoers to whose relative faithfulness Jerusalem has testified by its greater faithlessness, the promise of their restoration comes first and Jerusalem’s restoration comes on their coattails, rather than vice versa. Even that is not the end of Ezekiel’s stunning announcement. The transition in these verses again fits the pattern set by earlier messages, where good news is qualified by what follows. The object of Jerusalem’s restoration is not that it may escape its shame but that it may face it, face the paradoxical fact that it has brought comfort to Sodom and Samaria only by being more disgusting than them.

**16:55–58** The combination of promise and qualification continues, with the qualification expressed in a further way. The promise implicitly is that Sodom and the towns in its area will flourish again as Gen 13:10 describes, Samaria will flourish again as a great city, so will the northern towns, and so will Jerusalem and the towns of Judah. The new implicit qualification is that Jerusalem cannot deny how it used to enjoy hearing news reports about those disgusting Sodomites (see Isa 3:9; Jer 23:14). But it was hypocrisy on Jerusalem’s part. It will now have to face that fact about the days when it was under pressure from Aram (2 Kgs 15:37; Isa 7) and “the daughters of the Philistines,” the Philistine towns. Judah did have to carryits “willfulness”andits“outrages,” pay the penalty for them, when Sennacherib made his invasion, and it is about to pay it again and more spectacularly.

**16:59** Yahweh goes on to restate the promise once more in different terms. Once again he begins with a reaffirmation of his intent to bring trouble and with a summary of the indictment that justifies it. The Judahites have behaved as if he had never sworn his oath to them, never made his covenant to them. Ezekiel has often alluded to the expectations and warnings in Lev 26, but he has not previously picked up that chapter’s emphasis on the covenantal context of those expectations and warnings. Here he does. The warnings concerned troubles that would follow on “violating my covenant” (פָּרַר hiphil; Lev 26:15), and Jerusalem has “violated acovenant,” though the combination of “oath”(אָלָה) and “covenant” (בְּרִית)is a feature rather of the similar challenge in Deut 29:12, 14 [11, 13]. It is to be noted that it is not their oath and covenant that they have violated, but his.[[91]](#footnote-91)

**16:60** While Ezekiel referred to a covenant between Yahweh and Jerusalem in 16:8, the framework of thinking here differs. That link does combine with picking up again the language of being “mindful” and of “young days” as well as covenant. But Yahweh’s point is that he doesn’t forget things like some people. He had made this point, too, back in Lev 26. In light of their violating the covenant, he would implement its threats, but even then on his part there il be no “violating of my covenant.” Rather “I will be mindful for them of the covenant” (Lev 26:44–45). Thus here he declares that he will be mindful of that old covenant but also will “establishitforyouas acovenantforalltime.” “Establish” (קוּם hiphil) is the verb Yahweh used in Lev 26:9 (and often in Genesis) and elsewhere. He does not speak of renewing the covenant or confirming it but of establishing it in a new way, as now set up as a “covenantforalltime.” Traditionally, translations refer to an everlasting or eternal covenant. More literally it is a covenant of the age(בְּרִית עוֹלָם).

**16:61–62** Further notes follow. Again there is the motif of facing the facts of what the city has done, and feeling shame, so that the promise has a uncomfortable aspect attached to it. It does mean that Jerusalem will have a new relationship with its sisters. It is “the center of a new community” (Allen, 1:246). She is the mother, they are the daughters. The implication is that Jerusalem will be the capital of the entire land of Canaan (cf. Ezek 47). But the reason it will come about is “not because of your covenant,” not because of your keeping a covenant, but because of “my covenant,” my commitment and compassion (Rashi, in MG). “I myself will establish a covenant with you.” And a fruit of Yahweh’s establishing his covenant will be that “youwillacknowledgethat IamYahweh.” This commonplace note in Ezekiel has particular significance in this context. Jer 31:31–34 uniquely uses the expression “new covenant,” then goes on to see the people’s acknowledging of Yahweh as its fruit. If Yahweh’s action issues in Jerusalem acknowledging Yahweh, then its effect is the same as that of a “new covenant.” This reestablished covenant “is not called new for the substance thereof, for this was all one,” made as before by the gracious God on the basis of faith (Mayer, 415).[[92]](#footnote-92)

**16:63** Related to that acknowledgment will be another aspect to an associated capacity to keep the mouth shut. There will be no more complaining about Yahweh, partly because Yahweh’s faithfulness will mean they have nothing to complain about.[[93]](#footnote-93) Silence will be appropriate when Yahweh rouses himself in this way (Zech 2:13 [17]; cf. Rom 3:19 [Calvin, 2:207–8]). And/or there will be no more boasting (Eliezer of Beaugency, as quoted by Rosenberg, 1:125). Perhaps there will also be no more confessing, because “Ihaveexpiatedforyou” (כָּפַר piel). The subject of this verb is usually human, but Ezekiel distinctively uses the verb to describe something that Yahweh does for his people. Yahweh has cleaned things up. Ezekiel does not speak of cleansing individuals but of cleansing the people or the city (Odell, 201), which would fit the earlier picture of sprinkling purifying fire over the city (10:2), or fit the temple’s need of cleansing. The act of destruction would be a חַטָּאָה, an expiatory or purification offering (Sweeney, 88).

### Biblical Theology Comments

A narrative biblical theology can begin with creation (Genesis) or Abraham (Acts 7) or the exodus (Ps 106), but this one begins with Jerusalem (there will be more versions in Ezek 20 and 23). It tells the story of Yahweh’s settling on a city with no inherent prospects, and encouraging it to live. The story illustrates how there is no basis for Yahweh’s election of a people except the baby’s need and Yahweh’s character. The city comes to flourish but it then turns to worshipping in a way that appalls Yahweh, and to looking for support from other resources, which slights him and is unrealistic. Yahweh therefore determines to take drastic action against it, though he later also takes action to restore the relationship.

Like the rest of Ezekiel, the story could seem to play into the emphasis in Western theology on God as lawgiver and judge, which misrepresents the framework within which the First Testament does its theology. Tellingly, Hebrew has no word for judge or judgment. The words that get translated that way are words for holding and exercising authority in a family or community context in a fashion that is as likely to be concerned with redress, with the purification of the stained community, with what is now called restorative justice, and with fatherly discipline and correction, as they are with retributive punishment[[94]](#footnote-94)—for which again Hebrew has no words.

Ezekiel adds beef to the narrative outline by telling the story in the form of an allegory in which Yahweh is a parent and a husband and Jerusalem is a child and a woman. Again, it's possible to treat the allegory literally, so that Yahweh becomes a husband assaulting his unfaithful wife, which has a negative effect on understandings of what it means to be Yahweh and of what it means to be a husband, and potential danger for a wife.

As far as husbands and wives are concerned, it is illuminating to consider Ezek 16 in the context of the broad First Testament picture of marriage relationships. Gen 1–2 and the Song of Songs imply the ideal of an egalitarian relationship, which means not that the two people are the same or fulfill the same roles but that they complement each other in roles that make an equal contribution to their joint humanity. The liberal modern West aspires to a similar ideal. In the Scriptures, even the Song (and soon Gen 3) recognizes that the ideal is ever compromised, and the Scriptures work throughout with patriarchy in the sense of accepting the assumption that men usually carry formal authority in society and community, though women commonly carry actual power. They also work with an implicit recognition that patriarchy covers a spectrum of attitude and practice, and imply a crude distinction between bad patriarchy and not-too-bad patriarchy. Not-too-bad-patriarchy can make society and community work in a harmonious and generous way. Bad patriarchy can mean (among other things) men assuming the right to use their physical strength and structural power for the purpose of assaulting women. David often embodies not-too-bad patriarchy in the first half of his story but bad patriarchy in the second half. Not-too-bad patriarchy doesn’t involve the assumption that wives submit to their husbands’ control, as stories in Genesis and elsewhere make clear, or that husbands need not be sexually faithful to their wives but wives are expected to be sexually faithful to their husbands (the commandment on adultery is addressed to men). The relationship can be what is sometimes called “bonded love.”

Ezekiel the male prophet here works with the standard image of the city as a woman and thus of Yahweh as Jerusalem’s man, and with the regular First Testament conviction that Jerusalem has been wayward in its relationship with Yahweh and that Yahweh may, indeed must, take action against Jerusalem. That set of convictions, combined with Ezekiel’s baroque imagination, finds expression in a message that has been troubling for different reasons in different contexts. In much of the modern West, Ezek 16 is read in the context of convictions about patriarchy, gender, and sexual abuse.

It would be possible for a man to read Ezek 16 and claim Ezekiel’s authority for a portrait of Yahweh as a (bad) patriarchal husband dominating and assaulting his wife. Indeed, the decades up to the writing of this commentary have seen an “almost obsessive Jacob-like wrestling”[[95]](#footnote-95) with passages such as Ezek 16 that describe violence against Israel or Jerusalem who is portrayed as a woman. It has been said that Ezek 16 and 23 make the assumption that “female sexuality is inherently defiling”[[96]](#footnote-96) and that “men of Ezekiel’s time, accustomed to viewing women as under their control, would identify with Yahweh’s rage and look approvingly on Jerusalem’s public shaming and punishment. They perceive Jerusalem as the unclean Other and distance themselves from her in disgust” (Odell, 183). Maybe there were men who thought this way (as there are in the modern West), but the explicit evidence of male attitudes expressed in the First Testament (and for that matter, in other ancient Near Eastern documents) makes this assertion seems unevidenced, unwarranted, and implausible. Such a reading also presupposes the unwarranted assumption that Yahweh provides a model for human husbands. And it requires a selective literalism. “Modern readers remain literalists at heart” (Odell, 181).[[97]](#footnote-97) For instance, in Ezek 16 a “husband” does not attack his “wife.” Ezekiel portrays Yahweh getting foreign nations to attack the city of Jerusalem (readers may dispute the idea that the real God would do such a thing, but that’s another story).[[98]](#footnote-98) There is no evidence that any husbands have read Ezek 16 that way, or read it in connection with quest for “control,”[[99]](#footnote-99) and one might think that “the grotesque and the absurd, the ironic and the fantastical” in the chapter would inhibit it.[[100]](#footnote-100)

There is a Cartesian dualism within which the feminization of Jerusalem as the wife of YHWH in Ezekiel 16 creates a theological problem—one which feminists have ceaselessly critiqued: the female body as the metaphor of the “corporeal” state in tension with the “divine.” The unfaithful wife in Ezekiel 16 “embodies” the Cartesian dualism most vividly, for the feminine is “representing nature, emotionality, irrationality and sensuality. Images of the dangerous, appetitive female body, ruled precariously by her emotions, stand in contrast to the masterful, masculine will, the locus of social power, rationality and self-control. The female body is always ‘other’: mysterious, unruly, threatening to erupt and challenge the patriarchal order through ‘distraction from knowledge, seduction away from God, capitulation to sexual desire, violence or aggression, failure of will, even death.’[[101]](#footnote-101)

Ezek 16 does not provide indicarions of working with that dualism. There is no misogyny or pathological loathing of female sexuality here.[[102]](#footnote-102)

In Ezekiel’s outline of a narrative biblical theology, the covenant was unconditioned, though one might see it as conditional. And “who doubts” that the community or individual who has gone back on God’s special involvement with them as Jerusalem did was “worthy of far greater punishments?” (Jerome, 185). For the closer we were to God and the nearer neighbors we were to blessedness, so much the farther away from it shall we be when we have sinned (Origen [Homily 10:2], 296–97).

Yet Yahweh’s aim is to clean the city up and reestablish a relationship that will last for all time. As usual, the conditional/unconditional antithesis doesn’t work. As Ezekiel adds beef to the outline story by telling it in the form of an allegory in which Yahweh is a parent and husband and Jerusalem is a child and a woman, his telling also makes clear that God is not without passions. He feels the passion of love, mercy, and compassion, then passionate wrath, then love, mercy and compassion again (Origen [Homily 6:6], 192–95). It does not mean he is passive-aggressive, because he is quite open about the negative and the positive passion. And he keeps covenant, even if his city does not. Origen ([Homily 10:3], 300–3) goes on:

The Hebrews say that Sodom is to be restored to the same condition in which it was before, so that once again it will be compared to the Paradise of God and to the land of Egypt. If this is how it is, and whether it is going to happen in the future or not—for matters of this sort must be investigated among those who are most learned…. If, however, this takes place regarding Sodom and Samaria, who were justified by Jerusalem, what is to be said regarding Jerusalem herself, who justified the wicked deeds of the aforementioned [Sodom and Samaria]? “And you will be restored to be as you were from the outset; both you and your daughters will be restored to be as you were in the beginning.” Isaiah too knows what is said here—“as you were in the beginning”; he says, “And I shall establish your judges as before, and your counsellors as at the outset” [Isa 1:26].

Evidently Sodom had not been restored by Jesus’ day (see Matt 10:14–15; 11:24). Origen is wise to wonder what the promise of its restoration might mean.

### Application and Devotional Implications

Greenhill (378) comments:

A pure virgin church may in process of time become whorish, adulterous, idolatrous, and worse than others. This church of Jerusalem was at first chaste, holy, glorious; but when she had left the Lord, and those ways and rules of worship which he had given her, then she became a strumpet, a common whore.… If churches would therefore not degenerate, let them “holdfasttheformofwholesomewords*,* 2 Tim. i.13. Let them be content with the way of worship, which God hath prescribed them, and lead such lives as may not blemish the religion they profess; and then they shall never provoke God to complain of them.

It’s possible to suffer shipwreck in the faith by rejecting conscience, though shipwreck need not be the end of the world. People get saved (1 Tim 1:19–20). But then, “the second plank after a shipwreck is to be ashamed when you sin”: contrast Jer 3:3 (the first plank is baptism) (Jerome, 184). “The gospel also signifies something like this: ‘There is a shame that leads to sin and there is shame that leads to death and there is shame that leads to life’” (Jerome, 185: he is apparently quoting from memory and conflating Sirach 4:21, Matt 7:13–14, and Rom 6:21).

In the ancient world and in the modern world, shame is both a sense of one’s own unworthiness and a loss of esteem in the minds of other people. In English, we can use the word disgrace in the latter connection, but it is doubtful whether Hebrew distinguishes בּושׁ and כָּלַם (niphal) in this way. And it is misleading to characterize Israel’s world as a shame culture rather than a guilt culture and the modern world, as the opposite.[[103]](#footnote-103) The ancient world perhaps put more emphasis on the loss of esteem while the modern world puts more stress on the sense of unworthiness. By the time Ezekiel is preaching to the Kebarites in Babylonia, they surely feel shame at what happened in 597.[[104]](#footnote-104) Shame surfaces especially in situations where everything is falling apart.[[105]](#footnote-105) And while shame in Ezek 16 is a woman’s shame, reference to male shame appears elsewhere in Ezekiel,[[106]](#footnote-106) and Ezekiel presupposes that there is more shame for men on the way. But he also implies that shame will play a positive role in people’s formation, as one fruit of their chastisement.[[107]](#footnote-107) “The usual sequence of shame leading to repentance and expunging of sin by God is reversed here” (Greenberg, 1:292). Admittedly, the relationship between these two may be more subtle than this antithesis suggests. Paul implies as much in 2 Cor 7:9–11 (Calvin, 2:199). Even when we know that God has reconfirmed his covenant commitment to us when we did not deserve it, and that he has cleansed us from our waywardness, “we retain the memory of past sin, and our mouth is always closed, since we are saved not by our works but by the grace of God” (Jerome, 190). Origen reflects ([Homily 10:1], 288–89):

The first [goal] is to do no disgraceful deed, but instead to do only such things as are able to look at God with a bold countenance. But because, being human, we often sin, you must know that there is a “second ship” [a second-best option], so to speak: to blush after committing disgraceful deeds and to cast down one’s eyes in shame for one’s wicked acts, and not to walk along with an impudent face as though one has not sinned at all. For it is good to be ashamed after committing shameful deeds, because often the artificer of wickedness even manages to ensure that the sinner does not return in repentance and instead acts just as though he still continued in righteousness. We can see and learn, even in everyday life, that many people not only do not mourn after committing their sins, but even defend their own downfalls with an impudent expression. And so, a great favor is saved up for Jerusalem, if at any rate she would trust in the Lord when he says, “And as for you, be ashamed.”

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## The Eagles, the Cedars, and the Vine (17:1–24)

### Outline

Ezekiel is to present his readers with another מָשָׁל, a parable\* or allegory.\* It ends up portraying “the death and resurrection of the Judean monarchy” (Allen, 1:249).

Ezekiel also introduces it as a “puzzle” (חִידָה), which adds to the sense in which such a מָשָׁל “functions with force upon the hearer/reader, encouraging, teasing and inviting them to observe and regard the referents in a special or unusual way.”[[108]](#footnote-108) It further indicates that there is no necessary disjunction between prophecy and the “wisdom tradition.”[[109]](#footnote-109) As a story, the מָשָׁל is more precisely a fable, in which animals or plants represent human beings (cf. Judg 9:8–15).

While the prose announcement in 17:1–3aα might be an introduction issuing from Ezekiel’s compilation work, it doesn’t give readers any hint of the puzzle’s meaning, like the introduction to Ezek 16. The parable itself takes poetic form and comprises two parts, with the longer first part itself divided into two sections. Ezekiel’s readers might gradually understand what the parable refers to, but it could be read in more than one way, and a prose interpretation (also in two sections) follows the first part. Then the brief second poetic part is more or less self-explanatory in light of that interpretation of the first part. Finally, there is a prose conclusion incorporating a theological aphorism. Thus the chapter unfolds:

Introduction (17:1–3aα)

Parable part one: first section (17:3aβ–8)

An eagle, a shoot, a vine, and another eagle

Introduction (17:9aα)

Parable part one: second section (17:9aβ–10)

A series of questions about the vine and the second eagle

Introduction (17:11–12a)

Interpretation: first section (17:12b–18)

The first eagle is Nebuchadrezzar, who in 597 moved Jehoiachin to Babylon and replaced him by Zedekiah, the second eagle is Pharaoh, from whom in about 594 (a year or two before the date in 8:1) Zedekiah sought alternative support, a breach for which he will pay

Introduction (17:19aα)

Interpretation: second section(17:19aβ–21)

Zedekiah’s action will lead to disaster

Introduction (17:22aα)

Parable part two (17:22aβ–23)

In due course Yahweh will “plant” another shoot, which will flourish

Conclusion (17:24)

The aim: recognition of who Yahweh is (17:24aα)

Two bicola\* spell out of who Yahweh is (17:24aβ)

Closing declaration (17:24b)

Comparing the parable with the sequence of sign acts and messages in 4:1–5:4 and 5:5–17 suggests the possibility that Ezekiel might have delivered the parable and left people to think about it. He might then have had the prose interpretation available for people who were puzzled (like Jesus with the interpretation of his sower parable in Matt 13), or he might have delivered it subsequently, or he might have composed it in connection with collecting his messages after 587 (again, possibly like followers of Jesus some years later than his time). The second part of the parable and the conclusion might belong to any of these stages.

These possibilities interlink with the points of connection with Ezek 16. Here as in Ezek 16:

* there is colorful clothing (רׅקְמָה): four occurrences of this unusual noun come in these chapters
* there is growing (צָמַח)—two of the three occurrences of this verb in Ezekiel come in these chapters
* there is thus growth (צֶמַח)—all three occurrences of this noun in Ezekiel come in these chapters
* there is reference to Babylonia as the “merchant country”
* there is a covenant: there are twelve references to covenant in Ezek 16 and 17, six in the rest of Ezekiel
* the covenant is violated: four of Ezekiel’s five references are in these two chapters
* there is an oath: all Ezekiel’s references are in these two chapters
* there is despising of the oath: all but one of Ezekiel’s references are in these two chapters
* there is recourse to Egypt: the first two references in Ezekiel are in these two chapters
* there is a (military) assembly: Ezekiel’s first two references are in these two chapters
* Yahweh will put Zedekiah’s action against his head: two of Ezekiel’s four uses of this phrase are in these two chapters.

The juxtaposition in Ezek 16 and 17 of the two allegories or parables, their critiques, their threats, and their promises invites readers to see Zedekiah as an individual embodiment of whorish Jerusalem. “If chapter 16 is about the fidelity of the covenant community to God, this chapter considers the fidelity of the community’s ruler” (Bowen, 94). Zedekiah was the person who was never destined to be king, but who then despised his unexpected destiny. He particularly embodied whorish Jerusalem in his political policies, which he was the means of implementing on its behalf. He, too, was destined for disaster. Yet in his family line he was also destined to see (metaphorically) magnificent implementing of Yahweh’s promises. Underlying these detailed and verbal links between the chapters is thus a looser similarity is the way devastating threat leads into an unexpected promise, and a broader similarity in the way critique leads into threat in the classic fashion of a prophet message (there is no “therefore” in the parable, but there is in the interpretation). A further parallel lies in the movement through the chapters whereby the imagery in the original parable is reworked, in a fashion that suggests Ezekiel’s continuing inspiration or that of someone who followed him.

As a puzzle, Ezek 17 also compares with Ezek 15, though Ezekiel did not uses the term “puzzle” there. That puzzle, too, constituted an imaginative variant on the classic two-part message combining critique and threat, linked by a “therefore.” That puzzle, too, concerned a vine, which there stood for Israel, as the vine commonly does. One could hardly blame Ezekiel’s hearers if they thought the vine in this chapter stood for Israel (and the eagle for Yahweh). So the parable is not self-interpreting (Block, 1:525). But this chapter’s focus on the monarchy will be taken up again in Ezek 19, and it will become clear that Ezek 18 also links with Ezek 19. Thus Ezek 16 not only leads from 14:12–15:8 but leads into Ezek 17 and also into Ezek 18–19. And here as in Ezek 15 and Ezek 19, Ezekiel turns the positive significance of the vine image upside down.[[110]](#footnote-110)

Part one of the parable and the first half of its interpretation can be set alongside each other in columns (Block, 1:536–39):

Introduction (17:1–2) Introduction (17:11–12)

Bidding, “say” (17:3) Bidding, “say” (17:12)

An eagle comes (17:3) The king of Babylon comes (17:12)

It plucks a shoot (17:3–4) He gets the king (17:12)

He takes it to Babylon (17:4) He takes him to Babylon (17:12)

He plants another seedling (17:5) He puts in place another king (17:13)

It sprouts low (17:6) He aims to get him to stay low (17:14)

There is another eagle (17:7)

The vine reaches to it (17:7) He sends envoys to Egypt (17:15)

It had been planted in a good position (17:8)

Will it flourish? (17:9) Will he flourish? (17:15)

Or will it not wither? (17:9–10) Or will he escape? (17:15)

The juxtaposition draws attention to the extent to which the latter verses in the interpretation (17:16–21) develop what has preceded. Part two of the parable and the conclusion (17:22–24) also go substantially beyond what has preceded. That might be a sign that one or both are expansions of the message from during the siege or after 587.

### Translation

1Yahweh’s message came to me: 2My man, formulate a puzzle, pronounce a parable, to Israel’s household. 3Say, the Lord Yahweh has said this.

When the big eagle, big-winged,

long-pinioned,

Full of plumage, that had color:

came to the Lebanon.

He got the crown of the cedar,

4plucking the topmost of its shoots.

He had it come to a merchant country,

setting it in a city of traders.

5He got one of the country’s seed,

and put it in a seeding field.

A plant[[111]](#footnote-111) by extensive water,

setting it as a willow.[[112]](#footnote-112)

6It grew and became a vine,

spreading, low in height,

In turning its branches to him,

with its roots being under him.

So it became a vine and produced branches

and sent out boughs.

7But there was a big eagle,

big winged, extensive in plumage.

And there, this vine,

it stretched out its roots towards him.

His branches[[113]](#footnote-113) it sent out to him

to enable it to drink,[[114]](#footnote-114) away from the terraces where it was planted,

8Though by a good field,

by extensive water, it was bedded,

To produce greenery and to bear fruit—

to become a noble vine.

9Say, the Lord Yahweh has said this.

It will flourish?[[115]](#footnote-115)—

its roots, he[[116]](#footnote-116) will pull them out, won’t he.

As he tears off[[117]](#footnote-117) its fruit so it withers,

and all its crop of growth withers,

And not with a big force or with an extensive company

to lift it up from its roots.[[118]](#footnote-118)

10So there, bedded, will it flourish?—

when the east wind strikes it,

It will wither, utterly,

as it withers on the terraces where it grows,[[119]](#footnote-119) won’t it.

11Yahweh’s message came to me: 12Say to the rebellious household, will you: “You acknowledge what these things are, don’t you.” Say, There, the king of Babylon came to Jerusalem, got the king and its officials, and had them come to him in Babylon. 13He got one of the royal offspring, solemnized a covenant with him and had him come into an oath, getting the top people in the country,[[120]](#footnote-120) 14to be a lowly kingdom so it would not lift itself up, to keep his covenant so as to stand. 15But he has defied him by sending his envoys to Egypt [for it] to give him horses and an extensive company. Will he flourish? Will the person who does these things escape, violate a covenant and escape? 16I am alive (an affirmation of the Lord Yahweh), if in the place of the king who made him king, whose oath he has despised and whose covenant with him he has violated—[if] within Babylon he does not die.…[[121]](#footnote-121) 17With a large force and with an extensive assembly Pharaoh will not act with him in battle when people are pouring a ramp and building a siege tower to cut off many individuals. 18He has despised[[122]](#footnote-122) an oath in violating a covenant, and there, he gave his hand. Given that he has done all these things, he will not escape.

19Therefore the Lord Yahweh has said this. I am alive, if my oath that he has despised, and my covenant that he has violated, I do not put[[123]](#footnote-123) against his head….20I will spread my net over him and he will be caught in my trap. I will have him come to Babylon and I will engage in a ruling with him there for his violation that he has committed against me 21with all his fugitives in all his divisions falling by the sword, and the ones who remain scattering to every wind. And you will acknowledge that I, Yahweh, have spoken.

22The Lord Yahweh has said this.

But I myself will get,

from the high crown of a cedar,

I will put from the topmost of its shoots,

a tender one I will pluck.

I myself will bed,

on a high, towering mountain,[[124]](#footnote-124)

23On Israel’s lofty mountain I will bed it,

and it will bear greenery.

It will produce fruit

and become an impressive cedar.

Every bird will dwell under it,

every wing[[125]](#footnote-125) dwelling in the shadow of its branches.

24And all the trees of the open country will acknowledge that I am Yahweh.

I make high tree lowly—

I make lowly tree high—

I make green tree wither—

I make withering tree thrive.[[126]](#footnote-126)

I Yahweh have spoken and I will act.

### Textual Notes

MT has markers\* after after 17:8, 10, 18, 21, and 24.

**17:3–4** There are a number of puzzling renderings in LXX that likely reflect its perplexity over the verses.

**17:7** For אֶחָד, “a,” LXX, Vg. have “another,” which might imply אַחֵר. But MT may presuppose the use of אֶחָד followed by a second אֶחָד, meaning one then another (Zimmerli, 1:355).

**17:9** LXX has further differences from MT that may reflect uncertainties about the meaning of words.

**17:12–15** LXX has future tense verbs throughout, perhaps suggesting an interpretation in relation to the community’s relationship with the Seleucids and Ptolemies (Olley, 337).

**17:16** For “whose oath” and “covenant with him,” LXX has “my” both times, anticipating 17:19.

**17:20** LXX lacks “Iwillhavehimcome *…* againstme.”

**17:21** אֵת introduces the subject of the verb, perhaps with some emphasis.

Q מִבְרָחָיו presupposes that the hapax\* מִבְרָח is a regular sg. noun of which Ezekiel here uses the pl. K מברחו implies a collective.\* LXXL, Syr., Aq., Tg., imply מִבְחָרָיו “his picked troops” (cf. 23:7).

**17:23** LXX has a double translation of the first bicolon, and for *“*bird” has “animal,” which is more logical.

### Verse-by-Verse Commentary

**17:1–3aα** Ezekiel begins with a selection of the terms that recur in the introduction to messages, though only here does he use the expression “formulate a puzzle”(חוּד חִידָה). It occurs most often in Judg 14, where there is indeed also a puzzle to be solved. While we may refer to Ezekiel’s message as an allegory, that would be too precise an actual translation of מָשָָׁל. In 12:22, 23; 14:8, the word meant an instructive, pithy saying or an object to make people think, and here it means a story with that potential: a “parable.”

**17:3aβ–4** The strong, soaring eagle is the most impressive and formidable of birds, and this specimen is especially impressive, with its big wings and spectacular plumage that resembles colorful fabric (the word in 16:10, 13, 16). These features suggest a golden eagle rather than a vulture. Elsewhere the eagle is a figure for Yahweh (Hos 8:1) and for Nebuchadrezzar (Jer 48:40). As a tree, too, the cedar is tall, impressive, stately, and strong. What might it stand for? Assyria (Ezek 31:3)? An individual leader (2 Kgs 14:9)? Or must readers distinguish between the cedar and its crown—are they a people and its king? Anyway, the eagle removes this top shoot (17:3bβ–4a is a neat abcc′b′a′ line). In real life, “the real enemy of such fresh shoots in Palestine is undoubtedly the goat” (Zimmerli, 1:361). But Ezekiel need not be referring directly to a creature or tree that he or his people have ever seen, but to something they might know in art (Lind, 141). “TheLebanon” is a loose term for the area of Western Asia that includes Canaan, and a convenient term because it is the land with which the cedar is associated. *The* eagle plucks *the* top branch from *the* cedar: while the definite articles might just have referred to the examples in the parable, people might correctly infer that they point to particular examples. Less inference might be required to work out that the “merchantcountry”is Babylonia (see 16:29) and thus that “thecityoftraders” is Babylon itself. The reference would be an aspect of the way Ezek 17 is “a retrospective commentary on Judean history formed in the Babylonian milieu.”[[127]](#footnote-127)

**17:5–6** Once you have made that inference, then you might be on the verge of deducing that the shoot is Jehoiachin, just a youngster in 597 (Theodoret, 114). The seed is then Zedekiah, whom Nebuchadrezzar got from the native royal seed in Judah. Jehoiachin was Josiah’s grandson. Zedekiah was one of Josiah’s younger sons who had previously been passed over as potential king, but Jehoiachin’s uncle, less of a youngster than Jehoiachin, and father of two sons by the time of the grim report in 2 Kgs 25:1–7. Nebuchadrezzar planted him on the throne in Jerusalem, a position that surely should be full of promise and have good provision if it was like that of a willow by the abundant water that it needs. It was also like a vine, another significant First Testament image. Ezekiel remarks on a feature of a vine whose significance he will later draw out. By nature (unless buttressed), a vine spreads and flourishes but stays near the ground. Zedekiah was supposed to do that, looking to Nebuchadrezzar, staying rooted in him.

**17:7–8** It would not be difficult to work out who would be the second eagle. There are just the two big powers in Judah’s world, and by now people may have read the news item that Ezekiel is about to allegorize. Pharaoh from 595 to 589 was Psammeticus II (Psamtik II). Subsequently and thus at the time of the siege of Jerusalem it was Hophra (Jer 44:30), known in Egypt itself as Wahibre Haaibre, and in Greek as Apries. As Ezek 16 has noted, Judah had often looked for help from Egypt against the Mesopotamian power of the day. Jeremiah also refers to this dynamic. The implication of 17:5–6 was that Zedekiah didn’t need Egyptian help in order to improve his quality of life or that of his people. The vine was bedded by a good field, by abundant water. Yet it sent its branches away from the terraces or furrows to this other resource, for the same resources as it had already, to enable it to produce foliage and bear fruit. Why did it do that? Its desire “tobecome anoblevine” may provide a hint, though it’s not clear how it thought dependence on Egypt rather than Babylon really served that end. Maybe Zedekiah supposed that the terms of a relationship with Egypt might be better than those of a relationship with Babylon (Calvin, 2:211). Ezekiel is not interested in this question. “The riddle centers on the absurdity of a vine’s desire to transplant itself” (Odell, 210).

**17:9–10** A brief resumptive introduction marks the transition from the allegorical relating of the news item and the offering of editorial comment, of insight into Yahweh’s perspective—or rather, the making of inquiries in an oped, a series of rhetorical questions designed to establish whether the readers have got it (Block, 1:352). These lines manifest more unevenness and less parallelism,\* but also make use of anaphora.\* The repeated query is whether the plant will now thrive—though the first time, the listeners have to work out from the tone of voice that it is a question not a statement. But if the interrogative implication of “Itwillthrive*?*”is not instantly clear, the parallel rhetorical question surely is. The vine’s roots will be pulled up. There is nothing more radical that you can do to a plant. To spell the point out, its fruit will be torn off (so it doesn’t ripen but withers instead), along with its foliage. Little effort will be required—as Jer 37:10 puts it, even a tiny group of wounded men will be able to do it (Mayer, 417). The picture of the east wind provides another image of how destruction will come. So the destroyer will tear like a farmer who has lost his mind, or trample like an army, or wither like the east wind off the desert. Yahweh thus suggests another irony, in that the east wind once blew on Israel’s side to deliver it from Egypt and supply Israel in the wilderness (Exod 10:13; 13:21; Psa 78:26). Instead of offering any rationale for the vine’s action or commenting on what will happen to the shoot from the cedar (Block, 1:352), Yahweh just points out how irrational the vine is being. He focuses people's attention on that single question: What are the prospects for the vine?

**17:11–12** Yahweh makes the transition to speaking in prose and being explicit about the allegory’s meaning. Ezekiel is to address “therebellioushousehold,” the term for the Kebar community in 2:5–8; 3:9, 26–27; 12:2–3, 9, 25. As usual, he is addressing that community even when he is talking about Jerusalem. His new rhetorical question with its disdainful wording implies that they surely have or should have understood his allegory (Zimmerli, 1:364), but he will explain it anyway. First, “there is no doubt that by wings, feathers and plumes he means the regions and peoples over which Nebuchadnezzar presided; for we know that the Chaldeans possessed the monarchy of the East” (Calvin, 2:213). So: Nebuchadrezzar had come to Jerusalem in 597 and taken back to Babylon not only Jehoiachin but also the city’s officials—given that the king was a teenager, these are the people who were really running the country. It would be ironic if some of them were among the Kebarites whom Ezekiel is addressing, but more likely people who are that significant are in Babylon itself, whereas the Kebarites will be priests, scribes, and craftspeople (Block, 1:543). There is no critique of Jehoiachin here as there is in 2 Kgs 24:8–9, and no talk about his future destiny, even in light of Zedekiah’s prospective fate.

**17:13–14** Nebuchadrezzar would wisely not only put on the throne someone from David’s line but also try to keep him in line by making a concordat with him and the leading Judahites, to guarantee Nebuchadrezzar’s commitment to Zedekiah and undergird Zedekiah’s commitment to Nebuchadrezzar. Ezekiel emphasizes the nature of this commitment. It is a covenant, which is a serious thing. It is solemnized, literally “cut” (כׇּרַת), with the sober implications of the rite that this verb presupposes: see, e.g., Jer 34:18. And it involves coming into an oath. The aim is for Judah to submit to Babylon, to subordinate itself to Babylon. Paradoxically, if it will thus submit, it will stand.

**17:15–18** But Zedekiah has defied rather than submitted, in order to get military resources that would enable him to rebel against Babylon in the time-honored way. Thus Ezekiel now makes more specific what the vine was seeking, when it looked to that other eagle. But you do not get away with despising such an oath and violating such a covenant. And Zedekiah will find there is no *“*company”or“assembly”hastening to his aid when the siege of Jerusalem happens (cf. Jer 37:7). A letter sent just before the siege in 588 by a Judahite official in Lachish, the second-biggest Judahite city that was in a direct line to be attacked before an invader moved on to Jerusalem, refers to a military commander being on his way to Egypt, and it wouldn’t be surprising if he was on his way to plead for help from Psammeticus (Taylor, 145–46; see *ANET*, 322). Ezekiel’s description of the non-existent big Egyptian force makes for an ironic contrast with the non-necessary big Babylonian force to which Yahweh referred in 17:9. The other eagle will be a disappointment. Zedekiah will himself end up in Babylon, where one can imagine he did eventually die. Ezekiel does not suggest any further knowledge of what actually happened to him and his sons (again, see 2 Kgs 25:5–7).

**17:19–21** Yet another resumptive introduction breaks the continuity of the message. The crucial “therefore”underscores the break. It transpires that Yahweh has not yet made his most important point. The certainty of disaster has a basis beyond the predictability of Nebuchadrezzar’s reaction, and the wrong that Zedekiah has done goes beyond breaking his word to Nebuchadrezzar. Yahweh now notes that it was “myoath” that Zedekiah despised, “mycovenant” that he violated. Both Nebuchadrezzar and Zedekiah will have made their covenantal commitment in the name of their deities.[[128]](#footnote-128) So the oath Zedekiah despised was one in which he took Yahweh’s name in vain (see Exod 20:7). He attached Yahweh’s name to an oath that had no substance, in that he did not keep it. And to dishonor the oath-taking was to dishonor Yahweh (Olley, 340); 2 Chr 36:13 elaborates on the charge. The first threat in the “therefore” is thus to “put [his action] against his head,” to treat him as responsible for it and as bound to carry the burden of the consequences. The threat is reformulated from 16:43. What follows is then reformulated from the threat in 12:13–16, where Yahweh did refer to Zedekiah not seeing Babylon before he dies there. Here, Yahweh declares the intention to “engage in a ruling” with Zedekiah (שָׁפַט niphal), to involve himself in the exercise of authority. The verb form may hint that he will push Zedekiah into having an argument with him, in which Zedekiah will have to face the fact that he is in the wrong and deserves what he gets. Zedekiah will thus have to acknowledge his “violation” (מַעַל; see 14:13). Finally, whereas there was a tiny positive side to the close of 12:13–16 and the way it spoke of survivors who would “scatter” and even come to acknowledge Yahweh, here they will simply scatter. It will be the Kebarites who will “acknowledgethatIhavespoken*.”*

**17:22–23** The interim conclusion at 17:21 was solemn. Like Ezek 16, however the chapter does not end before leading into one of Ezekiel’s more far-reaching qualifications on or alleviations of or counters to what has preceded. The prose interpretation of the allegory gives way to an extension of the allegory that makes further use of anaphora and ellipsis.\* In the cola speaking of the cedar and its “fruit,” practically every word takes up from 17:3–8, but it is now Yahweh, “I myself,”who acts, not Nebuchadrezzar (Allen, 1:260). One could perhaps infer that the real eagle does turn out to be Yahweh, though Ezekiel does not quite say that Yahweh is acting as a third eagle. Ezekiel does add references to a mountain and to birds. “Ahigh*,* toweringmountain” or “Israel’sloftymountain” does not correspond to any way that Ezekiel or any other First Testament book speaks elsewhere, but it overlaps with 20:40 and with 40:2, and the context of those allusions suggests that Ezekiel will be referring to Jerusalem and specifically to Mount Zion as the location of the temple. Yet Ezekiel leaves that reference even vaguer than it is in 20:40 and 40:2. One result is not to identify the shoot (or rather, the one it represents) too closely with the temple, or at least with its worship, as if it is sovereign over that worship. Its role on Mount Zion relates to the second new image that Yahweh introduces to the reworking of the allegory. It is to provide its people with shelter and protection. The shoot is a shoot from the Davidic tree, and it will produce the fruit of wisdom, security, the proper exercise of authority, and the suppression of corruption (Isa 11:1–9; Jer 23:5–6). These verses are closer to implying that the cedar is the Davidic line rather than Judah as a whole. The cedar will produce fruit, which is an odd achievement for a cedar, but providing shelter is exactly the proper vocation of a king. Who is the shoot? Jehoiachin? Zerubbabel? The Messiah? Ezekiel gives no indication. There is a promise that there will be such a shoot, but not an identification of who it will be.[[129]](#footnote-129)

**17:24** The chapter almost ends in a spectacular double 3-3 bicolon with tight abca′b′c′ parallelism (see further Greenberg, 1:318, 319). The rest of the trees will then be the nations, or more likely their rulers. Yahweh once more picks up and reworks the language of trees, height, lowliness, and withering, while enriching it with the talk of greenness and thriving. He thereby makes an assertion about the likes of Nebuchadrezzar and Psammeticus. His authority covers them as well as Jehoiachin and Zedekiah. The closing colon encourages the Kebarites to believe it.

### Biblical Theology Comments

The chapter has described the lordship of Yahweh operating at a concrete point that would not look very important in the context of world politics. As Babylonian annals show, no one would have thought that a diplomatic move by a Judahite king and the Babylonian response was more important than many other items of news. But it was. And the chapter almost closes with an assertion about the lordship of Yahweh operating on the broadest canvas. In a sense that spectacular double bicolon finds embodiment in the rise and fall of every king, president, or government, as it is the case that Yahweh is the one who brings about the birth of every baby. But sometimes Yahweh is especially purposeful about either of these actions—he is set on achieving something especially significant through this regime change or that birth. Thus Ezekiel’s assertion here compares with Hannah’s (1 Sam 2:1–10) and Mary’s (Luke 1:46–56).[[130]](#footnote-130)

In a sermon before Parliament after a parliamentarian victory in a battle in the English Civil War in 1651, John Owen said:

As if the Lord should say, There is a great noise in the world about setting up and plucking down of kings, in this their carnal rule; and many of you see nothing else, —you will look no farther: but I also have my work in hand; my design is not bounded within these limits and outward appearances; I am setting up a King that shall have another manner of dominion and rule than these worms of the earth. He shall stand; —as Mic v.4.[[131]](#footnote-131)

Owen’s comment suggests a link between Yahweh’s closing aphorism and his preceding declaration about the shoot. While its original hearers might not understand it in terms of a Messiah, it will soon be taken as “a word of messianic promise, as is to be found again in 34:23f; 37:24f … prepared for by the חטר of Is 11:1 and, with a slight change, in theצמח of Jer 23:5; 33:15; Zech 3:8; 6:12” (Zimmerli, 1:368).[[132]](#footnote-132) And Jesus will burlesque on it with his παραβολή about a mere mustard seed and a giant tree where birds nest in its shade.[[133]](#footnote-133)

### Application and Devotional Implications

There is a related wide canvas and narrow canvas matter. On the narrow canvas, “faith must be kept even between enemies, and one must not take into consideration with whom, but by whom, you have sworn the oath” (Jerome, 192). We need to keep our word even if we didn’t swear in God’s name to do so (Matt 5:33–37). But there are situations in which we speak in God’s name, and taking God’s name is a serious business. It would be unwise to attach it to something empty (Exod 20:7) and thus treat it as an ordinary name (Lev 19:12).

On a slightly broader canvas, “Israel indeed needs to be free from the oppressive character of the Babylonian vassal treaty; but a treaty with Egypt and reliance upon the sword will only further entangle Israel with the oppressive web of Near Eastern power politics, ending in death” (Lind, 143). This broader canvas also compares and contrasts with Jeremiah, who in Jerusalem itself works among and in conflict with the people who believed it was quite right for the people of Yahweh to resist submission to the Babylonian superpower and for whom it seened crazy to think that Yahweh had made Nebuchadrezzar his servant in exercising power in the world (Zimmerli, 1:366).

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## The Freedom to Repent (18:1–32)

### Outline

Evidently people in Judah (but no doubt the Kebarites, too) believe that they are suffering Yahweh’s chastisement for outrages that were not their doing, the offenses of a previous generation. They might have heard theologians issuing the kind of explanation that appears in 2 Kgs 24 for the troubles of Jerusalem, including the deposing of Jehoiachin and the Kebarites’ own forced migration. Such a piece of background makes for a link between this chapter and Ezek 17. The explanation of these troubles in 2 Kgs 24 is that they are delayed chastisement for outrages going back to Manasseh. If that’s right, Ezekiel imagines or has heard the Kebarites asking, there’s nothing we can do, is there? We are locked into the misery of our situation. We have to pay the penalty for previous generations’ waywardness. But 2 Kgs 24 also makes a point of affirming that subsequent kings, Jehoiakim, Jehoiachin, and Zedekiah could not claim to be innocent. The disastrous history of their day did issue from the waywardness of Manasseh and Amon, but it would not have happened had people not continued to walk the same road. Second Kings thus half-implies that they had not been not locked into such penalty-paying. Ezekiel here makes that point explicit for the Kebarites, to persuade them that they (and the Jerusalemites) have “freedom to repent” (Zimmerli, 1:369), and that doing so will make a difference. There is the possibility of a return to Yahweh (Pohlmann, 1:257).

They implicitly want to ask a theological question, then, though they are not coming out with it. Ezekiel wants to discuss it, and on the surface does so by speaking to the question they are not asking as if they were asking it and as if he is a priest dealing with a question that someone brings to him. Then, typically, it transpires that he is playing a rhetorical trick on them. He is answering the question they are not asking, in order to turn his answer into a piece of priestly or prophetic confrontation about how they live, rather than how they are doing theology. But he also turns it into a promise, that they can be sure of life if they will turn. His message thus overlaps with 14:1–11, where some of the Kebarite elders did come to Ezekiel with a question. Indeed, the question they raised then might easily have concerned the truth or otherwise of the saying in 18:2.

The account of a faithful and a faithless life compares in general terms and in some specifics with the Torah and in particular with the Decalogue, but also with such summaries as Psa 15 or Job 31. But it is neither a comprehensive summary of the Torah or the Decalogue, nor an exhortation to keep Torah, nor a reminder of requirements associated with going to the temple. It combines prophetic and priestly form, and it is part of a prophetic message formulated by Ezekiel the master of rhetoric (Blenkinsopp, 81, 83). It compares with his subsequent formulation in 22:6–12 (Greenberg, 1:342–43). It actually relates more to the life that people might live in Canaan than to the life that people might be living in Kebar. The most specific example is the ruling that concerns celebrations on the mountains. But the challenge of this summary of a faithful or faithless life need not relate to the particulars of the present in either Kebar or Jerusalem.

This chapter has provided a basis for the idea that an important contribution by Ezekiel to Israelite theology was a doctrine of individual responsibility (cf. Skinner, 143–44). Prior to Ezekiel’s time, this theory assumed, sin and judgment were supposed to have been tackled by Yahweh on a corporate basis, now they will be tackled on an individual basis. But the assumption of individual responsibility reflected in this chapter is evident in texts much earlier than Ezekiel, and conversely, the corporate emphasis of earlier writings is never abandoned in favor of individualism. And individual responsibility is less in focus in this chapter than is implied by that idea about a move from corporate to individual. Indeed, the aim of the chapter is the transformation of the corporate body, specifically the exilic community (Block, 1:556).[[134]](#footnote-134) If anything, “far from constituting an argument for ‘individual responsibility,’ the purpose of the chapter is to demonstrate the collective responsibility of the contemporary house of Israel for the national disaster of defeat and deportation” (Joyce, 139). Further, a concern with the relationship between individual and community fits well with the situation of a migrant community that might disintegrate.[[135]](#footnote-135) Ezekiel is concerned for “the shaping of a community of character” and “the focus on the individual in Ezekiel 18 is in the service of the reconstitution of Israel as the people of God.”[[136]](#footnote-136) Individual responsibility is a responsibility in relation to the corporate body.[[137]](#footnote-137) The words Ezekiel uses do also raise more sharply the question of whether the individual is capable of making decisions about doing the right thing. In 11:19 Yahweh declared, “a new spirit I will put within you.” In this chapter he makes more explicit the mysterious relationship between Yahweh’s action and the individual’s action, with his“turn yourselves from all your acts of rebellion… and produce yourselves a new mind and a new spirit” (18:30–31).[[138]](#footnote-138)

The Hebrew of Ezek 18 is jerky, with many examples of asyndesis\* (see “The Prose and the Poetry” in the Introduction to this commentary). The chapter begins in a familiar way “Yahweh’smessagecametome,” but then instead of introducing words from Yahweh to Ezekiel, it addresses a question to the Israelites. There is no parallel in Ezekiel for a message aborting in this way. But conversely, a message to Ezekiel will appear in 19:1 without an introduction, which is also irregular. It seems that 18:1 introduces 19:1, and that 18:2–32 intervenes between the two (Sweeney, 92). Further, Ezek 19 concerns the kings who were the subject of Ezek 17, which suggests that Ezek 17–19 belong together and that 18:2–32 relates to them and their people. It will have been inserted after 18:1 by whoever did the assembling of these chapters—Ezekiel or a curator. That assembling took place after 587, and 18:2–32 itself might date from after 587. It would speak then, though it would also speak in 592. The matter of its date could link with the implications of the question’s addressing people “on the land of Israel” not people in Kebar, though before or after 587 that might be a rhetorical feature of the chapter such as recurs elsewhere in Ezekiel. Rhetorically Yahweh addresses people in the land, but directly he addresses the Kebarites. The dynamic of the interrelationship of Ezek 18 and 19 compares with that of 3:16–27:

3:16a Introduction 18:1

3:16b–21 Sidebar 18:2–32

3:22–27 Follow-up to introduction 19:1–14

There are also links of substance between 3:16–21 and 18:2–32, and between both and 33:1–20. But fFor convenience, we will comment on Ezek 18 and 19 separately. Ezek 18, then, unfolds:

Introduction (18:1)

Yahweh responds to a saying that the people repeat (18:2–18)

Yahweh raises a question about the saying (18:2)

Yahweh makes an initial response (18:3–4)

Yahweh spells out the response: father, son, grandson (18:5–17)

The man who lives a faithful life, which will mean life (18:5–9)

The son who lives a faithless life, which will mean death (18:10–13)

The grandson who does not follow, which will mean life (18:14–18)

Yahweh responds to an objection the people might raise (18:19–24)

The objection, a reminder, and the principle (18:19–20)

A proviso: what if someone changes? (18:21–24)

Yahweh responds to another objection that the people might raise (18:25–29)

The objection, and a rejoinder (18:25)

Yahweh reaffirms the proviso (18:26–28)

The objection repeated and Yahweh’s rejoinder repeated (18:29)

Yahweh issues a challenge and invitation that the argument gives people (18:30–33)

### Translation

1Yahweh’s message came to me:

2What does it mean for you people [that] you are pronouncing this saying on the land of Israel:[[139]](#footnote-139)

Whereas parents eat unripe fruit,[[140]](#footnote-140)

the children’s teeth go numb.

3I am alive (an affirmation of the Lord Yahweh), if there will be pronouncing of this saying in Israel by you any longer.…[[141]](#footnote-141) 4There, all people are mine, as the person of the parent, so the person of the child, they are mine.[[142]](#footnote-142) The person who offends[[143]](#footnote-143) Is the one who will die.

5So when an individual is faithful and acts on a faithful ruling:[[144]](#footnote-144)

* 6not eating at the mountains,
* and not lifting his eyes to the lumps of Israel’s household,
* and not defiling his neighbor’s wife,
* and not approaching a woman [during] her menstrual taboo,[[145]](#footnote-145)
* 7and not exploiting an individual,
* giving back the pledge [relating to] a debt,
* not committing theft,
* giving his food to someone hungry,
* and covering someone naked with clothing,
* 8not giving with a fee,
* and not receiving interest,
* turning his hand back from wrongdoing,
* acting on a truthful ruling between one individual and another,
* 9walking steadfastly[[146]](#footnote-146) by my laws,
* and keeping my rulings by acting with truthfulness:

he being faithful, will definitely live (an affirmation of the Lord Yahweh).

10But should he have fathered[[147]](#footnote-147) a violent son, pouring out blood, or doing one or another[[148]](#footnote-148) of these things 11whereas he himself[[149]](#footnote-149) did not do any of these things, but actually

* eating at the mountains,
* or defiling his neighbor’s wife,
* 12exploiting lowly and needy,
* committing theft,
* not giving a pledge back,
* lifting his eyes to the lumps,
* committing outrage,
* 13giving with a fee,
* or receiving interest:

and he will live?[[150]](#footnote-150) He will not live. Having committed all these outrages, he will definitely be put to death, his bloodshed being against him.

14But there, he has fathered a son, he has seen all his father’s offenses that he committed. He has seen,[[151]](#footnote-151) and has not acted in accordance with them—

* 15not eating on the mountains,
* and not lifting his eyes to the household of Israel’s lumps,
* not defiling his neighbor’s wife,
* 16and not exploiting an individual,
* not taking a pledge,
* not committing theft
* giving his food to someone hungry,
* and covering someone naked with clothing,
* 17turning his hand from someone lowly,
* not receiving a fee or interest,
* acting on my rulings and walking by my laws:

in that he will not die through his father’s waywardness, he will definitely live, 18whereas because his father practiced fraud, committing theft from a brother and doing what was not good among his peoples, there, he has died through his waywardness.

19You may say, “Why has the son not born[[152]](#footnote-152) part of the father’s waywardness?” In that the son has acted on a faithful ruling, keeping all my laws and acting on them, he will definitely live. 20While the person who offends, he will die, a son will not bear part of the father’s waywardness and a father will not bear part of the son’s waywardness, the faithfulness of the faithful person being upon him and the faithlessness of the faithless person being upon him.

21And when the faithless person turns from all his offenses that he has committed, and keeps my laws and acts on a faithful ruling, he will definitely live, in that he will not die. 22Given that al the rebellious acts that he has committed will not be kept in mind for him, through his faithfulness that he has practiced, he will live. 23Do I at all wish the dying of someone faithless (an affirmation of the Lord Yahweh)?—it’s for his turning from his paths and living, isn’t it. 24But when someone faithful turns from his faithfulness and does wrong, acting in accordance with all the outrages that the faithless person did, he will live?[[153]](#footnote-153) In that all his faithful deeds that he did will not be held in mind, through his violation that he has committed and through his offenses that he has committed, through these he will die.

25And you say, “The Lord’s path doesn’t measure.” Listen, will you, Israel’shousehold. Does my path not measure? It’s your path that doesn’t measure, isn’t it. 26When someone faithful turns from his faithfulness and does wrong and dies though them[[154]](#footnote-154) because of the wrong that he has done, he will die. 27But when someone faithless turns from his faithlessness that he has done and acts on a faithful ruling, that person will keep himself alive. 28He saw and he turned from all his rebellious deeds that he had done—he will live—he will not die. 29And Israel’s household will say, “The Lord’s path doesn’t measure.” Is it my paths that don’t measure, Israel’s household? It’s your paths, it doesn’t measure, does it.

30Therefore, as for an individual in accordance with his paths, I will rule for you people,[[155]](#footnote-155) Israel’s household (an affirmation of the Lord Yahweh), turn, turn yourselves[[156]](#footnote-156) from all your acts of rebellion, and waywardness will not be your downfall. 31Throw away from attachment to you[[157]](#footnote-157) all your acts of rebellion with which you acted, and produce yourselves a new mind and a new spirit. So why should you die, Israel’s household? 32Because I do not wish for the dying of someone who dies (an affirmation of the Lord Yahweh). So turn, and live!

### Textual Notes

MT has markers\* after after 18:4, 20, 23, 26, and 32.

**18:2** For עַל־אַדְמַת, “on the land of,” LXX has “among the sons of” (cf. 12:24).

**18:6** For גׅלּוּלׅים, “lumps,” LXX has “notions” here and in 18:15 but “idols” in 18:12. See further the textual note on 20:7.

**18:9** For אֱמֶת “[with]truthfulness,” LXX “them” implies אֹתָם. Sym. has “truly.”

**18:14** For וַיּׅרְאֶה, “he has seen,” LXX, Vg. “he was afraid” implies וַיּׅרָא.

**18:17** For עָנִי, LXX “wrongdoing” implies עָוֶל as in 18:8.

**18:20** For Q הָרָשָׁע, K has anarthrous רשע.

**18:26** For Q וַיָּשָׁב, K has the long spelling וישוב.

**18:32** LXX lacks “Soturn*,* andlive!”

### Verse-by-Verse Commentary

**18:1–2** As in 17:1, Ezekiel signals a new beginning with the phrase “Yahweh’smessagecametome,” and again reference to a מָשָׁל follows, but this is not a מָשָׁל that Yahweh is giving Ezekiel or a parable\* that Ezekiel is composing that the people were likely to dispute, but a saying that the people are repeating that Yahweh intends to dispute. So there is an unexpected transition from 18:1 to 18:2 and Yahweh’s actual message will not come until 19:1–14. Meanwhile, the מָשָׁל is a neat 3-3 saying comprising two parallel cola. Ezekiel describes it as a saying that “you people … on the land of Israel” are inclined to repeat, as Jer 31:29–30 confirms.[[158]](#footnote-158) They might be saying that it explains why the Kebarites are in exile.[[159]](#footnote-159) But it is a saying that the Kebarites might repeat, too. Ezekiel’s question is not, “What does this saying mean,” which is clear, but “what is this saying doing for you, what does it signify for you.”

To judge from what follows in the chapter, there might be several possible answers. Perhaps a subordinate note in the Ten Commandments, about one generation’s wrongdoing having an effect on another, has become the dominant note, in “a cynical version of what had been a fundamental tenet of Israel’s faith” (Jenson, 145). So “must I be blasphemed rather then you faulted? Is it for your fathers sins only that ye suffer? and do ye thus think to put off the reproofs of the Prophets, as if your selves had not seconded and out-sinned your Fathers, and are therefore justly punished?” (Trapp, 440). Is the saying holding people back from taking responsibility for their destiny in the way they could and should? Do they then think there is no escape (Block, 1:561)? “What use is repentance? Our fate is already sealed by the sins of the fathers” (Brownlee, 282).

Is one to be sympathetic? Ezekiel doesn’t think so. The point of the saying itself is not that sensible people don’t eat unripe fruit because it can taste sour. It is a regular snack, to judge from *m. Shebiith* 4.8; *m. Utzin* 3:6. The objection is that one set of people did the eating and a different set experienced the results. That is how the Judahite community sees things. While every generation may say that the previous generation made a mess of things and that this generation has to suffer for it,[[160]](#footnote-160) the saying likely has particular bite in Ezekiel’s context. To judge from 2 Kgs 21, people might concretely imply that Manasseh and Amon’s generation were morally and religiously stupid, and Jehoiakim, Jehoiachin and Zedekiah’s generation pay the price, in that Yahweh sends the Babylonians against them. One can picture people repeating the saying in 587 as well as in 592, as Lam 5:7 suggests they did (Qimhi, in MG). The dynamics were similar, and 33:1–20 restates some of the material in 18:2–32 in the 587 context.

**18:3** ButYahweh’s reaction to the saying is a passionate oath in response to their indignation (Zimmerli, 1:378). Something is going to change. What is it? Is it (for instance) that Yahweh intends to change his way of working with Israel: whereas in the past he has let one generation suffer for the previous generation’s wrongdoing, in future he won’t? Or is it that he intends to change his way of working with Jehoiakim, Jehoiachin and Zedekiah’s generation: whereas they are indeed suffering for the wrongdoing of Manasseh’s generation, that will not go on forever? Or is it that he will change his way of working with Israel, so that whereas in the past he has dealt with Israel corporately, he will now deal with people individually? Or is it that Israel will change its way of thinking theologically, so that whereas they have held one of those beliefs, they no longer will?

**18:4a** What Yahweh goes on to say suggests none of the above, though the third and fourth are nearer than the first and second. But Yahweh is not going to change at all. It is they who need to. Actually, the saying he quotes didn’t refer to him. It was a modern-style saying, one that doesn’t include God as part of the picture. Yahweh thus implicitly begins by reframing the saying in a radical way. The principle behind his response is that it always has been the case and it always will be the case that the persons of parent and child (that is, parent and child as persons) belong to Yahweh.

**18:4b** The further implication would be that he cares about the person, but even more that he has authority in relation to the person and makes the decisions about the person. He goes on to clarify the basis on which he makes the decisions. It is “thepersonwhooffends” who “will die.” Ezekiel’s talking in terms of a “person” who “offends” already suggests that he is speaking in priestly fashion (e.g. Lev 4:2; 7:18). In general, his hearers would know what he means by offending, but he will go on to spell it out in 18:5–9. And there is a general sense in which the person who offends dies: everyone offends and everyone dies. But the way Ezekiel talks about death elsewhere (e.g., 3:16–21) has made clear that he is not talking about the death that comes to everyone eventually, but to the early death that comes to people who are particularly wayward (cf. 33:7–20). Nearly all the references to death in Ezekiel are references of that kind, though 12:13 and 17:16 may be ironic exceptions, and 24:17–18 is a grievous one. Only 44:25 is a straightforward reference to death as it comes to everyone.

Thus Yahweh is declaring that he insists on a double change in Israel’s way of thinking about what decides its destiny. It needs to accept responsibility for its destiny rather than blaming its parents for it. And individual Israelites need to see that this works on an individual basis as well as a corporate basis and that individual Israelites need to accept responsibility for their moral and religious life. Thus, typically, in response to people’s complaints, Yahweh insists on a change in the agenda. It is the “person” who offends who will die. Each person has responsibility for his or her own living by Yahweh’s standards. If someone fails, that person will pay the price. “The proclaimed conversion to God is an action and being ascribed and promised personally to each individual… which reaches to the heart and veins, the bones and marrow, of this or that particular man.”[[161]](#footnote-161)

**18:5** What now follows will comprise general statements, specific obligations, and a conclusion, and this sequence will be followed three times. Nothing novel needs to be said about how to avoid offenses, or (to put it positively) about how to be a faithful person and how to live by Yahweh’s faithful rulings. Ezekiel the priest reminds people about the kind of thing that comes in the Torah, though he doesn’t stick closely to the Torah’s formulations. Indeed, being “faithful”isn’t a Torah way of thinking. It is more characteristic of the Psalms, Proverbs, and the Prophets. But it is a convenient way of summing up the Torah’s concerns. On the other hand, “a ruling”(מִשְׁפָּט), an authoritative judgment, is a regular word to describe a concrete enactment or law in the Torah. And the order in Ezekiel’s words in Hebrew, “anindividual*,* whenheisfaithful,”is a Leviticus order of words and could remind people of the way they have heard a priest speak. “Individual” (אִישׁ) commonly implies a male, and generally the obligations of which Ezek 18 speaks are ones that apply to men with power and authority in family and community (Bowen, 105–6). They presuppose their position in a patriarchal society and the responsibility their position places on them. It’s not difficult to establish from the Torah or from within Ezekiel that rulings that could apply irrespective of gender and class would so apply. But the greater challenge applies to the men with power, and it is their attitude that has the biggest effect on whether Israel is faithful and finds life.

**18:6a** While the concrete enactments do not correspond verbally to enactments in the Torah, they compare with them. Ezekiel begins with two about religion. “Eating at/on the mountains” comes only in Ezek 18:6, 11, 15; 22:9 (also Lev 19:26 LXX; Olley, 347). Presumably it denotes communal festivals at the highland shrines where people looked up to the gods who are the “lumps” about which Ezekiel fulminates. He has referred to the mountains in this connection in 6:13. Kebarites would not be able to eat on the mountains on the Babylonian plain, though they could be looking up to lumpsthere, and they might have been doing so half a decade ago. Jerusalemites could, and Kebarites could be holding equivalent unorthodox festivals. Or perhaps in general through this list of rulings Ezekiel is summarizing Yahweh’s requirements of Israel’s household wherever they are. Lifting one’s eyes is a more general expression to denote looking for support and provision (e.g., 23:27; 33:25; Deut 4:19; Pss 121:1; 123:1).

**18:6b** The two rules about sex are also religious rules in the sense, first, that Ezekiel’s concern about adultery here is not the ethics of sex in the narrow sense but the defiling effect of adultery on the woman. Ezekiel presupposes that the Song of Songs is not the only framework for looking at sex, but neither is ethics (Paul) or theology (Hosea). Our sexual lives also need to work within the context of a concern for purity, integrity, and order. It is this assumption that makes for a link between the ruling about adultery and the ruling about sex during a woman’s period. Ezekiel compares with Leviticus in focusing on the significance of sex for the maintaining of purity, integrity, and order in human life. Family life needs to be an embodiment of purity, integrity, and order, for humanity’s sake, and for the sake of human life working out as God designed it. Adultery compromises that, and the integrity of the body is also an important aspect of it. Human beings are commonly troubled by spitting, sneezing, and bleeding because they compromise that integrity, and the Torah recognizes it in making provision for purification offerings in connection with events such as the emission of semen and menstruation. So there are related reasons concerned with purity, integrity, and order for juxtaposing adultery with having sex during a woman’s menstruation.[[162]](#footnote-162)

**18:7** Ezekiel moves for the rest of the list of obligations from religion and sex to community life. In addition, for no apparent reason, he moves from past tense to present tense (from *qatal* to *yiqtol\**) and from a sequence of clauses a *waw* between them to a sequence without punctuation. What “exploiting”someone means (Ezekiel has seven of the First Testament’s twenty-one occurrences of this word) is illustrated in 45:8; 46:18, which speak of Israel’s leaders exploiting the people in connection with land, as the prophets elsewhere indicate they did. It is spelled out here in two ways. If a farmer has a poor harvest and has to borrow grain to tide him over, then his creditor is entitled to some collateral. In this connection, Exod 22:21–27 [20–26] mentions holding onto someone’s coat (which also functions as a blanket) instead of returning it overnight, which could count as an example of exploitation. “Theft”(Ezekiel has five out eight occurrences of noun and verb) might imply permanently holding onto the collateral even if the person paid the debt. The two negatives are balanced by two positive examples of the way a faithful person behaves. Giving food to a hungry person or giving clothing to someone who has had to surrender it or whose things have worn out pairs with resisting the temptation to exploit someone who has hit hard times.

**18:8** Those four acts of restraint and generosity fit with what follows. We don’t know for sure the meaning of the terms related to loans (נֶשֶׁךְ and תּרְבִּית; cf. Lev 25:36–37). They may denote respectively an amount deducted when the loan is made, and interest paid when the debt is repaid. Both illustrate the principle that making loans is not a way of making a profit for oneself, as is basic to business. It’s rather a way of helping someone in need (cf. Matt 5:42). The following two actions then form a more general negative and positive pair. On one hand, there is “turning his hand back from wrongdoing”(see 3:20). If it doesn’t imply he was doing some wrongdoing, it does imply he could have been about to (cf. 20:22). On the other, when there is some proper ruling that should govern relations with another person (say, a matter about land boundaries), he accepts it. Both the actions in 18:9b suggest the community’s proper quasi-legal processes (Zimmerli, 1:381), where the person about whom Ezekiel speaks might be one of the community elders (cf. Lev 19:15).

**18:9** Ezekiel sums up the content of 18:6–8 in a way that restates 18:5, then states the implications in a way that constitutes a positive restatement of 18:4b. Hardly anyone uses the verb “live”(חָיָה) more than Ezekiel, except the author of the genealogies in Gen 5 and 11. But Ezekiel’s talk about life parallels his talk about death. It doesn’t refer simply to the universal experience of drawing breath until one’s existence comes to its natural, expected end, but to something more like a life extending beyond a time when it might have come to an end (e.g., the 597 or 587 calamity) or a new life that resumes when it might have seemed to have come to an end (e.g., being able to start a new life on the land of Israel): beyond this chapter, see especially 33:10–20; 37:1–14. The person and the community that live faithfully will find that they live on and truly live.

**18:10–13** Now imagine that a son of the kind of man described in 18:5–9 is the opposite to his father. Calling him “violent” (cf. 7:22), spelled out as“pouringoutblood,” makes him worse than someone“doingoneoranotherofthesethings”that have just been itemized, but Ezekiel also lists eight of them, in a different order with a little reformulation and with some heightening, the son “committingoutrage” and the victim of exploitation as the “lowlyand needy” person. That expression mostly characterizes the Psalms but also features in Deut 24:14–16, which refers concretely to withholding a laborer’s wages and also uses the expression “put to death.” The hophal form of the verb occurs uniquely here in Ezekiel instead of the simple “die” and thus underscores Yahweh’s active involvement in ensuring that the son who has“committedalltheseoutrages” indeed “willnotlive.” Thus hisbloodshedwillbeagainsthim (see the commentary on 9:10). This expression commonly implies that someone who is executed had deserved it, for the wrong they had done, so that the executioner cannot be faulted. The slightly whimsical point here is that likewise Yahweh the executioner cannot be critiqued. The man could not complain if God takes action against him.

**18:14–18** Then imagine again: this man’s son is also the opposite to his father. Seeing what his father has done and perhaps knowing where that leads, he behaved differently. The Judahites might think that they are the third generation: the first generation was Hezekiah’s, the second was Manasseh’s, and they are Josiah’s. The grandson’s action matches his grandfather’s in twelve ways, with a little reformulation and some heightening: he didn’t even take a pledge. So he will definitely live, like his grandfather, not die like his father. More specifically, he will not “die throughhisfather’swaywardness,” in keeping with the saying from which we began. This waywardness is now summarized in terms of “fraud” (עשֶׁק, another terms from Deut 24:14) and “theft” (might this be that withholding to which Deut 24 refers?) from his fellow-Israelite, his “brother” (a term Deuteronomy likes to appeal to in such a connection). That appeal is reformulated in referring to “hispeoples,” his varied kinfolk, and a noteworthy litotes\* “hehasdonewhatwasnotgood,” which covers both the positives and the negatives in 18:5–9, 10–13, and 14–18.

The three accounts of right and wrong living thus compare:

Not eating at the mountains eating at the mountains not eating on the mountains

Not lifting his eyes to the lumps not lifting his eyes to the lumps

Not defiling his neighbor’s wife defiling his neighbor’s wife not defiling his neighbor’s wife

Not approach a woman during her period

Not exploiting an individual exploiting lowly and needy not exploiting an individual

committing theft

Giving the debt pledge back not giving a pledge back not holding onto a pledge

Not committing theft not committing theft

lifting eyes to lumps

Giving his food to someone hungry giving his food to someone hungry

committing outrage

Covering the naked with clothing covering the naked with clothing

not turning hand from lowly

Not giving with a fee giving with a fee not receiving a fee

Not receiving interest receiving interest or interest

Turning his hand from wrongdoing

Acting on a truthful ruling

Living by Yahweh’s laws and rulings living by Yahweh’s rulings and laws

Acting with truthfulness

**18:19–20** “He adds in the nextverse what seems superfluous and absurd: for the Israelites did not contend with God for sparing the innocent: but here Ezekiel represents them speaking as if they wished the innocent son to be punished equally with the wicked father” (Calvin, 2:270). Why might Ezekiel think that they could ask that question? Perhaps the implication of the saying from which he started was that life does work that way, and they don’t want it to be so. Attributing this objection to them is part of encouraging them to rethink the implications of their saying. Likewise, no one is suggesting that parents bear part of the penalty of their children’s waywardness (though actually, of course, parents do suffer because of their children, as children suffer because of their parents). Raising this possibility compares with raising the idea of children eating their parents (5:10). It’s a theoretical notion, though it does make for a further link with Deut 24:16, which affirms that parents cannot be executed for their children’s wrongdoing (cf. Num 26:11; 2 Kgs 14:6). The likely background is also that “they have a vested interest in the ‘sour grapes’ proverb; unless it can be established that one generation suffers for the sins of previous generations, they will have to admit that they are to blame for the current situation” (Joyce, 142).

**18:20** So it's worth Ezekiel raising the theoretical idea that he does raise, in order to deny its validity, which he does in a radical way. It is the person who offends who dies. The son does not even bear part of the father’s waywardness. Ezekiel makes his point in a unique formulation that emphasizes the point. The First Testament usually speaks simply of bearing (carrying) waywardness (cf. 4:10; 44:10, 12; and 4:4–6, in a special sense). The individual’s or community’s waywardness rests on them and exacts its consequences. Here, uniquely, Ezekiel speaks of bearing “partof” someone’s waywardness (נָשָֹא בַּעֲוׄן), to leave the Israelites without any claim of innocence. The faithful sit under their faithfulness, the faithless sit under their faithlessness. There is no wiggle room or concession.

**18:21–22** That is the (apparent) bad news. But it clears the way for consideration of another respect in which people need to rethink their saying. They speak as if their troubles issue from their being unavoidably caught by a past generation’s waywardness. They need to grant that this is not so. What has caught them is the consequences of their own waywardness. But the good news and challenge that Ezekiel urges is that they are not locked into living with their waywardness, as if they have no scope for changing and thus for changing their destiny. The present generation is not locked into the consequences of bad choices made by their forebears, and nor are they locked into choices that they themselves have already made. If they are caught by 18:5–17, they have a way of escape (Allen, 1:277–78). “The consistent message in this section is that what matters is present orientation; the past is forgotten” (Joyce, 143). “Repentance gives one a completely new start by emphasizing the centrality of the present state of one’s relationship with God.”[[163]](#footnote-163) Ezekiel argues in the way Moses did on the edge of the promised land, and speaks as if he is donning the mantle of Moses (Deut 18:15), who “concluded his final address with a challenge to shun the way of apostasy and death, and to choose the way of life and blessing” (Block, 1:582). The divine passive “willbeputtodeath” of 18:13 is balanced and countered by the divine passive “willnotbekeptinmind.”

**18:23–24** Ezekiel continues expounding the good news that he wants his hearers to heed, that will encourage them to turn. “There is nothing so necessary to draw us to repentance as good thoughts of God.”[[164]](#footnote-164) Ezekiel offers essentially good news about God that they don’t seem to grasp. God wants everyone to be saved—by repenting (Calvin, 2:277).[[165]](#footnote-165) “Have I any pleasure at all that the wicked should die?” (KJV). No, Yahweh does not wear a Janus head as one who is neautrally the God of life and the God of death.[[166]](#footnote-166) In light of who God is and what God longs for, then, “the human community can engage in responsible moral discernment and transformation. They have the power to grasp that possibility that leads to life.”[[167]](#footnote-167) So Luther affirms that 18:23 is as precious an “evangelical word” as any in the Scriptures (e.g., Psa 30:5 [6]; Matt 11:28).[[168]](#footnote-168) But 18:24 is then a worrying one. Is it speaking of people who were not really righteous (Calvin, 2:281)? Is it “a caution to prevent a righteous person’s falling, rather than an implication that he will or shall turn from his righteousness” (Greenhill, 459; cf. Beckwith, 107)? Readers need to note that Ezekiel is not just talking about someone committing one sin but really abandoning a faithful life (Theodoret, 125). But one also needs to note that Ezekiel is again speaking rhetorically and balancing 18:24 with 18:23. He’s no more aiming to say something practical about the faithful falling away than he was about the possibility of children eating their parents.

**18:25–29** For a third time Ezekiel picks up something the Israelites say, or might say, something that responds to his argument so far. “TheLord’spathdoesn’tmeasure” (תָּכַן niphal). The saying implies that people have measured it and proved that it doesn’t measure up, as the English colloquialism puts it. The piel verb occurs nine times in Ezek 18 and 33 and just once elsewhere (1 Sam 2:3), where it raises the question whether human actions measure up to Yahweh’s estimate. With hybris or hutzpah, the saying turns things around. Yahweh’s paths, his way of operating, don’t measure up to what we all know is the real standard (that is, our estimate). In response, Yahweh doesn’t attempt to vindicate his way of operating. He just reaffirms it, in the conviction that it is obviously right. “Great is repentance, which lengthens a person’s years” (*b. Yoma* 86b). If people can’t see it, too bad. With rhetorical effectiveness the repetition of the saying and the response leads into the climax of the chapter (Olley, 353).

**18:30** Because the “therefore”marks this as its crucial climax. As Ezekiel has been describing how God deals with an individual faithful or faithless person, throughout the individual has stood for the generation as a whole. So it does here (Joyce, 146). Here Ezekiel makes explicit that he *will* “ruleforyoupeople.” He will rule for “Israel’shousehold” in the way things work for “an individual.” He has used the verb “rule” (שָׁפַט, traditionally translated “judge”) a number of times (cf. 7:3, 8, 27; 11:10, 11; 16:38) in connection with making decisions about what happens to the people in light of their actions. The challenge to them, therefore, is to “turn”as the grandson did. It is to repent, whose nature involves turning (see 3:18–19). Through this chapter, “the intent is to preach for repentance rather than to engage in academic debate” (Allen, 1:279). If Israel turns in the period following 592 (8:1), then calamity need not happen. If it turns after 587, then restoration of life in Jerusalem could happen. Because “Whoever repents of sin is as good as innocent.”[[169]](#footnote-169) Repentance will mean that “waywardnesswillnotbe your downfall”(see 3:20; 7:19; 14:3). And “only repentance makes the difference. … So at last we are able to come to the point of the whole chapter” (Wright, 196, 203).

**18:31–32** Some strong action is therefore required. “Turn” is stronger than feeling regret, “turn” followed by “turnyourselves”isstronger, “throwaway”isstrongerstill, and “produceyourselves anewmindand anewspirit” seems an impossible demand, though not as impossible as “make yourselves” one (LXX, Vg.). Actually, Yahweh has already promised one heart or a new heart and spirit (11:19; cf. 36:26), and the verb that often means “make” (עָשָֹה) can mean “produce”or “get” (22:13; 28:4; 38:12). If they will throw away, then, they will be able to get (Allen, 1:267). There is action God needs to take, and action they need to take. And their action will base itself on what God wishes, or rather, does not wish. After the emphatic “anaffirmationoftheLordYahweh” which one might have thought would be the end of the chapter (as it is in Ezek 12; 15; 16), actually there is another final, succinct, dramatic appeal: “Soturn*,* andlive!” Thus, “at the end, the passage simply comes to a splendid climax and stops” (Jenson, 144).

### Biblical Theology Comments

Does responsibility for wrongdoing pass from one generation to the next? Yahweh makes clear at Sinai that he attends to parents’ waywardness in connection with the generations that follow (Exod 20:5; 34:7) and Ezek 18 is hardly disagreeing.[[170]](#footnote-170) The assumption that parents’ wrongdoing has an effect on their children but that the children make their own decisions runs through the Scriptures. As well as featuring in 2 Kgs 24–25 in connection with the circumstances and events that lie in the background of Ezek 18 (see 2Kgs 24:1–4, 9, 19), it surfaces in Lamentations (1:5; 5:7) and in Jesus’ attitudes (Matt 23:29–36 (Fairbairn, 191). There are occasions when people behave as if it is acceptable to let action against parents involve their children (e.g., 1 Sam 22:19; 2 Kgs 10:1–11; 2 Kgs 25:7).[[171]](#footnote-171) And there is a sense in which we are punished as a result of our first parents’ wrongdoing (Calvin, 2:247).[[172]](#footnote-172) But ethically and theologically, the Scriptures assume that everything depends on whether the children adopt the ancestors’ actions as their own (*b. Sanh*. 27b). Western thinkers may prefer to emphasize the “freedom” of the present generation and to see Ezekiel as seeking to move Israel from an acceptance of the idea that the decisions of parents can determine destinies for their children, or we may be glad to have the excuse to blame another generation for our situation and our waywardness (Wright, 181–90). And it is possible for Ezekiel to dispute it as a truth for his people to appeal to and yet for Jeremiah to accept it as a truth that has been working itself out but that will not fix things forever in a dispiriting way.[[173]](#footnote-173) “The proverb in 18:2… is truthful yet susceptible to misuse. No one would disagree with the truism that children often suffer from their parents’ mistakes” (Odell, 219). The question is whether the people are justified in quoting it.

### Application and Devotional Implications

A further question to which a simple answer is misleading is, can people get themselves a new heart and spirit or does God have to provide it? Ezekiel affirms both approaches (11:19; 18:31). He parallels Deuteronomy’s two approaches to the circumcision of the heart as an obligation and a divine undertaking (Deut 10:16; 30:6; Block, 1: 588). Each event (or rather, each image for this transformation) requires both human and divine commitment, and the relationship between these cannot be articulated in terms (for instance) of one being conditional on the other. Paul thus juxtaposes the exhortation to people to work out their salvation and the reminder that God is at work in them to this end (Phil 2:12–13).[[174]](#footnote-174)

To put it another way, if the wages of sin is death (Rom 6:23), is it really possible to turn and evade that death? Paul’s word for sin is ἁμαρτíα, which corresponds to LXX’s translation of חָטָא by ἁμαρτάνω. Ezekiel knows that everyone offends against Yahweh’s standards, knows that everyone dies, and might make a link between these two facts. Whether he does or not, his exhortation that people must turn from waywardness and his promise that they can then evade death does not imply that they can become sinless and need never die. He is promising the possibility of “the liberation of the individual from the burden of his own past” (Greenberg, 1:340), which Paul (for instance) experiences through Jesus’ appearing to him. Ezekiel’s promise corresponds to Jeremiah’s (Jer 18:1–12). On the other hand, the person who is standing needs to watch out to make sure of not falling (1 Cor 10:12; Allen, 1:278). Calvin suggests the prayer:

Grant, Almighty God, since you have so instructed us by thy law in the rules of living justly, that we have no excuse for error or ignorance: Grant, I say, that we may be attentive to that teaching which you prescribe for us; and so anxiously exercise ourselves in it, that each of us may live innocently among the brotherhood: and then may we so worship thee with one consent and so glorify thy name, that we may at length arrive at that happy inheritance which you have promised for us in your only-begotten Son. (Calvin, 2:257)

Ezekiel’s implicit wrestling with the tension between the idea that we are responsible for our actions and the recognition that we may be incapable of exercising that responsibility resonates in an age when we are aware that “the self is not an *actor*” or not simply an actor, “but is *acted upon* via a variety of constraints beypond its control.”[[175]](#footnote-175)

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## Elegies for a Doomed Dynasty and a Doomed People (19:1–14)

### Outline

After 18:1 lacked the message that it gave the impression of introducing, 19:1–14 lacks any introduction and looks as if it could be that message. But whereas Ezek 13, for instance, began “Prophesy,” Ezek 16 began “Get Jerusalem to acknowledge,” and Ezek 17 began “Formulate a puzzle,” Ezek 19 begins “Raise a requiem,” a mourning chant. The requiem turns out to be another allegory,\* however, which in this way resembles Ezek 17. One could call it a requiem that is also a חִידָה and a מָשָׁל, a puzzle and a parable.\* Its taking the form of a requiem conveys something of its significance. But it is also a puzzle, and more of a puzzle than Ezek 17, with less clarification.[[176]](#footnote-176)The instruction in 19:1 does give the hearers the clue regarding the fundamental significance of the allegory: it relates to Israelite leaders. The leaders are anonymous, but the chapter eventually makes clear that the allegory’s dramatic personae are fundamentally the same as was the case in previous chapters.

Much of Ezek 19 has the classic rhythm of a mourning song or other lament with the second colon shorter than the first. This shortfall might suggest that life is falling short of what one would have wished, or might correspond to the movement of people’s processing in their grief ritual. In Ezek 19, each line in 19:2–9a has a second colon with only two stresses (the first lament then comes to an end with a tricolon in 19:9b). In the second lament, the same is true of 19:10–12 and 14 (19:13 is a conventional 3-3). The first requiem begins with two 3-2 lines whose words are hyphenated in this translation to indicate how they work in Hebrew:

2What your-mother, lioness,

among pumas!

She-lay among cougars,

She-reared her-cubs.

In effect, the first requiem comprises elegies over two leaders, and the chapter as a whole unfolds:

19:1 introduction

19:2 19:5bα mother flourished 19:10

19:3 19:5bβ–7 offspring flourished 19:11

19:4–5a 19:8–9 offspring and mother failed 19:12–14

19:14b conclusion

Strictly, an elegy or requiem would be a lament over a death. This requiem relates only to a grim fate that may overtake someone—eventually, it transpires, two people. It constitutes a pretend requiem that Yahweh dictates to Ezekiel for him to share with his people. The allegory that is a requiem is a message, a subtle, indirect way of warning about catastrophe. On the assumption that both laments come from the time between 592 and 587, the portrayal in terms of past glory and past loss is actually a portrayal of present glory and coming loss (Allen, 1:286). As usual, its aim is to prepare the Kebarites for the further calamity that is to come. But the closing note, “This is a requiem. It became a requiem” sounds as if it derives from after 587 when the warning in the form of a requiem had come true. Either way, the message constitutes a total requiem over the Davidic kingship (Sedlmeier, 1:255). None of the kings is named, but one way or another, the requiem covers the fate of Jehoiakim, Johoahaz, Jehoiachin, and Zedekiah. It concerns “the end of the Jerusalem monarchy” (Pohlman, 1:276). “Both images,” lion and vine, “emphasise that the honour of the Davidic dynasty is about to turn into shame,”[[177]](#footnote-177) and not only that of the Davidic dynasty but that of Judah itself.[[178]](#footnote-178) It consists in “two elegies for a doomed dynasty” (Allen, 1:282) and for a doomed nation.

### Translation

1So you, raise a requiem for the princes of Israel, 2and say,

What your mother was, a lioness,

among pumas!

She lay among cougars,[[179]](#footnote-179)

as she reared her cubs.

3She brought up one of her cubs,

as it became a cougar.

He learned to catch prey,

eating human beings.

4Nations heard of him,

while it got caught in their pit.

They made him come in hooks

to the country of Egypt.

5She saw that she waited,[[180]](#footnote-180)

her expectation perishing.

She got another[[181]](#footnote-181) of her cubs,

appointing him a cougar.

6He walked about among pumas,

becoming a cougar.

He learned to catch prey,

eating human beings.

7He bedded their widows,[[182]](#footnote-182)

and their towns he wasted.

The country was desolate, and all in it,

at the sound of his roar.

8They set nations against him

from the provinces around.

They spread their net over him,

getting caught in their pit.

9They put him in a collar,[[183]](#footnote-183) in hooks,

and had him come to the king of Babylon,

So they might have him come in custody,[[184]](#footnote-184)

in order that his voice would not make itself heard anymore

at the mountains of Israel.

10Your mother was like a vine with your blood,

planted by water,

Being fruitful and branching

from extensive water.

11It had strong stems,

for the clubs of rulers.

His height towered

among the boughs,[[185]](#footnote-185)

He could be seen in his height

in the extent of his tendrils.

12But it was plucked up in fury

being thrown to the ground.

When the east wind withered its fruit,

they broke and withered[[186]](#footnote-186)

As its strong club,

fire consumed it.

13So now it is planted in the wilderness,

in a dry and thirsty country.

14Fire went out from the stem of its tendrils,

consuming its fruit.

There was not in it a strong stem,

a club for ruling.

This is a requiem. It became a requiem.[[187]](#footnote-187)

### Textual Notes

MT has markers\* after 19:9, 14.

**19:3** LXX“he went off” takes וַתַּעַל as qal rather than hiphil, but the f. gender indicates that the mother is subject and the verb is hiphil.

**19:7** For וַיֵּדַע, “bedded,” LXX “pastured,” Aq. “did what was dire,” imply forms from רָעָה or רָעַע (see Zimmerli, 1:389).

For אַלְמְנוֹתָיו, “widows,” Theod. has “fortresses” (see BDB, 48a). Cf. LXX “in boldness/strength” (Allen, 1:284).

**19:9** CEBomitsthe isolated *yiqtol\** phrase יְבׅאֻהוּ בַּמְּצֹדוֹת, “so they might have him come in custody.”

**19:10** For בְּדָמְךָ*,* “with your blood,” LXX has “like a flower in a pomegranate” (“pomegranate” is רִמּוֹן).

**19:14** LXX attaches the final colon of the requiem (“aclubforruling”) to the footnote rubric about the requiem.

### Verse-by-Verse Commentary

**19:1** The first actual “requiem”(קִינָה) in the First Testament follows the death of Saul (2 Sam 1:17; cf. 2 Chr 35:25), and Ezekiel will use this word later in connection with a death that is coming (28:12; 32:2, 16). But Ezekiel and other prophets use the term more broadly to denote lamenting a disaster that is coming to a people (26:17; 27:2, 32; Jer 7:29; 9:10, 20 [9, 19]; Amos 5:1; 8:10). When Yahweh gives Ezekiel this commission, then, neither he nor and his hearers might immediately be sure what sort of thing has happened to “theprincesofIsrael,”or who they are. Ezekiel has used the term “prince”(נָשִֹיא) of Zedekiah in 7:27; 12:10, 12, though prefers the word to “king” for the Judahite monarch. Is the requiem sincere or sarcastic (Darr, on 19:1–9)? Perhaps it can be both. Ezekiel will be scathing and scornful, but he really wants Judah’s leadership to turn to Yahweh and evade the calamity the requiem describes.

**19:2** A mourning song can address the dead person as well as mourners (e.g., 2 Sam 1:26; 3:33–34), so 19:2 could be addressing a leader such as Jehoiachin or Zedekiah, but the requiem will later refer to such leaders in the third person and there is no indication in 19:2 that the identity of “you” has changed. Yahweh continues to speak to Ezekiel (Henry, 4:1232) in words for him to share with the Kebarites as Yahweh’s message for them. “Yourmother,” Ezekiel’s mother (or for that matter Jehoiachin or Zedekiah’s mother) is then not his birth mother but mother Israel (Tg., Rashi, in MG) or mother Judah (Zimmerli, 1:394) or mother Jerusalem (Theodoret, 126), as we will assume, who had brought up the people as her “cubs” or children.[[188]](#footnote-188) While the exclamation/question about *“*yourmother” receives one response here, it will receive another in 19:10–hence “what” rather than a requiem’s usual “how” (Lam 1:1; Brownlee, 299). But even absent that particle, the question is disquieting (Allen, 1:283). It suggests that she was someone impressive and important, but that something terrible has happened to her. While this first lament will say nothing more about her fate, the second will come back to it. The disquieting nature of the implicit question is underlined by the attention drawn to what a great lioness she was among pumas and amongcougars(are they other cities or peoples?). She was the queen of them all, as among them she did her upbringing work.

**19:3** Meanwhile, however, the requiem focuses on her offspring. Jerusalem, then, has brought up one of its pride of cubs to be a powerful lion that has grown up in the manner of a lion, learning how to catch prey and eating what it catches. One can hardly blame a lion for behaving in this way. But it is hardly an uncritical description of a powerful Israelite. The Judahite leaders were like roaring lions tearing their prey, devouring human lives, and making widows (22:2–5). Jehoiakim shed innocent blood and practiced violence (Jer 22:37). “It seemed, judging from their behaviour, as if a lioness had been their mother—a lioness who had herself lived among the other wild beasts of her species, and who had reared her young amid the ravening and ferocious tenants of the forest” (Fairbairn, 205).

**19:4** “Then the hunter became the hunted” (Bowen, 109). Fortunately for the Israelites, one might infer, some hunters catch the lion, and take him to Egypt. The requiem does not name any of its characters, and there is scope for argument about who they are. Possibly Ezekiel’s hearers would know how to decode it, but “even though it is possible to detect historical allusions in the poem,” in general it may be more interested in attempting “to capture the dynamics of Judean history, not its details” (Odell, 236). Yet in the allusion to Egypt, the allegory does point to the identification of its reference: Jehoahaz was the king who was exiled to Egypt, to be replaced by Jehoiakim (2 Kgs 23:34). He reigned only three months, so hardly had time to so do much as the lion who ate human beings any more than much that was wrong in Yahweh’s eyes (2 Kgs 23:32), so the description here and the judgment in 2 Kings is formulaic. Anyway, “nationsheardofhim”(cf. 2 Kgs 23:31–33). He had been the people’s choice to succeed Josiah, and neither Assyria nor Egypt might therefore be enthusiastic about him. And he is captured like a lion.

**19:5a** As it was the Egyptians who put Jehoiakim in place as Jehoahaz’s successor, he might not count as a cub whom mother Jerusalem appointed. That would be a more plausible description of Jehoiachin or Zedekiah. After Jehoiakim’s enthronement, then, mother Jerusalem “waited” and “herexpectationperished” through the time of the Egyptian appointee king. Perhaps she was waiting for Jehoahaz to come back or waiting for something better than Jehoiakim, but in vain.

**19:5b–7** The description of the next cougar would fit Jehoiachin insofar as he also managed to earn the judgment that he did wrong in Yahweh’s eyes during a mere three-month reign (2 Kgs 24:9), but it more naturally fits Zedekiah, who had ten years to earn the critique. On the assumption that this message dates from the period before 587, the ten years are not over yet—this requiem is a prophecy. Yahweh makes the critique more specific in speaking of the widows and the towns, through it continues to portray the king in conventional terms. He is like an invader who kills the men in a country, rapes their widows, and wastes their towns. Slightly more literally, the way a king might be driven to waste the towns in his own country and make them desolate was by imposing harsh taxation to pay the imperial tribute, of which 2 Kgs 23:35 speaks in connection with Jehoiakim (Rashi, in MG).

**19:8–9 “**They” are anonymous—or rather, the statement is effectively impersonal passive, “nations were set against him.” They were “fromtheprovincesaround”—in the First Testament, “provinces” (מְדִינָה) nearly always refers to the provinces of the Persian empire, though it occasionally refers to districts within Israel (1 Kgs 20:14, 15, 17, 19; Lam 1:1). Here, the list in 2 Kgs 24:2 would apply. They are not nations sent to rescue the country that is wasted and desolate but nations that will make the country’s position worse. And they will catch the prince and take him off to Babylon in a way that will indeed be more horrifying for Zedekiah than it was for Jehoiachin (2 Kgs 25:1–7).

**19:10–11** Yahweh gives another answer to his question in 19:2. The idea of Israel or Judah as a vine is more familiar than the idea of its being a lioness, but the vine image makes the same point to Ezekiel about a mother and her offspring. Instead of being a lioness among lions and thus impressive, she is a flourishing vine and thus impressive. The collocation of lion and vine parallels Jacob’s blessing of Judah in Gen 49:9–11, which might have been a coincidence were it not for the otherwise-puzzling further reference to blood, because in Gen 49:9–11 blood stands for the juice of the grapes born by the vine (cf. Deut 32:14; Isa 63:1–6). So Yahweh continues to describe Judah’s impressiveness, and in doing so, mixes the metaphor again, or reengineers it: the stems of the vine become strong enough to be clubs such as rulers wield. In the second and third lines the masculine singular suffixes and verbs suggest that the allegory has one such ruler in mind, which would again be Zedekiah.

**19:12** Once more the impressiveness dissolves with disaster for Judah, and not just for the leader. One might even call this allegory a parody of Jacob’s blessing (Odell, 236). Judah’s history was supposed to manifest the blessing Jacob describes. As a lion Judah is as impressive as Jacob says, and as a vine it has the potential for a parallel impressiveness. But the vine gets uprooted, as well as Judah’s club getting withered and burned. The requiem laments the upcoming devastation of Judah as well as its ruler. As the subjects of the verbs in 19:8 were unidentified, here the agency of the devastation is unstated, but Yahweh can be the unidentified agent of such passive verbs (e.g., Exod 25:40; Psa 41:8 [9]). Here “fury” (e.g., 13:13–15) and perhaps “the east wind” support that inference (Allen, 1:289–90), while Deut 29:28 [27] also has Yahweh plucking up the people from their land in fury and throwing them into another land (Qimhi, in MG).

**19:13–14** The closing lines extend the requiem in a way that takes the imagery of 19:11–12 further, and with irony. The vine is again “planted,” not now “bywater” (19:10) but “inthewilderness, in a dryandthirstycountry,” which could stand for Babylonia. From the “tendrils” that were a symbol of impressiveness (19:11) there now issues “fire,” and whereas the vine had become “fruitful,” now the tendrils consume its “fruit.” Whereas the vine once had “strong stems for the clubs of rulers” (19:11), now there is no “strong stem” in it. It has no “club for ruling.” Whereas the first lament thus concentrated mostly on the cougars rather than the mother lioness, the second pays more equal attention to the vine (that is, Judah or Jerusalem) and the stems (that is, the rulers). The calamity it laments issues from “the stem of its tendrils,” and both consumes itself (it brings the Davidic line to an end) and consumes the vine (it brings Judah to an end). Thus there comes a horrifying end to the collection of messages associated with the sixth year, the sixth month, the fifth day of the month, which began in 8:1 and conclude here (20:1 is a new start). Greenhill (479) comments:

This prophecy is a matter of mourning to me at present. To hear and speak of such sad things coming on Judah and Jerusalem “is a lamentation,” and when they shall be accomplished, they will be “for a lamentation” to posterity. They will lament for the princes of Israel, for Jerusalem, for the temple and for this vine plucked up by the roots.

If the requiem began life as a warning of what was going to happen, the closing line (19:14b) will derive from the process of the scroll’s compilation. By that time, it had become the kind of requiem that people could use, and indeed should use. “In the Old Testament, it is ultimately *always God* who calls for lamentation: as a judge, he demands of men that they sign his verdict; this signature is lament.”[[189]](#footnote-189)

### Biblical Theology Comments

Jacob’s blessing promises:

A lion cub, Judah

(from prey, son, you’ve gone up):

He has bent down, lain, like a lion,

like a cougar–who would rouse him?

10The staff will not leave from Judah,

the scepter from between his feet,

Until there comes tribute to him,

and the obedience of the peoples to him.

11Tying his donkey to a vine,

the offspring of his she-donkey to a choice vine,

He has washed his clothing in wine,

his garment in grape-blood:

12Darker of eyes than wine,

whiter of teeth than milk. (Gen 49:9–12)

Ezek 19 links the images of lion and vine with the image of mother. She is the central figure in Ezek 19.[[190]](#footnote-190) Elsewhere in the Scriptures, Isaiah 66:7–16 is the most extensive exposition of Judah or Jerusalem or Yahweh as mother. In effect it reaffirms the vision of Israel or Judah or Jerusalem as the fruitful mother of a flourishing people, then has Yahweh in person nursing and comforting Judah. The Jerusalem above is our mother, Paul says (Gal 4:26), quoting the encouragement to mother Jerusalem in Isa 54:1. The mother figure reappears in Rev 12, where it stands for the people of God—Israel reborn as the Jewish-and-Gentile community of people who believe in Jesus. Jesus speaks of the community of his disciples, the people who do the will of his Father, as his mother, brother, and sister (Matt 12:49–50). It is through that association and through their being that kind of community that they maintain their own place as branches of the vine (John 15). In Rev 5:5 Jesus is also a lion, which promises his people that they have someone strong on their side.

The portrait of the unnamed Zedekiah (צׅדְקׅיָּהוּ, “Yahweh is my faithfulness”) now planted in dry country also offers an anticipatory contrast with that of Yahweh’s servant who proves himself צַדּׅיק, faithful, in Isa 52:13–53:12.[[191]](#footnote-191)

### Application and Devotional Implications

On June 26, 1748, Jonathan Edwards preached a sermon after the death in Boston of the Honorable John Stoddard, Chief Justice for the County of Hampshire. His text came from Ezek 19:12, and his title was “God's Awful Judgment in the Breaking and Withering of the Strong Rods of a Community.” He viewed Stoddard as an example of a godly ruler. What are the characteristics of a strong rod, then? Edwards suggests a series of characteristics that one might see as the opposite to ones manifested by the cougar in Ezek 19:

* great ability for the management of public affairs
* largeness of heart and a greatness and nobleness of disposition
* a spirit of government
* stability and firmness of integrity, fidelity and piety in the exercise of authority
* such circumstances as give him advantage for the exercise of his strength for the public good.[[192]](#footnote-192)

They suggest a personality profile for which one might look in a leader.

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## Part Three: Yahweh’s Message to Ezekiel, Year Seven (20:1–23:49)

If one takes the dates in the Ezekiel scroll as a key to its structure, the first three of its parts comprise almost half the scroll, which is the half set in the period leading up to 587 and the eve of the siege of Jerusalem. Three brings this devastating first half to a devastating and more or less hopeless conclusion. It begins like Part Two, with some of the community’s elders coming to consult Ezekiel. The scroll’s curator and readers know that the moment of Jerusalem’s siege and fall is drawing nearer. The opening date is the day on which the temple will be destroyed five years later, according to Jer 52:12 (Qimhi, in MG). It is the event that will be recalled on Tisha b’Av, though that date actually denotes the Ninth of Av, between the date in 2 Kgs 25:8–8 and the date in Jer 52:12 (Sweeney, 101). In this scroll, the next date, in 24:1–2, will mark the beginning of the siege. In the drama of the Ezekiel scroll, the “countdown to disaster” is beginning (Clements, 86). The contents of Part Three will fit with that.

* It begins with another revisionist account of the relationship between Yahweh and Israel over the centuries, another version that is more the story of rebellion and chastisement than the story of salvation, though it closes with a promise of restoration (20:1–44)
* It continues with a dramatic sequence of messages about the sword hanging over Jerusalem, though it ends with the sword hanging over Babylon (20:45–21:32 [21:1–37])
* It goes on to the most swingeing detailed indictment of Jerusalem with its most devastating declaration that Jerusalem is just slag and that its time is coming (22:1–31)
* It closes with yet another revisionist account of Israel’s history as more the story of rebellion and chastisement than the story of salvation, even more horrifying than previous ones (23:1–49)

Fairbairn (209) comments:

The entire series is of a peculiarly dark, objurgatory, and threatening character, interspersed with only some occasional gleams of light and distant prospects of a still coming good. No substantial amendment had been produced by the earlier communications of the prophet, and the contemporary efforts of other servants of God. Hence the guilt having become so much greater, and the time drawn nearer for the execution of judgment, the burden which the prophet had to deliver was but the more fearfully charged with intimations of brooding woe.

## A Confrontational Story of Outrages, Fury, and a Name (20:1–44)

### Outline

The arrival of some community elders becomes the occasion for Yahweh to develop another account of the relationship between himself and Israel over the centuries. The chapter comprises a report of a sequence of recollections, challenges, and declarations of intent by Yahweh, illustrating how “history-telling is meaning-making.”[[193]](#footnote-193) But it is a startling, shocking, and disorienting account of the past relationship between Yahweh and Israel, more radical than Ezek 16, and in some respects almost as startling, shocking, and disorienting an account of the way this relationship will be in the future. The result is radically gloomy. It is not salvation history but *Unheilsgeschichte* (Tuell, 126). Its effect is enhanced through its being expressed not as metaphor or allegory\* like Ezek 16 and 23 but as history (Taylor, 154). Yet it is an expression of “a selective revisionism,”[[194]](#footnote-194) marked by irony.[[195]](#footnote-195) There is a close relationship between its story and the teaching in Lev 18–20, which hints that it is not revisionist in the sense that Ezekiel simply thought it up for himself.[[196]](#footnote-196)

The point about history is to interpret the present, and it is a bizarre present that needs interpreting.[[197]](#footnote-197) Disaster is drawing nearer and the situation is becoming more desperate, and revisionist history implies an understanding of history that has been reworked in light of new facts that have emerged, or different convictions from the ones that underlay the accepted understanding, or different questions that a history now needs to address. In the Scriptures, Chronicles is a revisionist history compared with Kings, arising from the need to tell Israel’s story in a different way in Persian era Judah (when, for instance, Judah needs encouragement) from its telling after the fall of Jerusalem (when Judah needed confronting). One might call Stephen’s account of Israel’s history in Acts 7 another revisionist account (Jenson, 154). Not surprisingly, Ezekiel’s revisionist history compares somewhat with that in Deuteronomy through Kings and that in Psa 106,[[198]](#footnote-198) though it does not follow a scheme suggesting a sequence of sin, chastisement, turning to Yahweh, and deliverance.

“The creative and theological freedom with which this author turns and extends traditions extant in earlier literature marks him as brilliantly creative.”[[199]](#footnote-199) His “rhetorical strategy” is then parody: he seeks to to get this people to think as he “turns his people's history on its head” (Block, 1:613, 614). “A brief glance at each of the periods Ezekiel sketches will reveal his subversive message. In each case, he alludes to the most important known feature of the history, but twists or inverts it into a kind of parody of the received interpretation” (Wright, 157).

* Yahweh begins by locating his choosing Israel, and his exercising his authority to give Canaan to Israel, in the people’s time in Egypt, and simply omitting his involvement with Abraham and his family. This omission confronts the emphasis on the importance of that involvement in Genesis, which Ezek 33:24 indicates was important to Ezekiel’s people. And it would be hard to accuse the ancestors in Genesis of idolatry, a key theme for Ezekiel (Greenberg, 1:364).
* Yahweh makes no reference to the Israelites suffering undeserved affliction in Egypt. In this version of the exodus story, Yahweh simply got them out of Egypt to give them a better country to live in. Any suffering Israel experiences comes later, and it deserves it.
* Conversely, Yahweh needed to tell the Israelites to give up their worship of idols in Egypt, but they declined to do so. The Torah makes no reference to idols in Egypt, but idolatry is an important subject in Ezekiel’s day. In addition, Egypt is a political temptation in Ezekiel’s day (17:15), which might encourage an emphasis on Egypt as a place that suggests rebellion.
* Yahweh therefore determined to express his fury on Israel in Egypt, lest his name be treated as ordinary among the Egyptians. Exodus makes no reference to this development. It is an aspect of the way Ezekiel’s retelling of the exodus story is “the most independent in the OT.”[[200]](#footnote-200)
* Yahweh makes no mention of meeting with them at Sinai in connection with giving them his laws and rulings “in the wilderness,” and no mention of covenant-making. He does speak of making his sabbaths a sign, which the Torah does not mention, but which is a significant theme in Ezekiel’s day. Yahweh makes no mention of Moses or Aaron.
* While the people did “rebel” against Yahweh in the wilderness (e.g., Deut 1:26, 43), the Torah does not describe them as rebelling against his laws and rulings, nor did they “greatly” treat his sabbaths as ordinary.
* Although Yahweh let the exodus generation die out because of their rebellion, he did not think about destroying them and then decide not to do so.
* The Torah does not record any warnings or threats to the next wilderness generation such as Yahweh recalls here, though Leviticus and Deuteronomy do record threats to scatter the Israelites for not following his laws and rulings.
* Yahweh recalls giving them laws that were not good, which he perhaps explains by describing them as rulings by which they could not live in keeping with the aim he articulates in 20:11, and he further explains them as means by which he defiled them.
* He recalls bringing them into the land in fulfilment of his oath, but having to watch them turn it into a place of false worship.

“Ezekiel 20 attempts to make sense of a people’s ongoing history first by distorting its story, and then by encapsulating it within an overriding plot of God’s utter determination to fulfill a divine plan, despite every human effort to derail it” (Darr, Reflections on 20:1–44). Israel’s history has gone nowhere, except downwards. It is more cyclical than teleological.[[201]](#footnote-201) Yet the end of the story of the past is not the end of the story. The story is not one without a future. Yahweh issues a challenge to the current generation not to follow the ways of their ancestors, but then makes clear that the future does not depend on their meeting this unlikely challenge. No, Yahweh has not reigned as king over them, as Exod 15:18 said he would, but he will. The exodus and the time in the wilderness turn out not to have led anywhere, but Yahweh intends that there will be a new exodus and a new meeting in the wilderness (Allen, 2:15–16), that there will now be a covenant,[[202]](#footnote-202) a purging of the people, a new entering into the land, proper worship on Yahweh’s sacred mountain, a proper-self-loathing by the people, and a proper recognition of Yahweh.

The unfolding of this story is complex, but one might analyze it as follows:

Part A. After Ezekiel’s introduction to the chapter (20:1–3) and Yahweh’s introductory instruction to Ezekiel (20:4–5aα), Yahweh recalls concerning the Israelites’ ancestors:

1. I promised to get them out of Egypt and take them to Canaan (20:5aβ–6)

I insisted that they abandon their idols (20:7)

They declined (20:8a)

I formulated a plan to destroy them but did not implement it (20:8b–9)

1. I got them out of Egypt and took them into the wilderness (20:10)

I laid down further expectations of them (20:11–12)

They declined to fulfil them (20:13a)

I formulated a plan to destroy them but did not implement it (20:13b–17)

1. I reiterated the expectations to their children (20:18–20)

They declined to fulfil them (20:21a)

I formulated a plan to destroy them but did not implement it (20:21b–22)

I did determine to scatter them, and I gave them further, bad laws (20:23–26)

1. Yahweh issues a resumptive instruction to Ezekiel (20:27a), then recalls:

They committed violation against me in the land (20:27b–29)

Part B. After another resumptive instruction to Ezekiel, Yahweh speaks more directly to the present generation:

1. Are you imitating these ancestors yet inquiring of me? (20:30–31)

Are you thinking you can be like the nations in your worship? (20:32)

1. I intend to repeat the pattern of my earlier action (20:33–36)

I will bind you to me in a covenant and purge you (20:37–38)

1. In due course Israel will serve me on my sacred mountain (20:39–41)

And you will acknowledge me and recognize the facts about yourselves (20:42–44)

One might see 20:27–29 as belonging with Part A or Part B. The acknowledgment phrase in 20:26bβ suggests an ending there, and the “therefore” in 20:27 points to a new stage in the argument. Yet 20:27–29 continues and concludes the narrative recollection of Part A, after which the further “therefore” in 20:30 again suggests a new stage in the argument. So 20:27–29 looks both ways: it both concludes the recollection and leads towards the confrontation. The complexity of the chapter might suggest that a more straightforward message has been elaborated, but it seems just as likely that Ezekiel originally formulated something complex. 20:1–31 might come from 591 and 20:32–44 from after 587. But the entire message would speak to the community in the years before 587 and the years after 587.

### Translation

1Then, in the seventh year, in the fifth [month], on the tenth of the month, some individuals from Israel’s elders came to inquire of Yahweh, and sat in front of me, 2Yahweh’s message came to me: 3My man, speak to Israel’s elders, and say to them, The Lord Yahweh has said this. Are you coming to inquire of me? I am alive, if I will let myself be inquired of[[203]](#footnote-203) for you (an affirmation of the Lord Yahweh)….[[204]](#footnote-204) 4Will you give a ruling to them, will you give a ruling, My man? Their ancestors’ outrages—get them to acknowledge them. 5Say to them, The Lord Yahweh has said this.

On the day of my choosing Israel, I raised my hand[[205]](#footnote-205) to the offspring of Jacob’s household and got myself acknowledged by them in the country of Egypt. I raised my hand to them, saying, “I am Yahweh your God.” 6On that day I raised my hand to them to get them out from the country of Egypt to a country that I had sought out for them, flowing with milk and molasses,[[206]](#footnote-206) it being the most splendid of all the countries. 7And I said to them: “Each individual, the detestable objects that you set your eyes on,[[207]](#footnote-207) throw them out. The lumps of Egypt, don’t become defiled through them. I am Yahweh your God.” 8But they rebelled against me and were not willing to listen to me. Each individual, the detestable objects that they set their eyes on, they did not throw them out. The lumps of Egypt, they did not abandon them. So I said I would pour out my fury on them, in consuming my anger at them within the country of Egypt, 9and[[208]](#footnote-208) I acted for the sake of my name, so that it would not become ordinary in the eyes of the nations that they were among, before whose eyes I had got myself acknowledged by them[[209]](#footnote-209) in getting them out from the country of Egypt.

10So I got them out from the country of Egypt and had them come into the wilderness. 11I gave them my laws, and my rulings I got them to acknowledge, by which the person who acts on them will live. 12Moreover my sabbaths I gave them, to be a sign between me and them for acknowledging that I, Yahweh, make them sacred. 13But Israel’s household rebelled against me in the wilderness, not walking by my laws and rejecting my rulings by which the person who acts on them will live. And my sabbaths they greatly treated as ordinary. So I said I would pour out my fury on them in the wilderness, in consuming them, 14and I acted for the sake of my name, so that it would not become ordinary in the eyes of the nations, before whose eyes I had got them out. 15Moreover I myself raised my hand to them in the wilderness not to have them come into the country that I had given, flowing with milk and molasses, it being the most splendid of all the countries, 16since they had rejected my rulings, did not walk by my laws, and had treated my sabbaths as ordinary, because their mind was walking after their lumps. 17But my eye took pity on them instead of destroying them, and I did not consume them[[210]](#footnote-210) in the wilderness.

18I said to their children in the wilderness, By your parents’ laws do not walk, their rulings do not keep, and by their lumps do not become defiled. 19I am Yahweh your God. By my laws walk, my rulings keep and act on, 20and my sabbaths make sacred and they will be a sign between me and you in acknowledging that I am Yahweh your God. 21But the children rebelled against me, not walking by my laws and not keeping my rulings by acting on them (by which the person who acts on them will live), treating my sabbaths as ordinary. So I said I would pour out my fury on them, by consuming my anger on them in the wilderness 22and turning back[[211]](#footnote-211) my hand, and I acted for the sake of my name so that it would not become ordinary in the eyes of the nations before whose eyes I got them out. 23I both myself[[212]](#footnote-212) raised my hand to them in the wilderness to scatter them among the nations, to disperse them among the countries, 24since my rulings they did not act on, my laws they rejected, my sabbaths they treated as ordinary, and their eyes went after their parents’ lumps, 25and I myself gave them laws that were not good and rulings by which they could not live, 26and defiled them through their gifts, through the passing of everything that opens the womb, in order that I might make them desolate, in order that they might acknowledge that I am Yahweh.

27Therefore speak to Israel’s household, my man, and say to them: The Lord Yahweh has said this. Yet further in this your ancestors reviled me, in their committing violation against me. 28I had them come into the country that I raised my hand to give them, but they saw any high hill or any leafy tree and offered their sacrifices there and gave their enraging offering[[213]](#footnote-213) there. They made their sweet aromas there and poured their libations there. 29I said to them, what is this shrine that you are the ones coming to?[[214]](#footnote-214) So its name has been “shrine” until this day.

30Therefore say to Israel’s household, The Lord Yahweh has said this. In the path of your ancestors you are defiling yourselves and whoring after their lumps, 31and in carrying your gifts, in passing your children through fire, defiling yourselves as regards all your lumps until this day, and I myself will let myself be inquired of for you, Israel’s household? I am alive (an affirmation of the Lord Yahweh), if I will let myself be inquired of for you.… 32The thing that comes up into your spirit, it will definitely not happen, that you are saying “We will be like the nations, like the families of the countries, in ministering to wood and rock.”

33I am alive (an affirmation of the Lord Yahweh), if I do not with a strong hand and with a stretched out arm and with outpoured fury reign as king over you…. 34I will get you out from the peoples and gather you from the countries in which you are scattered, with a strong hand and with a stretched out arm and with outpoured fury. 35I will have you come into the wilderness of the peoples and I will engage in ruling with you there, face to face. 36As I engaged in ruling with your ancestors in the wilderness of the country of Egypt, so I will engage in ruling with you (an affirmation of the Lord Yahweh). 37I will have you pass under the staff and have you come into the disciplinary bond[[215]](#footnote-215) of the covenant. 38I will purge from you the people who defy and rebel against me, getting them out from the countries where they sojourn, but to the land of Israel they will not come. And you will acknowledge that I am Yahweh.

39So you, Israel’s household, the Lord Yahweh has said this. Each individual, go, serve his lumps, and after, if you are not going to listen to me.…[[216]](#footnote-216) My sacred name you will not further treat as ordinary with your gifts and with your lumps. 40Because on my sacred mountain, on Israel’s lofty mountain (an affirmation of the Lord Yahweh), there all Israel’s household will serve me, all of it, in the country, as I accept them there and inquire there after your donations[[217]](#footnote-217) and your first fruit offerings[[218]](#footnote-218) with all your sacred things, 41as I accept you with your sweet savor, when I have got you out from the peoples and gathered you from the countries in which you are scattered. I will manifest my sacredness through you in the eyes of the nations. 42And you will acknowledge that I am Yahweh when I have you come to the land of Israel, to the country that I raised my hand to give it to your ancestors. 43You will be mindful there of your paths and all your deeds by which you defiled yourselves, and you will feel a loathing at yourselves,[[219]](#footnote-219) at all the dire things that you have done. 44And you will acknowledge that I am Yahweh through my acting with you for the sake of my name, not in accordance with your dire paths or in accordance with your corrupt deeds, Israel’s household (an affirmation of the Lord Yahweh).

### Textual Notes

MT has markers\* after 20:1, 26, 29, and 44..

**20:1** For “Israel’s,” LXX has “the household of Israel’s.” So also in 20:3.

**20:4** For הֲתִשְׁפּׄט, “will you give a ruling,” LXX has a first-person verb.

**20:5** For the first וָאֶשָֹּא יָדׅי, “I raised my hand,” LXX has “I was made known,” and takes the second occurrence to mean taking the people by the hand. It interprets the phrase in varying ways through the chapter.

**20:6** For צְבִי, “splendid,” LXX has “a honeycomb” (so also in 20:15), which follows nicely on דְּבַשׁ taken to mean “honey.”

**20:7** LXX’s rendering of גִּלּוּלִים here and in 20:8, 18, 39 is “practices,” in 20:16, 24, 31 “notions,” and elsewhere (e.g., 18:15) “idols.”

**20:8** For וַיַּמְרוּ, “they rebelled,” Aq. has “they changed,” assuming the verb to be מוּר rather than מָרָה (cf. 5:6).

**20:13** LXX translates וַיּמְרוּ בִי, “rebelled against me,” as if derived from אָמַר, “I said,” which leads into further differences in 20:13.

**20:14** Aq. has “I did not act.”

**20:18** LXX has a double translation of אַל תִּטַּמָּאוּ, “do not become defiled.”

**20:21** For וַיַּמְרוּ, “rebelled,” LXX has “embittered,” assuming the verb to be מָרַר rather than מָרָה.

**20:22** LXX lacks “and I turned back my hand.”

**20:26** Theod., Vg. translate אֲשַׁמֵּם as if from אַָשַׁם and thus meaning “make guilty” rather than שָׁמַם “make desolate.”

LXX lacks “in order that they might acknowledge that I am Yahweh.”

**20:28** LXX has “[sacrificed there] to their gods,” then lacks “gave their enraging offering.”

**20:31** LXX assimilates the first two clauses of the verse to 20:40, as it renders it.

**20:37** For בְּמָסֹרֶת הַבְּרׅית “into the bond of the covenant,” LXX has “by number,” which might suggest בְּמִשְֹפָּר and the loss of הַבְּרׅית by haplography\* (see Cornill, 296–97 ).

**20:38** Rather than יָבוׄא, “come” (sg.), one would expect יָָבׄאוּ but “the Masora on Lv 1134 reckons fourteen instances of יָבוׄא where we should expect the plural” (GK 145u).

**20:39** For לְכוּ עֲבֹדוּ, “go, serve,” LXX “take away” suggests a form from בָּעַר or עָבַר rather than עֲבׄדוּ. Thus “the culmination in LXX is a call for repentance” which will prepare the way positively for the renewal described in 20:40–42 (Olley, 359).

**20:40** LXX lacks “Israel’s” and “in the country.”

**20:44** LXXlacks “Israel’s household.”

### Verse-by-Verse Commentary

**20:1–3** The date follows the pattern of 1:1 and 8:1, which refer to years five and six of the Kebarites’ forced move from Jerusalem. It is now 591, and readers of Ezekiel’s completed scroll know that it is only a couple of years to the time when Zedekiah will declare independence of Babylon and the Babylonians will again invade Judah, and four years to the day when Nebuzaradan will march into Jerusalem and enforce another exile (Jer 52:3–4, 12–15). The arrival of the elders also recalls 8:1, but the description of them as coming “to inquire of Yahweh,” sitting in front of Ezekiel (waiting for an answer?), and receiving a disdainful rejoinder, corresponds to 14:1–8. One can imagine that they might be asking about how events are going to turn out, and notwithstanding the dismissive nature of Yahweh’s response (which he confirms in 20:31), what follows could be exactly an answer to such an inquiry. Because Ezekiel doesn’t tell us the nature of their query, we cannot be sure. If they wanted to know what Yahweh was going to be doing or what the community was supposed to be doing in light of things they had heard from Jerusalem, then Ezekiel tells them, though it will not be what they will have been hoping to hear.

**20:4** Elsewhere in Ezekiel, Yahweh is the usual subject of the verb translated “give a ruling” (שָׁפַט). It denotes his exercise of authority (e.g., 7:3, 27; 16:38), traditionally taken to refer to his “judgment.” The bidding to Ezekiel recurs in 22:2. The third occasion in Ezekiel when the subject of the verb is not God is 44:24, where priests are to issue rulings that are in keeping with Yahweh’s own rulings, as is often the case in the use of this verb elsewhere in the First Testament. So here Yahweh issues a “polite request” (Allen, 2:3) to Ezekiel to lay the law down to the elders in his name. For the most part the judgment will concern the past, but a past with implications for the future. They need to acknowledge their ancestors’ outrages and (it will transpire) then to face the fact that their own are similar.

**20:5** There are no references to Yahweh “choosing” Israel in Genesis or Exodus, and this is the only time Ezekiel uses the word, but it recurs in Deuteronomy (e.g., 7:6–7). It is a fair summary of what Yahweh was doing in Genesis and Exodus, and some EVV use “chose” to translate יָדַע (literally “acknowledged”) in Gen 18:19. Exodus does have Yahweh “raising his hand” in connection with taking Israel into Canaan (Exod 6:8). EVV paraphrase “swore,” but the expression may rather suggest exercising authority.[[220]](#footnote-220) Three times Ezekiel refers to Yahweh’s raising his hand in this way here. Getting himself “acknowledged” by Israel is a motif in Exodus in the same context (Exod 6:7). Perhaps a subconscious recollection of the exodus lies behind the reference to “Jacob’s household,” the family that went down into Egypt (Gen 46:25). This is the only time Ezekiel speaks of “Jacob’s household,” an expression Isaiah is more fond of (e.g., Isa 2:5–6). Indeed, Ezekiel only once elsewhere uses the word “offspring” (זֶרַע) in a similar connection (see 44:22). In that same context in Exod 6:7–8 Yahweh declares “I am Yahweh your God” (cf. Exod 16:12), while in Ezek 1–24, Yahweh is “your God” only in 20:5, 7, 19, 20, and never “our God” (Olley, 362).

**20:6** Yahweh makes no reference to the Israelites’ oppression, crying out, or rescue from Egypt. Yahweh gets them out of Egypt to get them to a better country that he has especially “sought out” for them. This rare verb (תּוּר) nicely occurs first after the exodus in connection with Yahweh seeking out a resting place for the people, by means of the covenant chest (Num 10:33; Deut 1:33), though it occurs most commonly in connection with his commission to Moses to check out the land (Num 13–14). Yes, Yahweh had checked out this land, and was therefore in a position to call it the loveliest land there is (certainly compared with Egypt and Babylonia).

**20:7–9** Yahweh’s command about “each individual” (אִישׁ) throwing out their idols follows the wording of a formal rule (e.g., Lev 19:3) and resembles 14:4, 7 (Zimmerli, 1:409). Again, one cannot be literalistic about Israel worshiping idols in Egypt—at least, Exodus does not refer to them doing so. Josh 24:14 does, and soon after Exod 6:7–8 with its parallels to this passage, Exod 6:9 records their dispirited hearts.[[221]](#footnote-221) Likewise, Exodus does not speak of them rebelling in Egypt, but Psa 106:7 has them rebelling soon after, at the Red Sea (cf. Num 17:10 [25]; 20:10). Nor does Exodus say that the Israelites acknowledged Yahweh, though in effect it describes them doing so using other words (Exod 14:30–15:21). And if they did not have recourse to images in Egypt, they soon did (Exod 32:1–6), while the threat of anger recalled by Yahweh here compares with the one in Exod 32:10. But Yahweh’s first concern here with throwing out idols fits this chapter’s referring to idols (“lumps”) more than any other. It is a focal preoccupation.[[222]](#footnote-222) Yahweh now took action “for the sake of my name” (cf. 20:14, 22, 29, 44), my “sacred name” (20:39; 36:20–23; 39:7, 25; 43:7, 8). A person’s name expresses who they are, either because the name itself has significant meaning, or more often because it draws attention to the person, for anyone who knows the name and the person (if someone knows me, therefore, when they hear the name “John Goldingay,” the name immediately brings home the person). So the name “Yahweh” encapsulates and thus reveals the person of Yahweh (whether or not the vocable “Yahweh” in itself has meaning). And because Yahweh is sacred, distinctive in his authority and faithfulness, the name that encapsulates him is sacred and needs to be recognized, not profaned or treated as an ordinary name or an ordinary word. Yahweh himself must not seem to imply that his revelation of himself could be ignored with impunity, so that his name became ordinary (see 7:21–22) and ceased to be taken seriously. Yahweh actually is God, and he mustn’t give some other impression.

**20:10–11** Amos might comment that one also cannot be literalistic about Yahweh’s giving Israel laws, rulings, and sabbaths in the wilderness (Amos 5:25), and the material in Exodus and Leviticus actually came into being though Yahweh’s guiding people such as priests over subsequent centuries. Six times Ezek 20 refers to Yahweh’s laws and rulings (20:11, 13, 16, 19, 21, 24; see also 5:6, 7; 11:12, 20; 18:9, 17, 19, 21; 36:27; 37:24). The expression recurs in Leviticus (18:4, 5, 26; 19:37; 20:22; 25:18; 26:15, 43, 46). Lev 18:5 alone otherwise says that keeping these laws and rulings makes it possible to live by them.[[223]](#footnote-223) Paul will warn against the idea that someone can live by Lev 18:5 if it implies that this is a way of getting right with God, but Leviticus itself and Ezekiel are talking about the way people who already belong to Yahweh can live on and live a good life.

**20:12** “Moreover my sabbaths I gave them,” Yahweh adds. “When God is in a way of mercy with a people, he hath his ‘moreovers’” (Greenhill, 497). As laws and rulings feature through Ezekiel, sabbath(s) feature a number of times (20:12, 13, 16, 20, 21, 24; 22:8, 26; 23:38; 44:24; 45:17; 46:1, 3, 4, 12). They are another theme Ezekiel shares with Leviticus (see especially Lev 23; 25; 26), where making people sacred is also recurrent theme. Maybe it is Ezekiel who introduces the idea of the Sabbath as a means of God making Israel sacred,[[224]](#footnote-224) which is the sense in which the Sabbath is a sign (cf. Exod 31:13). The Sabbath becomes more significant from Ezekiel’s time onwards (the other big Sabbath chapters in the First Testament are Neh 13; Isa 56; and Jer 17). So it would be for people living in a foreign country. But the Decalogue urges Israel to make Sabbath sacred in response to the fact that Yahweh made it sacred (Exod 20:8–11). “It is a great sign for them that I gave the day of my rest to them for a rest. There, it is a great indication that I made them sacred to me” (Rashi, in MG). “By the sanctification of the day, we may remember the Lord who sanctifies us” (Jerome, 226–27).

**20:13–22** Deut 1:26, 43 refers to rebellion in the wilderness, though the rebellion was not really undertaken against Yahweh’s laws and rulings. Exod 16:27–29 describes an occasion when people treated the Sabbath as ordinary, which prompts Moses to speak of their refusing to keep Yahweh’s commands and instructions, and Num 15:32–36 describes an occasion when a man went out collecting firewood on the Sabbath and got executed for it, though these two events hardly amount to great profanation. Once again, Ezekiel is looking at long ago events as foreshadowings of the waywardness of his day, and looking at Yahweh’s response as a foreshadowing of his coming response in his day. In the wilderness Yahweh turned back his protective and active hand, as he is doing now (cf. Lam 2:3, 8), and let reversals happen to them in the wilderness, and a whole generation did not make it to the land. There is no mention of compassion here as there is in the recollection in Neh 9.[[225]](#footnote-225)

**20:23–24** Before the people are even in the land, Yahweh has threatened to scatter and disperse them (פּוּץ hiphil and זָרָה), paralleling respectively Deut 4:27; 28:64 and Lev 26:33, in the context of their respective threats concerning the consequences of ignoring Yahweh’s rulings and laws (cf. Lev 26:15). Our not knowing the date of material in Leviticus and Deuteronomy makes it impossible to be sure whether Ezekiel knew these warnings in the Torah, though warnings of some kind go back to Exod 32:34. The threat that Yahweh here recalls also matches Ezek 18: there is continuity between the chapters (Häner, 231). The idea is not that future generations will suffer because of their forebears’ wrongdoing, but they will suffer because they imitate their parents’ wrongdoing.

**20:25** A further, more eyebrow-raising action is Yahweh’s giving the wilderness generation “laws that were not good and rulings by which they could not live.” Tg. draws the teeth from Yahweh’s statement by turning the bad laws into ones that the people devised: “I rejected them because they were rebellious against my word and would not receive my prophets. I expelled them to a place far away and handed them over to the ones who hated them. And they followed their own foolish impulses and made for themselves bad statutes and laws, through which they could not have life.” In principle Ezekiel is only expressing in his own way an assumption that recurs through the Scriptures. Yahweh commissions Isaiah to make Judah’s mind dull (Isa 6:9–10) and Jesus sees himself as involved in the same mission (Mark 4:12). Israelites ask Yahweh why he made then stray from his ways (Isa 63:17) and Paul affirms God’s capacity to send delusion to people (2 Thess 2:11) (Fairbairn, 221–22). “Although Israel must carry the responsibility for its own fate, Yahweh retains full authority to determine its destiny, and to achieve that goal by whatever means he chooses” (Block, 1:641). But what were the not-good laws?

* Were they laws that people accepted as God-given but that are not in the Torah, of which the sacrifice of children or human sacrifice in general could be an example?[[226]](#footnote-226)
* Were they laws in the Torah that people could misinterpret, of which the rule about offering the firstborn to God (Exod 13:12–13) could be an example because people could think it implied sacrificing a child (see 20:26)? (Rashi, in MG). Actually, even 20:26 does not mention passing through fire—contrast 20:31. So it’s not clear that Ezekiel counts human sacrifice as something in any sense warranted by Yahweh.
* Were they laws in the Torah that could seem questionable in light of how things have worked out since Israel’s early days, such as the rule about kingship in Deut 17:14–20 (Ezekiel implies elsewhere that he is not enthusiastic about kingship) or the implicit permission to sacrifice at worship places all around the country (see 20:27–29)?
* Were they the detailed rules in the Torah which were not very good but were concessions to their waywardness (Jerome, 230)?
* Were they the entire body of laws and rulings such as we have in the Torah, by which the people would not live because they would not follow them, such as the Sabbath law and the ban on idols (see 20:24)? The way of life is thus turned into a way of death (Zimmerli, 1:411).
* Were they particular bodies of law such as Leviticus, the Priestly Code or the Holiness Code (if Ezekiel stood by Deuteronomy) or Deuteronomy (if Ezekiel stood by Leviticus)?
* Were then laws that Yahweh will improve on in Ezek 40–48?[[227]](#footnote-227)

It's not evident that the answer to this question would have been clearer to Ezekiel’s hearers or his original readers than it is to later readers, so this chapter with its parody and irony remains an enigma that they have to think about. Ezekiel is engaged in rhetoric (Block, 1:640) whose effect would be to drive them to reflect on what they think important and whether it is something good or something “not good” and whether it is something God has given them or allowed them to have more as an act of chastisement than as an act of generosity.[[228]](#footnote-228)

**20:26** Only here does Yahweh defile (Bowen, 116). His instructions mean that Israel experiences “the killing letter of the Law” (Origen, 660–61), in particular through the rule about the “passing” or passing through or passing over (עָבַר hiphil) of firstborn animals and human children (see further 20:31). Alongside the tension between what Yahweh says in 20:25 about the laws and rulings by which people could not live and what he says in Lev 18:5 about the laws and rulings being a means to life if you walk by them, there is a contrast between the Sabbath as a means to acknowledging Yahweh and this defilement as a means to acknowledging Yahweh. And in this final devastating judgment on the Israelites’ ancestors there is nothing corresponding to the mercy declared in 20:17 (Darr, on 20:18–26). They were just on the way to desolation.

**20:27** Yahweh’s “therefore” and his resumptive instruction to Ezekiel give the impression that we have now come to the point where Yahweh articulates the implications of this story for Ezekiel’s contemporaries. But it turns out that this impression is misleading. We are indeed getting towards that point, but we are not there yet. Rather the “therefore” and the bidding raise suspense. Yahweh simply continues his narrative, by noting that the same story continued when the Israelites were in Canaan. In their behavior there they “reviled” Yahweh (גָדַף—Ezekiel uses this rare verb only here). They acted with affront towards him. And they “committed violation” against him (מָעַל followed by its cognate noun—a more common expression in the First Testament and in Ezekiel).

**20:28–29** Yahweh goes on to indicate how they did it. After he had brought them into the land as he had said, one might have thought that they would serve him in accordance with his instructions about how to do so, but they did nothing of the sort. Deuteronomy laid down that they should serve him at a place he designated: maybe there would be just one, or maybe there would be a number. But they did as they liked. Presumably the enraging effect of their worship lay in their making their offerings to other deities (cf. 8:17; 16:26), but Ezekiel doesn’t make this explicit here as he will in a moment. That omission points to the likelihood that they didn’t see themselves as serving other deities. They went to worship at the traditional shrines on hills and under trees, and they prayed and offered sacrifices and offerings to Yahweh (as they saw it). They made the agreeable aroma of their sacrifices rise there as an accompaniment to their prayers, and they poured out their drink offerings. But their worship infuriated Yahweh. He understates his response in a dismissive paronomasia\* utilizing the threefold similarity between the word for a shrine (בָּמָה), the word for people coming (הַבָּאִים), and the word for “what” (מָה) (Rashi, in MG). Yes, *what* is it, this *shrine* to which youare *coming*? Did the elders want to set up a shrine in Kebar (was that the focus of their inquiry of Ezekiel?) and is this message Yahweh’s response?

**20:30–31** A resumptive “therefore” follows and confirms that there is indeed a judgment coming, though even now the declaration of judgment will not come immediately. And when it does come, the declaration will not be the usual, unequivocal kind. Initially, Yahweh asks another question—it will eventually emerge that Yahweh is picking up his earlier question in 20:3. In what follows, Ezekiel gives a mixed message over the identity of “Israel’s household” here. The renewed reference to inquiring of Yahweh makes one think of the Kebarite community whose elders had come with their inquiry. But the chapter so far has been about Israel as a whole. Either way, it wouldn’t be surprising if Ezekiel accused the present generation of following their ancestors’ ways of worship, and he speaks in familiar terms about defilement, whoring, and lumps. But he has not referred to whoring in this chapter, and the scroll has previously spoken on only one occasion about them defiling themselves (טָמֵא niphal, 14:11—that expression will recur in Ezek 22–23). Further, in 20:26 Yahweh spoke of himself as the agent of defilement: he had defiled their ancestors (טָמֵא piel).

Here in 20:31 they defile themselves through their gifts (cf. 20:26), which they “carry” (נָשָֹא). It is a common verb, but its use in connection with offering sacrifices is almost unique (see Psa 96:8), and the context is chilling. They are lifting up and carrying their children in connection with “passing them through fire.” In 20:26 “passing” (עָבַר hiphil) might or might not mean sacrificing them. In 16:21; 23:37, it does denote sacrifice, but those passages refer to another deity to whom they are passed, and don’t refer to fire. “Pass through fire” parallels passages such as Deut 18:10 where the context does not refer to sacrifice and suggests some divinatory procedure. Allusion to sacrificing children would likely imply reference to the Jerusalemites rather than the Kebarites, and a reference to some procedure whereby one seeks to get a message from Yahweh[[229]](#footnote-229) would fit the context of “inquiring of Yahweh” here. Perhaps Ezekiel would again be ambiguous even for his original hearers. They would again have to think. Or he might be pushing people who saw themselves as merely seeking to hear a word from Yahweh, to see themselves as engaged in a practice that was just as wrong as sacrificing a child.

The good news is that the question in 20:30–31 implies that “behind the historical survey,… which does not establish a fixed and unalterable fate, there is hidden implicitly the call of the ‘freedom to repent’ (Ezek 18)” (Zimmerli, 1:406). Ezekiel is not here implying that this generation is suffering because of the sin of earlier generations. He is not contradicting the message of Ezek 18 (Joyce, 149, 152). Some further good news will eventually emerge, when Yahweh indicates that the oath to be unavailable that he swears in 20:31 is not one that stands forever and inevitably, and 36:37 will indicate that Yahweh is capable of recanting (Rashi, in MG).

**20:32** The idea of wanting to be “like the nations” recalls the desire to be “like all the nations” in having a king (1 Sam 8:5). In both contexts it suggests willfulness but also fear and despair.[[230]](#footnote-230) There is some irony in Yahweh declaring that he will not allow them to worship deities made of wood and rock, because that is what he threatens them with elsewhere (Deut 4:28; 28:36, 64). He uses a significant term for worship, “minister to” (שָׁרַת), which mostly denotes the service of Yahweh by priests and Levites, and never elsewhere refers to worshiping images. Perhaps that links with Yahweh saying he won’t let it happen—it’s a kind of dishonoring of Yahweh. Thus this is a particularly “bothersome” concept against which Ezekiel fights.[[231]](#footnote-231)

**20:33–34** At last Ezekiel utters something like the threat that one expects after a “therefore,” but the threat continues to be equivocal. “A strong hand and a stretched out arm” is usually the language of deliverance (e.g., Exod 6:8; Deut 26:8), but Jeremiah could turn it into the language of judgment (Jer 21:5). Reigning as king (מָלַךְ) is what Yahweh was slated to do from the beginning of Israel’s story (Exod 15:18; cf. Isa 52:7–10), but “outpoured fury” would seem to spoil the picture. It looks as if outpouring is no longer cancelled (contrast 20:8–9, 13–14, 21–22). Or does 20:34 already imply that Yahweh might recant again? Whereas Ezekiel made no mention of the Israelites needing rescue from Egypt as the reason for Yahweh delivering them, now the strong hand, extended arm, and outpoured fury are working for Israel, not against it. Yahweh will get them out (יָצָא hiphil) as he got them out from Egypt (20:6, 9, 10), and will gather them from where they are scattered (קָבַץ piel) as he promised before (11:17; cf. Deut 30:3–4). Either the fury can be poured out on Israel but then subsequently on its overlords. Or it can be poured out on Israel or alternatively on its overlords: the future could go either way.…

**20:35–36** A new meeting in the wilderness naturally follows the new exodus. The first exodus had led to a meeting “in the wilderness of the country of Egypt”—that is, in the region to which had Yahweh had taken the Israelites outside Egypt. The exodus “from the peoples” (20:34) will likewise lead into a meeting “in the wilderness of the peoples”—that is, in the region to which Yahweh will have taken the Israelites outside the realm where other peoples control their life, or the region that is still only part way between the realm of the other peoples and their own land. The wilderness will surely be a good place for a meeting: cf. Hos 2:14 [16] (Fairbairn, 227). But a face to face meeting can be threatening, or at least solemn (Gen 32:30; Judg 6:22). So it is here. The meeting will be an occasion when Yahweh will come to a ruling with his people (שָׁפַט niphal). As usual, the implication of that verb is not that two equal parties will have a discussion and come to an agreed conclusion. Yahweh is the one with authority, and he will exercise it, as he did at Sinai. But the implication of the process is more positive than was suggested when he bade Ezekiel to give the people a ruling in 20:4.

**20:37** He will thus be like a shepherd having the sheep pass under his staff for counting (Lev 27:32). “Pass” is the same verb as in 20:26, 31, but this passing is more positive. Likewise, the staff (שֵׁבֶט) indicates his authority, and in 19:11, 14 it implied something more like a club (cf. 21:10, 13 [15, 18]), but this is a staff that has a more positive significance. This passing and this staff fit a link with “the disciplinary bond of the covenant” (see the translation footnote). Whereas Yahweh made no reference to a covenant in connection with his account of Israel’s history in 20:5–29 (contrast 16:8), now he declares that there will be a covenant. It will bind Israel to Yahweh in a more definite commitment. So the relationship between Yahweh and Israel is not broken: “they will be my people” (11:20; 14:11; 37:23, 27).[[232]](#footnote-232) “Although the divine oath had changed as a consequence of the people’s sins (v. 6.15.23), God did not retract **it, and the people’s behavior did not abrogate the everlasting existence of His commitments.”[[233]](#footnote-233)**

**20:38** Why will there be a process that implies counting? It will make sure that everyone is there. But the covenant making will also involve some purging (as one could say Sinai did). The verb (בָּרַר) can denote a positive selecting out (LXX has ἐκλέγω, the ordinary word for “choose”) which would work nicely with the image of the shepherd separating out the sheep who would be part of the tithe that was sacred to Yahweh. The rest of the sheep were not thereby rejected. But this process of selection does aim to exclude. It aims at purification. The people who defy and rebel against Yahweh may be among the people who escape the land of exile, but they won’t go back to the land of Israel. Once again, Ezek 20 resonates with Ezek 18 and Ezekiel’s message elsewhere. Yahweh is dealing with this corporate generation now in a way that does not sentence it to a fate determined by a previous generation, and Yahweh is dealing with Israel as a community in a way that need not take away from the responsibility of individuals to make the decisions that will determine their fate.[[234]](#footnote-234)

**20:39a** The same assumption underlies what follows as Yahweh addresses “you” (plural) as “Israel’s household,” a corporate entity, while also issuing a challenge to individuals (אׅישׁ) to make their decision about not serving their lumps. The injunction resembles Joshua’s when he tells the Israelites they can serve any god they choose if they decide not to serve Yahweh (Josh 24:15). It’s rhetorical. Surely anyone who has been listening to Yahweh is going to abandon their lumps, not serve them (cf. Jer 44:25). But if they are not going to listen and they are going to serve their lumps, then they will find that “after”…: Yahweh leaves unstated what will follow. Perhaps being unable to take Yahweh’s name on your lips actually is the consequence that will follow. More likely Yahweh is leaving unstated the actual result of following his rhetorical injunction, or the result consists in finding oneself among the purged.

**20:39b** The further consequence is then that people will not be continuing to treat Yahweh’s sacred name as ordinary when they bring their gifts to Yahweh and offer their worship with the aid of their lumps. That declaration makes more explicit that the images that people make are objects that they use as aids to worship of Yahweh. Given that there are the two kinds of idolatry (Calvin, 2:362), the conscious worship of another deity and the attempt to worship Yahweh with the aid of an image, the lumps Ezekiel here refers to are not images of some other deity but images of Yahweh made by people who think they are faithfully serving Yahweh. Yet anyone who thinks that a lump of wood or rock can represent Yahweh shows that they have no idea who Yahweh is. They are using his name, but not really serving him. They are profaning him, in the more serious of the two sense that can attach to profaning (see 7:21–22).

**20:40–41a** While 20:39 is eyebrow-raising as a piece of rhetoric, these two verses are eyebrow-raising in their message. In 17:22–23 Yahweh referred to “a high, towering mountain … Israel’s lofty mountain,” which denoted Mount Zion. Now he speaks of the worship that will be offered there, “on my sacred mountain, on Israel’s lofty mountain.” There will be no more treating the sacred name as ordinary. Instead there will be the offering of sacred things on the sacred mountain—these are the first three occurrences of the word “sacred*”* (the noun קֹדֶשׁ, used adjectivally) in the Ezekiel scroll. After the critique, gloom, and threat of the bulk of the chapter (and the bulk of the entire Ezekiel scroll so far), the picture in these two verses takes the breath away and brings a smile of joy to the face. “There” Israel will serve, “there” Yahweh will accept, “there” he will inquire after their contributions. The threefold “there” compares and contrasts with the threefold “there” of the sacrifices, the offerings, and the aromas in 20:28 (Eichrodt, 282). In contrast to the “serve” that Yahweh urged rhetorically on “Israel’s household” in 20:39, he now declares that “all Israel’s household will serve me” there.

The two references to Yahweh “accepting” Israel there are the scroll’s first two references to Yahweh “accepting“ Israel and its sacrifices (רָצָה), appreciating them, enjoying them, delighting in them (43:27 will be the only other occurrence of the verb).[[235]](#footnote-235) There is a nice ambiguity about the expression “with your sweet savor, I will accept you”: בְּרֵיַח could mean “through the savor” of the offerings, or “as the savor” that is now an aspect of you in your newly-committed state. And when the third “there” refers to Yahweh “inquiring after” these sacrifices, looking for Israel to be making its offerings, it nicely reuses the verb that describes the elders “inquiring” of Yahweh. The verses contain the seed thought that Ezek 40–48 will vastly expand.

**20:41b–42** So Israel’s history will not be simply a history of waywardness and chastisement. Like the narrative from Exodus to Samuel, Ezekiel’s narrative runs from the exodus to the land to the temple-building, from Egypt to Canaan to Mount Zion. The further recurrence of the word “sacred” in 20:41b raises the eyebrows even further than 20:40–41a. Instead of Israel treating Yahweh’s name as ordinary, through Israel Yahweh will be honored. He will manifest his sacredness Ezekiel has six of the eleven occurrences of this verb (קָדַשׁ niphal). Or instead of manifesting his sacredness by acting in judgment (28:22; 38:16), Yahweh will do it by restoring his people (28:25; 36:23; 39:27).

**20:43–44** Paradoxically, it will then not just be the experience of chastisement that will issue in remembering the dire things rather than putting them out of mind, and will issue in some self-loathing (6:9). Restoration will have those features, as the other side of recognizing how extraordinary is Yahweh’s acting on Israel’s behalf—not, again, for their sake, but for his name’s sake, but his own concern for his name is constructive for them. Calvin comments (2:390) that “the faithfulshould suffer voluntary disgrace, that they may glorify God by the pure and genuine confession of their shame.… When we not only suffer ourselves to be condemned by others, but inwardly reflect upon our own disgrace, and so of our own accord prostrate ourselves before God. This then is the fruit of penitence, this is true humility, flowing from genuine shame.” Yahweh’s words close with a final further reference to “Israel’s household,” to Israel as a whole with an emphasis on kinship ties, and thus with an implicit denial of the importance of any political disjunction between Judah and Ephraim, an affirmation of the significance of the exiled community, and a promise of the people being one again as a result of Yahweh’s act of restoration.[[236]](#footnote-236)

### Biblical Theology Comments

The people of God live in the present in light of the past and the future, and in that story, God acts for the sake of his name. In Ezek 20 “for the first time, the main motive of history is God’s concern for his name” (only 36:16–38 is comparable). “God’s concern for his name determined Israel’s destiny” (Greenberg, 1:382, 383). It is in his people’s interest that one reason he acts in the way he does is to avoid looking stupid, in that the biproduct is that it is an expression of his grace to his people. Given the nature of the story of the people of God, it is just as well that Yahweh’s proper concern for his name is such a factor in its continuing.

Like Israel, the church has to remember its story, the story of the church over the centuries. That means keeping in mind our waywardness as the people of God and asking how we might be continuing that waywardness in the present. It means recognizing the danger we might be in, the danger of God’s acting in heavy chastisement. It also means living in hope, because we know that God has not finished with us. Not least for the sake of his name, he will not finally abandon us. “What allegory might Ezekiel devise that would do justice to the horror and obscenity of the Crusades, the pogroms, the Inquisition, the conquistadores, the drowning and burning of Anabaptists, the Holocaust, apartheid, religious bigotry in Northern Ireland, genocide in Rwanda and ethnic cleansing in the Balkans?” In light of these realities, perhaps “we should listen for the echoes of Ezekiel’s voice and turn again in repentance to the severe but persistent grace of God—grace which will ultimately work God’s saving will for humanity in spite of the wretched failures of those whom he has called to be God’s people” (Wright, 167–68). Israel needs to attend to the Torah, but Ezekiel’s affirmation is that “its history will cease to mirror its idolatrous past.”[[237]](#footnote-237)

### Application and Devotional Implications

On completing his study of thie chapter, Calvin’s prayer is:

Grant, Almighty God, since we have already entered in hope upon the threshold of our eternal inheritance, and know that there is a certain mansion for us in heaven after Christ has been received there, who is our head, and the first-fruits of our salvation: Grant, I say, that we may proceed more and more in the course of thy holy calling until at length we reach the goal, and so enjoy that eternal glory of which you afford us a taste in this world, by the same Christ our Lord.

Thus ends Calvin’s incomplete commentary on Ezekiel, his last work. The editor of the commentary adds that after this lecture:

John Calvin, the Divine, who had previously been sick, then began to be so much weaker that he was compelled to recline on a couch, and could no longer proceed with the explanation of Ezekiel.… Nothing remains, kind Reader, but that you receive most favorably and graciously what is now sent forth to the world. (Calvin, 2:393)

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## The Sword of Damocles (20:45–21:32 [21:1–37])

At this point the medieval chapter division in printed English Bibles differs from the one in printed Hebrew Bibles such as *HUB*, *BHS*, andNJPS. The division in printed Hebrew Bibles corresponds better to the structure of the passage, but neither printed division corresponds to MT, which has a different set of eight sections, documented in the textual notes below. I give both references in the heading above, and in this section I give both references in the translation footnotes, in the textual notes, and in the lemmas\* in the verses-by-verse commentary. But it’s confusing and messy to keep giving two sets of references, and I will usually just give just the English ones. Anyone referring to a printed Hebrew Bible will need to add five to each verse reference.

### Outline

The four parts of this section have in common the theme of a “sword of Damocles” (Allen, 2:17) employed against Jerusalem and Judah and eventually turned back on Babylon (Damocles was a Sicilian courtier whose boss suspended a sword over his head to make him feel more insecure, as the boss himself felt). The sword theme recurs in the Prophets and elsewhere, notably in Lev 26, which Ezekiel recalls frequently (see especially Ezek 4–6), and which this section might therefore recall—with the irony that Lev 26 portrays the sword as Israel’s weapon as well as its peril. Ezekiel refers to the sword more than anyone else, and refers to it in this chapter more than any other (Zimmerli, 1:432–33). The section unfolds:

A sword wielded by Yahweh against Jerusalem and Judah (20:45–21:7)

A sword sharpened, shining, and whirling, for butchering people (21:8–17)

A sword brought by the king of Babylon, finding its way to Jerusalem (21:18–27)

A sword released but then sheathed and subjected to redress (21:28–32)

This section “stands by the side of ch. vii. as the most agitated utterance in the whole book” (Skinner, 160), which links with its being another chapter that is jerky, elliptical,\* and tricky (Greenberg, 2:438, 444–45). It may be suggestive of trauma,[[238]](#footnote-238) though the trauma will be the one it implies for people in Jerusalem, Ammon, or Babylon rather than for the Kebarites, whose tough time came a few years previously. Ezekiel may imply that he is himself frustrated, perturbed, or upset by people’s reaction to him (20:49), though that is part of the rhetoric of his message, as is commonly true of prophets such as Jeremiah and Ezekiel. Ezekiel is explicit that groaning and crumpling is something Yahweh commissions as part of that rhetoric (21:6–7, 12, 15). His anger is to be a representation of Yahweh’s anger (21:14, 17, 32).

Beyond the common motif of the sword, the messages in the section vary, and give the impression of being separate messages brought together because of their common motif. Their introductions also suggest that they were originally separate messages:

“Yahweh’s message came to me” (20:45)

“Yahweh’s message came to me” (21:8)

“Yahweh’s message came to me” (21:18)

Two exceptions prove the rule. “Yahweh’s message came to me” also occurs in 21:1, but the content of 21:1–7 shows that these verses are the second half of 20:45–21:7. In contrast, the last segment (21:28–32) does not have that usual introduction, but this links with its special relationship with the first three segments, as in the fourth segment there recur:

* from 20:45–21:7, the bidding, “My man … prophesy … and say … the Lord Yahweh has said this,” and also references to fire, consuming, trees, sheath, and the sword returning there
* from 21:8–17, the double reference to the sword and the references to polishing and sparkle, to butchery, and to the slain/defiled (חָלָל)
* from 21:28–27, Ammon, cut out, let loose, empty divination, bringing things to mind, authority, faithless, slain/defiled, “whose day is coming, with the time of final waywardness.”

There are thus few words in 21:28–32 that are new there and most take up expressions from 20:45–21:27. In 21:28–29 they function to summarize the implications of 20:45–21:27 and affirm its significance. In 21:30–32 they become the means of giving expression to a new point about the sword.

To say that these are four separate messages thus conveys an oversimplified impression of the interrelationships of the segments. The links between the first three and the last suggest that 21:28–32 was crafted in light of 20:45–21:27. The first three messages involve sign acts undertaken by Ezekiel (21:6–7, 12, 19–20) and thus his participation in his message, and suggest his actually delivering a message to the community. The last is purely words, composed in light of the first three. It might then be significant that Ezekiel does not describe it as Yahweh’s message coming to him. Perhaps he was conscious of shaping it himself in light of the earlier messages that he was more conscious of receiving from Yahweh. Either way, the last message ties together the first three and brings them to a conclusion. It reaffirms the drift of 20:45–21:27 with its threat to Judah (21:29), but also declares that this is not the end of the story. The sword as an embodiment of Babylon will have its comeuppance. If 20:45–21:27 are three messages from the period leading up to 587, then 21:28–32 might be a supplement from after 587.

### Translation

20:45Yahweh’s message came to me: 46My man, set your face in the direction of Teman, pour out to Darom. Prophesy to the country woodland of the Negeb 47and say to the Negeb woodland, Listen to Yahweh’s message. The Lord Yahweh has said this. Here am I, lighting a fire in you. It will consume in you every green tree and every withered tree, as the blazing flame[[239]](#footnote-239) will not go out, and all faces from south to north will be scorched[[240]](#footnote-240) by it. 48All flesh will see that I Yahweh set it alight, as it will not go out. 49But I said, Aagh, Lord Yahweh, they’re saying about me, “He’s someone who pronounces parables,[[241]](#footnote-241) isn’t he.”

21:1So Yahweh’s message came to me: 2My man, set your face towards Jerusalem, pour out towards sanctuaries. Prophesy towards the country of Israel 3and say to the country of Israel, Yahweh has said this. Here am I towards you. I will get my sword out of its sheath and cut off from you faithful and faithless. 4Since I am cutting off from you faithful and faithless, therefore my sword will go out from its sheath towards all flesh from south to north. 5And all flesh will acknowledge that I Yahweh got my sword out of its sheath—it will not return any more.

6So you, my man, groan, with collapsing[[242]](#footnote-242) of hips and with bitterness of groaning, before their eyes. 7Then, when they ask you, “Why are you groaning,” you will say, “Regarding the news. When it comes, every heart will melt, all hands will become feeble, every spirit will faint, and all knees, they will run with water[[243]](#footnote-243)—there, it’s coming and happening” (an affirmation of the Lord Yahweh).

8Yahweh’s message came to me: 9My man, prophesy and say, the Lord has said this. Say,

A sword, a sword,

it’s been sharpened, yes, and it’s also polished!

10For the purpose of doing butchery it’s been sharpened,

for the purpose of having sparkle it’s polished!

Or we will rejoice in my son’s club,

as it is scorning[[244]](#footnote-244) every tree.

11Someone has given it[[245]](#footnote-245) for polishing,

for grasping in the fist.

As it’s been sharpened as a sword and it’s polished,

for putting it in the hand of a slaughterer.

12Cry out and howl, my man,

because it’s coming on my people.

It’s [coming] on all Israel’s princes,

as they are thrown to a sword with my people.

Therefore strike your side,

13because [there has been] testing.[[246]](#footnote-246)

And what if it[[247]](#footnote-247) also scorns the club[[248]](#footnote-248)—

it will not happen[[249]](#footnote-249) (an affirmation of the Lord Yahweh).

14So you, my man, prophesy,

and bang fist on fist.

A sword is to repeat, a third time,

it being a sword for slain people,[[250]](#footnote-250)

it being a sword for someone slain, the great one,[[251]](#footnote-251)

surrounding them,[[252]](#footnote-252)

15To the end of melting the heart,

and multiplying the causes of downfall,

As I put at all their gateways

the threat[[253]](#footnote-253) of a sword.

Ah, made for sparkle,

grasped[[254]](#footnote-254) for butchery.

16Be sharp[[255]](#footnote-255) to the right, make for the left,

wherever your face is set.

17I too will bang, fist to fist

and settle my fury—I Yahweh have spoken.

18Yahweh’s message came to me: 19So you, my man, make yourself two paths for the sword of the king of Babylon to come, two of them going out from one country. And cut out a space,[[256]](#footnote-256) at the head of the path to a city cut it. 20A path you are to make for the coming of a sword, as regards[[257]](#footnote-257) Rabbah of the Ammonites or as regards Judah, against Jerusalem, fortified. 21Because the king of Babylon has stood by the source[[258]](#footnote-258) of the path, at the head of the two paths, to perform divination, shaking the arrows, asking the effigies, looking at the liver. 22In his right hand was the Jerusalem divination, to set battering rams, to let loose[[259]](#footnote-259) his mouth with murder, to raise his voice with a shout, to set battering rams against gateways, to pour a ramp, to build a siege tower. 23For them[[260]](#footnote-260) it has been like empty divination, as in their eyes they have people sworn by oaths. But it is bringing waywardness to mind,[[261]](#footnote-261) so that they get captured.

24Therefore the Lord Yahweh has said this. On account of your bringing your waywardness to mind,[[262]](#footnote-262) through your acts of rebellion revealing themselves, so that your offenses let themselves be seen, with all your deeds—on account of your bringing them to mind, by my fist you will be captured. 25And you, defiled, faithless prince of Israel, whose day is coming at the time of final waywardness: 26The Lord Yahweh has said this. Remove the turban, lift off the crown. Things will not stay as they are.[[263]](#footnote-263) Make the low lofty, make the lofty low.[[264]](#footnote-264) 27Ruin, ruin, ruin I will make it, though indeed this will not have happened[[265]](#footnote-265) until the coming of the one who will have the authority, and I give it.

28So you, my man, prophesy and say, the Lord Yahweh has said this about the Ammonites and about their disdain. You are to say,

A sword, a sword, let loose[[266]](#footnote-266) for butchery,

polished to make it consume, for the purpose of sparkle,

29When people have a revelation of emptiness about you,[[267]](#footnote-267)

when they divine deceit about you,

To put you

at the necks of the most defiled of the faithless,

Whose day is coming,

with the time of final waywardness.…[[268]](#footnote-268)

30Return[[269]](#footnote-269) it to its sheath,

as in the place where you[[270]](#footnote-270) were cut out,[[271]](#footnote-271)

In the country of your origins,[[272]](#footnote-272)

I will exercise authority over you.

31I will pour out my ire on you,

with my furious anger blowing on you.

I will put you into the hand of people who are brutish,

craftsmen of destruction,

32You being for fire for consuming.

your blood being within the country,

You will not be brought to mind,

because I Yahweh have spoken.

### Textual Notes

MT has markers\* after 20:49; 21:5, 7, 13, 17, 23, 24, 25, 27, and 32 [21:5, 10, 12, 18, 22, 28, 29, 30, 32, and 37].

**20:46 [51]** For הַטַּף, “pour out,” LXX has “look,” perhaps suggesting הַבֵּּט (Cornill, 299).

So also in 21:2 [7].

LXX has “leading” for הַשָֹּדֶה “country,” perhaps suggesting הַשַֹּר (also Cornill, 299).

**20:47 [52]** For “south,” LXX has “east wind” (so also in 21:4 [9]), the direction from which a destructive hot wind would come (17:10; 19:12) and also the actual direction of Babylon from Jerusalem (Olley, 373).

**21:3 [8]** For “faithful,” LXX has “unjust.” So also in 21:4 [9].

**21:7 [12]** LXX has “all flesh and every spirit.”

**21:10 [15]** LXX, Vg., and modern translations paraphrase 21:10b [15b], without suggesting an alternative Heb. text.

**21:12 [17]** For מְגוּרֵי, “as they are thrown,” LXX “they shall sojourn” takes the verb as גּוּר.

For יָרֵךְ “[your] side,” LXX “your hand” implies יָדְךָ.

**21:13 [18]** For בֹּחַן “testing,” Aq. “he tested” implies בָּחַן (*HUB*).

**21:14 [19]** For הַחֹדֶרֶת, “surrounding,” LXX “will confound” implies a form from חָרַד (Cornill, 305).

**21:15 [20]** For הַמּׅכְשֹׁלׅים, LXX “the weak” implies הַמֻּכְשָׁלׅים.

LXX has “sparkle” and “butchery” in the reverse order to MT.

**21:19 [24]** LXX lacks both occurrences of “cut [out].”

**21:20 [25]** For בְּצוּרָה, “fortified,” LXX “in the middle of it” implies בְּתוּכָה (Cornill, 307).

**21:22 [27]** For בְּרֶצַח, “with murder,” LXX implies בְּצֶרַח, “with a cry.”

**21:23 [28** LXX lacks the puzzling שְׁבֻעֵי שְׁבֻעוֹת לָהֶם (“they have people sworn by oaths”) and Aq., Theod. are confused by it.

**21:24 [29]** For בַּכַּף, “by [my] fist,” LXX “by them” implies בָּהֶם (Cornill, 308).

**21:29 [34]** LXX translates חַלְלֵי “slain” rather than “defiled” (see the commentary on 21:25 [30]).

**21:30 [35]** LXX has Ezekiel telling the sword to “return,” which makes for a smoother reading through 21:30–32 [35–37].

For “to its sheath,” LXX has puzzlingly “do not lodge.”

### Verse-by-Verse Commentary

**20:45–46 [21:1–2]** On a number of occasions Yahweh bids Ezekiel face a certain direction when delivering a message, usually with a look that suggests a “fixed and hostile stare” (Blenkinsopp, 91). Ezekiel thereby conveys and implements Yahweh’s dangerous hostility. “Set your face” (שֹׅים פָּנֶיךָ) was the expression in 6:2, and here the implications of the message that follows will correspond to 6:1–14. Hostile implications likewise attach to “pour out” (נָטַף hiphil), a rare expression for preaching or haranguing (Amos 7:16; Mic 2:6, 11). “Prophesy,” too, usually implies bad news.

While we do not know the precise location of Teman, it is in Edom (25:13), which is southeast of Judah, but תֵּימָן is also a term for “south” (47:19; 48:28). Etymologically, it denotes something on the right (יָמֵין) and therefore somewhere to the south from a Jerusalem perspective if one orients facing east, as the First Testament does. In the First Testament, Darom is simply a word for the south (e.g., Ezek 40:24–28), but in later writings it is also a more concrete place or area south of Jerusalem (see *DTT* 321–22), which is likely its meaning here. Negeb is another expression that is both a geographical term for the southland in Judah and a broader term for the south (e.g., 20:47; 21:4; 46:9). So Teman, Darum, and Negeb are all terms for the south, from a Jerusalem or Kebarite perspective. Ezekiel is to face south. Given that all three terms recur in Ezek 40–48, Ezekiel’s listeners might initially think he is addressing the temple. “Country woodland” need not work against that, as the expression could suggest at least the “House of the Forest of the Lebanon,” adjacent to the temple (1 Kgs 7:2; 10:17, 21)—whereas there is no woodland in the Negeb itself.

**20:47–48 [21:3–4]** What follows clarifies one point in a regrettable fashion: Ezekiel is talking about the woodland because he has a message about fire, a motif that opens and closes 20:45–21:32. The message concerns a forest fire. People in Israel knew the dreadful nature of forest fire, like Californians and other peoples in the modern world. Ezekiel describes the fire’s devastating nature—it will devour everything, it will consume green and dry, it will be a blazing flame, it will sear faces from south to north, it will not go out, it will be the kind of forest fire that no firefighting force can quench, it will leave nothing untouched, it will be visible to everyone, and everyone will see that Yahweh ignited it. “Neither green nor dry trees are spared, there is none excepted from the doom of destruction. Yahweh himself has kindled the fire. [48] So anyone who tries to quench it gets nothing for it but a skin scarred with burns, and is thus forced to admit that no human power can bring deliverance” (Eichrodt, 288).

**20:49 [21:5]** But why is Ezekiel given a message for the south? Why does Yahweh have it in for the southland? What is it this vision about? Ezekiel speaks as if even he doesn’t know—he only has a sense that this is a message he must deliver. The trouble is that doing so will reinforce the people’s conviction that he talks in riddles, as he did in 15:1–8; 17:1–21 (Jenson, 165). One could hardly blame them for their mystified or frustrated reaction. His protest to Yahweh may just be part of the rhetoric of his communication, part of his telling the story, a way of getting attention by arousing suspense. But his message is indeed a riddle (Block, 1:662). What do the forest and its conflagration stand for?

**21:1–2 [6–7]** He goes on to speak as if Yahweh responds to his protest by giving him another message. It begins as a new one, which perhaps explains why the Masoretes who provided a section marker\* after 20:45 and the medieval scholars who devised our chapter divisions thought he was doing that. Ezekiel is fooling them. He is answering his own implicit question about what on earth the riddle was about. Surprise, surprise, the south stands for Judah itself, to the south of Babylonia in that sense noted above (Ezekiel’s hearers now groan at the predictable nature of his message). More broadly, it stands for Israel, Jerusalem, and the “sanctuaries.” In Jer 51:51 that expression, rare in the plural, refers to the temple’s various sacred places (cf. Pss 68:36; 73:17)—the temple is a little like a cathedral with various chapels. But in Ezek 28:18 it denotes Tyre’s sanctuaries, and maybe here it refers to the places that Ezekiel elsewhere refers to as the shrines, and carries a sly implication that the temple has become just one of those or a collection of those.

**21:3–5 [8–10]** The south is explained as Jerusalem and the land, the fire is explained as slaughter by the sword of the warrior God. The parallel with 6:1–14 is more specific. The thoroughness of devastation is indicated by the note that Yahweh’s sword will not return to its sheath, until its job is done (Altschuler, in MG)—see 21:30. It will operate from south to north, from Negeb to Zaphon, from Judah to Babylon (the northern foe from a Judahite perspective: see 1:4). It will devour “all flesh” and be recognized by “all flesh,” which might mean all peoples, but might mean all Israel, notwithstanding the fact that “all flesh” will have been its victims (wondering about that question misses the force of Ezekiel’s rhetoric and hyperbole).\* It will assail both faithful and faithless, a prospect that contrasts with the stance of a passage such as 9:4–6, and with any idea of there being a remnant, and with 18:1–32 (and Gen 18:25). Perhaps “Ezekiel’s theology collapses in the face of war’s reality” (Bowen, 125). But again, raising that question misses the force and shock of Ezekiel’s rhetoric and hyperbole. It also overlooks his willingness to embrace perspectives that stand in tension but that both need to be recognized: Yahweh is fair but a sword is indiscriminate, like a fire (cf. Jer 21:14; Zimmerli, 1:423). That’s how slaughter is. “Once warfare is unleashed, a terrible arbitrariness of life and death comes into play” (Clements, 95).

**21:6–7 [11–12]** The point was to emphasize in every possible way how devastating the coming disaster will be. Ezekiel will bring it home by his first sign act in this chapter. The initial awareness that people will have, when he comes to deliver his horrifying message, is of his groaning. His body seems to be falling apart. His sighing is so bitter. So they will ask what is the matter. And he will tell them of the news report concerning the events that 21:3–4 announced. In a few pages time he will be speaking of these events as they happen, of the horrific calamity that is coming to Jerusalem (24:1–14; 33:21–22). The people will then all be reacting as he is reacting now, as Yahweh has given him this advance report of the events. His message is a brief version of the longer warning in 7:1–27, where the picture of people’s reaction overlaps in terms of hands and knees (7:17). Ezekiel adds heart (or mind) melting, and spirit fainting. In 7:1–27 he had warned Israel that the end was coming, it was upon them. Here he makes the point more briefly but more sharply as he uses the *qatal* verbs that more literally mean “it has come, it has happened.” He has seen it in what he has seen of the intention Yahweh has formulated. He wants the Kebarites to see it, because they need to be prepared for it.

**21:8–10 [13–15]** The introduction in 21:8–9a indicates that a new message begins, and it really does this time, but it links with what precedes by picking up the motifs of the sword from 21:3–5 (it also came in 6:1–14; 7:15) and the tree from 20:47 (it also came in 15:1–8; 17:24). The sword in question has been subjected to two processes. It has been sharpened so that it slaughters efficiently. “Butchery” (טֶבַח) is the word that usually denotes slaughtering animals. And it has been burnished. This adds to its effectiveness and also makes it flash, a little like lightning (the other common meaning of the word בָּרָק), so that it excites sword-bearer and spectator and frightens the enemy. The link with 21:3–5 would suggest that this is Yahweh’s sword, but who actually wields it?

Verse 10b points the way towards an answer, but it is elliptical, even though its individual words are not difficult. In connection with an upcoming conflict, one possibility is to take 21:9–10 to be warriors enthusing about a sword (it might be Yahweh’s sword as in 21:3–4, or it might be their own) and also about the prospect of wielding a club in this conflict. A warrior might be saying “we will rejoice” and be speaking for his fellow fighters, the Judahites and the leaders who will be mentioned in 21:12, and as a father he might then also be encouraging his son about the coming battle. The reference to “my son” is the trickiest element in this picture. “My son” could sound like Yahweh talking about the king, who has a “club” in Psa 2:7, 9. So 21:9–10 would be Yahweh speaking. Who, then, would be the ”we” who “will rejoice”? The rejoicing fits with the glee expressed in that same connection in Psa 2:4. Perhaps the “we” is then Yahweh and his court.

**21:11–12bα [16–17bα]** But either those fighters are deceiving themselves, or Yahweh has been speaking with irony. Yes, there is a sword that has been sharpened, polished, and put in the hand of a slaughterer, but it’s a sword that will be wielded against the Judahites, not wielded by them or on their behalf. If Ezekiel’s readers assume that the fighters spoke in 21:9–10 and that they continue to speak in 21:11, then 21:12 disabuses them. In light of Yahweh’s bidding to Ezekiel in 21:12, they might see 21:11 as beginning the disabusing. Yahweh had arranged for the sharpening and polishing in order for the sword to be grasped not in those leaders’ fist but in the fist of another slaughterer, the one to whom 21:18–32 will refer. So Yahweh bids Ezekiel to cry out and howl about this sword, not to rejoice about it. His crying out and howling is this message’s sign act. The Judahites are again intended to discover indirectly what Yahweh is saying to them, by hearing Ezekiel telling them what Yahweh was saying to him. The verbs “coming” and “are” are again *qatal*, as if the catastrophe has already happened—because it has happened in Yahweh’s intention and in the message Yahweh has given Ezekiel. It’s coming on Israel’s leaders, and it’s coming on “my people” (see, e.g., 13:8–23).

**21:12bβ–13 [17bβ–18]** Yahweh once more urges Ezekiel to manifest anguish by striking his side in an extension of the sign act, though the explanation is again expressed elliptically. In the First Testament, “testing” usually refers to what Yahweh does with people, and Ezekiel may make his hearers think of the results of Yahweh’s testing Judah (e.g., Jer 17:9–10). But the metaphor trades on the familiarity of “testing” in connection with proving metals (e.g., Zech 13:9). Here it could thus suggest the proving of the sword. The sword wielded by Yahweh or his agent is capable of scorning the club wielded by the Jerusalemites, even the club wielded by Yahweh’s anointed (21:10). The club therefore “will not come,” will not be there to do anything.

**21:14 [19]** All this is to be the subject of Ezekiel’s prophesying. The verb is picked up from 20:46; 21:2. Banging the fist will be an expression of wrath as in 6:11. It implies more than an angry feeling. Continuing the sign act, it will be like the clap by a commander that charges people on to take action. In this case, it charges the sword to take action, as if it then wields itself. “The sword has taken on a frightening life of its own,” weaving to and fro to give the impression of a multiplicity of swords (Block, 1:680), or a sword dance,[[273]](#footnote-273) or a sword striking once, twice, a third time, and thus piercing people generally and particularly piercing one important person. Ezekiel would expect people to be able to work out who that is?

**21:15–16 [20–21]** Yahweh thus wills to demoralize the people and cause vast numbers to collapse as he puts the sword in place at all the city gateways. Again he speaks in the *qatal*, as if he has already taken the action. The city will be assailed on all sides. There will be no escape through any gate. The sword is there with its threatening sparkle and its capacity for butchery. Yahweh addresses the sword (the imperatives are feminine, like the word חֶרֶב and the participles “made for” and “grasped”) to get it to do its job. Right or left, there will be no evading it. It can go whichever way it likes. The bidding allows it to have a life of its own. The ambiguity of the word פָּנׅים becomes useful: it can denote the sword’s “face” (it is like a person deciding which way to face) or its “edge” or “surface” that does the damage.

**21:17 [22]** At the end of this message, Yahweh takes up for himself the commission he gave Ezekiel. It will be his fury that the sword implements (cf. 5:13). Yahweh and Ezekiel thus come out of the imaginary description of events that portrays them as if they are actually happening, and speak more literally of the intention Yahweh intends to fulfill.

**21:18–20 [23–25]** Ezekiel’s audience might be relieved to discover that this third message about a sword is more straightforward,[[274]](#footnote-274) though it is another sign act and it would count as another מָשָׁל, another parable.\* Ezekiel is in some way to represent possible courses that the king of Babylon might take, leading to different goals. Perhaps he is literally to “cut out” a space: the verb denotes cutting down trees in Josh 17:15, 18, the only occurrences of the verb (בָּרָא piel) outside Ezekiel. Or perhaps he is to carve a representation (cf. 4:1–3). One possible route for Nebuchadrezzar leads to the Ammonite capital, present-day Amman. “Rabbah of the Ammonites” makes explicit which Rabbah the message refers to (“Rabbah” simply means “Big [City]”). It also makes for parallelism\* with the description of Jerusalem as capital of Judah and as “fortified” (בְּצוּרָה). That depiction will carry some irony. Fortification will not help the city when Yahweh decides to take action against it (Zimmerli, 1:442). “A city” will then mean “either city.” Presumably Ammon had been involved in rebellion against Babylon, like Judah. Nebuchadrezzar will be concerned to put wither of his underlings in their places.The “one country” will be Syria, from which Nebuchadrezzar would have to decide whether to go southwest to Judah or south to Ammon. It will turn out to be ironic if Ezekiel imagines Nebuchadrezzar at Riblah (2 Kgs 25:21). He will go in one direction or the other bearing a sword—the picture has the weight of 21:8–17 behind it. As in that preceding message, the implication is not that Nebuchadrezzar is on his way now, nor that he doesn’t decide on his destination until he gets nearly there. It’s an imaginative picture.

**21:21–22 [26–27]** In this parable, then, Nebuchadrezzar has to decide which way to go—whether to attack Jerusalem or Rabbah. He is thus seeking guidance, as a Judahite king might consult Yahweh by means of Urim and Thummim or by means of a prophet (1 Sam 22:10, 15; 23:2; 30:7–8; 2 Sam 5:19). Ezekiel mentions three methods available to Nebuchadrezzar. Shaking arrows implies inscribing arrows with possible alternative actions (directions, in this case), and shaking them in their quiver until one jumped out (Jerome, 246). The practice compares with letting a lot “go out” (e.g., Josh 19:17, 24). The effigies (תְּרָפׅים) are likely to be representations of human figures (cf. 1 Sam 19:13, 16) such as family members who have passed, who therefore may have more information available than living people. Looking at the liver implies examining the liver of an animal that has been sacrificed, which can also involve using a model of a liver in some way (a number have been found). Babylonian experts collected information on how the features of an animal’s liver correlated with events, and Nebuchadrezzar and his priests would utilize this information in interpreting what they found when they looked at a liver.[[275]](#footnote-275) Wisely, then, Nebuchadrezzar would multiply research into what might be the best action (cf. 1 Kgs 22:6). If he uses three separate forms of divination and they produce the same result, the implication is certain (Bowen, 128). While it’s not clear what (if anything) was literally in Nebuchadrezzar’s right hand at the end of the consultation, the implication is that the divination pointed to the right fork in the road, the road towards Judah. It will be against Jerusalem that he will therefore be setting up his siege equipment (see 4:2) and issuing the battle shout. He will be on his way there with “murder” in mind. Ezekiel has spoken of butchering, slaughtering, and slaying. Here yet another term brings out the significance of the sword.

**21:23 [28]** There was apparently no need to identify “them.” In the context of this chapter they are the same people as in 21:8–17. “They,” the Jeusalemites, are scathingly dismissive of divination. Actually Judahites were tempted by it (12:24; 13:23), but it suits Ezekiel to portray them that way. He was presumably being a little snide about the pathetic position of a king who has no proper priests or prophets to consult and has to go in for these multiple implausible sources of guidance. But ironically, the divination that he pictures Nebuchadrezzar acquiring suits Yahweh. The Judahites had trusted their prophets who assured them that they would not be given into the hand of the king of Babylon (Qimhi, in MG). They will turn out to be wrong. Pagan divination “is essentially hocus-pocus, but the Israelites judging it so is in this instance both erroneous and self-condemning” (Greenberg, 2:441). The result of Nebuchadrezzar following his divination will be disaster for Judah. The Judahites’ low evaluation of divination would compare with their low evaluation of their own oaths. They had sworn allegiance to Babylon but they don’t take their commitment seriously (17:1–24). Ezekiel’s direct point here is more likely that they have entered into sworn alliances with people such as the Egyptians, who should come to their aid. And their attitude to their oath to Nebuchadrezzar and the waywardness of that attitude is going to reach Nebuchadrezzar, and lead to his attacking and taking Jerusalem. They will thus “bring waywardness to mind,” draw Nebuchadrezzar’s attention to it, expose it, testify against themselves as if they were in court (cf. 1 Kgs 17:18) (Zimmerli, 1:445).

**21:24 [29]** But their waywardness is not just an outrage to Nebuchadrezzar and they will not just cause it to come to Nebuchadrezzar’s mind. Their dallying with the Egyptians is an affront to Yahweh (as 17:1–24 again says). It involved whoring with the Egyptians (16:26), public rebellion against Yahweh not just against Nebuchadrezzar, and thus offending against Yahweh. The “therefore” indicates that what follows is Yahweh’s response, and Ezekiel reformulates the terms of 21:23 to make the point about the deeper trouble the Judahites have got themselves into. They will be captured by Yahweh, not just by Nebuchadrezzar.

**21:25 [30]** The third sword message closes with words addressed to Zedekiah in particular—rhetorically so addressed, as presumably he will not hear about it. It is intended for the Kebarites. They need to hear what Yahweh intends for Zedekiah and why. It constitutes the straightest critique of the king of Judah. It has no separate introduction, and in effect it directly continues Yahweh’s “therefore” declaration in 21:24. Zedekiah is the person responsible for the waywardness expressed in rebellion, of which 21:24 spoke. The sword in 21:8–23 was destined for Israel’s leaders (21:12) as people who were (destined to be) slain (חֲלָלׅים; 21:14) and for an individual who was (destined to be) slain (חָלָָל; also 21:14). But another root חָלַל means “treat as ordinary” or “defile” (see 7:21–22). It recurred eight times in Ezek 20, and the adjective חָלָל with this meaning occurs in Lev 21:7, 14. Here, both meanings are significant. Zedekiah is not “slain” yet, and followed by the word “faithless,” the meaning “defiled” makes sense. But being slain is Zedekiah’s destiny. And if “faithless” points to one root חָלַל, “whose day is coming, at the time of final waywardness” also points to the other root. So readers may hear the resonances of both meanings in the word. Yes, Zedekiah is responsible for a significant element in Judah’s current waywardness, but his waywardness is about to come to a climax and to an end. As Gen 15:16 puts it, he has nearly completed his waywardness (Greenberg, 2:433). If only he would respond to the challenges of prophets like Jeremiah to turn! But Ezekiel, like Jeremiah, is prepared for the alternative scenario: Yahweh will decide that enough is enough. His day, his end is coming. “The end is coming… upon you.… The time is coming, the day is imminent,” Ezekiel said to Jerusalem (7:2). “End” (קֵץ) is the word for “final” here. Zedekiah is to have his personal experience of Yahweh’s day. The day that comes for Judah will have personal implications for him (see 7:1–21, also 13:5)

**21:26 [31]** As an aspect of that final judgment, Zedekiah is to lose his position as king—as he does in 587. While the turban (מׅצְנֶפֶת) is elsewhere a priest’s headgear, related words are used in other connections (Isa 3:23; 62:3). In this context, turban and crown must be Zedekiah’s. “Make the low lofty, make the low lofty” might be a saying. It recalls longer versions of this principle such as 1 Sam 2:4–9 and Dan 2:21. If you were a Jehoiachin supporter you might take these words as an encouragement to look for Jehoiachin’s reestablishment, and Jehoiachin did end up in a more exalted position in Babylon than Zedekiah (2 Kgs 25:27–30). But Ezekiel offers no pointers in that direction. Using infinitives as imperatives, he leaves open whether he addresses an individual or a group, and if anything takes the emphasis off the idea of a command (see the translation footnote). His words are an authoritative declaration about something that must and will happen.

**21:27 [32]** “Ruin” (עַוָּה) is a hapax,\* or it would be if Ezekiel did not use it three times here. It resonates with the word “waywardness” (עָוֹן), and its three occurrences match the three occurrences of עָוֹן in 21:23–25. The rest of 21:27 rounds off this message as it takes us back to the king of Babylon who is on his way, whose sword is to “come” (21:19), and who will have the “authority” from Yahweh to take action against Zedekiah when he arrives. Yes, Nebuchadrezzar will be his way soon, and he will take the action that 21:26 speaks of. Yet nothing is fixed in stone, so if only Zedekiah turns.… This verse might remind Ezekiel’s hearers of Judah’s word in Gen 49:10,[[276]](#footnote-276) though the overlap in wording is not great. It would be a painful and ironic reminder. And if subsequent hearers were inclined to see Zerubbabel (or later, Jesus) as a fulfillment of Gen 49:10, they might also look at this verse that way (*CTAT*, 163–64). Indeed, in the context of the establishment of Joshua and Zerubbabel’s position in the restored community, Zech 3:5 speaks of a turban (צָנׅיף), using a word related to Ezekiel’s) and Zech 6:11, 14 speaks of crowns (עֲטָרָה, as here).[[277]](#footnote-277) LXX does not see messianic implications in the chapter, though,[[278]](#footnote-278) and rather applies it to the leadership in its own time, in the Maccabean context.[[279]](#footnote-279)

**21:28 [33]** In 21:1 Ezekiel began, “Yahweh’s message came to me,” when it wasn’t the beginning of a new message—the apparent introduction fulfilled a rhetorical function. In a converse move here, Ezekiel has no “Yahweh’s message came to me,” but 21:28–32 will turn out to be a fourth sword message. Its lack of such a formula does correspond to its nature, as linking closely with all three messages that precede. It gives a signal to that link in its first half, which summarizes the implications of the first three sword messages, causes the section initially to mark time, and gives readers chance to draw breath before Ezekiel adds a vital extra message about the sword in 21:30–32 (see the “Outline” above).

Ezekiel begins, then, with an introduction taking up words from the beginning of the section (20:45), “My man, prophesy and say, the Lord Yahweh has said this,” and with a renewed reference to the Ammonites (21:20). “Disdain” (חֶרְפָּה) is a new motif within 20:45–21:32, but a familiar one (5:14, 15; 16:57; cf. 22:4). In effect, the Ammonites here stand for the nations in general who will feel disdain for Judah when Nebuchadrezzar comes to devastate Jerusalem. Greenhill (536) reports a rabbinic tradition that “when the Chaldeans carried the Jews captive through the lands of the Moabites and Ammonites, the Jews wept, and they reproached them, saying, Why do you afflict yourselves? why do you weep? are you not going to your father's house? they meant Chaldea, which was Abraham's country and habitation” (Greenhill does not give a reference). Ezek 25 will record the Ammonites’ taunting of Judah after 587, but in the present context any taunting relates to Nebuchadrezzar’s decision to go for Jerusalem rather than Rabbah (21:18–22). One could imagine them breathing a sigh of relief and also saying something a little more triumphalist. Yet what follows will not be a message directed against the Ammonites. After all, what they would say about the fate of Jerusalem is quite right. Ezekiel’s message goes on initially to recycle his earlier words describing the fate that will come to Judah (21:9–10). There is no critique of Ammon here.

**21:29 [34]** But certain people are envisioning something empty and divining something deceitful about the sword—a divining the opposite of that in 21:18–23. “Have a revelation of emptiness” (חֲזוֹת, שָׁוְא) and “deceit” (כָּזָב) take up from 13:6–8, and from there we know what kind of people are the bringers of false revelation, the prophets, who would have a false idea of what the sword would or would not be doing and would assure people that Yahweh was wielding it on his people’s behalf. Given the options in 21:18–23, they would say that Yahweh will surely ensure that Nebuchadrezzar goes for Rabbah rather than Jerusalem. Unwittingly, by resisting Yahweh’s true revelation they are setting the sword at the necks of their own leaders (and at their own necks), the necks of “the most defiled of the faithless.” That expression takes up the description of Zedekiah, whose day is coming because of his waywardness (21:25). Here, Ezekiel is explicit that the sword is on its way to other defiled and faithless necks, too. The emphasis in 20:45–21:7 was that it would reach everyone. Here, “the necks of the most defiled of the faithless” directs the threat especially to Judah’s leadership.

**21:30 [35]** Momentarily, Yahweh addresses some anonymous figure with the bidding to put the sword away. Apparently its job is done. It has completed the task threatened in 20:45–29 (or specifically in 21:28–29). He then reverts to addressing the sword. More overtly or systematically here, the sword stands for Babylon itself, which has been wielding it. Whereas Yahweh will have given Nebuchadrezzar authority (מׅשְׁפָּט) to take action against Judah, now he himself will exercise authority (שָׁפַט) over Nebuchadrezzar’s sword. Ezekiel continues to reuse expressions from 20:45–21:27 except for the rare word “origins,” taken up from 16:3, and the word “place,” which is common but fulfills a significant role here in pointing out that Yahweh will be exercising his authority over the sword in a new way back in Babylon itself. He is not intending merely to terminate Babylon’s control over Judah. He intends to put Babylon down. In both respects, this verse parallels the way the dying lines of some other sections of Ezekiel bring the sections to a more positive conclusion than the main part of them.

**21:31–32 [36–37]** In this case, the dying lines are positive by being so negative about Babylon. Instead of Judah being on the receiving end of Yahweh’s anger, Babylon itself now is. As was the case earlier in the chapter, the feminine “you” which is the sword stands for Babylon itself, as an apostrophe\* whereby a thing can stand for a person. And as usual, Yahweh will operate via human agents, here via “people who are brutish.” Some instances of בֹּעֲרׅים (e.g., Psa 94:8) imply not so much cruel as stupid (cf. LXX “barbarian”), but these agents of Yahweh will be skillful in being “expert destroyers”—like the Medes (cf. Isa 13:17–18; Jer 51:11, 27–28)(Greenberg, 2:437).

In rounding off 20:45–21:32, first Ezekiel returns to the motif of the sword as destined “for consuming” by “fire” (20:47), only now the sword itself or its former wielder is so destined. The blood it has shed is within the country (or within the earth), as the blood that Jerusalem has shed is within the city (22:3–4; 24:7) (Greenberg, 2:438). It will demand redress. And Babylon will be forgotten (cf. 21:23, 24). Well, not exactly forgotten, but not brought to mind anymore, not significant as it has been for some decades. Yahweh says so.

### Biblical Theology Comments

“The prophet speaks of the ‘wrath of God’ which is revealed against the unrighteous nature of his people (Rom 1:18)” (Zimmerli, 1:435), but also against the Gentile world, Paul notes, and Revelation emphasizes how it is revealed against the empire. Ezekiel points to several aspects of God’s relationships with imperial powers, with a perspective that recurs in the Prophets (see, e.g., Isa 9:8–11:16; Jer 25).

* Yahweh is taking action against his people (Ezek 20:45–21:7), but doing so by putting his sword in the hand of the imperial power (21:8–17)
* The imperial power formulates its intentions in light of the wisdom available to it, but what it decides fits Yahweh’s desire (21:18–27)
* Even another subaltern power may have more wisdom in this connection than Judah (21:28–29)
* When the imperial power has done its work (Yahweh’s work), Yahweh will take action against it (21:30–31a)
* Once again he will do so by means of another power that is also expert at destruction and bloodshed (21:31b–32a)
* The first imperial power (and no doubt its destroyer) will be forgotten (21:32b)

### Application and Devotional Implications

The declaration about exalting the low and lowering the exalted (21:26) recalls longer versions of this principle such as 1 Sam 2:4–9; Dan 2:21; Luke 1:51–52; 14:8–11 (Jenson, 172). Sometimes the Scriptures thus speak as if it possible to make a binary division of the world into two groups, the low and the exalted, the poor and the rich, the wicked and the righteous. But with more realism they also portray the world and the people of God as open to being plotted on a bell curve: there are some powerful and some powerless, and some rich and some poor, and some wicked and some righteous, but most people are in between. The binary analysis reminds the majority that they could go either way, for one reason or another. It might be chance, or it might reflect deliberate initiative, or it might issue from God’s action. And it’s easy, for instance, for people who get into a position of power to abuse their power, or for people who become powerless to get depressed. It is wise, then, to remember this declaration in 21:26 and remember that powerful and powerless live before God.

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## Bloodshed City, Slag Household, Grunge Country (22:1–31)

### Outline

“The countdown to the hour when disaster will befall Jerusalem continues in earnest” (Clements, 100). Whereas the critique in Ezek 20 reviewed Israel over the centuries, the critique in Ezek 22 looks in the face the Jerusalem of the present. Further, whereas Ezek 20 directly addressed the Kebarite elders, Ezek 22 indirectly addresses Jerusalem with “a Savonarola-like sermon” (Blenkinsopp, 95). Savonarola was a fifteenth-century Italian friar who condemned clergy for not living worthily of their profession, condemned lay leaders who exploited their position, and declared that judgment was coming, though it would be followed by renewal. But this sermon of Ezekiel’s holds out no overt promise. Lind (186) comments:

The hour is late; the fate of Jerusalem has been decided. But the three prophetic speeches of this chapter, each introduced by the revelation formula (22:1, 17, 23), again review the case against Jerusalem, to justify the sentence soon to occur. In these speeches the attention is focused not upon judgment itself but upon the *reason* for judgment. Can judgment be averted either by a change in the people or by some change on the part of God? If judgment cannot be averted, can Israel be cured of disloyalty by being fully convinced of the cause of judgment?

The chapter unfolds:

22:1–16:

A critique over bloodshed and idolatry in Jerusalem (22:1–4a)

The action Yahweh will take (22:4b–5)

Further critique over bloodshed and idolatry, abuses, and sexual wrongs (22:6–12)

The action Yahweh will take (22:13–16)

This longest of the three messages alternates between different forms of wrongdoing, in a way that approximately corresponds to the distinction between bloodshed and outrage:

* Abuse (22:6–7)
* Outrage (22:8
* Abuse (22:9a)
* Outrage (22:9b)
* Sexual wrongdoing (22:10–11)
* Abuse (22:12abα)
* Putting Yahweh out of mind (22:12bβ

The message also goes into greatest detail about specific wrongdoings.

* Making lumps and thus becoming defiled, and eating on the mountains
* Abusing parents, alien, orphan, widow
* Despising Yahweh’s sacred things and making his sabbaths ordinary
* Ignoring rules about sexual discipline
* Taking bribes, charging interest, and engaging in fraud
* Putting Yahweh out of mind

The focus on Jerusalem is underscored by the repeated “within it/you” and “in it/you” (22:3, 6, 7 [3x], 9 [3x], 10 [2x], 11, 12, 13, 16). Four other such prepositional expressions (22:3, 5 [2], 15) further extend the point.

22:17–22:

A critique over metal become slag (22:17)

The action Yahweh will take (22:18–22)

This shortest of the messages is distinctive for its utilization of a figure of speech to convey both critique and threat

22:23–31

A critique over the wrongdoing of the city’s leaders (22:24–30)

The action Yahweh will take (22:23, 31)

This message has a distinctive structure, as the threat occupies the first and last verses and the critique occupies the bulk of the space, in between

It again goes into detail about specific wrongdoings:

* Prophets abusing people for the sake of financial gain, and divining lies
* Priests failing to teach people about sacred and ordinary
* Officials using their position for the sake of financial gain
* The citizenry abusing lowly, needy, and alien
* The lack of anyone seeking to build things up

The entire chapter is a tour de force of hyperbole\*. Jerusalem is the murder capital of the Middle East. Its men are sex-mad for step-mothers, menstruating women, and relationships within the family. Jerusalem is nothing but slag. Prophets, priests, officials, and citizenry—there is not a single person trying to build up rather than pull down.

Like 20:45–21:32 [21:1–37], Ezek 22 thus juxtaposes a series of messages from Yahweh that have a similar theme and common motifs. Each begins “Yahweh’s message came to me” and each warns of calamity. The motifs are different from those in the previous chapter, and the overall balance is different. Here the stress lies less on the calamity itself and more on the reasons for it. In another parallel with the previous chapter, the first two messages look mutually independent in origin and each can stand alone, while the third takes up motifs from the first two. In that sense it works out their implications and sums them up (cf. Pohlmann, 1:329). But it is more than simply a reformulation and it has significant new features of its own. It also takes up motifs from Ezek 13–14; 18; and 21, but most noticeably from Zeph 3:3–4. The range of links and reworking suggests that it is summing up Ezekiel’s critique of Jerusalem’s leadership.

### Translation

1Yahweh’s message came to me: 2So you, my man, will you give a ruling, will you give a ruling,[[280]](#footnote-280) to the bloodshed city, and get it to acknowledge all its outrages?—3and say, The Lord Yahweh has said this.

City, pouring out blood within it,

so that its time is coming,

Making lumps for it,

so that it becomes defiled![[281]](#footnote-281)

4By your blood that you have poured out, you have become accountable,

and by your lumps that you have made, you have become defiled.

You have brought your days near,

and you have come[[282]](#footnote-282) to your years.

Therefore I am making you an object of disdain for the nations,

and an object of mockery for all the countries.

5The near and the far from you, they will mock you:

“Defiled by name, big in tumult.”

6There, the princes of Israel, each individual with his power, they have been in you for the purpose of pouring out blood,

* 7in belittling father and mother in you,
* acting towards the alien with fraud within you,
* exploiting orphan and widow in you,
* 8you despising my sacred things,
* and treating my sabbaths as ordinary,
* 9individuals being engaged in calumny[[283]](#footnote-283) in you for the purpose of pouring out blood,
* and eating on the mountains in you,
* enacting willfulness[[284]](#footnote-284) within you,
* 10someone exposing a father’s nakedness in you,
* men violating a woman while defiled during her menstrual taboo in you,
* 11and an individual performing an outrage with his neighbor’s wife,
* and an individual defiling his daughter-in-law as a willful act,
* and an individual violating his sister, his father’s daughter, in you,
* 12people taking a bribe in you for the purpose of pouring out blood,
* you taking fee and interest,
* and profiteering from your neighbor through fraud,
* and putting me out of mind (an affirmation of the Lord Yahweh).

13So, there, I am banging my fist toward your profiteering, which you have enacted, and over your blood(shed), which has been[[285]](#footnote-285) within you.14Will your heart stand or your hands be strong on the days when I am dealing with you, as I Yahweh have spoken and will act?

15I will scatter you among the nations,

and disperse you among the countries.

I will bring to an end the defilement from you,

16but you will be treated as ordinary in yourself in the eyes of nations.

And you will acknowledge that I am Yahweh.

17Yahweh’s message came to me: 18My man, Israel’s household have become slag to me, all of them, copper, tin, iron, and lead. Within a crucible, they have become silver slag. 19Therefore the Lord Yahweh has said this. On account of all of you becoming slag, therefore here am I, gathering you within Jerusalem, 20[like] the gathering of silver, copper, iron, lead, and tin nto a crucible to blow fire on it, to melt. So in my anger and in my wrath I will gather and lay down and melt you. 21I will collect you and blow on you with the fire of my fury and you will melt within it. 22Like the melting of silver within a crucible, so you will be melted within it. And you will acknowledge that I Yahweh have poured my wrath on you.

23Yahweh’s message came to me: 24My man, say to it,

You are a country not cleansed,

that is not rained on, on a day of ire,

25Its conspiracy of prophets within it,

like a roaring lion taking prey,

They have consumed a life[[286]](#footnote-286) so they might get[[287]](#footnote-287) treasure and wealth,

making many widows within it.

26Its priests, they have violated my instruction,

and treated as ordinary things that are sacred to me.

Between sacred and ordinary they have not distinguished,

and [the difference] between defiling and clean they have not got people to acknowledge.

From my sabbaths they have averted their eyes,

and I have become ordinary among them.

27Its officials within it:

like wolves taking prey,

In pouring out blood, in destroying lives,

for the purpose of profiteering.

28Its prophets, they have coated plaster for them,

envisioning emptiness,

Divining lies for them, saying

“the Lord Yahweh has said this”

though Yahweh has not spoken.

29The citizenry, they have practiced fraud

and committed robbery.

Lowly and needy they have exploited,

and the alien they have defrauded, without a ruling.

30From them I looked for an individual building a fence or standing in the breach in front of me on behalf of the country so that I would not destroy it, but I didn’t find one. 31So I am pouring my ire on them, consuming them with the fire of my fury, putting their path against their head (an affirmation of the Lord Yahweh).

### Textual Notes

MT has markers\* after 22:16, 18, 22, and 31.

**22:3** For גִּלּוּלִים, LXX has “notions” (cf. 22:4). See further the textual note on 20:7.

**22:6** For “Israel,” LXX has “Israel’s household.”

For זְרֹעוֹ, “his power,” LXX “his kindred” implies זַרְעוֹ.

**22:16** Forוְנׅחַלְתְּ from חָלַל, “you will be treated as ordinary,” LXX, Syr., Vg., Aq. “I will receive my heritage in you” imply וְנׅחַלְתּׅי from נָחַל. NRSV also assumes וְנׅחַלְתּׅי but derives it from חָלַל (see GK 67u).

**22:18** Q has לְסׅיג, the usual spelling of the word for slag. K has לסוג, the inf. from the verb סוּג “move away [from following Yahweh].” See further BDB, 690–91.

**22:21** LXX lacks “I will collect you.”

**22:24** For מְטֹהָרָה, “cleansed,” LXX “wetted” implies a form from מָטַר “rain.”

**22:25** For “its gang of prophets” (cf. Vg., Aq., Sym., Theod.), LXX has “whose leaders,” which corresponds more closely to Zeph 3:3: cf. NRSV. To reapply a comment by Greenberg (2:462), following the versions in conforming MT’s vivid expression seems lame.

**22:27** LXX lacks “destroying lives.”

**22:28** On LXX “will fall,” see the textual comment on 13:10.

**22:29** LXX has the prophets continuing to be the subject and “the citizenry” as the object.

**22:30** LXX gives up the metaphor and paraphrases “[an individual] living rightly and standing before my face entirely in the time of the country.”

### Verse-by-Verse Commentary

**22:1–3aα** “So you,” Yahweh begins (וְאַתׇּה), making a link with what precedes (cf. this expression in 7:2; 27:2; 37:15). His polite request to Ezekiel to “give a ruling,” to lay the law down, is then identical to the one in 20:4, including the repetition. The earlier commission did require Ezekiel to address the Kebarite elders, whereas this one relates to a message that rhetorically addresses “the bloodshed city,” but it is again initially the Kebarites who will hear the bidding. They might be familiar with the expression “bloodshed city,” which Nahum used a few decades previously to describe Nineveh, the Assyrian capital (Nah 3:1). His promise that it was about to fall had been fulfilled when Ezekiel was a child, an event that Kebarites a bit older than Ezekiel would remember well. So Nahum’s words might ring bells. A declaration such as 21:32 [37] could then easily and properly make them think of Babylon (Assyria’s destroyer) as bloodshed city. So is Ezekiel about to issue another promise about the fall of Babylon? A subtlety in Nahum is that it names Nineveh only three times and hints that any bloodshed city needs to ask whether Nahum’s critique and threats also apply to it. In effect Ezekiel takes up that question. Yes, Nahum’s threat could apply to Babylon. But within a few verses it will be clear that its application to Jerusalem is his concern.

In rhetorically addressing Jerusalem in an accusatory and threatening fashion, this chapter will parallel Ezek 16 as well as Ezek 20. But the phrase “bloodshed city” sets out the chapter’s distinctive tone. It will refer to blood eight times. “Bloodshed” (דָמִים) being the plural of the word for “blood” suggests blood in quantity. Ezekiel uses both singular and plural through the book, but in this chapter uses the plural only in 22:2, which draws more attention to the actual phrase “bloodshed city.” If only Ezekiel could get Jerusalem to acknowledge its outrages! It might then escape Nineveh’s fate. Of course he is not in Jerusalem and therefore in a position himself to urge it. His giving a ruling is more like the action of the president of a town’s elders pronouncing a decision and thereby ensuring its implementation. Speaking as he does in God’s name means something will happen. He is not just saying words (Taylor, 165). It is like Nahum’s declaring Yahweh’s ruling about Nineveh, which Nineveh does not hear but which speaks to the Jerusalemites about the destiny of their oppressor, while also implicitly urging them to face the questions about themselves that Ezekiel now articulates. With yet more irony, Ezekiel declares the ruling about Jerusalem that Jerusalem does not hear (though it hears it from Jeremiah) but that has implications for the Kebarites. Yahweh continues to commission Ezekiel to prepare the Kebarites for the disaster that has to come on the city that is the home from which they came and to which they might be hoping to return, preferably sooner rather than later. Ezekiel does not at thi spoint explicate how Jerusalem is the bloodshed city, though his subsequent critique will do so in connection with the actions of some individuals. At this point, a telling implication of Ezekiel’s words is that such actions that directly involve only individuals, groups, families, or the political leadership turn Jerusalem as an entity into “bloodshed city.”

**22:3aβ–4a** Calling Jerusalem by this name and making repeated reference to blood implies a point about the city’s ethical wrongdoing, but it also points to the city’s contempt for the sacredness of blood (Sweeney, 111) and thus for an aspect of the city’s accountability to God (see 6:6) and of its defilement. That defilement is more explicitly the focus of Yahweh’s second broad critique of the city, summed up by the familiar word “outrages” and spelled out by the familiar word “lumps.” The bloodshed means the city is accountable to God (אָשַׁם) for its wrongdoing and liable to his redress. The lumps mean the city is hopelessly defiled. The bloodshed but also the lumps mean that its time is coming (cf. 7:7, 12; 21:25, 29 [30, 34])—like Nineveh’s. While there is a sense in which Yahweh determines times, people themselves determine them by their actions. They are “their days” and “their years”: not ones they will enjoy, but ones that they bring near and come to voluntarily. In the way he speaks of the time, the days, and the years, one could almost call Ezekiel’s preaching eschatological (Joyce, 159), but like other prophets, Ezekiel is talking about an eschaton that is near, not a time that will come someday and probably not in my lifetime.

**22:4b–5** Ezekiel’s picturing nations far and near showing disdain and contempt for Jerusalem follows nicely on the references to Babylon and Ammon and contempt in 21:18–32. The references to defilement and tumult restate the critiques in 22:2–4a, in reverse order to bring to a close the opening part of Yahweh’s first critique with its rhythmic format. In 22:5b Ezekiel perhaps quotes the nations’ notional words (Fairbairn, 247), with their sarcastic implications. Jerusalem has a name—for defilement! It’s big (רַבַּת), like the Ammonites’ capital, Rabbah (21:20), but it’s about to be big in the tumult of devastation (cf. 7:7).

**22:6–7** Yahweh begins spelling out more prosaically the implications of “bloodshed,” and implicitly the implications of “outrages.” In this connection he sets alongside the repetition of the word “blood” the repetition eleven times of the accusatory expressions “in you” and “within you” (Taylor, 164). The bloodshed, at least, initially he essentially associates with Israel’s “princes,” the people who are in a position to use their power in this connection. He is not talking about ordinary rogues but about people such as elders and members of the royal court, and about how they deal with the vulnerable. He speaks of people who are too old to insist on their rights and whom the leaders can “belittle” (קָלַל hiphil). They can treat them as nothings in practical ways as well as in words, even though they are the mothers and fathers whose honor the commandment urges. He talks about aliens, people who never had any rights, whom they can use and not recompense properly. He talks about orphans and widows who have lost their rights through the death of the head of their family who could once have protected them and whom they can exploit.

**22:8–9bα** Yahweh goes on to speak to the city more generally about outrages that anyone might be involved in. Despising sacred things might mean failing to del with offerings in the proper way, as things that are special because they have been offered to God (see Lev 7:15–21). Treating the sabbath as ordinary will mean something similar, in doing ordinary work on the sabbath. In Ezekiel’s time, Jer 17:19–23 implies the natural temptation to let the sabbath be a great shopping day and a day when people might not only carry on with crafts such as pottery, jewelry-making, and baking, but also bring them (and the produce of their smallholdings) into the city to sell. A bit later, Neh 13:15–22 gives more examples of what sabbath-breaking would mean.

Yahweh goes further into the dynamics of bloodshed and makes clear that it is also not confined to leaders. It involves “calumny” (see the translation footnote), making false charges against people or making false claims in attemptingn to prove (for instance) that this land belongs to me not you, and thus deprive you of your land and livelihood. It might thus ultimately deprive you of your life—or it might have ways of achieving that within a quicker time frame (see 1 Kgs 22:1–14; and the context of the reference to calumny in Lev 19:15–16).[[288]](#footnote-288) The outrages involve people in Jerusalem eating at the mountains (see 18:6, 11, 15)—which might denote illegitimate worship on the heights of Jerusalem itself, or worship on the highland shrines elsewhere.

**22:9bβ–11** “Willfulness” (see 16:27, 43, 58), as well as denoting something that was not casual or accidental, especially applies to sexual wrongdoing (it recurs in Ezek 23). It thus introduces the list of sexual acts that are subject to critique, because they are ethically wrong, they involve abuse, and they contravene the rules in Leviticus about sexual order within the family. Ezek 22:1–16/19 is the Haftarah\* that accompanies Lev 16–18 in the synagogue lectionary (Fishbane, 128–32). The ethical aspect to these acts is expressed most clearly in the double reference to sexual violation (on menstrual taboo, see 18:6; 36:17). The word denoting violation (עָנָה piel) denotes putting down, afflicting, or humbling, and it is the nearest Hebrew has to a word for rape (see, e.g., Judg 20:5; 2 Sam 13:12, 14, 22; Lam 5:11). While Hebrew doesn’t have words that specifically denote rape or incest, then, these English words convey the abhorrent nature of such acts that Ezekiel presupposes (Odell, 284–85). Setting the reference to adultery in the context of allusions to abuse suggests that the focus of that concern here may lie in a relationship with one’s neighbor’s wife that is not really consensual (cf. 2 Sam 11). The concern in this passage with family order and with the nature of forbidden relationships as outrage is expressed in the references to defilement. Exposing the nakedness of one’s father would imperil the principle that the nakedness of a married couple belongs to each other. It would likely mean having sex with one’s stepmother (Lev 18:7; 20:11). Along with some of the other actions specified here and in Leviticus, such a sexual relationship would imply some claim to authority in the family, though no doubt others of these relationships might be undertaken out of love or sexual desire (see 2 Sam 13).

**22:12** Yahweh goes on a third time to spell out what is involved in the pouring out of blood and lesser offenses. It may involve taking a bribe, again in connection with bringing false charges against someone. The theme of fee and interest recurs (see 18:8–9). Yahweh introduces the verb “profiteer” (בָּצַע piel), traditionally taken to denote dishonest gain as an expression of covetousness. Here it is operating “through fraud” (cf. 18:18).[[289]](#footnote-289) The closing charge “putting me out of mind” (שָׁכַח, traditionally “forget”) looks like a final summary of the implications of committing “outrages.” It compares with Rom 3:18 (a quotation from Psa 36:1 [2]) as the climax of Rom 3:9–18 (or 1:18–3:18) (Trapp, 453). In this final confrontational remark, “over against the ‘you’ of the city here appears the ‘I’ of God” (Zimmerli, 1:459). Perhaps putting God out of mind is the background to everything else in this message (Greenhill, 542). Or perhaps the logic works the other way, as abuse becomes the foreground to putting God out of mind—it leads to it?

**22:13–14** Yahweh does not repeat his “therefore” (22:4b; cf. 22:19), but in effect the “so there” and “I am banging my fist” (see 21:14, 17) pick up from 22:4b in light of what he has said about profiteering and blood. “They may have ‘forgotten’ him, but he has not forgotten them” (Olley, 385). When Yahweh takes action, will Jerusalem’s mind or heart or courage (לֵב) stand firm? Will its hands be strong? The chapter makes another link with the preceding chapter (21:7 [12]), where Ezekiel predicted that “every heart will melt, all hands will become feeble” when the news comes of Jerusalem’s siege and fall. Those will be the days when Yahweh is “dealing with” Jerusalem. And will its hearts and hands be in any better shape than he predicted the Kebarites’ will be? Is Yahweh referring to people being firm and strong before him, and is he being ironical or sarcastic?

**22:15–16** Or are the implications of his questions spelled out in the lines that follow: will people be able to cope with scattering and dispersing? Throughout 22:13–16 “you” continues to be feminine singular and thus to refer to Jerusalem, but in a subtle way Yahweh moves between alluding to the city’s population and to the city itself. It is an entity semi-distinguishable from its inhabitants, so that when they go, it does not entirely cease to exist. Through 22:13–15a Yahweh addresses its people. Then in 22:15b–16a he addresses the city. Removing Jerusalem’s people will mean terminating its defilement (cf. 10:2), though it will also mean it becomes just an ordinary city in the eyes of the nations.

The last of the poetic cola, 22:16a, implies a suggestive paronomasia. For “you will be treated as ordinary” (וְנׅחַלְתְּ) KJV has “thou shalt take thine inheritance,” understanding the verb as a form from נָחַל rather than חָלַל (see the textual note). Perhaps the Kebarites could again hear it either way. Yes, Jerusalem will be profaned and will become just an ordinary city, not the special abode of the Lord Yahweh. And all it will have for an inheritance will be itself (Greenhill, 544).

**22:17–18** Yahweh’s second message is shorter, its critique is brief, and both critique and threat are expressed metaphorically rather than literally. It is another parable\* or מָשָׁל. The background of its image lies in the process of smelting metal, whose aim is to remove its impurities. Metals commonly occur in their natural form as ore, the valuable metal being combined with other metals and rock, and heating the ore makes it possible to skim these off. Yahweh’s point in using the image is that smelting Israel leaves no metal, only slag or junk. The expression “silver slag” implies that the ore in question combined silver with unwanted copper, tin, iron, and lead, which would be the slag to get rid of. But the idea that silver ore could be combined with all these is apparently implausible, as is the idea that they can all be removed by the same smelting process. Once again Ezekiel works with his parable like Jesus with his parable of the sower (Mark 4) and Paul with his picture of the olive tree (Rom 11) (cf. 15:1–5 and the verse-by-verse comment), the image being subordinate to the message. He is a preacher not a metallurgist, and presumably he and his audience had no more personal acquaintance with smelting than this commentator or the readers of this commentary (Odell, 288). At least, that is how it looks from the confusing way he talks about smelting. Copper, tin, iron, lead, and silver would hardly be in the furnace together. They need to be smelted separately to get the pure metal from the ore, because they melt at different temperatures.

**22:19–22** The same consideration emerges from the subsequent verses. You don’t put slag back into the furnace or gather the slag into the city. Ezekiel pictures the sequence of events in the reverse of the actual order. More literally, one would gather the metals not the slag, then light the fire. But here, the object of lighting the fire is not the purification of the metals but the destruction of the slag. As is the case in Paul’s picture of cutting out branches from the olive tree and then grafting them back, the message is prior to the image and the image has to be bent to accommodate it. Ezekiel is now also presupposing the possibility that people may withdraw into a city during an enemy invasion. If the Israelites do, Yahweh says, it will be Yahweh drawing them there for smelting, and not a smelting that will produce anything valuable (Block, 1:718). Further, the word for slag is the same or virtually the same (see the textual note) as a verb meaning to renege on a commitment to Yahweh (סוּג; e.g., Pss 53:3 [4]; 80:18 [19]). Ezekiel’s words thus suggest another paronomasia (Odell, 286–87). Israel’s household is people who renege in that way, which indicates that they are just slag.

Whereas Yahweh often speaks of people acknowledging him through what he does, sometimes the reference to acknowledgment has an extra nuance. Here its negative one matches the entire message that offers no prospect of something positive issuing from the smelting process in the manner of Isa 1:22, 25 (Greenberg, 2:468). Perhaps not surprisingly a century after Isaiah, Ezekiel’s adaptation of the image compared rather with Jer 6:28–30.

**22:23–24** The third message works differently from both first and second. It focuses on a catalogue of wrongdoers, but opens with a broader critique and closes with a brief threat. The opening and close take up Ezekiel’s least common word for anger (זַעַם, “ire”) whose one other use came in 21:31. But a link with Zeph 3:8 is also likely (see the verse-by-commentary on 22:31). “Say to it” raises the question of who is the “it.” Given that 21:23–31 builds on 21:1–22, “it” might be the city which is a crucible (Allen, 2:35), but in itself the message may suggest that the “it” anticipates and is explained by the following reference to the “country.”

The allusion to cleansing and rain parallels the first message’s talk of ending defilement (22:15) and the second message’s talk of smelting. It again describes the process of cleansing, but uses a different image. Like smelting, the image could have positive implications, but it will turn out not to have. As Israel’s household might have incorporated slag that needed smelting out but also good metal, but turned out to be just slag, similarly the country not cleansed and not rained on, a depressing sight, might have turned out to be capable of cleansing, but the picture of “a day of ire” is not encouraging, and Ezekiel’s image rather implies another warning of calamity. The country is going to be flooded (cf. Gen 6–8; Block, 1:723).

**22:25** What dirt or defilement needs washing away? In the same era as Nahum (see the verse-by-verse commentary on 22:2), Zephaniah was also working in Jerusalem, overtly critiquing and threatening Jerusalem itself.

Its officials in the midst of it,

roaring lions.

Its authorities, steppe wolves,

that have not left anything for the morning.

Its prophets, wanton,

people of faithlessness.

Its priests, they have treated as ordinary what is sacred,

they have violated instruction. (Zeph 3:3–4)

It looks as if Ezekiel knew Zephaniah’s words and is adapting them. He is presumably working from a memory of hearing Zephaniah’s message, first-hand or second-hand, rather than through reading it, and his portrayal is more extensive and has original elements. As Zephaniah’s verses can be laid out as poetic lines, so can Ezek 21:25–29. While Ezekiel’s verses are more prosaic, they fit Hebrew verse rhythm and manifest parallelism.\* It’s impossible to say why Ezekiel would take up Zephaniah’s message. Perhaps he was just struck by it and inspired to adapt it.

In his first distinctive adaptation, he begins with the vivid opening reference to “a conspiracy of prophets.” It no doubt is “a gang of prophets” (NJPS) but 22:28 will suggest why Ezekiel uses the word “conspiracy” (קֶשֶׁר). Whereas Zephaniah likens Jerusalem’s officials to roaring lions and compares its authorities with wolves, Ezekiel reworks these comparisons in light of the vehement concern about prophets that he shares with Jeremiah and has expressed in 13:1–14:11. The misleading work of other prophets is Jerusalem’s first, dangerous, and destructive problem. As his comments about leaders being responsible for the death of people sometimes refer to the indirect result of their action or inaction, so it will be with the prophets. They behave like prophets but they are not really fulfilling Yahweh’s commission and they are engaged in pursuing people’s lives like bird hunters (13:18–20). They will hope to make money out of their ministry (cf. Mic 3:11). Ezekiel’s reference to consuming lives and multiplying widows would cover the earlier fruit of prophet ministry in the fall of Jerusalem in 597 and also the upcoming repeat of that result in 587, which will also bring the opposite results to any hope of “treasure” and “wealth” (Jer 20:5; Greenberg, 2: 462).

**22:26** Whereas Ezekiel has no extensive critique of priests like his critique of prophets in 13:1–14:11, this single critique is devastating in what it covers.[[290]](#footnote-290) Violating the Torah is first illustrated in failing to observe propriety over keeping sacred things from defilement (see, e.g., Lev 22:1–9). Central to priestly vocation was distinguishing between sacred and ordinary, defiling and clean, and helping people to make these distinctions and thus live in light of them (Lev 10:10–11). Emblematic of the distinction between sacred and ordinary is the distinction between the sabbath and the rest of the week, but the priests have “averted their eyes” from the sabbath, ignored it (cf. Lev 20:4; Isa 1:15; Prov 28:27). They give into the same temptations as anyone else in this connection (see 22:8). But the emblematic nature of their persons as priests means that the lack of a distinction between sacred and ordinary in their lives also means that they fail to mirror the distinctiveness of Yahweh.

**22:27–29** The comments on Jerusalem’s leadership restate the critique from earlier in the chapter. The further comments on the prophets restate the critique from 13:1–10 but add the twofold “for them” that suggests an unholy alliance between prophets and leadership and thus picks up the reference to “a conspiracy of prophets.” While they may well conspire among themselves (cf. 1 Kgs 22:6; Jer 23:27, 30), they also conspire with the nation’s leaders to provide them with spiritual backing for their policies (cf. 1 Kgs 22:6 again; also Jer 2:26–27; 32:32; 37:19). The tricolon devoted to the second half of the critique of the prophets reinforces the sense conveyed by Ezekiel’s beginning with the prophets. This is where he wants to put most emphasis. The “citizenry” again looks like a reference to the rest of the people with some power in the community—people such as heads of households (see 7:27). Fraud, exploitation, and alien recur from 22:7. Lowly and needy, theft, and the observing of a ruling (in this case, the lack of it) recur from 18:7–18. Ethically and religiously disastrous leadership means disaster for the community.[[291]](#footnote-291)

**22:30** To underline the failure of all these forms of leadership, Ezekiel finally picks up another note from the critique of the prophets in 13:5. There he lamented the lack of any prophet going into the breaches, building a fence, and standing for Israel. Here he generalizes the lament. In Psa 106:23, “standing in front of Yahweh” suggests prayer and intercession, but elsewhere it does not have this specific connotation (e.g., Deut 4:10; 10:8; 29:14; 1 Kgs 22:21), nor when one stands in front of someone such as a king (e.g., 1 Kgs 1:2, 28; 12:8). It suggests a readiness for service, and that connotation fits here. And anyway, everything Ezekiel has said makes it unlikely that he would imagine Yahweh responding positively to prayer for him to show grace to a community with the characteristics he has described in 22:23–29. As Ezek 13 implied, what is required is someone to serve Yahweh by setting about rebuilding the moral and religious foundations of the city’s life. Yet the implication is that Yahweh, the one who is planning on assaulting the city’s walls, is also looking for someone to build them up (Jenson, 187). Ezekiel is more forthright and extreme about the lack of such people in Jerusalem than he was in Ezek 13, which is hard on people such as Jeremiah and Baruch (Mayer, 437). But Ezekiel didn’t get where he was without engaging in hyperbole.\*

**22:31** Yahweh’s conclusion to this third message takes up the motif of “ire” from its beginning (22:23) and also motifs from the second message, the “pouring out” of wrath and “the fire of my fury” (22:21–22). Given the message’s implied familiarity with Zeph 3:3–4, the parallel with pouring out ire in Zeph 3:8 (Zimmerli, 1:467) can hardly be a coincidence. “Putting their path against their head” is then a familiar Ezekiel expression for making people carry the consequences of the route they take (see 9:10).

### Biblical Theology Comments

An aspect of Ezekiel’s genius that he shares with Leviticus is an instinctive combining of ethics, religion, and order. There is nothing specifically Israelite about the ethics he urges, and his expectations of the responsibility that a government will take in areas such as justice and the protection of the vulnerable compare with those of other peoples (Greenberg, 2:454). His concern about abuse may be more distinctive. Odell (285, 291, 292) comments:

When men sexually force themselves on women with whom they have the closest of family ties and the greatest of obligations, nothing is left of the social fabric.… Ezekiel is not simply delineating an arcane set of sexual taboos or being excessively priggish about sexual morality. Rather, he is describing a society in which rape and incest have become the norm.… One should not have to ask whether women may be safely left at home alone with their sons, husbands, brothers, fathers, or uncles. But if this very basic level of trust has eroded, it should come as no surprise that no one is safe.

### Application and Devotional Implications

It’s possible for the people of God to bring their days near and come to their years (22:4), to bring their destiny nearer or further away. The awareness features in 2 Pet 3:10–12 in connection with the day of the Lord, the day of God. Ezekiel almost seems to be making a point of not using a technical terms such as the day of Yahweh. He just speaks of your days and your years, about the unfolding of ordinary time. Elsewhere, he and other First Testament figures see 587 as Yahweh’s day arriving, though it was not the final and ultimate Yahweh’s day, which we still await. Meanwhile we may see more interim days and years that constitute further interim embodiments of that final day, and the way we live has an effect on whether we bring them nearer, and on whether they are good or bad days and years.

In that connection, “Ezekiel in effect offers a negative ‘job description’ for the posts of prince, official, priest, prophet, and ‘people of the land’” (Darr, on 22:23–31). By reversing his picture, we can see God’s vision for the city of God and for its leadership “The sins of a city and nation may be such that God will not have his prophets to plead or intercede for them, but to cry out against them” (Greenhill, 539). He will surely also want a congregation to think about its prophets, pastors, officials, and citizenry so that they may be people who build up its fence and stand in the breach on its behalf—and will think in an analogous way about their community.

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## The Two Sisters (23:1–49)

### Outline

In the arrangement of the Ezekiel scroll, Ezek 23 is the last chapter before Nebuchadrezzar begins the siege of Jerusalem that leads to the city’s fall (24:1). It is thus the last chapter in the threefold compilation of messages that are presented as leading to that catastrophe, as warning the Kebarites about it and seeking to prepare them for it, and as suggesting the terms on whose basis the Jerusalemites could forestall it. Part Three of the scroll (20:1–23:49) has been briefer than Part One and much briefer than Part Two, and it becomes more devastating and hopeless than Parts One and Two. This final chapter is more devastating and hopeless than the preceding chapters. It makes for a horrific close to the horrific chapters that prepare for the horrific event that is to follow.

The first three of the six parts of the scroll comprise almost half of it, and the first almost-half draws near its close with another substantial retelling of Israel’s story as the story of Israel’s waywardness. As such a retelling, it pairs with Ezek 20, the first chapter in Part Three. As another retelling in the form of a parable,\* another מָשָׁל, and another parable that portrays Israel’s waywardness in terms of whoring, it pairs with Ezek 16, too (whoring also featured in 20:30). Against the background of Jer 3:6–14, Ezek 23 adds and exhaustively develops the motif of the two whoring sisters, Ephraim and Judah, the latter imitating the former instead of learning from her fate. Ezek 23 thus develops the motif of whoring in a way comparable with Hosea. But whereas Ezek 16 emphasized religious unfaithfulness while also referring to political unfaithfulness, Ezek 23 has the balance the other way (Eichrodt, 324). Its political concern makes for another connection with Hosea, and it will also link with its starting with Egypt. It does compare further with Ezek 16 in being a “broken allegory,”\* in which Yahweh appears “not only as the teller of the story but as an agent—and victim!—within it,” in keeping with his actual relationship with Israel and its story (Jenson, 189).

Ezek 23 is not quite as long as that other great whoring chapter, but it expounds the motif in a more thoroughgoing fashion, and it is more bleak, quite lacking in any positive prospects for Judah. Its focus is the need to confront Judah’s inclination to get involved with Egypt (also prominent in Ezek 20) in order to assert independence from Babylon. Really, the sisters are ambivalent in their attitude to the imperial authorities. They both envy them and wish they were them, and they are resentful of them and repelled by them.[[292]](#footnote-292) Yahweh sees their involvement with Egypt as an act of gross unfaithfulness analogous with whoring and adultery, and about to cause the catastrophe that will soon overwhelm Jerusalem. Israel is supposed to trust in Yahweh and rely on Yahweh as its husband, but its leaders refuse to do so. In this chapter “the prophet is undoubtedly participating in the political debates of this Jerusalem élite.”[[293]](#footnote-293) Ezekiel does not comment on the political unwisdom of Judahite policies, only on their religious unwisdom. Israel’s husband will not tolerate them and will ensure that they lead to disaster—the kind of disaster whose actuality Ezek 24 will immediately announce.

Mostly because of its portrayal of the two women, their action, and their experience, the chapter causes offence in the context of Western scholarship.[[294]](#footnote-294) It seems likely to have caused offence in Kebar, which will have been Ezekiel’s aim. Like Ezek 16, it was designed to shock and appall. Readers have to keep in mind all the way through that the depiction of whoring and adultery is an allegory for Judah’s political dealings (the exception is that while the chapter focuses on the political aspect of Judah’s unfaithfulness, it does incorporate references to child sacrifice). It might have the effect of titillating both women and men, and of devastating both women and men—perhaps more obviously the men for whom the two sisters stand. The men in the community may form more than half of the people who listen to it, and are likely the majority of the objects of its invective. “The text is filled with hypervirility, and is more concerned with symbols of masculinity than it is with the misconduct of the woman.”[[295]](#footnote-295)

The chapter unfolds:

Introduction (23:1–2a)

The story of the two sisters’ whoring (23:2b–21)

How it started in Egypt (23:2b–4)

How Oholah whored with Assyria and paid a penalty (23:5–10)

How Oholibah whored with Assyria, Babylon, and Egypt (23:11–21)

How Yahweh will respond to Oholibah’s whoring (23:22–35)

He will arouse her lovers against her (23:22–27)

He will deliver her to them so that she has to drink a poisoned chalice (23:28–35)

Further critique and warning to the sisters (23:36–49a)

A renewed introduction (28:36)

A double critique (28:37–44)

A double threat (23:45–49a)

Conclusion (23:49b)

Whereas 23:1–27 unfolds smoothly as one unit, 23:28–49 is a series of shorter units that continue it more loosely. Perhaps, then, 23:1–27 (or an earlier version) is the original form of the chapter, and the rest of the material was added later by Ezekiel or a curator (see, e.g., Sedlmeier, 1:320). The message centering on the poem about the poisoned chalice in 23:28–35 does form a forceful continuation of the story and threat in 23:1–27. While 23:36–49 then presupposes 23:1–35, it adds motifs to it. And while 23:1–35 is smooth, 23:36–49 is jerky. One aspect of its jerkiness is the mixing of feminine and masculine suffixes and verb forms, which cause the verses to move between the dominant female subject of the parable and the dominant male object of the actual critique. If the poem in 23:32–35 is a climax in the chapter, these later sections might seem an anti-climax, though this may be a Western judgment comparable to the assumption that Ezekiel is more likely to be the author of smooth messages than of jerky ones. And the closing paragraphs’ broadening Yahweh’s critique so that it once again covers blood and human sacrifice as well as whoring, and also covers the sabbath and the sanctuary, suits their position as a conclusion to Ezek 1–23.

All the material in 23:28–49 speaks as if the catastrophe is still future and thus as if it issued from the same time as 23:1–27, and the simple view is that it came from that time, rather than that someone composed messages that spoke as if the catastrophe was still future when actually it was past. But the work of assembly might have taken place after 587 as part of the process whereby the scroll reached the form in which we have it.

A story such as this “leaves no space open through which hope can enter.” Why did Ezekiel construct such a story? “Because he was convinced that the events of 597 BCE were not the end of his people's suffering.… that the coming destruction was the doing, and not the undoing, of Israel's God.… that what God has done, and is about to do, is not a capricious act undertaken at the deity's whim, but rather is punishment for Israel's sins.… because he believed that Yahweh was just—that the punishment was proportionate to the crime.”[[296]](#footnote-296) In this sense even this chapter leaves open a space through which hope can enter, though hope has to come through the space created by the story, not by evading the story’s perspective. (And of course if Jerusalem turns even now, the story could have a different ending.)

### Translation

1Yahweh’s message came to me: 2My man, there being two women, the daughters of one mother, 3they whored in Egypt. As they whored in their youth, their breasts were pinched there, and men squeezed their girlish nipples there. 4Their names: the elder Oholah, and her sister Oholibah. They became mine, and bore sons and daughters. Their names: Oholah (Samaria), and Oholibah (Jerusalem).

5Oholah whored while under me and had a desire[[297]](#footnote-297) for her lovers, for Assyria, guards[[298]](#footnote-298) 6clothed in blue, governors and superintendents,[[299]](#footnote-299) attractive young men all of them, cavalry riding on horses. 7She gave her whorings to them, the choice of the Assyrians, all of them. With all that she desired, with all their lumps, she defiled herself, 8not abanoning her whorings from Egypt, because they had bedded her in her youth and those men had squeezed her girlish nipples and poured out their whoring[[300]](#footnote-300) on her. 9Therefore I gave her into the hand of her lovers, into the hand of the Assyrians, for whom she had a desire. 10Those men, they exposed her nakedness, taking her sons and daughters and slaughtering her with the sword so she became a name to women, and acting on rulings[[301]](#footnote-301) against her.

11Her sister Oholibah saw, but her desire was more corrupt than hers, and her whorings than her sister’s whoredoms.[[302]](#footnote-302) 12As she had a desire for the Assyrians, governors and commanders, guards clothed in excellence,[[303]](#footnote-303) cavalry riding on horses, attractive young men, all of them, 13I saw that she had defiled herself, the two of them having the same path. 14And she added to her whorings. She saw carved men on the wall, images of Chaldeans carved with red, 15fastened around with a belt at their waists, overhung with turbans at their heads, with the appearance of officers, all of them, in the likeness of the Babylonians whose native land is Chaldea. 16She had a desire for them upon her eyes’ seeing them, and she sent envoys to them in Chaldea. 17And the Babylonians came to her to a love bed and defiled her with their whoring, and she defiled herself with them. But her spirit recoiled from them.

18So she exposed her whorings and exposed her nakedness, and my spirit recoiled from her as my spirit recoiled from her sister, 19but she multiplied her whorings, becoming mindful of her young days when she whored in the country of Egypt. 20She had a desire for their concubines, whose[[304]](#footnote-304) flesh was the flesh of donkeys and whose deluge was the deluge of horses.[[305]](#footnote-305) 21So you attended to the willfulness of your youth, in the squeezing by the Egyptians of your nipples, with the pinching[[306]](#footnote-306) of your youthful breasts.

22Therefore, Oholibah, the Lord Yahweh has said this. Here am I, arousing your lovers against you, from whom your spirit recoiled, and I will get them to come against you from all around, 23the Babylonians and all the Chaldeans, Peqod, Shoa, and Qoa, all the Assyrians with them, attractive men, governors and commanders, all of them, officers and commissioned men,[[307]](#footnote-307) riders on horses, all of them. 24Cavalry,[[308]](#footnote-308) chariotry, and wheels will come against you.[[309]](#footnote-309) With an assembly of peoples, body shield, hand shield, and helmet they will put themselves against you around. I will put a ruling in front of them, but they will rule you with their rulings. 25I will set my passion against you and they will deal with you in wrath, taking off your nose and your ear, and the last of you falling by the sword, those people taking your sons and daughters, and the last of you being consumed by fire. 26They will strip you of your clothes and take your lovely things. 27So I will put a stop to your willfulness for you,[[310]](#footnote-310) and your whorishness from the country of Egypt. You will not lift your eyes to them as you will not be mindful of Egypt any more.

28Because the Lord Yahweh has said this. Here am I, giving you into the hand of people that you are hostile to, into the hand of people that your spirit recoiled from. 29They will act towards you with hostility. They will take all you have toiled for and abandon you stark naked, and your whoredoms’ nakedness will expose itself, your willfulness and your whorings. 30They will do[[311]](#footnote-311) these things to you because of your whoring after nations, since you defiled yourself with their lumps.

31In that you walked in your sister’s path,

I will put her chalice into your hand.

32The Lord Yahweh has said this.

In that you will drink your sister’s chalice

deep and wide.

It will cause laughter and derision,

in containing a profuseness.[[312]](#footnote-312)

33With drunkenness and suffering you will be full,

a chalice of devastation and desolation.

Your sister Samaria’s chalice—

34you will drink it and drain.

Its shards you will gnaw,

and your breasts you will tear off.[[313]](#footnote-313)

Because I have spoken (an affirmation of the Lord Yahweh).

35Therefore the Lord Yahweh has said, Since you have put me out of mind and thrown me behind your back, you too must carry your willfulness and your whorings.

36So Yahweh said to me, My man, will you give a ruling to Oholah and Oholibah and declare to them their outrages. 37Because they committed adultery, and blood is on their hands, as they committed adultery with their lumps, and also the passed to them the children that they bore me, for eating. 38Moreover, when they did this to me, they defiled my sanctuary on that day, and made my sabbaths ordinary.39When they slew their children for their lumps, they came to my sanctuary on that day to make it ordinary, and there, so they did within my house,[[314]](#footnote-314) 40and also when they sent for men, coming from far away, to whom an envoy was sent. And there, men for whom you bathed, painted your eyes, and put on finery came.[[315]](#footnote-315) 41You sat on a couch made majestic, with a table spread in front of it, and my incense and my oil you put on it, 42with the sound of a relaxed horde by it.[[316]](#footnote-316) And as for men from a profusion of humanity brought drunk[[317]](#footnote-317) from the wilderness, they put bracelets on their hands and splendid crowns on their heads.[[318]](#footnote-318) 43I said regarding the one worn out with adultery, “Now, they will engage in whoring with her, her too?”[[319]](#footnote-319) 44And someone had sex with her[[320]](#footnote-320) as someone has sex with a woman who was a whore, in this way having sex with Oholah and with Oholibah, whorish women, 45though faithful people will apply to them the ruling for women committing adultery and the ruling for people who pour out blood, because they are women committing adultery, with blood on their hands.

46Because the Lord Yahweh has said this. They are to bring up[[321]](#footnote-321) an assembly against them,[[322]](#footnote-322) and make them an object of horror and of looting. 47An assembly will pelt them with rocks and cut them down with their swords, killing their sons and their daughters,[[323]](#footnote-323) and burning their houses in fire. 48So I will put a stop to willfulness from the country, and all the women will let themselves be disciplined[[324]](#footnote-324) and will not act in the manner of your willfulness. 49They will put your willfulness on you, and the offenses constituted by your lumps, you will carry.[[325]](#footnote-325) And you will acknowledge that I am Yahweh.

### Textual Notes

MT has markers\* after 23:10, 21, 27, 31, 34, 35, 45, and 49.

**23:10** LXX also has “with regard to her daughters” at the end of the verse, perhaps following 16:46–55 (*HUB*).

**23:16** Q וַתַּעְגְּבָה has a longer form of the *yiqtol\** giving it more emphasis (cf. 23:20; GK 48d). K ותעגב is the regular form (cf. 23:5).

**23:21** For לְמַעַן, “for the sake of,”which occurs 35 times in Ezekiel and gives poor sense here, I follow Vg., Syr. “to press,” implying לׅמְעֹךְ, “with the pinching”; cf. 23:3; *CTAT*, 190–92.

**23:23** Literally, “called”. NRSV emends קְרוּאׅים to קְרוּבׅים as in 23:5, 12.

**23:24** For the hapax הֹצֶן, “cavalry,” LXX “from the north” implies צָפֹן.

**23:29** After כָּל־יְגׅיעֵךְ, “all you have toiled for,” LXX’s also has “and hardships.”

**23:32** LXX lacks “it will cause laughter and derision.”

**23:33** LXX has only one word for שַׁמָּה וּשְׁמָמָה, “devastation and desolation.”

**23:34** LXX reads “And you will drink it and her feasts, and her new moons I will overturn,” perhaps inspired by Hos 2:11 [13] (*HUB*).

**23:36–45** The individual words in these verses raise few difficulties but the way they fit together is often problematic and the ancient versions offer little illumination.

**23:37** LXX has “passed to them through flames” (instead of “as food”), making the assumed meaning explicit.

**23:38** LXX lacks “on that day”; similarly in 23:39.

**23:41** For כְּבוּדָה, LXX “covered” implies perhaps כְּבוּרָה (Cornill, 325) or רְבוּדָה (Cooke, 263).

For שַֹמְתְּ**,** “you put,” LXX “[they] rejoiced” implies שָֹמְחוּ (Cornill, 325).

**23:42**. K סובאים is an alternative spelling for Q סָבָאׅים.

LXX lacks “drunk,” perhaps by haplography\* through סובאים following מובאים, or perhaps MT has a double reading.

**23:43** For לַבָּה, LXX has “not in these,” suggesting לא באלה (*HUB*).

For Q עַתָּה יׅזְנוּ, K has sg. עת יזנה “Now he will whore.”

**23:44** For וַיָּבוֹא, 4QEzeka has pl. ויבאו, which LXX, Vg. also imply.

### Verse-by-Verse Commentary

**23:1–3** One might expect Yahweh to say or at least imply that Ezekiel is to pass on his revelation to someone (compare and contrast Ezek 4; 6; 7; 12; 13; 16; 17; 20:45 [21:1]; 22), but here he does not. He just begins telling a story. To describe its “scenario” as “in some respects, surreal” (Darr, on 23:1–4) is an understatement. There are two women. They are full sisters, not half-sisters or step sisters, like many sisters in the ancient Middle East and the modern West. They are now grown up, but they are portrayed as having been free sexually even when they were younger, both in the sense that no one determined how they behaved and in the sense that they consequently did as they liked. There is no suggestion of sexual abuse here as there was in some previous chapters. Ezekiel rather implies a gender equality in sexual liberty, enjoyed by the women as it was by the men in previous chapters, comparable but also contrasting with the gender equality in the Song of Songs. So they enjoyed themselves sexually when they were teenagers. Their story that begins in Egypt, like the story in Ezek 20, has no gracious start, like the ones in Ezek 16 and 20. Ezekiel’s audience might be led to think of the Egyptian whoring that began in 2 Kgs 17:4, or even 1 Kgs 9:16, rather than of the whole people’s origins in Egypt.[[326]](#footnote-326) Either way, two sisters asserting themselves in mutual association might be a worrying idea.[[327]](#footnote-327)

**23:4** After the titillating beginning, Ezekiel provides the women’s names, which both contain the word for a tent (אֹהֶל). People might then think of Oholah as a tent woman and be reminded of Exod 33:7–11, while Oholibah might suggest “my tent is in her.” But Ezekiel doesn’t comment on the names, and they resemble other First Testament names that incorporate the word tent (see Gen 36:2, 41; Exod 31:6). Nor does Ezekiel identify their mother (Sarah? Rebekah?). He does indicate that Yahweh took both of these sexually free women in marriage, notwithstanding Lev 18:18 (but this is a parable). He thus acts like Abraham marrying two women and Jacob marrying two sisters. And they had sons and daughters, like Abraham’s wives and Jacob’s wives. Ezekiel eventually identifies the sisters as Samaria and Jerusalem, the two capital cities, and thus provides his audience with a first key to his parable if they hadn’t guessed it already. Samaria is the big sister. After the split into two nations, Ephraim, northern Israel, was bigger than Judah. Ezekiel’s comment looks odder in LXX, where she becomes the “older” sister, but she was involved in international politics earlier (Olley, 391). Ezekiel also indicates that he is not talking about all women any more than he is talking about an ordinary husband. These are extraordinary women (Block, 1:734).

**23:5–7** Oholah, aka Samaria, then, carried on being sexually free when she was married—“under me” suggests a wife’s legal position in relation to her husband (Num 5:19, 20). Ezekiel now provides his audience with another clue to his parable. The Hebrew word for “love” (אָהַב) and thus the participle for “lover” can apply to a political commitment as well as a personal one, a commitment to an ally: Hiram is David’s אָהֵב (1 Kgs 5:1 [15]) and in Ezekiel’s day Jerusalem has to worry about its מְאַהֲבׅים (Jer 22:20, 22—the piel participle as here). Sex and marriage can be a metaphor for politics. Now in a patriarchal culture, a husband is expected to look after his wife and a wife is expected to look to him do so.[[328]](#footnote-328) That is the stance Israel is expected to take to its husband. But Samaria, standing for Ephraim, looked to Assyria. Ezekiel’s point, then, is not that war-making is wrong. It is that turning to nations for resources and support is wrong. Like other prophets, Ezekiel lays before his people a wildly unrealistic challenge to rely on God rather than earthly resources.

In political terms, Ezekiel may be being tough on Samaria, which was as much victim as delinquent in this relationship with Assyria. Shalmanezer III records receiving tribute from Jehu (*ANET*, 280, 281), and one might suspect that the arrangement did not come about on Jehu’s initiative. Adad-Nirari III is more explicit on that point (*ANET,* 281). The same may be true of Menahem’s payment to Tiglath-Pileser III (2 Kgs 15). But Ezekiel’s main concern is to prepare the way for his critique of Judah. And his going on to comment on the Assyrians’ lumps reflects the interweaving of religion and politics in international affairs. Nations form alliances and make war on the basis of the gods they believe in, such as democracy, liberalism, or socialism. In some respects, Ephraim will have had to acknowledge Assyrian gods as the price of a treaty relationship with Assyria. So whoring does imply a religious unfaithfulness as well as a political one.

**23:8–10** Nor was that all. Ezekiel’s reference to whoring in Egypt was not just a piece of history. Whoring and Egypt continued to go together, in that Ephraim went back on its relationship with Assyria and initiated negotiations for a relationship with Egypt (2 Kgs 17:1–4). Yahweh let Ephraim have its way, and it paid a price (2 Kgs 17:5–41), in the way women may pay a price for a relationship. The man Oholah fancied turned on her, and he exposed her. Literally, nowadays, such a man may post nude photographs on the internet. In Samaria’s case, the Assyrians exposed her feebleness and her stupidity. They turned on Oholah and her sons and daughters, the people of Ephraim, with violence, as the men to whom a woman has recourse may turn on her, whether or not she deserves it. They formulated their policies and made their decisions, their “rulings,” and implemented them. Vicious they were (2 Kgs 17:5–41). Obviously the exposure meant that other “women” (people like Aram, Ammon, and Moab) would be wise to learn the lesson of what happened to Ephraim. She became a name that one might use as an insult or a curse (2 Kgs 9:31; Isa 65:15) (Greenberg, 2:477). Her lifestyle had been the one she had followed in Egypt, and even if one takes into account the grim nature of her life there, it will have seemed better than the life she had subsequently, as Israel had felt in the wilderness (see Num 11 and 14; Jenson, 191).

**23:11–17** One might have thought that Oholibah would be among the women who learned a lesson from Oholah, but she wasn’t. First, Judah got involved with Assyria as Ephraim did (2 Kgs 16). Then things continued to develop in the Middle East, and Assyria went into decline. Judah reckoned it was now profitable to get involved with the upcoming Babylonian power, and became impressed with Babylonian culture. Perhaps Ezekiel implies a diplomatic visit to Babylon that 2 Kings does not record, or perhaps he is reflecting an acquaintance with Babylonian culture that he and his fellow-Kebarites gained through living in Babylonia. But the Babylonians even more than the Assyrians are “completely other” than Judahites, and the exiles in particular ought to be wary of them and stay distinctive from them rather than wanting or seeking to be like them.[[329]](#footnote-329) The description of the Babylonians’ coming to Jerusalem for a love fest might be an allusion to the visit in Hezekiah’s day (2 Kgs 20:12–19). But that dallying with Babylon was short-lived, and Oholibah’s spirit recoiling from Babylon might refer to her subsequent submitting to Assyria through Manasseh’s reign (2 Kgs 21).

**23:18–21** Yahweh goes on to summarize the grim story of Jerusalem’s relationships with Egypt, Assyria, and Babylon. The Assyrians exposed her and now she exposed herself. Yahweh had recoiled from her sister, and now recoils from her. She is thus in danger. But not only does she decline to take that possibility into account. Once again she turns to Egypt in light of her history with Egypt, which is the current political possibility in Ezekiel’s day, but Ezekiel pictures her as looking to be more than Egypt’s whore. “She had a desire for their concubines” in the sense that she wants to be one of them (Rashi, in MG). A concubine is not merely a lover or a mistress but more like a wife, albeit a secondary wife. She doesn’t have the same status as a primary wife, and specifically her children may not have the same inheritance or succession rights, but she has a legal status as a wife. The description of the Egyptian men’s sexual impressiveness is a metaphor for the way Judah sees Egypt’s political and military impressiveness, like that of Assyria earlier but more so. It’s an exaggeration, but it is how things seemed in the current political context.

**23:22–24a** Yahweh has switched from talking about Oholibah in the third person to addressing her in the second person, which has prepared the way for the ominous “therefore” that follows. Yahweh will draw the “lovers” in whom Judah has lost interest, and they will become its attackers, as happened once with Samaria in relation to Assyria.

Of the three unfamiliar names, Peqod is significant enough also to be mentioned in Jer 50:21 and in *ANET* 308; the Peduqu were a tribal group in Babylonia. In addition, their name makes a link with the verb “attend” in 23:21 (פָּקַד), which commonly refers to Yahweh’s “attending” in the sense of taking action against someone. It could thus add to the threatening implications of this allusion, though Ezekiel never uses the verb in this sense. The name Shoa could tellingly recall a verb that means “cry out” (שָׁוַע; BDB, 1002) while Qoa could suggest a verb known from later Hebrew that means “tear down” (קׅעְקַע; BDB, 891). These names may be deliberate perversions of the names of places in Babylonia such as Sutu and Qutu, which are otherwise known. “The Assyrians” will refer to the Assyrians who are now reduced to being part of the empire they once controlled.[[330]](#footnote-330) The description of these peoples in their possible impressiveness recalls what once attracted Ephraim about Assyria and attracted Judah about Babylon, but their impressiveness is now to work against Judah. If it were the case that in this chapter “the events’ historicity is immaterial,” then one might have to ask whether the chapter implied that “since her sexuality belongs to YHWH, Oholibah eventually faces punishment” (Bowen, 141). But actually, the historical significance of the events that feature in the parable is central to its significance.

**23:24b–27 “**I will” and “they will” interchange in 23:22–27 (Lind, 197), underlining the double causality of events. Yahweh decides what will happen. Nations decide what will happen. The two causalities are both significant, though Ezekiel notes how there can be tension between them. People such as the Babylonians will come as the agents of Yahweh’s ruling, Yahweh’s decision (מׅשְׁפָּט). But the bad news is even worse than that implies. They will actually operate on the basis of their own rulings, decisions, or policies, which are worse than Yahweh’s. Yes, Judah will be the victim of Yahweh’s passion (קׅנְְאָה). He feels strongly, he is really angry, and in this context the meaning of passion as jealousy is also appropriate. But the peoples who are his agents will themselves act in wrath—which as usual need not imply themselves feeling angry but does indicate acting with forceful violence, as if they were angry. In his own passion, Yahweh expresses in not-very-logical terms his awareness of the horror of what they will do. First, to add a specific example and to complement earlier expressions of what whoring brings, they will hack off the Judahites’ noses and ears, a known punishment in the ancient Near East (*ANET*, 180b, 215b). But “the last of you” whom they don’t mutilate they will kill. They will take off Oholibah’s offspring in forced migration, and they will also burn “the last of you.” That might refer to the burning of their bodies after they have been killed (which would finally stop Judah’s whoring) or the burning of their houses (see 23:47). But Ezekiel may be typically repeating himself in gory fashion with variations, doubling the horrific prospects before the Jerusalemites, and allowing for some people dying one way, some the other way.

Ashurnasirpal II (883-859) records, of a campaign to put down some rebels:

To the mountain of Kashiari I crossed, to Kinabu, the fortified city of Hulai, I drew near. With the masses of my troops and by my furious battle onset I stormed, I captured the city; 600 of their warriors I put to the sword; 3,000 captives I burned with fire; I did not leave a single one among them alive to serve as a hostage. Hulai, their governor, I captured alive. Their corpses I formed into pillars; their young men and maidens I burned in the fire. Hulai, their governor, I flayed, his skin I spread upon the wall of the city of Damdamusa; the city I destroyed, I devastated, I burned with fire.… From Kinabu I departed, to the city of Tela I drew near. The city was exceeding strong and was surrounded by three walls. The men trusted in their mighty walls and in their hosts, and did not come down, and did not embrace my feet. With battle and slaughter I stormed the city and captured it. 3,000 of their warriors I put to the sword; their spoil and their possessions, their cattle and their sheep I carried off. Many captives from among them I burned with fire, and many I took as living captives. From some I cut off their hands and their fingers, and from others I cut off their noses, their ears, and their fingers(?), of many I put out the eyes. I made one pillar of the living, and another of heads, and I bound their heads to posts (tree trunks) round about the city. Their young men and maidens I burned in the fire, the city I destroyed, I devastated, I burned it with fire and consumed it.[[331]](#footnote-331)

**23:28–30** Yahweh sums up his threat. He simply adds the note that the attackers will take away everything Judah has toiled for, “the referent—the Judahites—intruding into the metaphor” (Greenberg, 2:483).

**23:31** Yahweh begins a return to where we started, to the two sisters. First, he goes back to the way Oholibah had been following Oholah’s example and the consequences that had issued for Oholah (23:5–11). They will also issue for Oholibah. This line about her path and the chalice makes for a bridge between the prose threat and critique (23:28–30) and the threat that will follow in the five further poetic lines about the chalice (23:32–34), the fate mug (Pohlmann, 1:348). Yahweh’s getting people to drink from a poisoned chalice (more likely than simply getting them drunk) is a recurrent image for making people collapse or bringing about their defeat or causing their downfall (Ps 75:8 [9]; Isa 51:17–23; Jer 25:15–29; Lam 4:21; Hab 2:15–16). Its background is the theme of people formulating a plot to bring about a coup, which the plotters implement at a dinner party, or of a king entertaining other kings or envoys at a banquet, and poisoning them.

**23:32–34a** In the two bicola that form the first part of this poetic message, Ezekiel emphasizes the point by describing the gigantic size of the chalice. It is a huge bowl of wine that they cannot avoid drinking. The people who make them drink it will then be characterized by “laughter and derision” when they see what it does to their victims. Someone who drinks poison and is caused to fall about may indeed be like someone drunk, but they are also in terrible pain. Or there is a parallel between the way getting drunk may be fun but you may not be so enthusiastic about it when you are throwing up later. The chalice’s contents are “a profuseness to contain” in the sense of “a profuseness to endure” (כָּלׅיל from כּוּל: cf. Jer 10:10; Joel 2:11; Amos 7:10) (Rashi, in MG). More literally (23:33), this chalice implies “devastation and desolation.” The two words are almost the same (שַׁמָּה and שְׁמָמה), they can both suggest both material devastation and inner desolation, and they function as a hendiadys for desolating destruction. In addition, Samaria (שֹׁמְרוֹן) resonates with these two words, and with the words for drunkenness (שׁׅכָּוֹן) and suffering (יָגוֹן): they all end -*ôn*.

Oholibah will now have to drink it all, as her sister did. It will be as if she is trying to eat the bottom of the pottery chalice. The final line closes the little piece of poetry with some further outlandish and disturbing images. Through its position here, it also pairs in another distasteful way with the talk about breasts in 23:1–27. Drinking the chalice will make Oholibah beat her breasts in pain and grief (Isa 32:12) as if she is trying to tear them off. While beating the breasts is likely a familiar expression, it occurs less frequently in the First Testament than in the New Testament (Isa 32:12; Nah 2:7), and here it carries the irony that breasts have been significant in that different way previously in this chapter.

**23:34b–35** One more time Yahweh reaffirms that this is his message, adds a threatening “therefore,” and sums up its implications. On one hand, there is Oholibah’s waywardness, here summed up as putting Yahweh out of mind (cf. 22:12). Judah had put out of mind what it should have kept in mind, and had kept in mind what it should have put out of mind.[[332]](#footnote-332) More adventurously, Ezekiel describes Judah’s waywardness as throwing Yahweh behind its back (cf. 1 Kgs 14:9; Neh 9:26). On the other hand, there is therefore the warning that Judah has to accept responsibility for its willful actions and its whoring, and take the consequences that Yahweh has vividly described. It is a powerful conclusion, as MT recognizes by making 23:35 a stand-alone paragraph that might once have constituted the conclusion to 23:1–35.

**23:36** A new start follows, a supplement to the message so far that picks up from it but adds to it. and also picks up from preceding chapters so as to enable 23:36–49 to bring Ezek 1–23 to a conclusion. Yahweh begins with a bidding to Ezekiel “will you give a ruling” and declare to the sisters their “outrages,” which picks up from 22:1–2. He also begins rounding off this chapter by referring again to the two sisters together (cf. 23:1–4). Unexpectedly, he requires a ruling to be given to Oholah, who had been killed long ago (23:10), as well as to Oholibah. Yet this fits the subtle stance Ezekiel and other First Testament writings take to Ephraim. It’s been destroyed, but Yahweh is not finished with it. His resumed concern with both sisters and thus with both parts of Israel fits his eventual reference to intending to terminate willfulness “from the country” (23:48; Odell, 305). Yet he speaks here as if Ephraim is still in business as a people. It’s as if he has withdrawn from the real chronological moment and is addressing the two nations back in the ninth century, and is thus speaking as if Oholah is still in danger of Yahweh issuing a ruling about her, as Oholibah really is. He has indeed not finished with her, but she needs to think about her wrongdoing, actual and possible. In the Persian period, it would remind any current embodiment(s) of Yahweh’s people (when there is again both Samaria and Judah) that it may need to put itself into the position of the two sisters. “Here, it seems, is another means by which the prophet speaks of God’s judgment upon the whole house of Israel” (Darr, on 23:36–49).

**23:37** In specifying their outrages, Yahweh looks further back than Ezek 22 to summarize two sides to the sisters’ wrongdoing in terms of “adultery” and “blood” (see 16:38), to neither of which 23:1–35 referred. Terming the whoring of 23:1–35 as “adultery” heightens its offensiveness. Adding reference to blood broadens the critique there. Yahweh goes on to make it worse. It was the “lumps” with which the sisters committed adultery, They featured en passant in 23:7, but also earlier in 22:3–4 and prominently in 20:5–39. Further, the blood the sisters have on their hands is the blood of “the children that they bore me” (see 23:4) whom “they have passed” to the lumps (e.g., 16:21; 20:31)—passed “for eating,” he grossly adds (cf. 16:20). They then not only defiled themselves (23:7, 13, 17, 30) but defiled his sanctuary (cf. 5:11) by virtue of coming into the temple in their defiled state, after sacrificing a child. It would be easy to go there if they made their sacrifices in the Hinnom Ravine just below the temple mount (e.g., Jer 7:31–32). Either they didn’t see this act as incompatible with serving Yahweh, or they saw the sacrifice as offered to Yahweh. But even if they made the later assumption, the Prophets saw it as an offering to Molech (Jer 32:35).

**23:38–39** It seems that they made a point of letting the Sabbath be the occasion for offering such sacrifices and then praying in the temple—which would be logical, as it is their day off from work. They have thus de-consecrated the Sabbath, too. Ezekiel picks up this theme from earlier, too (e.g., 22:8), but tightens the screw by associating child sacrifice and Sabbath, as he looks for ways of underscoring the horror of what he describes. The repeated “on that day” also has this effect. So does the recollection of Lev 19:29–30, which juxtaposes treating one’s daughter as ordinary and causing her to whore, causing the country to whore and fill with willful wrongdoing, and keeping Yahweh’s Sabbath and being in awe of his sanctuary. Jonathan Edwards saw these verses as “A Warning to Professors” (which denotes anyone who professes to be a believer, but the modern meaning is also instructive) about “The Great Guilt of Those Who Attend on the Ordinances of Divine Worship, and Yet Allow Themselves in Any Known Wickedness.”[[333]](#footnote-333)

**23:40–44** Yahweh takes yet further the critique of the two sisters, as if they are both in a position to recall it in the present, and describes in more detail the way they entertained envoys from the empires. The event especially recalls 2 Kgs 20:12–19. Metaphorically, they made themselves as attractive as possible so as to win an alliance with whichever was the empire of the moment. Literally, the picture recalls Prov 7:17, and recalls it tellingly. They think they are being wise, which is Proverbs’ concern, but they are being stupid. In another biting irony, Ezekiel 1–23, having begun with “magnificence” (כָּבוֹד; 1:28, also, e.g., 8:4; 10:4; 11:23), is now closing with an ersatz version of the “magnficent” (כְּבוּדָה; 23:41) The references to “my incense” and “my oil” (cf. 16:28) suggest additional profanation and defilement. In the supplementary description of further excess, a banquet has become a drunken riot. The guests are more like uncivilized drunken louts than cultured sophisticates (see 23:14–15). They treat a married woman who is tired out with adultery, as if she is just any old whore whose services they can presume on.

**23:45** The declaration about what will follow makes for a conclusion to the critique in 23:36–44 while also constituting a bridge to the further warning that follows. Ezekiel continues to speak in allegory and with irony. The Torah has a ruling for women and men committing adultery (Lev 20:10) and a rule for murderers (24:17). It’s a theoretical ruling—the Torah lays down the death penalty for many offenses and we don’t know that it was ever implemented. Its aim is to make a point about how serious these offenses are (see the verse-by-verse comment on 16:38). Arguably the same is true of Yahweh’s own words here. He did not actually put Israel to death. But to some extent, at least, Yahweh’s agents “will act on rulings against you” (16:41). Not surprisingly, it will be “faithful people” who do so: faithful people are people who implement the Torah. The irony is that when we move outside the allegory, the faithful people are people like the Babylonians. Ezekiel speaks the way Isa 49:24 will: they will be the people who faithfully (but unconsciously) implement what Yahweh says.

**23:46–48** Yahweh puts the threat more literally and in terms that found literal fulfillment in 587, though still with interplay between the allegorical and the literal, and still in a way that involves restating earlier warnings. The major source of these verses is 16:40–41. To the threats there, Yahweh adds “horror” and “plundering” and people killing sons and daughters (cf. 23:25), and the assembly putting a stop to willfulness (cf. 23:27). The “women” (which chiefly means the men who comprise most of the political decision-makers) will specifically let themselves learn a lesson through what they see, and will thus not follow the willfulness of the two “sisters” (which again chiefly means the men). “By ‘women’ here understand, cities, provinces, nations, which seeing the just judgments of God upon these whorish women, Aholah and Aholibah, might learn to beware of such sins, and not to go out from God, having once given up themselves to him, lest they draw such severe and shameful punishments upon themselves” (Greenhill, 569).

**23:49** A summary brings to a close Ezek 23:36–49, and Ezek 23 as a whole, and Part Three of the Ezekiel scroll, and the pre-587 almost-half of the entire Ezekiel scroll. The people who bring up the assembly will have ensured that the sisters carry the consequences of the willfulness expressed in serving their lumps. “Put” is נָתַן, which most often means “give”: as we say, “they will give it to them.” The final sentence offers another reminder of the interweaving of allegorical and literal in this message, as “your … you … you … your” is feminine, then the final “you” is masculine. Except insofar as there is a positive note in 23:49b, “with words of judgment, and without a ray of hope to lighten the darkness of the picture, the prophet closes this last survey of his people's history” (Stalker, 197).

### Biblical Theology Comments

In what has been called a “virtually obsessive investigation of Jerusalem’s sexual impurity,”[[334]](#footnote-334) Ezek 23 has been seen as manifesting a hostility to women that is not surprising given that “with few exceptions, the literature of antiquity was written by men for men” so that it reflects “the ambiguity, suspicion, and fear aroused by female allure” (Blenkinsopp, 99).[[335]](#footnote-335) Actually, Ezekiel is not speaking about womanhood, and certainly not about womanhood as opposed to manhood. He is expounding an allegory. Iinferring from the allegory a stance to womanhood makes unwarranted assumptions about the link between the reality he is describing and the figurative language he uses to describe it (between the tenor and the vehicle). The question of whether a prophet had a feeling of ambiguity, suspicion, and fear cannot be answered from his allegory, nor is it possible to establish whether or not First Testament writers were affected by such ambiguity, suspicion, and fear, but the First Testament text itself gives no indication of such attitudes outside their allegories. There is no treating women as the other in the First Testament. It recognizes women’s role as prophets and people who are smart, and portrays them as full members of the community (e.g., Deut 29:11 [12]; 31:12; Josh 8:35; 1 Sam 1–2; Ezra 10).

The focus in Ezek 23 and other passages in the prophets that refer to whoring lies on critique of a culture in which men held the major formal power. Ezek 23 speaks only about two women who feature as metaphors and it actually speaks more broadly about the men it literally refers to, concerning whom it has only negative things to say. The chapter is thus more negative about men than about women. Further, if the prophets were giving covert expression to a sense of ambiguity, suspicion, and fear that was endemic in a patriarchal context, and to an anti-feminine attitude, one might expect that male commentators in patriarchal contexts over the centuries would note the prophecy’s implications for critique of women. But they do not. They know that when Ezekiel is talking about women, he is actually talking about men, and that it is the men who have to face the commentators’ critique (see, e.g., Jerome, 256–68; Greenhill, 560–70; and see further the “Biblical Theology comments on Ezek 16.

### Application and Devotional Implications

Whether or not Ezekiel had a sense of ambiguity, suspicion, and fear of women, such a sense can be a reality in the modern world and the modern church. Perhaps “revenge porn” and “slut-shaming” were realities in Israel, and this is why it is powerful for Ezekiel to adapt them. Certainly they are realities in the modern world.[[336]](#footnote-336) While Ezekiel does not engage in them in order to get at women, the feminist critique of Ezekiel implies the possibility that Ezekiel might be used that way, a possibility that modern readers should be aware of. Likewise Ezekiel does not suggest an acceptance of domestic abuse as a husband’s right, but domestic abuse is an issue in Christian and non-Christian contexts.[[337]](#footnote-337)

Reviled by many for glorifying violence, especially against women, rap is subject to the same critiques leveled at Ezekiel. But the ugliness and brutality of rap is a form of truth telling. Rap reflects the ugliness and brutality of society. The social context that produces rap is the violence of poverty and racism that swallows entire lives and communities. When daily life is a constant barrage of violence in the streets, drug culture, gang culture, discrimination, and disinterest by the rest of society, violent language is but a mirror of violent life. And so it is with Ezekiel. If Ezekiel’s language physically nauseates people, it is because the world it describes is nauseating. The language of violent assault and rape expressed in Ezekiel mirrors the violence of war and siege. Ezekiel, like rap, is writing from the perspective of a brutalized people. (Bowen, 144).

Christians and Jews live in such a context. And whether or not “the female and the male sexual identities are fractured in Ezekiel 23 and God is portrayed there in “horrific” ways,”[[338]](#footnote-338) it can seem that this is so or people in our world, which makes Ezek 23 either a message that can have the effect of deepening the problems or one that could be a positive aid to debate about it. Moving beyond this problem is the task to be undertaken.[[339]](#footnote-339)

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1. On the introductory phrase as a marker here, see Mayfield, “Re-examination,” 142–44. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. See the translation footnote on 2:6. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. While the general meaning of 12:10b is reasonably clear, it reads rather “incoherently” (Allen 1:172), perhaps because Ezekiel wants to juxtapose נָשֹׅיא (prince) and מַשָֹּא(lifting) from נָשָֹא (lift; 12:6, 7; Greenberg, 1:212), and perhaps also has in mindמַשָֹּא meaning “utterance” and also meaning “burden” in the sense presupposed by Jer 23:33–40. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. We do not know the precise meaning of אֲגַף, an Akkadian loan word occurring only in Ezekiel and only in the pl. (17:21; 38:6, 9, 22; 39:4), but army divisions must be about right. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Vg. translates אֶל “in,” but “in Israel’s land” seems an odd way to describe Jerusalem. LXX’s ẻπì neatly preserves MT’s ambiguity. For the translation *concerning*, see BDB, 40. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. LXX and Vg. translate “because of the violence,” but if 12:19b is a bicolon,\* then מׅן more likely has the same meaning in both parallel cola. Whereas LXX took חָמָס to mean lawlessness in 7:11, 23, here it takes it to mean “impiety”; Vg. again has *iniquitas*, injustice. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. See further Sweeney, “[Ezekiel's Conceptualization](https://www.mohrsiebeck.com/en/article/ezekiels-conceptualization-of-the-exile-in-intertextual-perspective-101628219222712802916835?no_cache=1)”; Levitt Kohn, “As Though You Yourself Came Out.” [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. See Othmar Keel, *The Symbolism of the Biblical World: Ancient Near Eastern Iconography and the Book of Psalms* (reprinted Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1997), 89–95. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Gile, “Deuteronomy,” 289–90. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. So Thambyrajah, “Etymology.” [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. In 33:24 this expression has to mean “on Israel’s land” not “about Israel’s land,” and so it will here (cf. 28:25; 36:17; 37:14; 39:26). See further Scatolini, “עדמת ישראל¯על.” [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. The verbs in 12:25 are *yiqtols* (except for the final *weqatal*),\* and LXX and Vg. translate them as future. I take the opening ones, at least, as general statements that undergird any declarations about the future that Yahweh makes now. “It will happen” (וְיֵעָשֶֹה) is likewise a logical rather than chronological future. The final *yiqtol* and *weqatal* might also be a general statement and a logical rather than chronological future, if the topic continues to be declarations Yahweh has already made but not yet fulfilled, not statements he intends to make. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. See the translation footnote on 12:19. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. While הוֺי (cf. 13:18; 34:2) often introduces a rebuke and threat, it does not mean “Woe” and it can be simply an attention drawer (e.g., Isa 55:1). [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. With the unusual use of לְבׅלְתּׅי, cf. Jer 23:14; 27:18. *TTH* 41 thinks the text needs emending every time, but MT looks like an example of a prophet turning a statement of result into a statement of purpose because the result could have been foreseen but the person acting still acted. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. That is, *my people* (which is grammatically sg., as it can be in English). [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. The verb is now f., indicating that “it” is Jerusalem (cf. 13:16) (Lind, 110; cf. Qimchi in MG). [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. אַצּׅילֵי יָדַי, “literally, “joints of hands” (יָדַי is apparebtly an odd shortened dual: see GK 87f). [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. On the form לׇכֶנֶה, “belong to you,” see GK 103f. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. While *DTT* has one verb פָּרַט that can mean both bud and fly, BDB lists two homonyms,\* though it puts the term for the young of a bird, אֶפְרַׄח, under the first. Given that link, this participle (only in this verse does the meaning “fly” occur) instead of the usual word for “bird” hints at flying fledglings and thus underlines the sharpness of the critique. The preposition לְ is also puzzling, but Ezekiel is loose with prepositions. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. Literally, “the downfall of their waywardness”; similarly when the phrase recurs. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. The expression is a variant on the regular emphatic sequence of inf. abs. followed by finite verb, the inf. being אׅדָּרֺשׁ instead of the expected הׅדָּרֺשׁ. The verb is a “tolerative niphal” (GK 51c). There are others in 14:4, 7, and further instnaces of this verb in 20:3, 31; 36:37. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. שׁוּבוּ וְהָשׁׅיבוּ, qal followed by inwardly transitive hiphil. A regular hiphil follows later in the verse. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. On מֵעַל, see BDB, 759. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. The jussive וְיַעַל thus appears in something close to a purpose clause (see *TTH* 171, 172; cf. JM 116de). [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. בּׅי, literally “by me.” [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. Lust (“Major Divergences,” 85–86) infers that it is a later addition to the text. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. כָּל־חָזוון, “every-revelation,” counts as one word in Hebrew. [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. Sedlmeier, “Füchse.” [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. On the process implied, see Davies, “Archaeological Commentary,” 117–21. [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. Origen’s Hexapla quotes a version that uses the word φυλακτήρια (see Field, *Origenis Hexaplorum quae supersunt*, 2:800). [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. Cf. Berlejung, “Divine Presence.” [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. See *ANET*, 349–51; cf. Bowen, “Daughters”; Adrien Janis Bledstein, “Was Habbiryâ a Healing Ritual Performed by a Woman in King David’s House?” *Biblical Research* 37 (1992): 15–31; Hannah Marcuson, “‘Word of the Old Woman’: Studies in Female Ritual Practice in Hittite Anatolia,” Diss., University of Chicago, 2016; Tzvi Abusch, *The Witchcraft Series****Maqlû* (Atlanta: SBL, 2015); Daniel** Schwemer, “Magic Rituals: Conceptualization and Performance.” In Karen Radner and Eleanor Robson, ed., *The Oxford Handbook of* *Cuneiform Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 418–42. [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
34. Evans, “Death-Dealing,” 81. [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
35. Hiebel, “Hope,” 4. [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
36. Cf. Boadt, “Poetry,” 19 (he begins the sequence with 15:1–8). [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
37. חַיָּה רָעָה is collective. [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
38. But contrast Wahl, “Noah.” [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
39. Cf. Strine, “Repentance,” 471. [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
40. Ahn, “Ezekiel 15.” [↑](#footnote-ref-40)
41. Greenberg, “Notes,” 32. [↑](#footnote-ref-41)
42. Walther Zimmerli, *The Fiery Throne: The Prophets and Old Testament Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2003), 1–2. [↑](#footnote-ref-42)
43. Schöpflin, “Composition.” [↑](#footnote-ref-43)
44. Renz, *Rhetotical Function*, 144–48, 166–72. [↑](#footnote-ref-44)
45. Gile, “Song of Moses.” [↑](#footnote-ref-45)
46. Kamionkowski, *Gender* *Reversal*, 92–133. [↑](#footnote-ref-46)
47. Galambush, *Jerusalem*, 124, 162. [↑](#footnote-ref-47)
48. Block 1:472, following Henry van Dyke Parunak, “Structural Studies in Ezekiel”(Diss., Harvard, 1978), 252–53. [↑](#footnote-ref-48)
49. Greenberg, “Ezekiel 16,” 143. [↑](#footnote-ref-49)
50. Haag et al., “Ezekiel 16,” 210. [↑](#footnote-ref-50)
51. See further McKenzie, *History*, 149–214. [↑](#footnote-ref-51)
52. מְכֺרָה or מְכוּרָה or מְכֻרָה occurs only in Ezekiel (cf. 21:30 [35]; 29:14) and its precise meaning is unknown (BDB lists it under כּוּר), but its general sense is clear from the context. LXX and Vg. have “root.” [↑](#footnote-ref-52)
53. The quasi-object אֺתָךְ “you” follows, as if הוּלֶדֶת were a hiphil inf., not a hophal; so also 16:5. [↑](#footnote-ref-53)
54. מׅשְׁעׅי is a hapax whose meaning is guessed from the context. [↑](#footnote-ref-54)
55. Or “disdain for your life” (נַפְשֵׁךְ). [↑](#footnote-ref-55)
56. While pl. דָּמַיׅךְ would most often imply bloodshed, here it might denote the flow of blood associated with giving birth (Lev 12). [↑](#footnote-ref-56)
57. רְבָבָה, literally “profuseness”: on the use of the abstract noun, see Greenberg, 1:276, and compare the use of the abstract nouns “bareness and nakedness” later in the verse. [↑](#footnote-ref-57)
58. עֵרֹם וְעֶרְוָה, literally “bareness and nakedness.” Cf. 16:22, 39. [↑](#footnote-ref-58)
59. דּוֺדׅים as opposed to אַהֲבָה (Greenberg, 1:277). [↑](#footnote-ref-59)
60. Literally, “adorned you [with] adornment.” [↑](#footnote-ref-60)
61. This puzzling phrase, לֺא בָּאוֺת וְלֺא יׅהְיֶה (“perhaps an idiom”: Greenberg, 1:280), may be a comment that the things are actual, but should not be at all. See 16:19 and the footnote. [↑](#footnote-ref-61)
62. A euphemism for big penises, a metaphor for impressive manliness and strength. [↑](#footnote-ref-62)
63. זׅמָּה, “willfulness,” depends quasi-adverbially or epexegetically on דַרְכֵךְ (DG 39 remark 1; GK 131r). Like the English word, etymologically זׅמָּה suggests simply thinking something through and making a decision, but it characteristically denotes a decision that then expresses deliberate wrongdoing (cf. 16:43, 58). [↑](#footnote-ref-63)
64. Literally, “because of the nonexistence of your fullness.” [↑](#footnote-ref-64)
65. כְּנַעַן, “Canaan,” had become a term for “merchant,” which might be momentarily confusing; thus כּשְֺדִּימָה removes any uncertainty. [↑](#footnote-ref-65)
66. For this expression cf. 23:5; Num 5:19, 20, 29 (Greenberg, 1:284). [↑](#footnote-ref-66)
67. Literally, “it was not whored.” [↑](#footnote-ref-67)
68. נְחשֶׁת usually means “bronze,” but that meaning makes poor sense, so perhaps the word is a homonym,\* a hapax whose meaning has to be guessed from the context. Brownlee (217) translates “brazenness,” LXX “money,” which would make ironic sense when bronze had become a raw material for coinage. [↑](#footnote-ref-68)
69. Ezekiel uses קָהָל to denote an army assembled for attack (e.g., 17:17; 26:7). [↑](#footnote-ref-69)
70. The negative carries over from the first verb, as in 16:47, and 11:11 (Greenberg, 1:288). [↑](#footnote-ref-70)
71. The sentence is an unmarked question. [↑](#footnote-ref-71)
72. Literally, “Like her mother, her daughter.” [↑](#footnote-ref-72)
73. The expression אֲחוֹת אֲחוֹתֵךְ, “sisterofyoursisters,”introduces the difficulty of telling when Ezekiel refers to sg. sister and when to pl. sisters in 16:45–61. [↑](#footnote-ref-73)
74. The hiphil וַתַּשְׁחׅתׅי is inwardly transitive. [↑](#footnote-ref-74)
75. On “I am alive” and such “if” statements, see 5:11. [↑](#footnote-ref-75)
76. In the expression וְשַׁבְתִּי אֶת שְׁבוּת, שׁוּב qal must be transitive, as if it were hiphil. The usage is virtually confined to this compound phrase (see *HALOT*). LXX, Vg., and Tg. take the phrase to mean “I will bring back your exile,” linking שְׁבוּת with the verb שָׁבָה. This fits most occurrences of the phrase, but not this one nor (e.g.) Job 42:10. More likely the noun derives its meaning from its similarity to שׁוּב. [↑](#footnote-ref-76)
77. See Yedida Eisenstat, “Ezekiel in the Jewish Tradition,” in *OHE*. [↑](#footnote-ref-77)
78. Malul, “Adoption,” argues that the description of Yahweh’s action is in effect a description of adoption, but contrast Koller, “Pornography,” 407–12; Kamionkowski, “In your Blood.” [↑](#footnote-ref-78)
79. Oeming, “Deine Zeit.” [↑](#footnote-ref-79)
80. See further Kemp, *Ezekiel, Law*, 145–66. [↑](#footnote-ref-80)
81. See Mein, “Awkward God,” 272–73. [↑](#footnote-ref-81)
82. See, e.g., J. H. Schwartz, F.D. Houghton, L. Bondioli, and R. Macchiarelli, “Two Tales of One City: Data, Inference and Carthaginian Infant Sacrifice,” *Antiquity* 91 (2017): 442–54. [↑](#footnote-ref-82)
83. See the Assyrian and Babylonian annals and inscriptions in *ANET* and in Christopher B. Hays, *Hidden Riches: A Sourcebook for the Comparative Study of the Hebew Bible and Ancient Near East* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2014), 213–31. [↑](#footnote-ref-83)
84. Zsolnay, “Inadequacies,” 58. [↑](#footnote-ref-84)
85. Hays, *Hidden Riches*, 224; *ANET*, 288. [↑](#footnote-ref-85)
86. See Bibb, “Patriarchal Translation,” 342. [↑](#footnote-ref-86)
87. Cf. Day, “Prostitute.” [↑](#footnote-ref-87)
88. See Peterson, “Sin of Sodom.” [↑](#footnote-ref-88)
89. Hoezee “‘Live!’” 88. [↑](#footnote-ref-89)
90. Kim, “Perils,” 193; see *ANET*, 637–45. [↑](#footnote-ref-90)
91. Odell, “Inversion,” 109. [↑](#footnote-ref-91)
92. Cf. Dohmen, “Nicht wegen deines Bundes.” [↑](#footnote-ref-92)
93. Odell, “Inversion.” [↑](#footnote-ref-93)
94. See Wong, *Retribution*. [↑](#footnote-ref-94)
95. Brenner, “Reflections,” 71. [↑](#footnote-ref-95)
96. Moughtin-Mumby, *Metaphors*, 201. [↑](#footnote-ref-96)
97. See further Peggy Day, “Adulterous Jerusalem”; Peggy Day, “Bitch”; contrast Linda Day, “Rhetoric.” [↑](#footnote-ref-97)
98. See Dempsey, “Whore.” [↑](#footnote-ref-98)
99. See Sloane, “Aberrant Textuality?” [↑](#footnote-ref-99)
100. Zoutewdaw, “A Grotesque Attack,” 65. [↑](#footnote-ref-100)
101. Tan, “Judith’s Embodiment,” 34. The internal quotation is from Kathy Davis, ‘Embody-ing Theory: Beyond Modernist and Postmodernist Readings of the Body,” in Davis (ed.), *Embodied Practices: Feminist Perspectives on the Body* (London: Sage, 1997), 1–23 (5)he quote at the end of Davis’s statement is from Susan Bordo, *Unbearable Weight: Feminism, Western Culture, and the Body* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 5. [↑](#footnote-ref-101)
102. But see Zucker and Reiss, “Ezekiel as Misogynist”; Halperin, *Seeking Ezekiel*. [↑](#footnote-ref-102)
103. See further Wu, *Honor*. [↑](#footnote-ref-103)
104. Odell, “Inversion,” 105. [↑](#footnote-ref-104)
105. Stiebert, “Shame”; see further Stiebert, *Construction of Shame*, 129–64. [↑](#footnote-ref-105)
106. Odendaal, “South African Annotation,” 484. [↑](#footnote-ref-106)
107. See Lapsley, “Shame.” [↑](#footnote-ref-107)
108. Molnár-Hídvégi, “Paths,” 90. [↑](#footnote-ref-108)
109. Hamilton, “Riddles.” [↑](#footnote-ref-109)
110. Rom-Shiloni, “Nature Imagery, 95–102. [↑](#footnote-ref-110)
111. On the hapax\* קָח, see Allen, 251; *CTAT*,115–18. [↑](#footnote-ref-111)
112. Though the meaning of the hapax צַפְצַף seems clear (see *DTT*, 1298), the tree doesn’t seem actually to be willow-like, which perhaps lies behind alternative understandings in (e.g.) LXX. [↑](#footnote-ref-112)
113. One would expect “its branches,” but the thing signified (here, Zedekiah) can poke through an allegory. Because “eagle” is m., Ezekiel can speak simultaneously of the symbol and the thing signified (Pharaoh) using m. [↑](#footnote-ref-113)
114. That is, for the other eagle to enable the vine to drink. [↑](#footnote-ref-114)
115. תִּצְמָח is an unmarked question and a single-word colon, carrying emphasis. [↑](#footnote-ref-115)
116. Presumably the first eagle. [↑](#footnote-ref-116)
117. קָסַס is a hapax whose meaning has to be guessed from the context. [↑](#footnote-ref-117)
118. “The entire Hebrew alphabet is found in this verse, and I am puzzled that it is not listed in the Masorah” (Rashi, in MG). [↑](#footnote-ref-118)
119. Literally, “the terraces of its growth.” [↑](#footnote-ref-119)
120. That is, “got” them into the covenant (Allen 1:252). [↑](#footnote-ref-120)
121. On “I am alive” and such incomplete self-curses, see 5:11. Another follows in 17:19. [↑](#footnote-ref-121)
122. The simple *waw* clause is resumptive and functions like a coordinating simple *­waw* clause referring to the same event as the one that precedes (see, e.g., *TTH,* 131–32; DG 84). [↑](#footnote-ref-122)
123. The *wayyiqtol\** follows the extraposed\* clause (*TTH*, 123α). [↑](#footnote-ref-123)
124. The lines in 17:22 hold back the object of לָקַח and נָתַן (get, put) until the fourth colon, and then of שָׁתַל (bed)until 17:23. The verbs in the two middle cola in 17:22 come in the reverse of logical order (plucking comes before putting). “[A] tender [one]”(רַךְ) functioning asa noun occurs only here. While צַמֶּרֶת, יֹנְקוֹתָיו, and קָטַף (crown, its shoots, pluck) did occur in 17:3–4, they are rare words (and “its shoots”is differently formed there). There are no great difficulties about the lines’ translation (though LXX manifests some difficulty with them) but they do stretch the readers, keep them on their toes, and heighten expectations (Block 1:548). [↑](#footnote-ref-124)
125. A synecdoche for every winged creature—another way of saying every bird. [↑](#footnote-ref-125)
126. I follow LXX in taking the *qatal\** verbs as gnomic. [↑](#footnote-ref-126)
127. Vanderhooft, “Ezekiel,” 116. [↑](#footnote-ref-127)
128. *ANET*, 531–41, has examples of such treaties between ancient near Eastern monarchs with their appeals to their gods. [↑](#footnote-ref-128)
129. It might hint at hope concerning Jehoiachin (Block, “Tender Cedar Sprig”). [↑](#footnote-ref-129)
130. See further McKay, “Political Reading.” [↑](#footnote-ref-130)
131. Owen, “Advantage,” 317; cf. Beckwith, 96. [↑](#footnote-ref-131)
132. Osborne, “Afterlife”; cf. Cho, “Rabbinic Understanding.” [↑](#footnote-ref-132)
133. Funk, “Looking-Glass Tree.” [↑](#footnote-ref-133)
134. See further Mol, *Collective and Individual Responsibility*. [↑](#footnote-ref-134)
135. Andrew Mein, *Ezekiel and the Ethics of Exile* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 184. [↑](#footnote-ref-135)
136. Matties, *Ezekiel 18,* 222. [↑](#footnote-ref-136)
137. Saur, “Verantwortung.” [↑](#footnote-ref-137)
138. See Lapsley, *Bones*. [↑](#footnote-ref-138)
139. “On” rather than “concerning”: see Lust, “Sour Grapes”; Scatolini, “על אדמת ישראל“; and the translation footnote on 12:22. [↑](#footnote-ref-139)
140. בֹּסֶר is not confined to grapes (Rashi, in MG). [↑](#footnote-ref-140)
141. On “I am alive” andthe incomplete self-curse, see 5:11. [↑](#footnote-ref-141)
142. For “people/persons” (נֶפֶשׁ), translations traditionally have “soul,” which is all right if the word “soul” has the sense it has in an expression such as “the ship went down with all souls,” but it is misleading if it implies soul rather than body. See, e.g., 17:17; 22:25, 27. [↑](#footnote-ref-142)
143. חָטָא; see on 3:21. [↑](#footnote-ref-143)
144. A hendiadys\*: literally, “a ruling and faithfulness.” [↑](#footnote-ref-144)
145. For the quasi-adverbial construction, cf. 16:27. There is another instance in 18:7. [↑](#footnote-ref-145)
146. The piel of הָלַךְ (see BDB) brings the list towards its climax. [↑](#footnote-ref-146)
147. An irreal or hypothetical *qatal\** (cf. 24:13; 33:5, 9; GK 106p; *IBHS* 30.5.4b; DG 60). [↑](#footnote-ref-147)
148. Literally “one from one,” if אָח is a shortening of אֶחָד. [↑](#footnote-ref-148)
149. That is, the father, as LXX makes explicit. [↑](#footnote-ref-149)
150. An unmarked question. [↑](#footnote-ref-150)
151. The first “hasseen” had the usual apocopated form וַיַּרְא, the second has the long form וַיִּרְאֶה, which draws attention to it. [↑](#footnote-ref-151)
152. The verb is *qatal*; contrast NRSV’s “why should the son not suffer,” perhaps implying an irreal or hypothetical *qatal*, as NRSV does more explicitly in 18:10 (see the translation footnote). KJV nicely solves the oddity of this question in the context by translating, “Why? doth not the son bear,” but this is hardly justifiable. [↑](#footnote-ref-152)
153. Another unmarked question. [↑](#footnote-ref-153)
154. That is, the turning and the committing (Greenberg, 2:674–75). [↑](#footnote-ref-154)
155. The “you” is pl. [↑](#footnote-ref-155)
156. For the qal of שׁוּב followed by inwardly transitive hiphil, see 14:6. [↑](#footnote-ref-156)
157. See the translation footnote on 14:6. [↑](#footnote-ref-157)
158. But in Jer 31:29–30 the verb is *qatal*: see Hutton, “Parents.” [↑](#footnote-ref-158)
159. See Wöhrle, “Was habt ihr.“ [↑](#footnote-ref-159)
160. William McKane, *Proverbs: A New Approach*, OTL (London: SCM, 1970), 29–30 (Allen 1:270–71). [↑](#footnote-ref-160)
161. Barth, *CD* 4,2: 565–566. [↑](#footnote-ref-161)
162. See Feinstein, *Sexual Pollution*; Erbele-Küster, “Eat this Scroll.” [↑](#footnote-ref-162)
163. Launderville, “Imaginary,” 14. [↑](#footnote-ref-163)
164. Manton, “Ezekiel xviii. 23,” 463. [↑](#footnote-ref-164)
165. On Calvin’s argument, see Muller, “Two Wills” [↑](#footnote-ref-165)
166. Barth, *CD* 3,2: 616–17. [↑](#footnote-ref-166)
167. Matties, *Ezekiel 18*,59. [↑](#footnote-ref-167)
168. Martin Luther, *On the Bondage of the Will; to the Venerable Mister Erasmus of Rotterdam* (*1525*), translated by Edward Thomas Vaughan (London: Hamilton, 1823), 178–79 (cf. Beckwith, 103). [↑](#footnote-ref-168)
169. Clytemnestra, in Seneca, *Agamemnon*, 243 (Trapp, 441–42). [↑](#footnote-ref-169)
170. Maurais, “Ézéchiel 18.” [↑](#footnote-ref-170)
171. Greenberg (1:338–39) also notes Hittite examples in the “Instructions for Temple Officials” and the “Plague Prayers of Mursilis” (*ANET*, 207–9, 394–96). [↑](#footnote-ref-171)
172. Given that the unfinished commentary on Ezekiel was Calvin’s last, his commentary on this chapter constitutes his final statement on justification by works (Coxhead, “Calvin’s Interpretation,” 307). [↑](#footnote-ref-172)
173. Lee, “Sour Grapes.” [↑](#footnote-ref-173)
174. Cf. Crouch, “Ezekiel,” 203. [↑](#footnote-ref-174)
175. Lapsley, *Bones*, 190. [↑](#footnote-ref-175)
176. Saur discusses the interrelationship of the chapters in "Prächtige Zeder.“ [↑](#footnote-ref-176)
177. Prinsloo, “Lions and Vines, “ 355. [↑](#footnote-ref-177)
178. Botha, “Ezekiel 19.” [↑](#footnote-ref-178)
179. Lioness, puma, and cougar are random translations of different words for lion; we do not know the difference between the three Heb. words for big cats, לְבִיָּא, אֲרִי, and כְּפִיר. [↑](#footnote-ref-179)
180. יָחַל niphal otherwise occurs only in Gen 8:12; 1 Sam 13:8, each time denoting waiting that is disappointed. Zimmerli (1:389) describes LXX’s alternative versions of this elliptical\* verb as “etymologically obscure.” [↑](#footnote-ref-180)
181. See the textual note on 17:7. [↑](#footnote-ref-181)
182. The verb יָדַע usually means “know” or “acknowledge,” but it can be a euphemism for having sex (e.g., Gen 4:1, 17, 25). The suffix on אַלְמְנוֹתָיו is collective sg., picking up the sg. אָדָם in the previous colon (Rashi, in MG). [↑](#footnote-ref-182)
183. On סוּגַר, see Block, 1:597. [↑](#footnote-ref-183)
184. בַּמְּצֹדוֹת ; LXX has “in custody,” suggesting an abstract plural [↑](#footnote-ref-184)
185. עֲבׄתִים; but עָבוֹת is “clouds,” and Ezekiel would surely be happy for readers to pick up both resonances, as in 31:3, 10, 14. [↑](#footnote-ref-185)
186. The “they” is presumably the stems, boughs, or tendrils, and the *weqatal*\* verb perhaps indicates that the withering did not simply follow the breaking. [↑](#footnote-ref-186)
187. For וַתְּהִי, “it became,” LXX and Vg. have “and it will become,” but the *wayyiqtol*\*makes sense as a past tense verb. [↑](#footnote-ref-187)
188. Cf. Beentjes, “Lioness,” 26–31. Korpel (“Kryptogramme”) suggests that the figure goes back to Jezebel. [↑](#footnote-ref-188)
189. Scholem, “Ezekiel Chapter 19,“ 330. [↑](#footnote-ref-189)
190. See Carvalho, “Mother.” [↑](#footnote-ref-190)
191. Begg, “Zedekiah.” [↑](#footnote-ref-191)
192. On Ezekiel in Edwards more broadly, see Tooman, “Edwards’s Ezekiel.” [↑](#footnote-ref-192)
193. Crouch, “Before and after,” 354. [↑](#footnote-ref-193)
194. Peterson, “Ezekiel’s Perspective,” 295. [↑](#footnote-ref-194)
195. Osborne, “Irony.” [↑](#footnote-ref-195)
196. See Jarrard, “Legal Allusion.” [↑](#footnote-ref-196)
197. Newsom, “Rhyme,”, 225. [↑](#footnote-ref-197)
198. Cf. Levitt Kohn, “Mighty Hand.” [↑](#footnote-ref-198)
199. Patton, “Pan-Deuteronomism,” 205. [↑](#footnote-ref-199)
200. Niccacci, “Exodus,” 29. [↑](#footnote-ref-200)
201. Eslinger, “Ezekiel 20.” [↑](#footnote-ref-201)
202. Krüger, “Transformation,” 171. [↑](#footnote-ref-202)
203. Another “tolerative niphal”; cf. 14:3–4, and the recurrences in 20:31. [↑](#footnote-ref-203)
204. On “I am alive” and the incomplete self-curse here and in 20:31 and 33, see 5:11. [↑](#footnote-ref-204)
205. The *wayyiqtol\** וָאֶשָֹּא יָדׅי follows the extraposed\* temporal expression (*TTH* 127β). [↑](#footnote-ref-205)
206. See 3:3. [↑](#footnote-ref-206)
207. שׁׅקּוּצֵי עֵיכֵיהֶם, literally, “the detestable things of your eyes.” [↑](#footnote-ref-207)
208. Here and in 20:14 EVV have “but”; contrast LXX and Vg. (see Giffone, “Anger”). Cf. also 20:22. [↑](#footnote-ref-208)
209. That is, the Israelites. [↑](#footnote-ref-209)
210. Literally, “make an end of them,” but the noun כָּלָה, “end,” is related to the verb כָּלָה “consuming” in 20:13. [↑](#footnote-ref-210)
211. JM 172a suggests that the *weqatal*\* וַהֲשׁׅבֹתׅי is adversative (cf. Vg.), but this does not fit the context (Aq., Theod., Sym. have “and”— LXX lacks the phrase). Rather the finite verb continues from the inf. כַּלּוׄת (“consuming”). [↑](#footnote-ref-211)
212. 20:23 and 25 begin with גַם, suggesting “both … and” (BDB, 169). Each is followed by the semantically unnecessary אֲנׅי. [↑](#footnote-ref-212)
213. כַעַס קָרְבָּנָם, literally, “the enragement of their offering.” [↑](#footnote-ref-213)
214. “The shrine” is הַבָּמָה; “the ones coming” is הַבָּאִים. [↑](#footnote-ref-214)
215. "Disciplinary bond” is a double translation of the hapax\* מָסׄרֶת. Aq links the word with אָסַר “bind” (cf. BDB, 64), which often implies tie up and imprison as in 3:25 (cf. Vg.), Syr. links it with יָסַר “discipline, chasten” (cf. BDB, 416), and Theod. links it with מָסַר “deliver, transmit” (cf. BDB 588, *TTH*, 810–11). [↑](#footnote-ref-215)
216. Dramatically, the if-clause leaves unstated what will follow; it resembles a self-curse (see 5:11). [↑](#footnote-ref-216)
217. On תְּרוּמׇה, see the translation footnote on 45:1. [↑](#footnote-ref-217)
218. Literally, “the first fruit of your offerings.” [↑](#footnote-ref-218)
219. Literally, “at your faces.” [↑](#footnote-ref-219)
220. See Strine, *Sworn Enemies*. [↑](#footnote-ref-220)
221. Lust (“Exodus 6,2–8”) sees Exod 6 as based on Ezekiel. [↑](#footnote-ref-221)
222. Ooi, *Scripture and Its Readers*,132–33; Ooi then suggests setting 1 Cor 8 alongside Ezek 20. [↑](#footnote-ref-222)
223. See Sprinkle, “Law and Life.” [↑](#footnote-ref-223)
224. See Barter, “Reuse,” 378–80. [↑](#footnote-ref-224)
225. See Kugler, *When God Wanted*, 145–63. [↑](#footnote-ref-225)
226. See further the discussion of Jewish and Christian interpretation in van der Horst, “I Gave Them Laws.” [↑](#footnote-ref-226)
227. Patton, “I Myself Gave Them.” [↑](#footnote-ref-227)
228. See further Kugler, “Cruel Theology.” [↑](#footnote-ref-228)
229. See, e.g., Richard D. Nelson, *Deuteronomy: A Commentary*, OTL (Louisville: WJK, 2004), 233. [↑](#footnote-ref-229)
230. Ruiz, “Exile’s Baggage.“ Lust, “Ezekiel Salutes Isaiah,” 382, emphasizes the former. [↑](#footnote-ref-230)
231. Rom-Shiloni, “Deuteronomic Concepts,” 120. [↑](#footnote-ref-231)
232. Sedlmeier, “Sie werden.” [↑](#footnote-ref-232)
233. Rom-Shiloni, “Facing Destruction,” 202. [↑](#footnote-ref-233)
234. See Joyce, “Ezek. 20.32–38.” [↑](#footnote-ref-234)
235. See Sedlmeier, “Ich will euch gnädig.” [↑](#footnote-ref-235)
236. Delorme, “בית ישראל.” [↑](#footnote-ref-236)
237. Jarrad, “Legal Allusion,” 30. [↑](#footnote-ref-237)
238. Cauchi, “Ezekiel 21.” [↑](#footnote-ref-238)
239. לַהֶבֶת שַׁלְהֶבֶת, two words meaning flame (the second an Aramaism). [↑](#footnote-ref-239)
240. צָרַב is a hapax,\* but a derived noun denotes a sore in the skin (Lev 13:23, 28), which suggests that the verb denotes the fire’s effect on the skin. [↑](#footnote-ref-240)
241. The piel of מָשַׁל occurs only here (12:23; 16:44; 17:2; 18:2, 3; 24:3 have the qal). It looks frequentative, perhaps suggesting a habitual or professional activity (cf. *IBHS* 24.5c), but with a slur. [↑](#footnote-ref-241)
242. שׁׅבָּרוֹן, literally, “breaking.” [↑](#footnote-ref-242)
243. See the translation footnote on 7:17. [↑](#footnote-ref-243)
244. מֹאֶסֶת is f., so “it” is f. חֶרֶב “sword,” not m. שֵׁבֶט “club. [↑](#footnote-ref-244)
245. וַיּׅתֵּן, literally “and he gave it” (cf. LXX), and “he” might be Yahweh (Vg. has “I gave it”), but a third-person sg. active verb, like the pl., can be impersonal (cf. 46:12), “pseudo-passive” (*IBHS 22.7a*;cf. GK144d; JM 155de). “It” is again f., so refers to the sword. [↑](#footnote-ref-245)
246. That is, testing of the sword, so that it will be effective, and perhaps also testing of Judah: see the verse-by-verse commentary. [↑](#footnote-ref-246)
247. That is, the sword (see the translation footnote on 21:10). [↑](#footnote-ref-247)
248. The club wielded by Judah (21:10). [↑](#footnote-ref-248)
249. The phrase לֹא יׅהְיֶה is particularly elliptical; as the verb is m., the subject is presumably the club rather than the sword or the event, for which one would expect another f. verb. “So far a really convincing interpretation of the verse has not been found” (Zimmerli, 1:429). [↑](#footnote-ref-249)
250. That is, to produce slain people. [↑](#footnote-ref-250)
251. That is, the sword strikes a particular important person (see the verse-by-verse commentary on 21:25). [↑](#footnote-ref-251)
252. That is, surrounding its victims in general and the individual just mentioned. [↑](#footnote-ref-252)
253. אׅבְחָה is a hapax; its possible meaning can only be guessed from the context. [↑](#footnote-ref-253)
254. Taking the verb as עָטָה II. [↑](#footnote-ref-254)
255. Taking הׅתְאַחֲדׅי as derived from a byform\* of חָדָה. [↑](#footnote-ref-255)
256. בָּרָא piel elsewhere means cut down (Josh 17:15, 18; 23:47), and the noun יָד usually means “hand” but “monument” in 1 Sam 15:12; 2 Sam 18:18. More stretching is required to get traditional understandings such as “make a signpost.” [↑](#footnote-ref-256)
257. On the object marker אֶת before Rabbah and before Judah, see BDB, 85. [↑](#footnote-ref-257)
258. אֵם, literally “mother.” [↑](#footnote-ref-258)
259. פְּתֹחַ, literally, “open”: but cf. 21:28 [33]. [↑](#footnote-ref-259)
260. That is, the Jerusalemites. [↑](#footnote-ref-260)
261. Nebuchadrezzar’s mind (and/or Yahweh’s mind?), leading to his capturing (and/or Yahweh’s?). [↑](#footnote-ref-261)
262. In 21:24, more explicitly Yahweh’s mind and Yahweh’s capturing. [↑](#footnote-ref-262)
263. Literally, “this not this.” [↑](#footnote-ref-263)
264. Hebrew has little by way of hiphil imperatives, and הָסׅיר, הָרׅים, and הַשְׁפּׅיל are inf. construct functioning as imperatives. הַגְבֵּחַ is inf. absolute functioning similarly, or perhaps actual imperative, if Ezekiel thought there was such a thing (the same possibilities arise with הָשַׁב in 21:30 [35]). Vg. takes the last two infs. as having the significance of *qatals\** (cf. 17:24) (*HUB*). GK 113bb describes the inf. as equivalent to an emphatic imperative, but JM 123u (and the note) questions this, and the initial observation in GK 113a that the inf. puts the emphasis on the verbal idea in the abstract is suggestive in this context. [↑](#footnote-ref-264)
265. I take this asyndetic\* clause with the subject preceding the verb as a circumstantial, concessive clause, and the *qatal* verb as having future perfect significance. [↑](#footnote-ref-265)
266. פְּתוּחָה, literally, “opened” (cf. 21:22 [27] and the translation footnote). The term could recall a Mesopotamian practice of readying weapons (Miglio, “Polysemy”). [↑](#footnote-ref-266)
267. “You” is f. sg., addressing the sword. [↑](#footnote-ref-267)
268. “This rambling sentence lacks a main verb” (Allen 2:22). [↑](#footnote-ref-268)
269. See the translation footnote on 21:26 [31] above. [↑](#footnote-ref-269)
270. The “you” continues to be f. sg., addressing the sword, through 21:30–32 [35–37], though now it more directly stands simply for Babylon itself, which has been wielding it. [↑](#footnote-ref-270)
271. בָּרָא niphal, traditionally “created”; see the translation footnote on 21:19 [24]. [↑](#footnote-ref-271)
272. See the translation footnote on 16:3. BDB’s suggestion that it might denote “digging out” matches the parallelism between the middle cola here in 21:30 [35]. [↑](#footnote-ref-272)
273. Terrien, “Dance of the Sword.” [↑](#footnote-ref-273)
274. Pohlmann (1:317, 345–50) sees it as the key passage in the chapter. [↑](#footnote-ref-274)
275. See, e.g., Derek Collins, "Mapping the Entrails: The Practice of Greek Hepatoscopy" *American Journal of Philology* 129 (2008): 319–45;; Darshan, “Meaning.” [↑](#footnote-ref-275)
276. See Steiner, “Inner-Biblical.” [↑](#footnote-ref-276)
277. Jauhiainen, “Turban.” [↑](#footnote-ref-277)
278. Lust, “Messianism.” [↑](#footnote-ref-278)
279. van der Kooij, “Septuagint.” [↑](#footnote-ref-279)
280. After the repetition for emphasis, Ezekiel twice has the *weqatal\** verb continuing the interrogative. [↑](#footnote-ref-280)
281. I read 21:3aβ–5 as six bicola\* with neat parallelism and plausible poetic rhythm—except for this one-word colon\* that stands out, לְטָמְאָה, “so that it becomes defiled.” [↑](#footnote-ref-281)
282. Whereas וַתָּבוֹא looks like second person m. or third person f., neither fits in this context, but the form might be second person f. without the final י (*CTAT*, 184). [↑](#footnote-ref-282)
283. Literally, “individuals of calumny.” Whereas the verb רָכַל and the noun רְכֻלָּה (most of whose occurrences are in Ezekiel) simply refer to trading, רָכׅיל (Lev 19:16; Prov 11:13; 20:19; Jer 6:28; 9:4 [3]) has pejorative connotations and characteristically implies reference to speech. E. Lipiński (*TDOT* 13, 498–99) suggests the meaning “swindle.” [↑](#footnote-ref-283)
284. See the translation footnote on 16:27. [↑](#footnote-ref-284)
285. הָיוּ is pl., as if the subject was pl. דָּמַיׅךְ, “your bloodshed” instead of sg. דָּמֵךְ. [↑](#footnote-ref-285)
286. The sg. נֶפֶשׁ contrasts with the pl. in 22:27; it picks up from the sg. “prey” in the preceding line. [↑](#footnote-ref-286)
287. יׅקָּחוּ, the sole *yiqtol\** in this message, suggests purpose and is subordinate to the preceding clause. ּ [↑](#footnote-ref-287)
288. See further Adam, “Bloodshed and Hate.” [↑](#footnote-ref-288)
289. See Harland, “בצע.” [↑](#footnote-ref-289)
290. See Harland, “Violence.” [↑](#footnote-ref-290)
291. See Ndoga, “Reflections.” [↑](#footnote-ref-291)
292. Erickson, “Unstable Constructions,” 162–72. [↑](#footnote-ref-292)
293. Andrew Mein, *Ezekiel and the Ethics of Exile*,Oxford Theological Monographs (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 86. [↑](#footnote-ref-293)
294. See the Selected Bibliography. [↑](#footnote-ref-294)
295. Kamionkowski, *Gender Reversal*, 148. [↑](#footnote-ref-295)
296. Darr, “Justifications,” 100 (the comment there relates to Ezek 20), 111. [↑](#footnote-ref-296)
297. The verb עָגַב occurs only in Ezek 23 and in one reference to men desiring women in Jer 4:30, in the same political context. The noun עֲגָבׅים occurs in 33:31–32. [↑](#footnote-ref-297)
298. קְרוׄבׅים, people who were “near” the king in their service (or who came “near” the other side in battle: cf. קְרָב “battle”). [↑](#footnote-ref-298)
299. Guards, governors, and superintendents are all Assyrian terms. [↑](#footnote-ref-299)
300. The verb suggests this is a euphemism for semen. [↑](#footnote-ref-300)
301. שְׁפוּטׅים occurs otherwise only in the sg. in 2 Chr 20:9; it is an odd form (one would expect שְׁפָטּׅם), but the meaning is clear. [↑](#footnote-ref-301)
302. Whereas Ezek 23 usually has the word תַּזְנוּת as in Ezek 16, for variation it has זְנוּנׅים here and in 23:29, and זְנוּת in 23:27 as in Ezek 43. For parallel variation I translate these whoredom and whorishness. [↑](#footnote-ref-302)
303. מׅכְלוֹל this time for variation instead of תְּכֵלֶת (blue, 23:6); cf. the translation footnote on 23:23. The word otherwise occurs only at 38:4, again suggesting their military garb. [↑](#footnote-ref-303)
304. That is, the people signified by the “their,” the Egyptians. [↑](#footnote-ref-304)
305. That is, they had huge penises and produced huge amounts of semen. [↑](#footnote-ref-305)
306. See the textual note. [↑](#footnote-ref-306)
307. For variation, קְרוּאׅים (literally, summoned men) instead of קְרֹבׅים (23:12). [↑](#footnote-ref-307)
308. The meaning of MT’s hapax\* הֹצֶן can only be guessed. [↑](#footnote-ref-308)
309. “Chariotry and wheels” looks like a hendiadys.\* [↑](#footnote-ref-309)
310. Literally, “from you.” [↑](#footnote-ref-310)
311. The inf. עָשֹה instead of a finite verb conveys some force (DG 103b); cf. the inf. in 23:46. [↑](#footnote-ref-311)
312. For the hapax מׅרְבָּה, LXX has “faintness,” [↑](#footnote-ref-312)
313. I read the poem as five bicola\* (Taylor, 172), a more usual sequence than two bicola and two tricola (if one follows MT versification). [↑](#footnote-ref-313)
314. The pl. suffixes and the *wayyiqtol*\* verb in this verse are m. [↑](#footnote-ref-314)
315. In 23:40–41, תּׅשְׁלַחְנָה, “they sent,” is f. pl., the second-person verbs are f. sg. [↑](#footnote-ref-315)
316. בָּהּ, “which has no ckear word of relation” (Zimmerli, 1:478). [↑](#footnote-ref-316)
317. I follow K, whose סובאים looks like a participle from סָבָא (BDB). Q’s form סָבָאׅים is a hapax that might imply Sabeans, who are סְבָאׅים in Isa 43:14 (BDB); סְבָא is associated with Egypt in 43:3. [↑](#footnote-ref-317)
318. וַיּׅתְּנוּ, “they put” is m., יְדֵיהֶן and רָאשֵׁיהֶן, “their hands/heads” are f. [↑](#footnote-ref-318)
319. In this particularly elliptical\* verse, I take the second clause as an unmarked question. [↑](#footnote-ref-319)
320. Literally, “went into her.” [↑](#footnote-ref-320)
321. While הַעֲלֵה could be imperative, elsewhere the imperative is הַעַל (and one would expect pl.), whereas הַעֲלֵה is the regular inf. form, and further infs. (with jussive significance) follow (נָתֹן, בָּרֵא). [↑](#footnote-ref-321)
322. “Them” is m.; the next “them” is f. [↑](#footnote-ref-322)
323. The suffixes on sons and daughters are m.; the suffix on houses is f. [↑](#footnote-ref-323)
324. The verb form נׅוַּסְּרוּ is a cross between niphal and hitpael from יָסַר (GK 55k). [↑](#footnote-ref-324)
325. “You” and “your” in 23:48–49a is f.; in 23:49b it is m. [↑](#footnote-ref-325)
326. Lyons, “They Whored.” [↑](#footnote-ref-326)
327. Kalmanofsky, “Dangerous Sisters.” [↑](#footnote-ref-327)
328. See the ”Biblical Theology Comments” on Ezek 16. [↑](#footnote-ref-328)
329. Liebermann, “Apparel.” [↑](#footnote-ref-329)
330. See further Ran Zadok, “West Semitic Toponyms in Assyrian and Babylonian Sources,” in Yitschak Avishur and Joshua Blau, ed., *Studies in Bible and the Ancient Near East Presented to Samuel E. Loewenstamm on His Seventieth Birthday* [Vol. 2] (Jerusalem: Rubenstein, 1978), 163–79 (178–79). [↑](#footnote-ref-330)
331. Daniel David Luckenbill, *Ancient Records of Assyria and Babylonia. Volume 1: Historical Records of Assyria from the Earliest Times to Sargon* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1926), 146–47; Block 1:751–52. [↑](#footnote-ref-331)
332. De Vries, “Remembrance,” 64 (cf. Allen 2:50–51). [↑](#footnote-ref-332)
333. Edwards, “Warning.” [↑](#footnote-ref-333)
334. Galambush, *Jerusalem*,124 [↑](#footnote-ref-334)
335. Shields, “Abusive God,” 131, quotes Blenkinsopp and substantially develops this critique. [↑](#footnote-ref-335)
336. Morse, “Byword.” [↑](#footnote-ref-336)
337. Patton, “Sister.” [↑](#footnote-ref-337)
338. Shields, “Abusive God,” 150, 151. [↑](#footnote-ref-338)
339. Shields, “Abusive God,” 151. [↑](#footnote-ref-339)