

UNIVERSITY OF SHEFFIELD

THE THREAT TO THE REPUTATION OF YHWH:  
THE PORTRAYAL OF THE DIVINE CHARACTER  
IN THE BOOK OF EZEKIEL

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## SUMMARY

### THE THREAT TO THE REPUTATION OF YHWH: THE PORTRAYAL OF THE DIVINE CHARACTER IN THE BOOK OF EZEKIEL

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The portrayal of the divine character in a literary context shows the God in the narrative as he is perceived by the narrator. The chapters which follow focus on the pericopes within the narrative which are concerned with the portrayal of God as a character in the story. The present study reveals a unique image of the God of Israel as portrayed in the narrative.

I have devoted chapters 1, 2, and 6 to the three pericopes, labeled within the text as "visions of God" (chs. 1:4-3:15; 8:1-11:24; 40-48) because they create the ground work for the divine character's activity revealing the narrator's portrayal of the God in the narrative. These three "visions" are strategically arranged at the opening, middle and closing of the narrative. The first "vision" shows God's encounter with Ezekiel while he is in exile. The second "vision" shows the reason for God's activity in the opening "vision" and the basis for all the activity within the narrative. The third "vision" shows that God's actions have not been in vain but will culminate in a reordering of God's place within the cultus.

Ezekiel 37 contributes to the narrator's portrayal of the divine character and for this reason I have included it within my analysis in chapter 5. Likewise, in chapter 3, I have included the "divine oracle" of Ezekiel 16 which reveals the depth of the

bond of the covenant and its affect on the God of the narrative. Furthermore, in chapter 4, I have focused on the "divine oracles" in Ezekiel 20 and 36 because of the narrator's emphasis on the profanation and vindication of the name of God.

That the narrator has carefully crafted his portrayal of the divine character is evident, and attested to in the construction of the pericopes. My reading and analysis of the text are a critical attempt to show, at least in portions of the text, that the narrator's portrayal of the divine character is an anomaly.

## Acknowledgement

This dissertation is a result of the inspiration of teachers who have encouraged and nurtured my study of the Hebrew Bible. This encouragement and nurture began as far back as my first Hebrew teacher, Dr. Karen Joines. Dr. Joines' enthusiasm for the Hebrew language and the message recorded in the Hebrew Bible fostered the same within me. I am also especially grateful to Professor David J.A. Clines, my faculty supervisor at the University of Sheffield, for his consistent encouragement and for his insight in pursuing the message of the Biblical Hebrew text. His critical input transformed this work from a superficial reading of the Book of Ezekiel to a critical analysis of the portrayal of God in the narrative.

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Most of all I value the support, confidence, and encouragement of my wife, Robin, who along with my family have endured with me through the course of this project.

I dedicate this work to Joel David, my brother, whose life and death have provided me with the determination to persevere to the end.



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## ABBREVIATIONS

AB	Anchor Bible Commentary
<u>AJSLL</u>	<u>American Journal of Semitic Languages and Literature</u>
<u>ANET</u>	<u>Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament</u>
<u>ASTI</u>	<u>Annual of the Swedish Theological Institute</u>
<u>AT</u>	<u>Aramaic Targum (Jonathan)</u>
ATD	Das Alte Testament Deutsch
ATANT	Abhandlungen zur Theologie des Alten und Neuen Testaments
<u>BA</u>	<u>The Biblical Archaeologist</u>
<u>BASOR</u>	<u>Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research</u>
BBibC	The Broadman Bible Commentary
BDB	Brown, Driver, and Brigg, <u>A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament</u>
<u>BHS</u>	<u>Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia</u>
<u>BI</u>	<u>Biblical Illustrator</u>
<u>Bibl</u>	<u>Biblica</u>
<u>BJRL</u>	<u>Bulletin of the John Rylands University Library of Manchester</u>
BK	Biblischer Kommentar Altes Testament
<u>BS</u>	<u>Bibliotheca Sacra</u>
BT	Babylonian Talmud
<u>BTod</u>	<u>The Bible Today</u>
<u>BTB</u>	<u>Biblical Theology Bulletin</u>
BWAT	Beiträge zur Wissenschaft vom Alten Testament
BZAW	Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft
CBC	Cambridge Bible Commentary
<u>CBO</u>	<u>Catholic Biblical Quarterly</u>
ch(s).	chapter(s)
<u>CTM</u>	<u>Concordia Theological Monthly</u>
<u>DD</u>	<u>Dor le Dor</u>
ed.	editor; edited by
<u>EI</u>	<u>Eretz-Israel</u>
<u>EJ</u>	<u>Encyclopaedia Judaica</u>
ET	English Translation
<u>ET</u>	<u>The Expository Times</u>
<u>EvTh</u>	<u>Evangelische Theologie</u>
<u>ETSJ</u>	<u>Evangelical Theological Society Journal</u>
f	Designates one verse or page following the verse or page cited
FOTL	The Forms of the Old Testament Literature
GKC	Gesenius' Hebrew Grammar
Herm	Hermeneia
<u>HAR</u>	<u>Hebrew Annual Review</u>
HAT	Handbuch zum Alten Testament
<u>HS</u>	<u>Hebrew Studies</u>
<u>HTR</u>	<u>Harvard Theological Review</u>
<u>HUCA</u>	<u>Hebrew Union College Annual</u>
IB	The Interpreter's Bible

<u>ICC</u>	International Critical Commentary
<u>IDB</u>	<u>The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible</u>
<u>IDBS</u>	<u>The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible Supplement</u>
<u>IntBC</u>	Interpretation, Bible Commentary
<u>Int</u>	<u>Interpretation: A Journal of Bible and Theology</u>
<u>JAOS</u>	<u>Journal of the American Oriental Society</u>
<u>JBL</u>	<u>Journal of Biblical Literature</u>
<u>JE</u>	<u>The Jewish Encyclopedia</u>
<u>JETS</u>	<u>Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society</u>
<u>JJS</u>	<u>Journal of Jewish Studies</u>
<u>JNES</u>	<u>Journal of Near Eastern Studies</u>
<u>JNWSL</u>	<u>Journal of Northwest Semitic Languages</u>
<u>JQR</u>	<u>Jewish Quarterly Review</u>
<u>JR</u>	<u>The Jewish Review</u>
<u>JSOT(S)</u>	<u>Journal for the Study of the Old Testament(Supplement)</u>
<u>JSS</u>	<u>Journal of Semitic Studies</u>
<u>JTC</u>	<u>Journal for Theology and the Church</u>
<u>JTS</u>	<u>Journal of Theological Studies</u>
<u>OTL</u>	Old Testament Library
<u>MQ</u>	<u>McCormick Quarterly</u>
<u>MT</u>	Masoretic Text
<u>NCBC</u>	New Century Bible Commentary
<u>NTS</u>	<u>New Testament Studies</u>
p.(pp.)	page(s)
<u>RSV</u>	The Holy Bible, Revised Standard Version
<u>RTR</u>	<u>The Reformed Theological Review</u>
<u>SBLMS</u>	Society of Biblical Literature Monograph Series
<u>SBT</u>	Studies in Biblical Theology
<u>SJOT</u>	<u>Scandinavian Journal of the Old Testament</u>
<u>Tarb</u>	<u>Tarbiz</u>
<u>TDNT</u>	<u>Theological Dictionary of the New Testament</u>
<u>TDOT</u>	<u>Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament</u>
<u>THAT</u>	<u>Theologisches Handwörterbuch zum Alten Testament</u>
tr.	translator, translated by
v(v)	verse(s)
<u>VT</u>	<u>Vetus Testamentum</u>
<u>VTSup</u>	Vetus Testamentum, Supplements
<u>WBC</u>	Word Biblical Commentary
<u>ZA</u>	<u>Zeitschrift für Assyriologie</u>
<u>ZAW</u>	<u>Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft</u>
<u>ZWTh</u>	<u>Zeitschrift für wissenschaftliche Theologie</u>

## INTRODUCTION

### Purpose and Text

My research into the prophetic narrative of Ezekiel is undertaken in order to arrive at a better understanding of the God as he is portrayed by the narrator in the narrative. The chapters which follow focus on the pericopes within the narrative which I have for reasons of their content selected as significant literary arrangements concerned with the portrayal of God as a character in the story. The present study reveals a unique image of the God of Israel, as portrayed in the narrative, which has been overlooked or possibly avoided by past researchers.

The seven pericopes which are here analysed are categorized by most researchers either as "visions" or "divine oracles". Each of the seven pericopes that I have focused on is helpful in reaching an understanding of the God as he is portrayed by the narrator of Ezekiel.

I have devoted chapters 1, 2, and 6 to the three pericopes which are labeled within the narrative as "visions of God" (chs. 1:4-3:15; 8-11:24; 40-48) because they create the ground work for the divine character's activity which reveals the narrator's understanding of God. These three "vision" pericopes are strategically arranged within the structure of the text at the opening, middle and closing of the prophetic narrative. The first "vision" shows God's encounter with Ezekiel while he is in exile.



The second "vision" adds to the story told in the first by showing the rebelliousness of the people in Jerusalem, and also sets the scene for the vindication of God and his entering of the new temple. The third "vision" shows that God's actions have not been in vain but will culminate in a reordering of God's place within the cultus. Chapter 37, though not specifically labeled a "vision", is accepted by most researchers as a vision that also contributes to the narrator's portrayal of the character of God; and for this reason I have included it within my analysis. Likewise I have included the "divine oracle" of chapter 16 which reveals the intensity of the bond of the covenant and its effect on the God in the narrative. Furthermore, I have devoted chapter 4 to the "divine oracles" in chapters 20 and 36 because of the narrator's emphasis in these sections on the profaning and vindicating of the name of God. I suggest that the seven sections of my analysis will collectively reveal the narrator's unique portrayal of the God of Israel.

#### **Existing Research on the Book of Ezekiel**

Because of the contrast between previous research on the subject of the book of Ezekiel and my own, I suggest that it is here necessary to mention briefly<sup>1</sup> the results of the analysis of

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<sup>1</sup> For a more in-depth survey of the history of criticism on the book of Ezekiel, see Walther Eichrodt, Der Prophet Hesekiel, ATD 22, 2 vols. (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1959), ET: Ezekiel, OTL (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1970), pp. 7-11; G. A. Cooke, Ezekiel, ICC (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1936), pp. xx-xxvii; Walther Zimmerli, Ezechiel, BK 13, 2 vols.

the researchers who have worked on the prophetic narrative of Ezekiel. This brief introduction of the existing contributions to the subject of the book of Ezekiel will be helpful in that it will enable the reader of my research to relate my work to the significant points of the existing research on the book of Ezekiel. I will refer more extensively to the existing research on the book of Ezekiel in my analysis where it is relevant to the discussion of the material.

### Earlier Views

Earlier research on the book of Ezekiel, from the pre-critical phase of the late 19th century, was concerned with the integrity of the narrative. S. R. Driver's conclusion that the whole text of Ezekiel, "from beginning to end", bears the unmistakable "stamp of a single mind"<sup>2</sup> summarized the general attitude of the majority of his colleagues regarding the acceptance of the integrity of the book of Ezekiel.

At the turn of the 20th century, Driver's conclusion, however, was challenged. Gustav Hölscher concluded in his analysis that only 144 of the 1273 verses of the prophetic

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(Neukirchen/Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag des Erziehungsvereins, 1969), ET: Ezekiel 1, Herm (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1979), pp. 3-8; H. H. Rowley, "The Book of Ezekiel in Modern Study," BJRL 36 (1953), pp. 146-190.

<sup>2</sup> An Introduction to the Literature of the Old Testament (New York: Meridian Books, 1960) [1897], Charles Scribner's Sons, p. 279.



narrative were penned by the "poet" Ezekiel.<sup>3</sup> He further concluded that the remainder of the verses were written by a redactor in the fifth century who took portions of Ezekiel's material and worked it into the form now existing. Holscher also claimed that small contributions were made at various times by other redactors.

The discussion, questioning of the integrity of the prophetic narrative, branched out to include questions regarding the intended audience of the prophecy and the location of the author or authors in forming its proclamation. Charles C. Torrey concluded that the original Ezekiel was a pseudepigraph claiming to be from the time of Manasseh, yet in fact, was composed many centuries later.<sup>4</sup> Torrey claimed that an editor, not many years following the original composition, converted it into a prophecy of the "so-called "Babylonian Golah"".

Volkmar Hertrich,<sup>5</sup> clearly critical of Holscher's work<sup>6</sup> and likewise, through content, in opposition to Torrey's conclusions,<sup>7</sup> attributed the authorship of the book of Ezekiel and the location of the author to two distinct sources. The first

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<sup>3</sup> Hesekiel. Der Dichter und das Buch, BZAW 39 (Giessen: A. Töpelmann, 1924).

<sup>4</sup> Pseudo-Ezekiel and the Original Prophecy (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1930), p. 2. Torrey notes his observations place the composition around 230 B.C.E.

<sup>5</sup> Ezechielprobleme, BZAW 61 (Giessen: A. Töpelmann, 1932), pp. 48-72.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., pp. 12ff.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., pp. 48ff.

was Ezekiel himself in Palestine, and the second was a priestly redactor who was also among the Babylonian exiles.<sup>8</sup> Hertrich determined because many of Ezekiel's words were directed to Jerusalem that the intended audience of the prophecy was shown in the term "house of Israel" which he concluded referred to the Jews of Judah and Jerusalem where Ezekiel himself was living.<sup>9</sup> Hertrich supported his observation that the Jews of Judah and Jerusalem were the recipients of Ezekiel's message by noting the use of the phrase "rebellious house"<sup>10</sup> which he viewed as a clear reference to the disobedient residents of Judah and Jerusalem especially.

In 1943 William A. Irwin, unlike Hertrich, concluded in his research on Ezekiel that there was a historical Ezekiel who started his work in Jerusalem and completed it in the land of Babylon among the exiles.<sup>11</sup> Irwin, in opposition to the results of Hertrich's analysis, claims that out of the existing corpus (i.e. 1273 verses) Ezekiel himself wrote only 251 verses. His analysis was thus similar in its results to those found by Gustav Hölscher some 19 years earlier. It is obvious that Irwin's

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid., p. 125.

<sup>9</sup> Hertrich concludes, "Ezechiels Zuhörerschaft kann nicht die Golah Jojachins sein" p. 44.

<sup>10</sup> See 2:5, 6, 8; 3:9, 26, 27; 12:2, 3, 9, 25; 17:12; 24:3; 44:6 where the recipients of Ezekiel's message are referred to as bêt m<sup>e</sup>ri "rebellious house".

<sup>11</sup> The Problem of Ezekiel (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1943).

observations were not concerned with showing any rationale for the text as it existed. Irwin's questioning of the clear statements in the text itself was typical of the period and further contributed to the continuation of the cycle of hypercriticism.

Carl Gordon Howie in the 1950 Society of Biblical Literature Monograph Series, The Date and Composition of Ezekiel, concluded that the prophet Ezekiel composed the majority of the prophetic narrative.<sup>12</sup> Howie's conclusion was clearly in opposition to the conclusions of Irwin, Hölscher, Torrey, and others who claimed that Ezekiel himself wrote very little if any of the corpus of the text.

The disagreement over, and the attempt to discover definitive evidence regarding, the composition of the text of Ezekiel was now the focus of the few who worked on this prophetic narrative. During this period of hypercriticism the book of Ezekiel was viewed as unconnected oracles, riddled with tensions, rather than a carefully balanced unit. Even the portions of the text which had been understood to be straightforward became questionable under the zealous criticism of researchers.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> The Date and the Composition of Ezekiel, SBLMS 4 (Philadelphia: Society of Biblical Literature, 1950), pp. 27-46.

<sup>13</sup> The diversification in opinions and conclusions can be seen in comparing the work of those who purpose a dual ministry: Alfred Bertholet and Kurt Gallig, Hesekiel HAT (Tubingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1936); W. A. Irwin, The Problem of Ezekiel (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1943); H. Wheeler Robinson, Two Hebrew Prophets (London: Lutterworth Press, 1948); Otto Eissfeldt, The Old Testament, an Introduction (New York: Harper and Row, 1965), pp. 372-381; H. H. Rowley, "The Book of Ezekiel in Modern Study", BJRL

In 1952 Georg Fohrer<sup>14</sup> made a careful and in depth examination of the criticism regarding the book of Ezekiel, and concluded that, although the book cannot be thought of as a carefully balanced unit, it is appropriate to begin an analysis of the text with the statements in the book which attest to the time and place of Ezekiel's activity.<sup>15</sup> Fohrer's conclusion became a typical response of the researchers of the early fifties. Most of the recent authors of the commentaries on Ezekiel have followed Fohrer's acceptance of beginning with the claims of the text which refer to the time and place of Ezekiel's activity.<sup>16</sup>

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36 (1953), pp. 146-190; with those who conclude that Ezekiel conducted his ministry in only Babylon: C. G. Howie, The Date and Composition of Ezekiel (Philadelphia: Society of Biblical Literature, 1950), pp. 27-46; J. Herrmann, Ezekiel (Leipzig: A. Deichert, 1924); Gustav Hölscher, Hesekiel, Der Dichter und das Buch.

<sup>14</sup> Die Hauptprobleme des Buches Ezekiel, BZAW 72 (Berlin: A. Topelmann, 1952).

<sup>15</sup> See also C. J. Mullo Weir, "Aspects of the Book of Ezekiel," VT 2 (1952), pp. 97-112. Weir accepted the Babylonian background and the exilic date of Ezekiel's ministry as disclosed in the narrative.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. Eichrodt, Ezekiel; J. W. Wevers, Ezekiel, NCBC (London: Thomas Nelson and Son Ltd., 1969); Zimmerli, Ezekiel 1, 2.



## Contemporary Views

For the most part, research on the prophetic narrative of Ezekiel has, in recent years, analysed the text diachronically. Zimmerli,<sup>17</sup> having produced a detailed critical commentary on the book of Ezekiel, consistently returns to the issue of identifying the portions of the text which came from the prophet himself from those which were added by what he calls "the school of the prophet".<sup>18</sup> Zimmerli concludes that,

we cannot therefore accept the simple explanation of the book as a straightforward collection of oral speeches of Ezekiel. We must reckon with a process of literary editing.<sup>19</sup>

He further suggests that the editing

...indicates a process of successive development of a kernel element, which has been developed further in new additions at a somewhat later time.<sup>20</sup>

Thus Zimmerli approached the text from the point of view of a redaction critic, whose intentions were different from this research.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Ezekiel 1, 2, Herm. (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1979 [vol.1], 1983 [vol.2]).

<sup>18</sup> Ezekiel 1, p. 110. Zimmerli concludes that "the circle of the 'school' which preserved Ezekiel's words, redacted the book, and elaborated upon his words by way of comment and addition".

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., p. 68.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., p. 69.

<sup>21</sup> An example of Zimmerli's redactional analysis of the text of Ezekiel can be seen in his attempt to organize 1:11a. (ûpenêhem v<sup>e</sup>kanpêhem p<sup>e</sup>rudot milmā'lāh "and their faces, and their wings divided upward"). See p. 84.

Zimmerli mentioned that the message of Ezekiel included the view that YHWH is not bound to a specific land or sanctuary, but can manifest God's self wherever the divine chooses. Zimmerli notes that in Ezekiel "...God reveals the sovereign freedom of his appearing, when and where he wills, even in an unclean land".<sup>22</sup> However, in his analysis, Zimmerli does not attempt to view the narrative in order to see any possible significance of this message on the narrator's portrayal of the divine character. Moreover, Zimmerli suggests,

...[YHWH] and his action is...in substance the great central theme of the prophetic preaching. The frequent use of the recognition formula of the proof-saying shows that this preaching of the prophet has to do above all with [YHWH's] great self-revelation.<sup>23</sup>

Though Zimmerli here suggests that YHWH's self-revelation is of primary importance in the message of Ezekiel, he does not show how the narrator uses the self-revelation to develop the divine character.

Zimmerli concludes that the message proclaimed is one of judgment and protection. Although his conclusion may be accurate, his attempt to divide the text with regard to its original and edited material, as part of his diachronic approach to the text, keeps him involved with the issues relating to the redaction of the narrative. As I intend to demonstrate in the following chapters, the narrator's use of the motif of the movement of YHWH and the self-revelation of YHWH are essential elements which

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid., p. 140; see also p. 128, pp. 253-254, and p. 256.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., vol. 1, p. 52.



contribute to a significant portrayal of the God in the narrative. Zimmerli's work is a major achievement with regard to an understanding of the construction of the prophetic narrative. However, because of his diachronic analysis, his work's contribution is less significant regarding an understanding of the message which this text has to offer.

Moshe Greenberg,<sup>24</sup> having yet completed his commentary on chapters 1 through 20 only, has attempted to approach the prophetic narrative of Ezekiel synchronically rather than diachronically. Greenberg's analysis seeks to discover recurrent themes in the text and significant patterns which are scattered throughout the narrative in his analysis of the final form of the text. In consequence, Greenberg's analysis is intent on revealing "the product of art and intelligent design" in the book of the prophet Ezekiel. In this way Greenberg makes a necessary contribution to the revelation of the message of the prophet Ezekiel. As Ellen Davis accurately points out,

a chief aim of Greenberg's commentary is to illustrate and awaken appreciation for the style of the prophet, as well as to show that its complexity is consistent both with Ezekiel's rhetorical purpose and with the literary conventions of the ancient world.<sup>25</sup>

Greenberg seeks to stand against such redaction critics as Zimmerli in his attempt to show the order of the text in its final form. Greenberg criticizes, what he seems to accept as, the

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<sup>24</sup> Ezekiel 1-20, AB (Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1983).

<sup>25</sup> Ellen F. Davis, Swallowing the Scroll (Sheffield: The Almond Press, 1989).

simplistic assumptions used by redaction critics, stating

such prejudices are simply a priori, an array of unproved (and unprovable) modern assumptions and conventions that confirm themselves through the results obtained by forcing them on the text and altering, reducing, and reordering it accordingly.<sup>26</sup>

In his synchronic analysis, Greenberg alludes to the movement of YHWH from the expected and traditional abode within the temple and the land. He does not elaborate, however, on whether this divine move has any significance in the development of the narrative. Even in his analysis of the "final form" of the text, Greenberg fails to see the significant portrayal of the divine character.

Greenberg's contribution to the study of the book of Ezekiel, though at times concerned with the message recorded in the existing text, has predominantly focused on the aspects of the text which he claims impugn the criticisms of those who question its balanced unity.<sup>27</sup>

M. E. Andrew<sup>28</sup>, another contributor to research on Ezekiel, has recently written a book entitled Responsibility and Restoration. His interpretation of the message of Ezekiel is

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<sup>26</sup> Ezekiel 1-20, p. 20.

<sup>27</sup> Ellen F. Davis, Swallowing the Scroll, pp. 20-21. Davis argues that Greenberg's synchronic analysis "misses an important aspect of how the linguistic possibilities inherent in a text may be recognized and exploited, thereby enriching over a period of time the author's original work". Davis concludes, therefore, that Greenberg's commentary takes too lightly "the process of progressive interpretation".

<sup>28</sup> Responsibility and Restoration (Dunedin, New Zealand: University Of Otago Press, 1985).

plainly stated in the title of his research. Andrew, like Zimmerli and Greenberg, alludes in passing to the movement of YHWH from the expected abode of the divine as he attempts to interpret the message of the prophetic narrative. He bypasses, however, the importance of this theme of divine movement as he focuses on what is for him the core of the prophetic message of the restoration of the people. Andrew suggests that restoration comes because of the people's change of heart (i.e. repentance) in accordance with their awareness of their responsibility to God. He concludes, therefore, that the restoration can only be achieved through the changing of the attitudes of the people. Andrew suggests that the message of the Book of Ezekiel is

that proclaiming judgment to rebels can lead to restoration, and indeed that this is the ultimate aim of judgment.<sup>29</sup>

Even though most contemporary researchers of the book of Ezekiel accept the explicit statements in the text regarding the location of Ezekiel, as Fohrer advocated in 1952, there are still exponents who conclude, in opposition to the text, that Ezekiel was not among the exiles in the land of Babylon. William H. Brownlee,<sup>30</sup> though having written only on chapters 1 through 19 of Ezekiel before his death, concludes that Ezekiel was solely functioning as a prophet in Palestine. Brownlee claims that the passages within the narrative which allude to an exilic locale are from the hand of a later editor. Brownlee's conclusions, as

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid., p. 29.

<sup>30</sup> Ezekiel 1-19 (Waco, Texas: Word Books, Publisher, 1986).



are those from the researchers who precede him, reveal that the clarity of the purpose of the existing text of Ezekiel remains caught up in a tautological argument.<sup>31</sup>

### Reading of the Prophetic Narrative

The book of Ezekiel, regardless of the existing problems, and for uncertain reasons, stands as a unit attributed to a man called to be a prophet of YHWH. We must decide, therefore, whether we will attempt to discover what the text may have been like before any additions or reordering of it were made, or we must attempt to understand the text as it has been given to us.

The majority of researchers<sup>32</sup> of the prophetic narrative of Ezekiel, as shown in the previous section, have chosen to attempt to piece together what they conclude to be an almost original text of Ezekiel. These researchers have attempted to distinguish what was originally from the hand of the prophet Ezekiel from that which was added by the hand of an editor or redactor of the text. They have thus deleted or emended the various portions of

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<sup>31</sup> John T. Bunn, Ezekiel, BCom (Nashville, Tennessee: Broadman Press, 1971), p. 228.

<sup>32</sup> E.g. S. R. Driver, An Introduction to the Literature of the Old Testament; Gustav Hölscher, Hesekiel, der Dichter und das Buch; Charles C. Torrey, Pseudo-Ezekiel and the Original Prophecy; Volkmar Hertrich, Ezechielprobleme; William A Irwin, The Problem of Ezekiel; Carl Gordon Howie, The Date and the Composition of Ezekiel; Andrew W. Blackwood, Ezekiel: Prophecy of Hope (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1965); Walther Zimmerli, Ezekiel 1, 2.

the text of the book of Ezekiel which they conclude to be inconsistent or dubious additions to the narrative.

Though numerous scholars have attempted to resolve the problems within the text of Ezekiel, quite often their conclusions have raised issues which are more problematic than those within the narrative itself. From just a cursory observation of the existing research done on the text of Ezekiel it is clear that the scholastic analyses of the book have failed to arrive at a consensual view. It seems reasonable to ask whether these analyses have contributed to a clearer understanding of the narrative or have detracted from it.

The obvious observation that there are existing problems in the text of Ezekiel is something with which I am in agreement. I view the attempts to explain away the existing problems, however, by creating a text which, except at the hands of researchers, does not exist, as being untenable. An analysis of the first chapter of the narrative reveals that there are numerous "problems" within the text. One could, as many researchers have done, attribute these "problems" to a corrupted text brought about by the tampering of a redactor or editor. As some researchers<sup>33</sup> have suggested, however, the very nature of the manifestation of the divine, and the awe associated with it could have led to the problematic structure of the inaugural vision, both grammatically and descriptively. This observation though

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<sup>33</sup> See Daniel I. Block, "Text and Emotion: A Study in the 'Corruptions' in Ezekiel's Inaugural Vision (Ezekiel 1:2-28)," CBO 50 (1988), pp. 418-442; Moshe Greenberg, Ezekiel 1-20.

seemingly ontological can also be considered from a literary viewpoint. The narrator could be attempting to communicate the confusion of Ezekiel caused by the narrative event of the manifestation of the divine. The conclusion of some researchers that the textual problems in Ezekiel indicate that these portions were added to the text by the hands of editors and redactors is questionable in itself. I suggest that it is unreasonable to conclude that an editor would contribute so many "problems" to a text which would be as obvious to the person as they are to us. Therefore I propose that, for the purpose of this analysis of Ezekiel, we accept the existing text, problems and all, as the standing narrative of Ezekiel and as its own witness. My analysis, therefore, as Fohrer concluded, will begin with the statements in the text which attest to the location and time of Ezekiel's activity.

### **Reading Technique**

My analysis of the narrative of Ezekiel is not an attempt to raise or solve the somewhat overwhelming text critical issues of the book. It is, however, an attempt to allow the text itself to reveal a portion of its story which has been passed over by researchers because of their focus on the existing textual instabilities. I approach the text of the narrative paying close attention therefore to the language, structure, plot, characterization, thematic development, and point of view. Using



the tools of literary criticism therefore I hope to move beyond the problems of the text and into the story told in the text. I prefer a literary analysis of the final form of the narrative, because I think that attending to the internal features of the narrative helps avoid the tendency to override the text's own inner workings with external considerations.

The text referred to in my analysis will be, for the most part, the Hebrew text as recorded in *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia* which is based on the text of *Codex Leningradensis*. The reading of this text will not be mixed with readings derived from either other Hebrew texts or from other versions such as the LXX and the Syriac.

My reading of this Masoretic text, as any researcher must confess, will be elucidated intermittently by inferences I have made as the reader. I note, however, that my reading and analysis of the text are a critical attempt to show, at least in portions of the text, that the narrator's portrayal of God is an anomaly.

### **Characterization**

The development of a character in a narrative is not an accurate portrayal of the one characterized. Therefore, how the narrator shows a character is only his own portrayal of how he or she sees and understands the character in the narrative. Since the narrator cannot make all the connections between the various aspects in that information regarding a character, it is at times

necessary for the reader to draw the information together. Dana Nolan Fewell rightly observes,

characterization is dependent upon the narrator's construction and the reader's reconstruction. The narrator constructs character by providing information; the reader reconstructs character by observing, assessing, combining and interpreting the information that is given as well as by speculating about information that is not given.<sup>34</sup>

It is my claim that the focus on the characterization of God in the narrative of Ezekiel, in hand with the reconstruction of my reading of the text, will enable us to see, the divine character as he is portrayed by the narrator.

We will, for the purpose of my analysis of the narrative, assume that Ezekiel and the narrator are not the same. Therefore, I do not attempt to deal with Ezekiel as a historical figure, but instead, rather as a character in the story as is the character God. In viewing the portrayal of God in the narrative I will refer to this portrayal from the perspective of the narrator who is therefore detached from any historical connections.

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<sup>34</sup> Circle of Sovereignty (Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic Press, 1988), p. 22.

## CHAPTER 1

### The First Mar'ô<sub>t</sub> 'Ēlōhîm: The Manifestation of YHWH Among the Exiles (Ezekiel 1:1-3:15)

The narrative's first presentation of the "vision(s) of God" in which we see the divine character is in Ezekiel 1:1-3:15. The initial encounter between Ezekiel and the manifestation of the divine is an appropriate place to begin our analysis of the narrator's development of the character of God in the narrative. Although the total "vision" does not relate to the divine character directly, it will be helpful, however, to observe each portion of the vision which relates to the future development of the character of God in the narrative.

#### The Setting of the Opening Vision (Ezekiel 1:1-3)

The narrative of Ezekiel opens with information about time, place and event.

(1) In the thirtieth year, in the fourth month, on the fifth day of the month, as I was among the exiles by the river Chebar, the heavens were opened, and I saw visions of God. (2) On the fifth day of the month, it was the fifth year of the exile of king Jehoiachin, (3) the word of YHWH came to Ezekiel the priest, the son of Buzi, in the land of the Chaldeans by the river Chebar; and the hand of YHWH was upon him there.<sup>1</sup>

It is obvious that there are two chronological references in the introduction and likewise two introductions to the event which

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<sup>1</sup> Ez. 1:1-3 RSV.



follow. Since v. 1 is set as the opening of the introduction to the narrative, and is part apparently of the opening of the upcoming description of the manifestation of God, it is in our interest to address the peculiarity of the ambiguous date and the unidentified "I" 'anî. An explanation of each of these aspects of the introduction will be helpful with regard to how we read and understand the remainder of the text. It will also help in our observation of the narrator's development of the God in the narrative if we have an understanding of the setting of the narrative. As with all the other characters, God, is shown as one who is active at a given time, in a given place, and amongst a given audience.

The first verse of the introduction to the prophetic narrative is similar to the introductions of most other prophetic narratives;<sup>2</sup> it gives the reader information about the time and the place. In this passage the narrator identifies the time to be "the thirtieth year", and the setting to be "among the exiles by the river Chebar".<sup>3</sup> It is at this point, however, that the book of Ezekiel begins to set itself apart from the other prophetic texts as a unique account of a prophetic encounter with God. The speaker in the introduction (v. 1) to the prophetic drama in Ezekiel is identified in first person ('anî, and 'er'eh). The first person introduction in Ezekiel 1:1 is peculiar when

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<sup>2</sup> See Is. 1:1; Jer. 1:1-3; Hos.. 1:1; Mic. 1:1; Zep. 1:1; Hag. 1:1; Zec. 1:1.

<sup>3</sup> Ez. 1:1.

compared with the introductions of other prophetic narratives. In the first verse of the prophetic introductions of Isaiah,<sup>4</sup> Jeremiah, Hosea, Micah, Zephaniah, Haggai, and Zechariah the person addressed is identified. Here, however, in the opening verse of the book of Ezekiel, the identity of the "I" is not disclosed. The verse does no more than inform us that someone is saying that they were "in the thirtieth year...among the exiles by the river Chebar".

The date ("the thirtieth year, in the fourth month, on the fifth day") in v. 1 is also ambiguous because we are not told what the thirtieth year refers to. We have an elaborate date identifying the exact year, month, and day therefore which cannot be pinpointed chronologically. The speaker identified as "I" does no more than inform the reader of the place in which this date and the event which followed occurred. The person states "va'<sup>ā</sup>nî b<sup>e</sup>tôk-haggôlāh 'al-n<sup>e</sup>har-k<sup>e</sup>bār" ("and I was in the midst of the exiles upon the river Chebar").

V. 1 informs us therefore that, at a given time ("the thirtieth year"), the speaker was among a people displaced from their land. Although it is not possible to pinpoint the date chronologically, and the speaker is not identified, the mention of the exiles is helpful in revealing that the setting is not in the homeland but in a place where the people are exiled. The

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<sup>4</sup> In Is. 1:1 The narrator introduces the vision referring to Isaiah in the third person. However, at the call of Isaiah in Is. 6:1 the call is recorded in the first person as in Ez. 1:1.

inclusion of the speaker as an exile is implied in that the person is b<sup>e</sup>tôk-haggôlāh ("in the midst of the exiles"). If the speaker is accepted as an exile the event of the heavens opening up and the seeing of "vision(s) of God" occurs outside the homeland. The significance of this point will be addressed later in this chapter.

The character identified as "I" follows the designation of his location with his reference to the event which occurred at the time of "the thirtieth year" and in the setting "among the exiles". The narrator states that "the heavens were opened" and the unidentified character "saw mar'ôṭ 'ēlōhîm" (v. 1b). Neither the phrase "the heavens were opened" nor the reference to seeing "mar'ôṭ 'ēlōhîm" are clear in describing the actual details of the event.

The phrase niphṭû haššāmayim ("the heavens were opened") is used elsewhere in the Old Testament to indicate impending destruction and judgment (e.g. Gen. 7:11, Is. 24:18) and occasionally for blessing (e.g. Mal. 3:10). Does the narrator here intend to communicate that a message will follow of either judgment or blessing? Is it possible that both messages will be framed within the content of the mar'ôṭ 'ēlōhîm? The answers to these questions remain for us to see as the narrative develops.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Daniel I. Block, "Text and Emotions: A Study in the 'Corruptions' in Ezekiel's Inaugural Vision (Ezekiel 1:4-28)," CBO 50 (1988), p. 428 has attempted to give an interpretation of the expression "to open the heavens" (Ez. 1:1). He accurately notes that the use of the expression in Ezekiel is unique. He argues that even though the expression does occur in Gen. 7:11 its meaning is



## Translating mar'ôṭ 'ēlōhîm

In the opening verse to the narrative, the narrator prefaces the story with a phrase that might possibly inform us of the perspective in which we are to read the text:

...the heavens were opened, and I saw vision(s) of God (mar'ôṭ 'ēlōhîm).

Because of the significance and peculiarity of the phrase mar'ôṭ 'ēlōhîm it is necessary that we attempt to understand its meaning.

The phrase mar'ôṭ 'ēlōhîm is used three times by the narrator in the book of Ezekiel. Each of the three references occur either immediately before a vision<sup>6</sup> or in the introduction to a vision.<sup>7</sup> This phrase curiously enough does not occur outside the book of Ezekiel and is therefore a unique expression used by the narrator. In Ez. 1:1 mar'ôṭ 'ēlōhîm is the expression used to communicate what was seen by the character identified so far as "I" and, therefore, the way in which we understand and translate it is relevant to my analysis.

There are two questions regarding the translation of mar'ôṭ 'ēlōhîm. The first is whether the narrator means that the character identified as "I" saw "mar'ôṭ from God" or "mar'ôṭ of

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clearly different. Block ventures to conclude that the opening of the heavens in Ez. 1:1 shows that the "heavenly throne room of God" is exposed. Although Block's interpretation may be correct, he fails to show the significance of such an event as the exposure of the "heavenly throne room of God".

<sup>6</sup> See Ez. 1:1.

<sup>7</sup> See Ez. 8:3 and 40:2.

God"? In other words does the mar'ôṭ 'ēlōhîm mean that God was showing the mar'ôṭ or that the mar'ôṭ were showing God. The second question is with regard to reading mar'ôṭ as a true plural (i.e. "visions") or as a generalization to be read as a singular (i.e. "vision")?

In dealing with the first question, Walther Zimmerli<sup>8</sup> and M. E. Andrew<sup>9</sup> have translated mar'ôṭ 'ēlōhîm as "divine visions". Neither Zimmerli nor Andrew are clear on what they mean by "divine visions". It is apparent, however, that they interpret mar'ôṭ 'ēlōhîm to mean visions which are divinely inspired. Moshe Greenberg is more obvious in his translation of mar'ôṭ 'ēlōhîm in Ez. 1:1, rendering it as a "divine vision"<sup>10</sup>. Greenberg plainly concludes that God is the one who is giving the mar'ôṭ and claims that in Ez. 1:1 and likewise 8:3 and 40:2 "the sense is 'a supernatural vision,' one no mortal eye could see without divine help."<sup>11</sup> Zimmerli, Andrew, and Greenberg agree that in Ez. 1:1

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<sup>8</sup> Ezechiel, BK 13, 2 vols. (Neukirchen/Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag des Erziehungsvereins, 1969), ET: Ezekiel 1.

<sup>9</sup> Responsibility and Restoration.

<sup>10</sup> Ezekiel 1-20, p. 41. Note that Greenberg uses the singular translation of mar'ôṭ.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., p. 41; Daniel I. Block, "Text and Emotion: A Study in the 'Corruptions' in Ezekiel's Inaugural Vision (Ezekiel 1:4-28)," pp. 428-429 interpretation agrees with Greenberg. Also see H. W. F. Gesenius, Gesenius' Hebrew-Chaldee Lexicon to the Old Testament, tr. Samuel Prideaux Tregelles (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1979), p. 506 who translates mar'ôṭ 'ēlōhîm "visions sent by God".

the phrase mar'ôṭ 'ēlōhîm is to be understood as mar'ôṭ inspired by the divine.

The question to be asked at this point is whether or not we should accept that the narrator intends for us to interpret mar'ôṭ 'ēlōhîm to mean that God is the one giving the mar'ôṭ? My conclusions lead me to reject this interpretation. The grammatical construction of mar'ôṭ 'ēlōhîm indicates that the mar'ôṭ is of God (mar'ôṭ 'ēlōhîm) [v. 1] and not mar'ôṭ from God (mar'ôṭ mē'ēlōhîm)<sup>12</sup>. The translation of mar'ôṭ 'ēlōhîm as "visions of God" is reinforced by the use of the conjunctive accent mēr<sup>e</sup>khâ (v. 1) under the ' (aleph) of the noun mar'ôṭ (v. 1). The mēr<sup>e</sup>khâ functions in the same way as the maqqeph informing the reader that both words, together (i.e. mar'ôṭ 'ēlōhîm), constitute a single compound idea. This grammatical technique is significant in that it indicates that this was not just mar'ôṭ given to the "I" by God or from God, but more specifically the mar'ôṭ were of God. G. A. Cooke supports this interpretation of mar'ôṭ 'ēlōhîm and agrees that the mar'ôṭ were "visions in which God was seen".<sup>13</sup> Cooke adds also that "we must take this to mean that the prophet was allowed to see, not God

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<sup>12</sup> There are no references in the OT to mar'ôṭ mē'ēlōhîm. However, mē'ēlōhîm is used in 2 Chr. 22:7 and is translated "from God". See Ezra 8:23 where mē'ēlōhênû occurs, translated "from our God". See also Is. 40:27 mēy<sup>e</sup>hvāh ūmē'ēlōhay and Jer. 51:5 mē'ēlōhayv.

<sup>13</sup> Ezekiel, p. 5. See for the same John W. Wevers, Ezekiel, p. 43.



directly, but visions of God, an appearance of the glory of [YHWH]".<sup>14</sup> God was revealing himself therefore to the "I".

This translation of mar'ôṭ 'ēlōhîm as "vision(s) of God" is significant because it communicates, with respect to the setting of the event, that the God in the narrative was revealing himself to the "I" in exile outside the land of Israel. The grammatical structure of mar'ôṭ 'ēlōhîm shows God ('ēlōhîm) to be the object of that which was seen by the "I" instead of being just the one who was giving the mar'ôṭ.

The question remains as to how we will translate the term mar'ôṭ. Mar'ôṭ is plainly the feminine plural form of the feminine singular noun mar'āh from the root rā'āh. Therefore if mar'āh is singular (i.e. "vision") and mar'ôṭ is plural then it would apparently be translated "visions". Zimmerli, Andrew, and Cooke<sup>15</sup> translate mar'ôṭ as it is in the plural. On the other hand, Greenberg translates mar'ôṭ in the singular. He claims that it is not a true plural but what is called a "plural of generalization" often to be rendered as a singular.<sup>16</sup> An attempt to resolve the question regarding the plural or singular

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<sup>14</sup> Ezekiel, p. 5.

<sup>15</sup> Note that as previously mentioned Cooke does differ from Zimmerli and Andrew with respect to the translation of the entire phrase mar'ôṭ 'ēlōhîm.

<sup>16</sup> Ezekiel 1-20, p.41. Greenberg notes for comparison Gen. 46:2 and h<sup>a</sup>lōmōṭ in Gen. 37:8; and Dan. 2:1. Greenberg refers to Gesenius' Hebrew Grammar, Clarendon Press, 1910, p. 124 e. See also Daniel I. Block, "Text and Emotion: A Study in the 'Corruptions' in Ezekiel's Inaugural Vision (Ezekiel 1:4-28)."



translation of mar'ôṭ is important since the description that immediately follows the introduction is of a single "vision".

It is important to ask whether Greenberg is correct in suggesting that the mar'ôṭ in v. 1 should be translated in the singular. Greenberg's claim would be reasonable if it was clear that v. 1 was only the introduction to the vision in 1:4-3:15. I do not totally accept, however, that v. 1 is an introduction of the opening vision only. At this point, I will agree with Zimmerli, Andrew, and Cooke that mar'ôṭ is a true plural and should thus be translated "visions". The textual support in favour of the plural translation of mar'ôṭ will be presented in the following section.

#### The Second Introduction

If Ez. 1:1 was the introduction to the pericope which immediately follow, we might expect the description of this mar'ôṭ 'ēlōhîm to begin in v. 2. This is not the case, however. V. 2 gives us another date which also appears to refer to the chronological placement of the event which follows.

On the fifth of the month, it was the fifth year of the exile of king Jehoiachin. (Ez. 1:2 RSV)

Although the historicity of the text is not the focus of my analysis, it is relevant to my discussion to address the chronology which the narrator has established within the text. It is unusual to have two dates, one referring to "the thirtieth year" of some unknown time, and the other referring more

specifically to "the fifth year" of a specific time, "the exile of king Jehoiachin". We should not avoid considering the dates since they contribute significantly to the setting of the narrative. The way in which we read and understand the double dates will influence how we interpret other aspects of the story.

Zimmerli concludes that v. 2 is an elucidation of v. 1.<sup>17</sup> He bases his conclusion on the placement of *hî'* following the reference of the day in v. 2 which he claims "shows that verse 2 is to be understood as an additional remark to verse 1 connected by the catchword [*bah̄miššāh lahōdeš*]." Zimmerli argues that:

an editorial hand has been at work here, and the date which originally stood in v 1, and which now stands in the later gloss v. 2, was displaced by the insertion of the thirty years.<sup>18</sup>

Zimmerli, as is his habit, therefore attributes the unusual nature of the text to the vast amount of re-editing done by the school of Ezekiel. Zimmerli also notes with regard to his conclusion, that vv. 1 and 2 introduce the elaborate vision of the prophet which follows and sets it in perspective by giving it a specific and recognizable chronological location.<sup>19</sup> This redactional argument is a possible solution to the two dates. However, Zimmerli's solution is problematic if he accepts that

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<sup>17</sup> Zimmerli, Ezekiel 1, pp. 101, 113. The dating (v. 2) of "the fifth year of the exile of the king Jehoiachin" *l<sup>e</sup>gālūt hammelek yôyākîn* points to an era which is also utilized in the dates which occur throughout the text of the Book of Ezekiel. See also Greenberg, Ezekiel 1-20, p. 39.

<sup>18</sup> Ezekiel 1, p. 114.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., p. 100.

mar'ôṭ of v. 1, which he has translated as "visions", is, in hand with v. 2, the introduction to the event which is described in 1:4-3:15. Why does the narrator introduce an event which seems to be a "vision" (singular) by referring to it as "visions" (plural)?

Cooke concludes that the date ("the thirtieth year") in v. 1 was the original date to the vision, but later became unintelligible as a means of placing the vision. For this reason an annotator added the explanation in v. 2 ("the fifth year of king Jehoiachin's captivity") which identified the obscure date in v. 1.<sup>20</sup> Cooke suggests that the most plausible explanation for the difficulty in understanding the dates presented in vv. 1 and 2 is that since the month and the day are the same in both verses, "it is probable that the year referred to in both verses is the same also."<sup>21</sup> Cooke's explanation is problematic since he supports his claim on the repetition of the month and the day in each verse. The problem exists since the "fourth" month referred to in v. 1 is not present in v. 2. Cooke is incorrect therefore in saying that the month is the same. He is correct, however, in noting that the "fifth" day is repeated in the second verse. He has apparently accepted the inference from v. 1 that the "fourth" month (bārbî'î lahōdeš) could be understood as the designation of the month (lahōdeš) which is absent in v. 2. This inference does

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<sup>20</sup> G. A. Cooke, Ezekiel, p. 3. (See also M. E. Andrew, Responsibility And Restoration, p. 12).

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., p. 4.



seem to be the most plausible one due to the location of the two verses. It should be made clear, however, that this is not due to the duplicating of information such as Cooke has suggested but which does not appear in the text (i.e. "fourth month" in only v. 1).

It is interesting to see that the dates of the opening two verses were a problem to the Targumists as they are to modern scholars. The writers of the Targum, in their work, eliminate some of the confusion caused by the ambiguous "thirtieth year" in v. 1 and the second date in reference to the year of Jehoiachin's exile in v. 2 by adding text which explains the reference to the "thirtieth year".

It was in the thirtieth year, from the time that Hilkiyah the High Priest found the Book of Torah in the Temple, in the court under the entrance; during the night, after the beginning of moonlight: in the days of Josiah, son of Amon king of the tribe of the House of Judah.<sup>22</sup>

The Targum's explanation gives both dates a specific chronological identity which can be pinpointed in time. Whilst the first date (i.e. "the thirtieth year") places the occurrence of the event in relationship to the finding of the Book of Torah,<sup>23</sup> the second date (i.e. "the fifth year") places the event

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<sup>22</sup> Samson H. Levey, The Targum of Ezekiel, vol. 13, The Aramaic Bible (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark Ltd., 1987), p. 20.

<sup>23</sup> Greenberg, Ezekiel 1-20, p. 40 notes that if we count back thirty years from the fifth year of exile of king Jehoiachin in accordance "to the regnal years given in the Book of Kings [we arrive] at year 18 of Josiah, in which the Torah book was found and the great reform undertaken." Greenberg's observation does not explain that there is no indication that the finding of the Book of Torah marked a specific point of reference in dating.



in relationship to the exile of King Jehoiachin and therefore the first exile of Israel in Babylon.

The writers of the Targum, on the one hand, resolve the issue of the peculiarity of the two dates in vv. 1 and 2 by clarifying the first date themselves. Cooke, Zimmerli, and Greenberg, on the other hand, resolve the same problem by accepting that the date of v. 2 clarifies the ambiguous date of v. 1. Each group apparently accept that vv. 1 and 2 comprise the introduction only for what appears to be the first vision (i.e. 1:4-3:15). If this is the case, their readings show that the character identified as "I" experienced the *mar'ôṭ 'ēlōhîm* in "the thirtieth year"(v. 1) which was also "the fifth year of the exile of king Jehoiachin" (v. 2).

Walther Eichrodt's reading of vv. 1-3 is different. He concludes in his analysis of the text that vv. 1-3 are "the superscription of the whole book" which have been "incorporated in the opening of the description of the vision" in ch. 1.<sup>24</sup> Eichrodt's reading suggests that vv. 1-3 are not the introduction to the vision in 1:4-3:15 alone but are the introduction to the whole of the narrative. The use of the two dates so closely together is clearly accepted as an unusual feature in the opening of the narrative. The peculiarity of the dates would remain, however, even if Eichrodt was correct in suggesting that they

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<sup>24</sup> Der Prophet Hesekiel, ATD 22, 2 vols. (Gottingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1959), ET: Ezekiel, p. 51.

would, together, be a part of "the superscription of the whole book".

My observation of the verses leads me to conclude, in opposition to the existing opinions, that v. 1 alone should be read as the introduction to the whole narrative and that vv. 2 and 3 should be read as the introduction to only the vision in 1:4-3:15. The separation of v. 1 and vv. 2-3 as two different introductions would help to explain the use of and peculiarity of the two dates. The "thirtieth year" pinpoints the beginning of the whole narrative and indirectly the vision in 1:4-3:15 since it is part of the narrative. The date in v. 2 which is in reference to the exile of Jehoiachin refers only to the vision which immediately follows the introduction. V. 1 should therefore be thought of as introducing the whole narrative.

In the thirtieth year, in the fourth month, on the fifth day of the month, as I was among the exiles by the river Chebar, the heavens opened, and I saw visions of God. RSV

Vv. 2-3 should be read as the introduction to the first "vision" of the "visions" in the narrative. The second date, therefore, refers specifically to the first "vision":

On the fifth day of the month, it was the fifth year of the exile of King Jehoiachin... RSV

This reading also would help to explain the use of the plural mar'ôṭ "visions" in v. 1. The narrator appropriately would use the plural mar'ôṭ since this verse is the introduction to the

entire text which is composed of numerous visions.<sup>25</sup> The use of mar'ôṭ is problematic if v. 1 is read only as the introduction to the "vision" mar'eh in 1:4-3:15. The reference in 8:4 to the "vision" mar'eh which was seen by Ezekiel in the plain (i.e. 3:23) shows that the narrator does refer apparently to the specific events using the singular mar'eh.

Reading v. 1 as the introduction to the whole narrative does not separate the ambiguous date of the "thirtieth year" in v. 1 from being identified by the date in v. 2. The information in v. 1 as the introduction to the whole narrative would be read together with the information in v. 2 since it introduces the first event of the narrative (i.e. a vision). The two dates are therefore read as descriptive of the same time, yet not as one and the same introduction. Zimmerli, Cooke, and Greenberg, though not reading v. 1 by itself as the introduction to the narrative, have correctly noted that the "thirtieth year" (v. 1) is clarified by the date in v. 2. Although the clarity of the exact reference intended by the "thirtieth year" remains a riddle, it is obvious that the date in v. 2 functions, whether intentionally or unintentionally, as the chronological setting of both the opening of the narrative and the opening of the immediate event. Any attempt to chronologically pinpoint the "thirtieth year"

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<sup>25</sup> It also would explain the repeated reference (i.e. vv. 1, 3) to the location of the recipient being by the river Chebar. Ezekiel was by the river Chebar when he experienced the events which are described in the whole narrative and he was by the river Chebar when he had his first vision. This argument will be followed when I include v. 3 in the introduction of the pericope (1:4-3:15).



apart from the "fifth year of the exile of Jehoiachin" is merely conjectural.<sup>26</sup>

### The Identity of the 'anî

The narrator, so far, has identified only the setting of the narrative and the events which took place. The identity of the recipient who has "visions of God" by the river Chebar among the exiles of Judah beginning in the fifth year of their exile,<sup>27</sup> however, has not been disclosed. If it were not for the information in v. 3, the identity of the "I" would remain a mystery until 24:24 where YHWH addresses by name the "I" of the narrative.<sup>28</sup> The mystery, however, is removed in v. 3 when the narrator gives the reader a name for the unidentified recipient of the "visions". The first person 'anî becomes the third person "Ezekiel".

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<sup>26</sup> For various attempts to resolve the ambiguous "thirtieth year" see Walther Zimmerli, Ezekiel 1, p. 114; Walther Eichrodt, Ezekiel, p. 52; Joseph Blenkinsopp, Ezekiel IC (Louisville: John Knox Press, 1990), p. 16; Julius A Bewer, "The Text of Ezek. 1:1-3," AJSLL 50 (1933-1934), p. 98; M. E. Andrew, Responsibility and Restoration, pp. 12, 225; Cooke, Ezekiel, pp. 6-8; William H. Brownlee, Ezekiel 1-19, intro. xxxi-xxxii and pp. 4-5; Bernhard Lang, "Die erste und die letzte Vision des Propheten. Eine Überlegung zu Ezechiel 1-3," Bibl 64 (1983), pp. 225-230; Crawford H. Toy, "The Babylonian Element in Ezekiel," JBL 1 (1881), p. 62; H. H. Rowley, "The Book of Ezekiel in Modern Study," BJRL pp. 198ff; William F. Albright, "The Seal of Eliakim and the Latest Preexilic History of Judah with Some Observations on Ezekiel," JBL 51 (1932), p. 97; C. C. Torrey, "Certainly Pseudo-Ezekiel," JBL 53 (1934), p. 306.

<sup>27</sup> The first exile is referred to with respect to the exile of King Jehoiachin who was carried away by the Babylonians into Babylon in 597 B.C.E.

<sup>28</sup> In 24:24 the narrator has YHWH identify the "I" as "Ezekiel" who is to function as a sign to those around him.



The word of YHWH came to Ezekiel the priest, the son of Buzi, in the land of the Chaldeans by the river Chebar; and the hand of YHWH was upon him there. (Ez. 1:3 RSV)

The identification of the character (i.e. 'anî) as being Ezekiel enables us to have a better point of reference to the "I" of the text. Though the text does not explicitly make the connection between the two, we can infer that the "I" is Ezekiel, the son of Buzi the priest. The narrator draws this parallel together by mentioning again the location of the man now identified as Ezekiel. Ezekiel is the "I" who is "in the land of the Chaldeans by the river Chebar" (v. 3).

#### The Emphasis on the Event and Location and its Significance

In v. 3 the narrator not only identifies the "I" of v. 1 but also alludes once again to the information from v. 1 which refers to the event and its location. The narrator has already shown that the events were of a divine nature and that they were seen outside the land of Palestine, among the exiles of Judah by the river Chebar. The question now to be asked is whether the narrator communicates anything by informing us as in v. 1 of the event experienced by the character Ezekiel and the location of Ezekiel.

Zimmerli concludes that the narrator purposefully mentions again the event and the location of Ezekiel. He supports his argument by noting the narrator's use of *hāyōh hāyāh* as the opening words of v. 3. Zimmerli observes that the "infinitive absolute of *hāyāh* in the form *hāyōh* is found again in 1 Kings

13:32, and with the form *hāyô* in Gen 18:18; Nu 30:7; Jer 15:18; Ezek 20:32. In all these references the strengthening of the assertion becomes intelligible."<sup>29</sup> Zimmerli's comparison of *hāyôh* *hāyāh* with its use elsewhere in the Old Testament indicates that the narrator emphasizes that "the word of YHWH" came to Ezekiel where he stood. If Zimmerli is correct the narrator emphasizes the location of Ezekiel among the exiles.

The narrator continues to emphasize the manifestation of YHWH<sup>30</sup> before Ezekiel by stating that "the hand of YHWH (*yad-YHWH*) was upon him" (v. 3b). The expression *yad-YHWH* (v. 3) is used extensively in the Old Testament. In the majority of the times it occurs it refers to the manifestation of God's power in punishment or destruction.<sup>31</sup> There are instances where it refers to God's personal contact with a person (e.g. 1 Kgs. 18:46).<sup>32</sup> This personal contact appears to be the narrator's emphasis here in v. 3.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Zimmerli, Ezekiel 1, p. 82.

<sup>30</sup> The narrator has referred to "visions of God" in v. 1 and the coming of "the word of YHWH" in v. 3.

<sup>31</sup> (i.e., Ex. 3:20; 7:4, 5; 9:3; 13:19; 15:9; Deut. 2:15; 3:24; Josh. 4:24; 22:31; Jud. 2:15; Ruth 1:13; 1 Sam. 5:6, 7, 9; Is. 41:20; etc.)

<sup>32</sup> See Herbert May, The Book of Ezekiel, IB 6, ed. G. A. Buttrick (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1956), p. 68.

<sup>33</sup> Ez. 1:3b continues to refer to Ezekiel, the "I" of v. 1, in third person (*'ālāyiv*). However, there is an alternative reading (e.g. LXX). The MT is one of the few texts which uses the third person after the identity of the "I" has been given. Zimmerli and Cooke choose to read "upon me" *'ālî* rather than *'ālāyiv* of the MT. This reading would place the later part of v. 3 in accordance with the remainder of the text of Ezekiel. However, it would place

The narrator emphatically states in v. 3b that the hand of YHWH was upon Ezekiel "there"  $\bar{\text{š}}\bar{\text{a}}\bar{\text{m}}$ .<sup>34</sup> We have already read that "there" means "in the midst of the exiles"  $\text{b}^{\text{e}}\text{t}\bar{\text{o}}\bar{\text{k}}\text{-hagg}\bar{\text{o}}\bar{\text{l}}\bar{\text{a}}\bar{\text{h}}$  (Ez. 1:1).<sup>35</sup> The narrator, therefore, in the two introductions in vv. 1-3, has repeatedly informed us that YHWH's manifestation and revelation<sup>36</sup> have come to Ezekiel (vv. 1, 3) who was "in the midst of the exiles" (v. 1) in the land of the Chaldeans (v. 3) by the river Chebar (vv. 1, 3). Verse 1, as the introduction to the narrative, and vv. 2-3, as the introduction to the immediate event, conclude with the narrator's emphasis that it was "there" in the midst of the exiles in the land of the Chaldeans by the river Chebar that Ezekiel experienced the events described in the narrative.

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itself in conflict with the opening section of the same verse which uses the third person title to identify the "I" as "Ezekiel". Thus, it does not resolve the conflicting nature of the verse to make this change from the third person pronominal suffix "him" to the first person pronominal suffix "me". Therefore, I suggest that we read v. 3 as it is rendered in the MT ( $\bar{\text{a}}\bar{\text{l}}\bar{\text{a}}\bar{\text{y}}\bar{\text{i}}\bar{\text{v}}$ ). This reading, whether or not it is an inserted comment by an editor, causes no problem in understanding the development of the text.

<sup>34</sup> (See Zimmerli, Ezekiel 1, p. 82. 3.d. He concludes that  $\bar{\text{š}}\bar{\text{a}}\bar{\text{m}}$  "there" in Ez. 1:3 was added by the hand of a redactor because of its absence in the Septuagint and the related texts 3:22; 8:1.) Whatever the case may be, we will accept it as it is present in the Masoretic Text in Ez. 1:3. I adopt the MT as the basis for my treatment of the narrative, although, I must note that it is not always an easy matter to establish the best reading of the MT.

<sup>35</sup> See also Y. Kaufmann, The Religion of Israel (London: George Allen & Union Ltd., 1960), p. 426; Greenberg, Ezekiel 1-20, pp. 15, 40; Andrew, Responsibility and Restoration, pp. 3, 12; Zimmerli, Ezekiel 1, pp. 16, 54.

<sup>36</sup> (i.e. "vision of God" in v. 1; "the word of YHWH" in v. 3a; and the "hand of YHWH" in v. 3b.)

The information in vv. 1-3 is important since it establishes the setting (i.e. the story's time, place, and situation) in which can be placed the events that follow. We now know that the first event in the prophetic narrative begins among the exiles in the fifth year of the exile of King Jehoiachin (1:2). Although this date can with some certainty be charted historically, the specific time is of little consequence to our reading. We are only concerned with how the narrator uses this date and those elsewhere in the narrative to communicate the progression of the events in the story.

The narrator's description of Ezekiel as a resident among the exiles is significant with regard to our understanding of the theme of YHWH's movement in the narrative. Since the narrator has informed us that Ezekiel sees visions of God among the exiles, we might speculate on the impact such an event would have on someone under these circumstances. The Deuteronomistic tradition emphasized that YHWH's earthly abode was contained within the temple of Jerusalem.<sup>37</sup> This centralized location of the divine

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<sup>37</sup> For a more in depth discussion of the Deuteronomistic tradition as it relates to the understanding of the earthly abode of God: see Robert Henry Pfeiffer, Introduction to the Old Testament (New York: Harper Brothers Publishers, 1941), pp. 232, 234; H. Wheeler Robinson, The Religious Ideas of the Old Testament (London: Gerald Duckworth & Co. LTD., 1913, 2nd edition, 1956), p. 136; Martin Noth, The Deuteronomic History, JSOTS 15, 1981, pp. 94, 95, and The Laws in the Pentateuch and other Studies (Edinburgh: Oliver & Boyd, 1966), p. 144; E. W. Nicholson, "The Centralization of the Cult in Deuteronomy," VT 13 (1963), pp. 380-389; Gerhard von Rad, Old Testament Theology, vol. 1 (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1962), pp. 21f., 43-47; R. E. Clements, God and Temple (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1965), pp. 71, note 1, 81, note 3. See for a variation on this understanding Moshe Weinfeld, Deuteronomy and the Deuteronomic School (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972), pp.



presence enabled Israel to more efficiently monitor the practices of the cultus, and, to focus its worship of God.<sup>38</sup> The centralization of the worship of the God of Israel furthermore increased the importance of the Jerusalem temple and the city.<sup>39</sup> The focus on the solitary sanctuary in Jerusalem contributed to the belief among the people that YHWH had singled out this particular place for the earthly abode of the divine one. The Deuteronomists emphasized the belief that YHWH chose Jerusalem

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191, 193, 195, 197; Menahem Haran, "The Divine Presence in the Israelite Cult and Cultic Institutions," Bibl 50 (1969), pp. 251-267; Gerhard von Rad, "Deuteronomy's 'Name' Theology and the Priestly Document's 'Kabod' Theology," Studies in Deuteronomy, tr. D. Stalker, Studies in Biblical Theology 9 (Chicago, 1953), pp. 38-39.

<sup>38</sup> Georg Fohrer, History of Israelite Religion, p. 297; T. C. Vriezen, An Outline of Old Testament Theology (Oxford: Blackwell, 1958), pp. 28, 49, 176-177; H. Wheeler Robinson, The Religious Ideas of the Old Testament, p. 135. Moshe Weinfeld, "Cult Centralization in Israel in the Light of a Neo-Babylonian Analogy," JNES 23 (1964), pp. 202-212 does not agree that the centralization of the cult prevented religious syncretism. Weinfeld's argument is questionable since it is obvious that control of the religion would be easier if there was one place as the central point rather than numerous places in various locales. The likelihood of religious syncretism would clearly be diminished.

<sup>39</sup> For others who note the importance of the temple in Jerusalem see Ralph W. Klein, Israel in Exile, (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1979), p. 4.; Georg Fohrer, History of Israelite Religion, p. 318; John H. Hayes, "The Tradition of Zion's Inviolability," JBL 82 (1963), pp. 419-426; Albrecht Alt, Essays on Old Testament History and Religion, tr. R. A. Wilson (Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1967), pp. 233-234; Paul Joyce, Divine Initiative and Human Response in Ezekiel, JSOTS 51, 1989, p. 15.

and the temple as the place where YHWH's name was to dwell (Deut. 12:5).<sup>40</sup>

The influence of this belief of the Deuteronomists would place the exiles under severe theological strain. James D. Newsome, Jr. suggest that to the exiles,

the God of Israel, who was supposed to shape nations and events, now seemed puny and remote, a Deity holed up in the far-off Jerusalem Temple who was either unable or unwilling to blunt the sword of Nebuchadrezzar and save His own people.<sup>41</sup>

It would be reasonable for us to conclude that the exile raised the question of the superiority of YHWH's power over that of Marduk and the remainder of the Babylonian pantheon. The exiles must have asked whether or not YHWH was defeated by the Babylonian gods?

Even if the exiles believed YHWH had not been defeated by the Babylonian pantheon, the problem would remain for them concerning worshipping YHWH outside the land and away from the chosen sanctuary. The exiles had been taken captive from their land and the sanctuary of the God of Israel. The people in exile were separated from the temple which they viewed as the footstool

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<sup>40</sup> See for a similar conclusion Raymond Abba, "Name," IDB 3, 1962, p. 503. See for discussion on the dwelling of the "name" of God: Moshe Weinfeld, Deuteronomy and the Deuteronomic School, pp. 191, 193, 195, 197; Menahem Haran, "The Divine Presence in the Israelite Cult and Cultic Institutions," pp. 251-267; Walter Brueggemann, "Presence of God, Cultic," IDBS, 1976, p. 681; R. E. Clements, "Deuteronomy and the Jerusalem Cult Tradition," VT 15 (1965), pp. 302, 304. Gerhard von Rad. "Deuteronomy's 'Name' Theology and the Priestly Document's 'Kabod' Theology," Studies in Deuteronomy, pp. 38-39.

<sup>41</sup> By the Waters of Babylon (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1979), p. 71.



of God (Lam. 2:1), YHWH's dwelling place (1 Kgs 8:13; Ez. 43:7), God's resting place (Ps. 132:14), and the place where God's face was to be seen (Is. 1:12). This view of God's earthly presence as being confined to the temple in the land of Israel would give the exiles good reasons to feel that they were far from the presence of God. Charles F. Whitley concludes that

on removal from Judah the exiles were forthwith confronted with the problem of worship. They had hitherto worshipped [YHWH] at the sanctuary in Jerusalem but now wondered if communion with the national God of Israel were at all possible on foreign soil (cf. e.g., Ps.137:4).<sup>42</sup>

It is this sense of separation from God which the narrator appears to build upon as he describes the exilic manifestation of God in the narrative; for it was by the river Chebar, in the land of Babylon, that Ezekiel had the first of his recorded visions of God (1:4-3:15).<sup>43</sup> Andrew Blackwood, Jr. accurately observes the significance of YHWH's manifestation to Ezekiel outside the land of Palestine:

since the time of Moses, God had not spoken to a prophet beyond the physical boundaries of Palestine.

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<sup>42</sup> Charles Francis Whitley, The Exilic Age (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1957), p. 6.

<sup>43</sup> The significance of YHWH's manifestation outside of Palestine is also noted by Bernhard Lang, "Die erste und die letzte Vision des Propheten," Bibl 64 (1983), p. 229; Harry M. Orlinsky, "Where did Ezekiel receive the Call to Prophecy?" BASOR 122 (1951), p. 35; Charles H. Sherlock, "Ezekiel 10: A Prophet Surprised," RTR LII/2 (1983), p. 44; Walther Zimmerli, "The Message of the Prophet Ezekiel," Int 23 (1969), p. 138; Ralph W. Klein, Ezekiel the Prophet and His Message (Columbia, South Carolina: University of South Carolina Press, 1988), p. 26; G. A. Cooke, Ezekiel, p. 30.



Here it was, at the time and place least expected, that the "hand of the Lord was upon him."<sup>44</sup>

This detail establishes at the outset a theological dimension to the narrative.

**The First of the Visions of God**  
(Ezekiel 1:4-3:15)

The narrator's elaborate description (vv. 4-27) of the first vision immediately follows the introduction to the visionary experience (vv. 2-3). It will be helpful to make an analysis of the opening verses since the narrator gives only a general description of Ezekiel's initial view of the approach of the manifestation of YHWH. In this description the narrator uses elements of past traditions to describe Ezekiel's unique vision. His use of the images and metaphors which were commonly used in reference to descriptions of theophanies enable us to better understand Ezekiel's vision, however unique it may have been.

The narrator begins his description of the vision with *vā'ēre' v<sup>e</sup>hinnēh* (v. 4 "and I looked and behold"). The heavens have opened (v. 1) and Ezekiel looks to see what is to be revealed (v. 4). As Ezekiel looks, he sees a *rûah s<sup>e</sup>'ārāh*<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Ezekiel: Prophecy of Hope, p. 37.

<sup>45</sup> See for parallel references: Job 38:1; 48:6; Zec. 9:14. Regarding references to the destructive nature of YHWH's wrath see Jer. 23:19; 30:23.

("stormy wind") coming from the north, and a 'ānān gādōl<sup>46</sup> ("great cloud"), with nōgah<sup>47</sup> ("brightness") all around it, and 'ēš<sup>48</sup> ("fire") flashing forth continually (v. 4). These images used by the narrator of Ezekiel in his description of the manifestation of the divine are familiar terms used in the Israelite tradition to describe the theophanies of God.<sup>49</sup> These images in the description therefore clearly indicate that this is a manifestation of YHWH.

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<sup>46</sup> See for parallel references relating to the glory of YHWH appearing in a cloud: Ex. 13:21, 22; 16:10; 24:15, 16; 33:9; 34:5; 40:34, 35, 36, 37, 38; Lev. 16:2; Num. 9:15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22; 10:11, 12, 34; 11:25; 12:5; Deut. 31:15; 1 Kgs. 8:10; 2 Chr. 5:13; Neh. 9:12, 19; Ps. 78:14; 99:7.

<sup>47</sup> See: 2 Sam. 22:13 for a fascinating comparison with the vision of Ezekiel in ch. 1. See especially 2 Sam. 22:8-17.; Ps. 18:9-12 (13); Is. 4:5; Hab. 3:4. Each of these references refer to a theophanic encounter. See Helmer Ringgren, *Israelite Religion*, tr. David E. Green (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1966), p. 90 notes that often the appearance of the glory of YHWH is associated with the light phenomenon.

<sup>48</sup> See for parallel references: The exact expression from Ezekiel (v<sup>e</sup>'ēš mitlaqqahat) only occurs outside of Ezekiel in Ex. 9:24 in the story of the plague of hail upon the land of Egypt. Ex. 3:2 (Though this text is initially described as an angel of YHWH is later presented as YHWH himself.); 13:21, 22; 14:24; 19:18; 24:17 "Now the appearance of the glory of YHWH was like a devouring fire on top of the mountain..."; 40:38; Lev. 10:2; Num. 9:15, 16; 14:14; Deut. 1:33; 4:11, 12, 15, 33, 36, 24, 36; 5:4, 22 (19), 24 (21), 26 (23); 9:3, 10; 10:4; 2 Kgs. 2:11; 2 Chr. 7:1-3; Neh. 9:12, 19; Job 1:16; Ps. 78:14; Is. 66:15; In Jeremiah YHWH's fury is associated with fire- 4:4; 21:12; See also Lam. 2:4; Nah. 1:6.

<sup>49</sup> E. C. Kingsbury, "The Theophany Topos and the Mountain of God," *JBL* 86 (1967), pp. 205-210 notes the similarities in the imagery used to describe the theophanies in the OT.

### Coming From the North

There is one reference in the narrator's description of the approach of the manifestation which is not as clearly placed in the tradition of Israel, *bā'āh min-haṣṣāpôn* ("came from the north"). Outside the book of Ezekiel there is only one other reference in Psalm 48:3<sup>50</sup> which might allude to the abode of YHWH in the north.<sup>51</sup> Psalm 48:1-3 reads:

Great is YHWH and greatly to be praised in the city of our God! His holy mountain, beautiful in elevation, is the joy of all the earth, Mount Zion, in the far north (*ṣāpôn*), the city of the great King. (RSV)

Even this reference to Mount Zion, in the far north" is a curious phrase and is therefore somewhat problematic. Mount Zion, located in Jerusalem, is not to the far north since it is due south.

Mitchell Dahood<sup>52</sup> translates *yark<sup>e</sup>tê ṣāpôn* in Psalm 48:3 as "heart of Zaphon". Dahood argues that the narrator was apparently equating the importance and sanctity of Mount Zion as the dwelling of God to the religion of Israel with that of Mount Zaphon to the Canaanite religion.<sup>53</sup> Dahood observes that:

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<sup>50</sup> The reference is to the MT. The English equivalent is 48:2.

<sup>51</sup> See Norman C. Habel, *The Book of Job*, CBC (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975), pp. 198-199. E. C. Kingsbury, "The Theophany Topos and the Mountain of God," pp. 205-210 observes in his research on storm theophanies in the OT that most storm passages "have an interest or origin in the north" (pp. 206-207). Job 37:22 implies that God comes out of the north. "Out of the north comes golden splendor; God is clothed with terrible majesty."

<sup>52</sup> *Psalms 1*, AB (Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1965).

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 289-290.



Though [šāpôn] came to mean "North" in Hebrew, there are three other poetic passages where the ancient Canaanite sense as the name of a specific mountain is still preserved: Ps lxxxix 13; Isa xiv 13, where [yark<sup>e</sup>tê šāpôn] stands in apposition to [har mō'ēd], "the mountain of assembly"; and Job xxvi 7.<sup>54</sup>

Arthur Weiser<sup>55</sup> differs from Dahood in his translation of the phrase yark<sup>e</sup>tê šāpôn in Psalm 48. Weiser maintains the literal translation "the extreme north" and suggests that the phrase is probably in opposition to pagan ideas that the "extreme north" was the location of the "mountain of the gods"<sup>56</sup> Weiser's conclusion, however, is not opposed to that of Dahood. Weiser suggests that the idea of the greatness and sanctity associated with the "mountain of the gods" is here applied to the mountain in Jerusalem on which the temple stood.<sup>57</sup>

It is apparent that Dahood and Weiser, though they may differ in their translation of yark<sup>e</sup>tê šāpôn, agree that the phrase does not suggest that God dwells in the north but that the sanctity attributed to the idea of the northern dwelling of the gods is also attributed to the mountain in Jerusalem.

Psalm 48:3, as it is understood by Dahood and Weiser, does not help in our attempt to understand the reference to the "north" in Ez. 1:4 better. We must look elsewhere in the Old

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<sup>54</sup> Ibid., p. 290.

<sup>55</sup> The Psalms, OTL, tr. Herbert Hartwell (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1962).

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., p. 381.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

Testament therefore to other sources which might enhance our understanding of what is taking place in the first chapter of Ezekiel.

The north is mentioned in Isaiah (14:31; 41:25) and Jeremiah (1:14; 4:6; 6:1) with reference to divine intervention through a foe who will approach Palestine from that direction. Cooke concludes that since the north is the direction from which destruction was to come in Jeremiah 1:13ff.; 4:6; 6:1 it also implies impending destruction here in Ezekiel.<sup>58</sup> Zimmerli, in opposition to Cooke, relates the reference to the north in Ez. 1:4 to the image of the mountain of the gods. He argues that "we must think here of a belief in the mountain of God in the north, which ultimately stems from Babylonian mythology. This is to be found in...Is 14:13 and possibly in the historized reference to the enemy from the north summoned by [YHWH] in Jeremiah..."<sup>59</sup>

M. E. Andrew has a unique suggestion in reference to the theophanic approach from the north in Ez. 1:4. His point is that the reference to the north would have significant implication for Ezekiel among the exiles in Babylon. Andrew concludes that this northern approach of the storm would indicate that YHWH was coming from Jerusalem, since this is the direction from which any approach from Jerusalem to Babylon would occur. Andrew suggests that this northern approach implies that YHWH is not confined to

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<sup>58</sup> See Cooke, Ezekiel, p. 10.

<sup>59</sup> Zimmerli, Ezekiel 1, p. 120.

Jerusalem, but can make himself known in an "unclean land".<sup>60</sup> He claims that this would denote to the exiles "that something quite beyond the ordinary" was going to happen.<sup>61</sup>

Cooke and Zimmerli have both noted the reference to the foe from the north in Jeremiah. Yet neither Cooke or Zimmerli suggest that the approach from the north does not necessarily mean that the foe dwelt in the north. The identity of Jeremiah's foe supports this understanding. Jeremiah eventually reveals that the foe from the north was in reality from Babylon. The invader could have concluded that the most strategic approach from Babylonia was from the north. Andrew has made the most plausible argument therefore in reference to the phrase in Ez. 1:4. It would seem reasonable for us to conclude, based on Jeremiah's Babylonian foe from the north, that from "the north" in the Babylonian perspective most likely means from the west. The approach of the storm theophany therefore is from Palestine, the homeland of the exiles in Babylon.

#### **The Approach of the Glory of YHWH**

The approach of the storm from the direction which was apparently the strategic point of entry from Palestine into Babylon reveals that the storm and whatever it carries is moving from Palestine to the area in Babylon among the exiles. Joseph

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<sup>60</sup> Responsibility and Restoration, p. 13.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid.



Blenkinsopp points to the significance of the images of movement in the first vision concluding that they attempt "to explain how [YHWH], at home in the Jerusalem temple, can now appear in the Babylonian diaspora".<sup>62</sup> The theme of movement, as portrayed through the narrator's imagery, clearly implies that the God in the narrative has moved from one place to be in another. It is an obvious allusion to movement for the narrator to mention any form of approach. The narrator presents the images of movement in the opening vision therefore as he begins his detailed description of the storm's approach to the prophet.<sup>63</sup> These images of movement and their significance with regard to the theme of the movement of YHWH will be the focus of this section.

At the opening of the description of the vision, we have been told therefore that Ezekiel sees a storm coming from the north (1:4). He says:

As I looked, behold, a stormy wind came from the north; a great cloud and fire flashing, and brightness round about it; and from the midst of the fire was the color like gleaming bronze" (1:4).

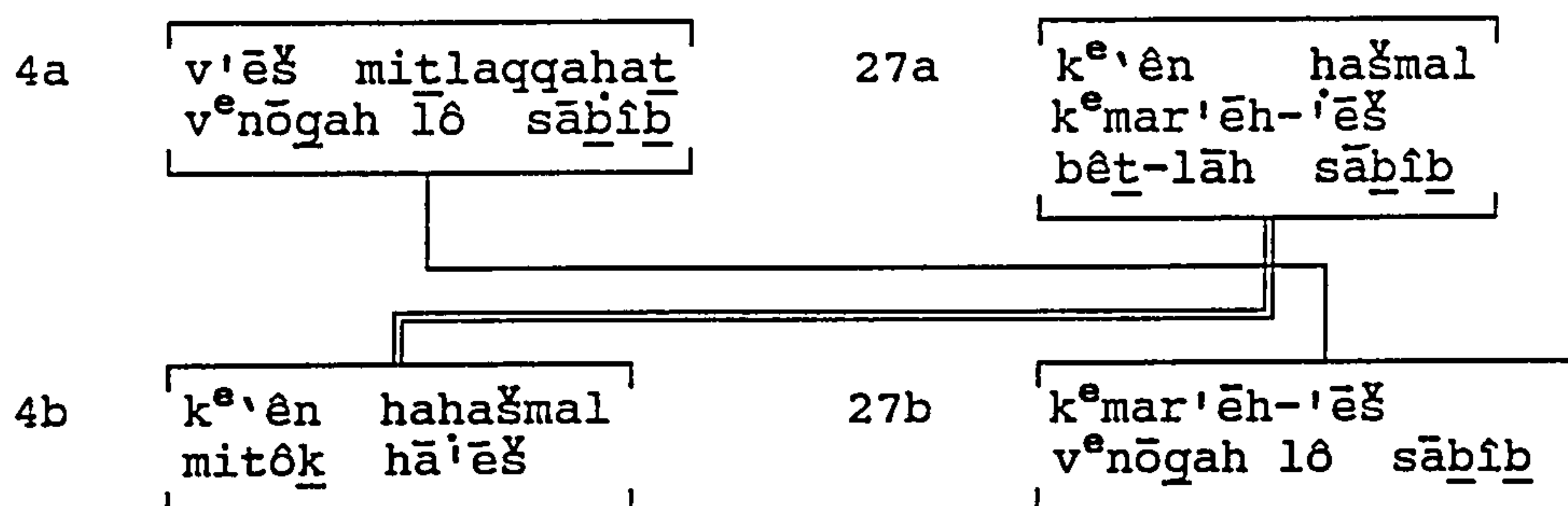
The connection between the approach of the storm cloud and the movement and presence of the glory of YHWH is revealed in the

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<sup>62</sup> Ezekiel, IC (Louisville: John Knox Press, 1990), p. 21.

<sup>63</sup> The emphasis on movement is also noted by Carl G. Howie, "Ezekiel", IDB 2, ed. George Arthur Buttrick (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1962), pp. 204, 210; Ralph W. Klein, "[YHWH] Faithful and Free--A Study in Ezekiel," CTM 42 (1971), p. 494; Daegeuk Nam, "The 'Throne of God' Motif in the Hebrew Bible," Th.D. diss., Andrews University Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary (Ann Arbor, Michigan: University Microfilms International, 1989), pp. 254, 272, 277; Ronald M. Hals, Ezekiel FOTL, vol. 19 (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1989), pp. 58-59.

language<sup>64</sup> used by the narrator as he describes the storm which brought a cloud with nōqah lō sābīb (brightness round about it) radiating a color like 'ên hahas̄mal (gleaming bronze). At the end of the description of the manifestation, the narrator informs us that Ezekiel sees the same features in reverse order ('ên hahas̄mal, 1:27a; nōqah lō sābīb, 1:27b) as he looks at the throne which is above the firmament.<sup>65</sup> These two verses (4 and 27) form a chiastic parallel which describes the same manifestation.



Immediately following v. 27, the narrator moves on to define clearly this appearance which parallels the opening description. In 1:28b Ezekiel says, "This was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of YHWH". The connection with the approaching storm therefore strengthens the relationship between the general introduction of the vision (1:5-25) and the

<sup>64</sup> The language used by the narrator is not only significant in how it parallels texts outside of Ezekiel but is also significant with respect to how it parallels other portions of the text of Ezekiel.

<sup>65</sup> H. Van Dyke Parunak, "The Literary Architecture of Ezekiel's Mar'ot 'Elohim," *JBL* 99/1 (1980), p. 63 draws attention to this chiasma in Ezekiel 1.

description which is identified in 1:26-28 as the appearance of the likeness of the glory of YHWH.

The description of the general approach of the whole manifestation (i.e. 1:4) in the image of a storm parallels the description which comes at the end of the vision of the glory of YHWH in 1:27. The features which are first noticed by Ezekiel in 1:4 are the very same features of the glory of YHWH in 1:26-28. The parallel is significant because it connects the characteristics of the first of the visions with those of the likeness of the glory of YHWH. The narrator has established a connection, from the start, between the general description of the manifestation (i.e. the storm) and the appearance of the likeness of the glory of YHWH. This connection is of importance with regard to the relationship between the movement and approach of the storm and the exilic appearance (i.e. presence) of YHWH in the narrative because it shows that the divine character has approached the exiles in the foreign land of Babylon. The significance of the theme of movement will be seen as the description of the vision makes the connection between the movement of the living creatures, the wheels, and the glory of YHWH.



### The Likenesses of What is Seen From Within the Storm

The motif of the movement in the first vision develops progressively as the narrator begins to describe in more detail what is seen in the storm. Each of the various elements described, although not being divine, have appeared as part of the theophany. It seems, then, that the movement portrayed in this imagery is important in the narrator's portraying the divine character of the narrative.

#### The Ḥayyôṭ (Living Creatures)

The text moves from the initial description of the approach of the storm (v. 4) to a more detailed description of what it brings to Babylon (v. 5 ff.). Ezekiel sees a  $d^e m\dot{u}t$  'arba' ḥayyôṭ ("likeness of four living creatures") coming from the midst of the fire within the cloud. Though the narrator's description of the living creatures appears to dominate the account of the divine manifestation in ch. 1 it is important to remember that there is some justification for this in that he is describing a theophanic manifestation. It is through this elaborate description (vv. 4-27) that the narrator establishes the relationship between the movement of the living creatures and the likeness of the glory of YHWH. The description occurs in the section of the vision between 1:4 and 1:26. Here the narrator gives an elaborate account of the movement of the glory of YHWH

(1:28) outside of the temple. It is in the relationship between the movement of the living creatures and the divine presence that the narrator reveals that according to the narrative the creatures have transported YHWH.

It appears that the narrator shows Ezekiel to be hesitant to give these living creatures a clear identity; they are not even identified with conviction as being living creatures. Ezekiel ventures to say only that out of the storm came "the likeness of four living creatures" (1:5b). The narrator qualifies Ezekiel's description of these living creatures, using often the words "likeness" (*d<sup>e</sup>mûṭ*; 5 occurrences in ch. 1)<sup>66</sup> and "appearance" (*mar'eh*; 4 occurrences in ch. 1). He is unwilling to admit that his description of the living creatures is an exact one.<sup>67</sup> He states only that they have a resemblance to things which exist in the natural world. A good example of the narrator showing that the character Ezekiel is unwilling to commit himself to an exact description can be seen in 1:10 as he attempts to describe the faces of the living creatures. He says,

And each of their faces were like a face of a man (in front), and the four of them had a (likeness of a) face

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<sup>66</sup> See H. D. Preuss, "damah; *d<sup>e</sup>mûṭh*," *TDOT* 3, ed. G. Johannes Botterweck and Helmer Ringgren, tr. John T. Willis, Geoffrey W. Bromiley, and David E. Green (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1978), pp. 250-260 for a valuable discussion of the terms *damah* and *d<sup>e</sup>mûṭ*.

<sup>67</sup> Christopher Charles Rowland, "The Influence of the First Chapter of Ezekiel on Jewish and Early Christian Literature," Ph.D. diss., The University of Cambridge, 1974, p. i suggests that the narrator's continuous use of the qualifying preposition *k* and the noun *mar'eh* communicates the overwhelming nature of the event.

of a lion on the right side, the four of had the (likeness of a) face of an ox on the left side, and the four had the (likeness of a) face of an eagle (at the back). (1:10)

The narrator uses d<sup>e</sup>mû<sup>t</sup> 9 times in describing what Ezekiel sees in the first vision and 4 times in his description in the second vision.<sup>68</sup> It is interesting that the narrator uses the term more than it is used in the remainder of the Old Testament.<sup>69</sup>

William H. Brownlee argues that the narrator uses d<sup>e</sup>mû<sup>t</sup> because he is hesitant to describe what Ezekiel sees since it is of spiritual realities which defy description in human terms.<sup>70</sup> Ralph W. Klein claims that the narrator's non committal way of describing what Ezekiel sees in the first "vision" is because of the character's "priestly awe in the presence of the reality of God".<sup>71</sup> It is reasonable to conclude, as have Brownlee and Klein, that the narrator wanted to communicate that the character

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<sup>68</sup> (i.e. 1:5 twice, 10, 13, 16, 22, 26 twice, 28; 8:3; 10: 10, 21, 22). Ez. 1:28 is the only use of d<sup>e</sup>mû<sup>t</sup> in reference to YHWH in Ezekiel.

<sup>69</sup> In total, d<sup>e</sup>mû<sup>t</sup> is used only ten times outside of the Book of Ezekiel (see Gen. 1:26, 5:1, 3; 2 Kgs. 16:10; 2 Chr. 4:3; Ps. 58:5; Is. 13:4, 40:18 (used twice); Dan. 10:16).

<sup>70</sup> Ezekiel 1-19, p. 14. See for the same G. A. Cooke, Ezekiel, pp. 9, 11; J. M. Miller, "In the 'Image' and 'Likeness' of God," JBL 91 (1972), pp. 291-292; John T. Bunn, Ezekiel, p. 240; Daniel I. Block, "Text and Emotion: A Study in the 'Corruptions' in Ezekiel's Inaugural Vision (Ezekiel 1:4-28)," pp. 429-430.

<sup>71</sup> Ezekiel the Prophet and His Message (Columbia, South Carolina: University of South Carolina Press, 1988), p. 25. See for the same John T. Bunn, Ezekiel, pp. 227, 240; H. D. Preuss, "damah; d<sup>e</sup>mu<sup>^</sup>th," pp. 250-260.



Ezekiel felt inadequate in describing his encounter in the vision of God.<sup>72</sup>

Daniel Block takes a step further with regard to the impact of the manifestation upon Ezekiel. Rather than merely suggesting that this is the reason for the use of the word d<sup>e</sup>mût he argues:

It is apparent that the vocabulary and forms of expression available to the prophet fall far short of the requirements of this vision, which transcends all of the bounds of normal human experience.<sup>73</sup>

Block suggests therefore that it is probable that the nature of the manifestation of the divine led to the problematic structure of the inaugural vision, both grammatically and descriptively. Block's argument is opposed, however, by Cornelius Houk,<sup>74</sup> who concludes that the problems should be attributed to the hands of editors and redactors.

Greenberg explains the narrator's vagueness by suggesting that he "wished to have his audience bear in mind always that this was mar'ôt".<sup>75</sup> It is possible that the narrator has Ezekiel describing the vision obscurely, however, because he is trying to communicate the understanding that these living creatures and the

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<sup>72</sup> Greenberg, Ezekiel 1-20, p. 53 concludes that the frequent use of d<sup>e</sup>mût, mar'ēh, and k<sup>e</sup>'ēn signifies Ezekiel's unwillingness to commit himself "to the substantial identity of the seen with the compared".

<sup>73</sup> Daniel I. Block, "Text and Emotion: A Study in the 'Corruptions' in Ezekiel's Inaugural Vision (Ezekiel 1:4-28)," p. 430.

<sup>74</sup> Cornelius B. Houk, "A Statistical Linguistic Study of Ezekiel 1:4-3:11," ZAW 93 (1980), pp. 76-85.

<sup>75</sup> Ezekiel 1-20, p. 53.

accompanying manifestation are connected to the sacred and revered likeness of the glory of YHWH. The creatures are what appear to bear and transport the throne and the human form with its bronze-like appearance which is identified as the glory of YHWH (1:22-27). Being aware of the Deuteronomistic belief of God's location within the temple of Jerusalem, Ezekiel would be cautious in making the claim that these creatures were the bearers of the throne of God. He will go as far only as to compare them in his description as being similar to the holy entourage which abides around the throne in the temple. In the narrative Ezekiel's boldness comes later when he clarifies the identity of these creatures and shows them to be synonymous with the cherubim of the temple in ch. 10. His clarification, however, occurs after he has been shown the events which initiated the movement of YHWH's presence out of the temple in Jerusalem in ch. 10.

### Gender Vacillation

The narrator's hesitancy in identifying the "living creatures" in ch. 1 is further revealed in his vacillation in regard to their gender. The feminine plural ḥayyōt (5b-21) would be accompanied grammatically by feminine plural suffixes. The narrator vacillates, however, in his use of gender with regard to the ḥayyōt (5b-21).<sup>76</sup> A prime example of the narratives hesitancy to designate the gender of the ḥayyōt, even though the

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<sup>76</sup> See Appendix 1, "Gender Vacillation in Ezekiel 1".

vacillation begins in v. 6, can be seen in vv. 10 and 17 where the narrator uses the masculine and feminine pronominal endings interchangeably with reference to the living creatures.

v. 10 p<sup>e</sup>nêhem "their faces" (mas.)  
l<sup>e</sup>'arba'tām "to the four of them" (mas.)  
l<sup>e</sup>'arba'tān "to the four of them" (fem.)  
l<sup>e</sup>'arba'tān "to the four of them" (fem.)

v. 17 rib'êhen "their sides" (fem.)  
b<sup>e</sup>lektām "in their going" (mas.)  
yēlēkū "they went" (mas.)  
yissābū "they turned" (mas.)  
b<sup>e</sup>lektān "in their going" (fem.)

This vacillation continues throughout the chapter (5-26) with reference to the hayyôt. Zimmerli contends that it is possible that the vacillation of gender with regard to the living creatures (feminine plural) could be attributed to their association with the cherubim (masculine plural). These are not mentioned until ch. 10 where they are said to be synonymous with the living creatures of ch. 1.<sup>77</sup> Zimmerli's conclusion seems reasonable if the association of the living creatures with the cherubim could be made at this time in ch. 1. However, the "vision" pericope in 1:2-3:15 does not reveal this connection. At this point within the prophetic narrative, therefore, we cannot make the assumption that the living creatures (fem.) are to be confused with the cherubim (mas.).

Greenberg concludes that the vacillation presents no real difficulty since the narrative is attempting to communicate that

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<sup>77</sup> Ezekiel 1, p. 102. See for a similar conclusion W. Boyd Barrick, "The Straight-Legged Cherubim of Ezekiel's Inaugural Vision (Ezekiel 1:7a)," CBO 44 (1982), pp. 545-546.



Ezekiel is struggling to describe something which is neither male nor female or that may be both male and female.<sup>78</sup> There is thus no need, says Greenberg, for the narrator to use the proper grammatical feminine plural in regard to the feminine plural noun, hayyôṭ.<sup>79</sup> The description vacillates in reference to the gender of the "living creatures," it would appear, because the narrator intends to show that Ezekiel is unsure of the creatures' gender. Greenberg's conclusion is congruent with the obscure description established so far in the pericope. The vacillation in grammatical gender may then be seen as one of the narrator's literary devices for showing Ezekiel's unwillingness to categorize the living creatures because of their connection with YHWH and since they did not fit neatly into the category of male or female. Because of this Ezekiel will not venture out and boldly state that these creatures are within the grasp of his description. Their similarity with the holy entourage which abide in the temple with YHWH prevents him from making the direct connection. Neither Ezekiel, nor the Deuteronomists, expect to see these creatures outside of their traditional abode. Their appearance therefore is shown to disorient Ezekiel.

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<sup>78</sup> John W. Wevers, ed., Ezekiel, p. 28 attributes the gender vacillation in reference to the "living creatures" in Ez. 1 to "literary accretions".

<sup>79</sup> Moshe Greenberg, Ezekiel 1-20, pp. 43-44.

## The Straight Legs of the Living Creatures

The emphasis on the mobility and movement of the manifestation before Ezekiel is also present in the narrator's description of the legs and feet of the living creatures (v. 7).<sup>80</sup> The narrator proclaims in the description in v. 7 that the living creatures, who had a form likened to a man (v. 5), also had straight *r<sup>e</sup>gālīm* (feet or legs, v. 7) and the soles of a calf's foot which sparkled like burnished copper. The description does not clearly indicate that the living creatures each had one *regel* or whether they each had two.<sup>81</sup> It would appear from *regel y<sup>e</sup>šārāh* ("straight foot") which follows *raglêhem* that each creature, however, had only one leg. If this is the case, the narrator may be informing us that the mobility of the creatures was not dependent on their legs.<sup>82</sup> The narrator has previously mentioned in v. 6b that each of the creatures had four wings. The image of the wings would denote flight and thus mobility. The narrator has previously mentioned, however, that the living creatures had the likeness of a human (v. 5) which would have implied that they also walked on two legs. The narrator does not

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<sup>80</sup> (i.e. "and their legs were straight, and the sole of their feet was like the sole of the foot of a calf; and they sparkled like the color of burnished copper").

<sup>81</sup> *raglêhem* ("their feet/leg" v. 7) could mean either of the above.

<sup>82</sup> W. Boyd Barrick, "The Straight-Legged Cherubim of Ezekiel's Inaugural Vision (Ezekiel 1:7a)," p. 550 arrives at the same conclusion.

intend apparently for us as the reader to conclude that the legs in v. 7 were for walking. The one leg was instead for the purpose of standing when the creatures settled down upon the earth. This interpretation of the function of the legs is reasonable since they are described as "straight". The description of the legs as straight, unaccompanied by a description that they could bend, implies that the legs were unable to bend. The legs of the creatures served as support therefore as does a leg on a chair or a table. The narrator makes this point after he mentions the wings in order to clarify that the creatures, though made in likeness of humans, do not have the same means of locomotion as humans. Because of this he adds to his description of the creatures this reference to the portion of a human which provides the mobility, and states that the creatures were different in this way.

Greenberg takes this interpretation a step further. He concludes that the description *regel y<sup>e</sup>šārāh* and the *regel 'ēgel* ("calf's foot") of the living creatures is used to imply a lack of orientation on their behalf. The *ḥayyōt* would possibly have only one leg which was disjointed. This type of physical structure would emphasize that each creature was dependent on the others and especially the guiding force of the *rūah* "spirit" (v. 12).<sup>83</sup> Greenberg's association of the mobility of the living

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<sup>83</sup> Greenberg, Ezekiel 1-20, p. 44.



creatures with that of the rûah (v. 12) is premature.<sup>84</sup> My suggestion is that the implication that the legs do not bend, and that the narrator's placement of his description of the creature's straight legs immediately following his first mention of the wings implies that the mobility of the living creatures was not dependent upon their legs.

### The Wings and Wheels of the Living Creatures

The vehicle which transports YHWH outside of the temple is further described as the narrator tells of the appendages of the living creatures. In the narrative Ezekiel states in 1:6 that each of the living creatures had four wings. The narrator follows this statement by showing, in describing the wings, that they are used by the creatures for cover (1:11) and to lift themselves up from the earth (1:19, 21). In the narrative Ezekiel states that the living creatures furthermore have wheels alongside each of all four of them (1:15). The narrator describes the general

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<sup>84</sup> v. 12 states, 'āšer yihyeh-šammāh hārûah lāleket yēlēkû ("wherever the rûah went, they went"). I agree with Cooke (Ezekiel), Greenberg (Ezekiel 1-20), and Zimmerli (Ezekiel 1) that the rûah (spirit) mentioned in vv. 12, and 20 is not to be confused with rûah s'ārāh (stormy wind) of v. 4. The distinction between the two uses of the term rûah (spirit/wind) is made in vv. 20 and 21 when the narrator informs us that the animating rûah in reference to the creatures is the rûah hahayyah (spirit of the living creatures). The rûah, thus, cannot be separated from the Divine presence sitting upon the throne above the firmament (vv. 26-28). As Zimmerli (p. 130) accurately concludes, the rûah "refers to the mysterious underlying power which permeates the whole phenomenon, and which cannot be understood apart from the will of the One who is enthroned above the creatures".

appearance of the wheels, referring to their color (*k<sup>e</sup>'ên taršîš*, "like the color of a precious stone") and their construction (*hā'ôpan b<sup>e</sup>tôk hā'ôpān*, "a wheel within a wheel"). In continuing to emphasize the movement and activity of the divine apparition before Ezekiel, the narrator states (v. 17) that the wheels were able to go in four directions without having to turn if they changed direction (*'al-'arba'at rib'êhen b<sup>e</sup>lektām yēlēkû lō' yissabû b<sup>e</sup>lektān*). The narrator does not attempt to explain the physics of Ezekiel's description so that the audience can clearly understand how this movement is possible. He emphasizes merely that the wheels were not limited in their ability to move. The description of the wheels does communicate the motif of movement, among other things. In noting their wings and the accompanying wheels, the narrator has described the means of celestial and terrestrial locomotion of the living creatures.

The connection between these two features of the vision is significant in that the narrator is showing that the living creatures had wheels just as they had wings. The narrator's descriptions of the wings and the wheels are closely linked to one another (see following diagram). The movement made possible by the wings and wheels is connected to the living creatures. The narrator has made it clear in his description that the creatures have the wings and the wheels beside each of them. The connection of the movement of the wings and wheels with one another and the living creatures is furthermore emphasized in the repetition between vv. 19-21.

The diagram below, comparing vv. 19 and 20 with v.21, illustrates the narrator's emphasis on the relationship between the living creatures and the wheels. The words in bold type in v. 19a indicate that the narrator first mentions the movement of the living creatures. This movement is emphasized by the repetition in v. 21a (bold type). The text in v. 19b blocked off in box [a] states that the wheels responded to the movement of the living creatures. The response of the wheels is repeated in v. 21 (block [a]).

19 **ūbleket** **haḥayyōt** **yēlkū**  
 hā'ōpannīm 'eslām  
 ūbhinnāsē' haḥayyōt

mē'al hā'āres  
 yinnās<sup>e</sup>'ū hā'ōpannīm

[a]

20 'al 'āšer yihyeh-šām  
 hārūah lāleket yēlēkū  
 šāmmāh hārūah lāleket  
 v<sup>e</sup>hā'ōpannīm yinnās<sup>e</sup>'ū

l<sup>e</sup>'ummātām kī rūah

haḥayyāh bā'ōpannīm

[b]

21 **b<sup>e</sup>lektām** yēlēkū  
 ūb'āmdām ya'āmōdū  
 ūbhinnās'ām

mē'al hā'āres  
 yinnās<sup>e</sup>'ū hā'ōpannīm

[a]

l<sup>e</sup>'ummātām kī rūah

haḥayyāh bā'ōpannīm

[b]

In this repetition, within vv. 19-21, the narrator emphasizes that the living creatures (**ḥayyōt**) and the wheels (**ōpannīm**) function as one. Whatever movement the **ḥayyōt** made, the **ōpannīm** also made. When the **ḥayyōt** went in a particular direction, the **ōpannīm** went along beside them ('eslam). When the **ḥayyōt** lifted up (**ūbhinnāsē'**) from upon the earth, the **ōpannīm** lifted up (**yinnās<sup>e</sup>'ū**) also. When the **ḥayyōt** stood still (**ūb'āmdām**), the **ōpannīm** stood still (**ya'āmōdū**). In this way the



narrator has clearly indicated that the living creatures and the wheels of the vision were closely integrated and far from static.

v. 20b (block [b]) and v. 21b (block [b]) explicitly declare the connection between the synchronized movement of the wheels in unison with the movement of the living creatures. The spirit of the living creatures is the force which moves the wheels (vv. 20-21), which are appendages of the living creatures. The narrator, through the use of repetition, reinforces the connection made of the movement of the living creatures and the responsive movement of the wheels.

The narrator has noted that the living creatures and the wheels have mobility upon the land (ûbleket yēlkû v. 19; b<sup>e</sup>lektām yēlēkû v. 21) and in the air (ûbhinnāsē'...mē'al hā'āres yinnās<sup>e</sup>'û v. 19; yinnās<sup>e</sup>'û v. 20; ûbhinnās'ām mē'al hā'āres yinnās<sup>e</sup>'û v. 21). Zimmerli overlooks the distinct images of flight in these verses (19-21). He concludes that in the narrative Ezekiel "avoids any open affirmation of the flight of the creatures, although 1:24 and 3:13 mention the beating of wings and 1:24b (25b) adds a reference to the lowering of the wings."<sup>85</sup> Zimmerli has missed the narrator's emphasis of flight indicated in the "lifting up" (ûbhinnāsē' haḥayyôṭ mē'al hā'āres v. 19) of the living creatures from upon the earth (vv. 19-21). These references strongly suggest the flight of the living creatures.

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<sup>85</sup> Zimmerli, Ezekiel 1, p. 127.

By connecting the movement of the wings and the wheels the narrator combines two ways of mobility in his description of the vehicle of YHWH. The wings and the wheels provide the means of movement for the living creatures. The narrator's emphasis on movement of the manifestation becomes more evident as the description continues. The importance of this emphasis on the images of movement will be seen as the narrator continues to describe the manifestation culminating in the glory of YHWH.

#### The Transporters of the Platform (rāqīa')

The narrator's description of a platform<sup>86</sup> over the living creatures is relevant to the development of the theme of the movement of the divine character. The platform is first mentioned in v. 22 when the narrator describes what Ezekiel sees over the tops of the heads of the living creatures. He writes:

Over the heads of the living creatures there was the likeness of a platform, like the color of shining crystal, spread out above their heads. (1:22)

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<sup>86</sup> In Gen. 1:6, 7 it is the firmament which separates the waters of the earth from the waters above the earth as a barrier. In similar fashion the firmament-like platform in Ezekiel clearly separates the living creatures from the throne and ultimately the glory of YHWH which sits upon the throne. The similarity between the two uses of rāqīa' is that they both serve as a source of holding back or holding up something. The difference between the two uses of "firmament" is that rāqīa' in Genesis is clearly said to be the heavens whereas in Ezekiel we have only the likeness of a firmament. Therefore this firmament in Ezekiel is not to be understood as the heavens above the heads of the living creatures. But is the platform which is over the heads of the living creatures bearing the throne of the glory of YHWH upon it. See for a similar conclusion Alvin A. K. Low, "Interpretive Problems in Ezekiel 1," Th.D. diss., Dallas Theological Seminary (Ann Arbor, Michigan: University Microfilms International, 1985), p. 232.

In v. 23 the narrator immediately follows this description by describing the platform in reverse order (above to below) rather than from below to above as in v. 22. Each of the descriptions is centered around the platform (rāqīa'). The difference is that v. 22a focuses from the heads of the living creatures up to the platform whereas 23a focuses from the platform down to the living creatures.

In the description of the platform in v. 22 the narrator describes briefly the likeness of the appearance of the platform. Its color is "like the color of awesome crystal" (v. 22b). The narrator immediately follows, however, with a description of the wings and movement of the living creatures. He repeats what has previously been described in 1:11 by stating:

their wings were straight, one toward the other; two covering to them, and to each two covering to them their bodies. (1:23b)

Since the narrator has connected the two images in his description (i.e. the platform and the living creatures) the conclusion can be made that they are both portions of the same manifestation. The narrator therefore indicates in the correlated description of the two that there is a connection between the movement of the living creatures and that of the likeness of a platform above their heads.

The narrator has emphasized clearly the connection of the platform with the living creatures by stating repetitively that it was spread out over the heads of the living creatures (vv. 22, 25 and 26). The presence of the platform, then is connected to



the movement of the living creatures. The approach of the living creatures therefore brings the likeness of the platform to its position before the eyes of Ezekiel in the narrative.

The platform is not everything that is seen by the character Ezekiel above the living creatures in the narrative. Ezekiel also observes the appearance of a throne above the platform (v. 26). This throne is occupied by a human-like form, which is identified as the appearance of the likeness of the glory of YHWH (v. 28). We can deduct from the throne's position above the platform, and by its divine occupant, that it, too, has been carried by the living creatures, since the living creatures are the means by which the platform is carried to its present location before Ezekiel. In the narrative the living creatures, therefore, transport the platform on which the throne and the glory of YHWH are seated (e.g. 1:5, 22, 26).<sup>87</sup>

In this way the text of ch. 1 presents the vehicle of the God in the narrative, which is described above, as the mode of transportation used by the divine character in the visionary experience of Ezekiel. John T. Bunn notes that there are archaeological discoveries pertaining to the ancient Near East which attest to the practice of depicting deities "enthroned upon movable thrones and in sculptures as hovering over the backs of

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<sup>87</sup> This position is supported by Ralph W. Klein, Israel in Exile, pp. 72-74.; Parunak, "The Literary Architecture of Ezekiel's mar'ot 'elōhim", pp. 63-64.; Y. Kaufmann, The Religion of Israel, p. 437; G.A. Cooke, Ezekiel, p. 9.

sacred animals".<sup>88</sup> In a similar manner the narrator of Ezekiel has vividly described in ch. 1 the movement of the living creatures who bore the glory of YHWH. Their mobility has been shown in the narrative to be the means of YHWH's transport to Ezekiel among the exiles. According to the narrative their moving has brought them and the glory of YHWH to Ezekiel by the river Chebar from the direction of the north. YHWH, along with the accompaniment of the living creatures, is depicted as distinctly mobile and in this narrative actively in movement.

#### The Glory of YHWH

In v. 24 the narrator informs us that Ezekiel is making a transition of observation from *vā'ešma'* "and I heard" (v. 24) to *vā'ēre'* "and I saw" (vv. 4, 15, 27). The narrator's use of *vā'ešma'* shows that at this point it is not what Ezekiel sees which attracts his attention to the presence above the living creatures and the platform, but an audible distraction instead. As the creatures "let down their wings" (v. 24b) and stood still, Ezekiel's attention was attracted by a voice coming from above the platform (v. 25). It was the silence of the wings (vv. 24b, 25b) and the sound from above the platform (v. 25a) which drew his attention to the presence above (vv. 5-24). The narrator now uses *vā'ešma'* to create the transition from the focus on the

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<sup>88</sup> Ezekiel, p. 239. Bunn refers to G. Ernest Wright, Biblical Archaeology (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1957), pp. 147-148 in support of his claim.

living creature (vv. 5-24) to the new focus on the Divine presence (vv. 25-28).

The description in v. 26 of the human form and its accompanying detail, in v. 27, sitting on the likeness of a throne is the culmination of the narrator's description of the theophany in the first "vision" of God. The sound which Ezekiel hears above the platform after the living creatures have settled upon the earth ( $b^e\text{'}\underline{a}m\bar{d}\bar{a}m\ t^e\text{r}apen\bar{a}h\ kanp\bar{e}hen$  vv. 24, 25) has drawn his attention to the portion of the theophany which he had previously overlooked.

And above the platform over their heads was the likeness of a throne, in appearance like sapphire; and seated above the likeness of a throne was a likeness as it were of a human form. (1:26)

In v. 27 the narrator describes the likeness of a human form seen sitting on the throne. This likeness of a human form is described in detail.<sup>89</sup> The narrator, however, does not describe the form as having "normal" human qualities.

And upward from what had the appearance of his loins I saw as it were gleaming bronze, like the appearance of fire enclosed round about; and downward from what had the appearance of his loins I saw as it were the appearance of fire, and there was brightness round about him. Like the appearance of the bow that is in the cloud on the day of rain, so was the appearance of the brightness round about. (1:27-28 RSV)

The narrator closes Ezekiel's description of the theophany with the phrase  $h\bar{u}'\ mar'\bar{e}h\ d^e\text{m}\bar{u}t\ k^e\text{b}\bar{o}d\text{-}YHWH$ . This phrase has been

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<sup>89</sup> This association of the divine character with a human form is not unique to the book of Ezekiel, e.g. Ex. 33:18-23; Is. 6:1-2; Jer. 1:9; Dan. 7:9; Amos 7:7.



translated in various ways. It leaves us with the option to decide whether the entire description is to be understood as the  $h\bar{u}' mar'\bar{e}h d^{\bar{e}}m\bar{u}t k^{\bar{e}}b\bar{o}d-YHWH$  or simply the immediate description of the human form. The way we translate this phrase will determine what we include in its summation. The translation of the key word  $mar'\bar{e}h$  will contribute to the way we understand the phrase. Cooke,<sup>90</sup> and Zimmerli<sup>91</sup> translate  $mar'\bar{e}h$  in 1:28b as "appearance".<sup>92</sup> The "appearance of the likeness of the glory of YHWH" would suggest that we should only understand this phrase as referring to the identity of the "likeness of a human form" from vv. 26-28a.<sup>93</sup> In 8:4, however, they translate  $mar'\bar{e}h$  as "vision".<sup>94</sup> If they had translated  $mar'\bar{e}h$  in 1:28b as "vision" it would read as a summation of the whole description.

This was the vision of the likeness of the glory of YHWH.

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<sup>90</sup> Ezekiel.

<sup>91</sup> Ezekiel 1.

<sup>92</sup> The translators of the KJV, RSV, NAS, and NIV each translate  $mar'\bar{e}h$  in 1:28b as "appearance". Brownlee, Ezekiel 1-19, translates  $mar'\bar{e}h$  in 1:28b (p. 8) and 8:4 (p. 124) as "manifestation". And Greenberg, Ezekiel 1-20, translates  $mar'\bar{e}h$  1:28b (p. 38) as "appearance" and in 8:4 (p. 164) as "apparition". Eichrodt, Der Prophet Hesekiel, ATD 22, 2 vols. (Gottingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1959), ET: Ezekiel, translates  $mar'\bar{e}h$  as "image" in 1:28b (p. 50) and discards the entire verse in 8:4 (p. 105).

<sup>93</sup> For this reading see Julian Morgenstern, "Biblical Theophanies," ZA 25 (1911), p. 140 and "Biblical Theophanies," ZA 28 (1914), p. 39.

<sup>94</sup> In 8:4 each of the translators, except the NAS, translate  $mar'\bar{e}h$  as "vision". The NAS translates  $mar'\bar{e}h$  as "appearance" in 8:4.

Zimmerli acknowledges that it is possible that the narrator intended to communicate that Ezekiel understood the whole phenomenon as the glory of YHWH. He notes:

3:12; 8:4; 11:23, which refer briefly to the standing still or the rising up of the [k<sup>e</sup>bôd-YHWH], may point to this understanding...It is not impossible, even though it cannot be demonstrated with certainty, that the original presentation...intended the whole phenomenon to be understood by the term [k<sup>e</sup>bôd-YHWH].<sup>95</sup>

It is necessary to ask whether the narrator means that from the description of the storm until now all of what Ezekiel has seen is included under the umbrella of the likeness of the glory of YHWH? Greenberg concludes that "the glory of YHWH" (v. 28) does "not include the creatures"(vv. 5-25).<sup>96</sup> He argues that this conclusion "is inferable from 9:3; 10:4, 18f.; 11:22 where it is distinguished from its vehicle (the cherubs)."<sup>97</sup> This inference, however, is not necessary if we translate mar'ēh as "vision". The text itself implies that all which lies between vv. 4 and 28a is summarized in 1:28b. The narrator has introduced the story by stating that Ezekiel saw "visions of God" (v. 1). He then informs the audience that Ezekiel experienced a personal encounter with the divine character among the exiles (v. 3). The approaching storm then, which brought with it the entourage of God, including

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<sup>95</sup> Zimmerli, Ezekiel 1, p. 124.

<sup>96</sup> Ezekiel 1-20, p. 51. See for the same Cooke, Ezekiel, pp. 21-22; Gerhard von Rad, "[k<sup>e</sup>bôd] in the OT," TDNT 2, ed. Gerhard Kittel (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1964), p. 241.

<sup>97</sup> Ezekiel 1-20, p. 51.



the human form, is summarized in the phrase "[all of] this was the [first] vision of the likeness of YHWH".

The reference to "the glory of YHWH" reveals the presence of YHWH himself in the narrative. Edmond Jacob maintains that: "According to Ezekiel the kabôd is not merely the manifestation of God in concrete form, it is identical with him."<sup>98</sup> The use of the kabôd is therefore in itself identical with YHWH/God. The closing verse to the description of the theophany (v. 28b) clarifies the detailed description (vv. 4-27) of the great vision of the glory of YHWH. "This was the vision of the likeness of the glory of YHWH" (kēn mar'ēh hannōqah sâbîb hû' mar'ēh d<sup>e</sup>mût k<sup>e</sup>bôd-YHWH).

Some researchers, furthermore, rightly note that "the glory of YHWH" denotes honour or social weight.<sup>99</sup> Alvin K. Low observes that "the primary use of the noun [kabôd] refers to the social

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<sup>98</sup> Theology Of The Old Testament (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1958), pp. 80-81. This understanding that "the glory of YHWH" identifies YHWH himself is accepted by numerous researchers: e.g. Julian Morgenstern, "Biblical Theophanies," ZA 25 (1911), p. 140; "Biblical Theophanies," ZA 28 (1914), pp. 25, 41; Alvin A. K. Low, "Interpretive Problems in Ezekiel 1," pp. 256-257; George Ricker Berry, "The Glory of YHWH and the Temple," JBL 56 (1937), p. 115; Israel Efros, "Holiness and Glory in the Bible: An Approach to the History of Jewish Thought," JQR 41 (1950-1951), pp. 366, 374; Abraham J. Heschel, Between God and Man (New York: Harper, 1959), p. 56; John T. Bunn, Ezekiel, pp. 239, 240; Ursula M. Niebuhr, "Glory," BTB 14 (1984), p. 51.

<sup>99</sup> See Alvin A. K. Low, "Interpretive Problems in Ezekiel 1," p. 245; Gerhard Kittel, "[kavôd] and [y<sup>e</sup>qara] in Palestinian Judaism," TDNT 2, ed. Gerhard Kittel (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1964), p. 245; Gerhard von Rad, "[kavôd] on the OT," p. 238; Andrew W. Blackwood, Jr., Ezekiel: Prophecy of Hope, p. 82; John W. Wevers, ed., Ezekiel, p. 49.



"weight" or influence of a person (Job 29:20; Pss. 21:6; 62:8; 73:24; Prov. 11:16)".<sup>100</sup> When the divine character is identified by the phrase "the glory of YHWH," it shows that YHWH himself is present in all his honour.

### The Message of the Theophany

The theophany in the first chapter (vv. 1-28) of the book of Ezekiel depicts one of the most detailed descriptions of an encounter with YHWH in a narrative of the Old Testament. The content of the description, including the introduction to the vision, regardless of the numerous curiosities in the description of the theophany, communicates the setting of the vision, the motif of movement, and the manifestation of YHWH. These three points form the core of the narrator's message that YHWH, the God of Israel, has approached Ezekiel, an exile of Judah, dwelling among his fellow exiles in the foreign land of the Chaldeans.

The content of the description and the way in which it is communicated implies that this divine manifestation was the first to be experienced by Ezekiel in exile. Therefore, in vv. 4-28 the narrator is describing YHWH's initial movement among the exiles. The description supports this reading since the narrator details the approach of the manifestation and its appearance. When the narrator in the following chapters shows that Ezekiel is again confronted by the theophany, he relates them to this initial

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<sup>100</sup> "Interpretive Problems in Ezekiel 1," p. 245.

encounter. If this manifestation of the God in the narrative had been just one of many others which preceded it, the narrator would have indicated, in keeping with his style, that what Ezekiel saw was the same as the manifestation seen earlier.

The theophany in the land of the exiles is shown as convincing and realistic in the narrative in that Ezekiel "fell upon his face" (vā'epōl 'al-pānay) when he recognized it as the glory of YHWH. W. A. VanGemeren notes Rabbi Eliezer's conclusion in reference to Ezekiel's response to the theophany:

Ezekiel did not perceive the nature of the vision until the conclusion of the vision (cf. 1:27). At this point Ezekiel became aware of the object of the revelation and showed his obeissance [sic] to God.<sup>101</sup>

The response of Ezekiel in the narrative (v. 28b) is a typical response with regard to a person before the theophany in other Old Testament texts. The self-revelation of God is traditionally depicted as evoking awe and fear in the person who views the manifestation. The grandeur of the event causes people to respond by either hiding their faces (i.e., Moses - Exodus 3:6, Elijah - I Kings 19:13), or by falling upon their faces on the ground (i.e., Abraham - Genesis 17:3, our text Ezekiel 1:28).<sup>102</sup> Ezekiel's response to the identity of the apparition by falling upon his face therefore would link the significance of

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<sup>101</sup> "The Exegesis of Ezekiel's 'Chariot' Chapters in Twelfth-Century Hebrew Commentaries," Ph.D. diss., The University of Wisconsin Ann Arbor, Michigan: University Microfilms, 1974), p. 156.

<sup>102</sup> See Kuntz, The Self-Revelation Of God, p. 43.

this divine encounter with that of the theophanies of earlier Biblical tradition.<sup>103</sup>

The description of the vision has used phrases and images which reflect the divine character and his entourage in the temple in Jerusalem. The narrator has used these phrases and images to reveal that the temple entourage has the ability to be in more than one place at a time or to move from the temple to other locations. So far in the narrative the God of the people of Israel is revealed as a mobile God who has appeared among the people in exile.<sup>104</sup> The reason for YHWH's manifestation at this point in the narrative is not yet revealed. This vivid description of God as mobile, not static, however, stands in unique form against the literature written since the building of the temple in Jerusalem. The appearance of the divine in a foreign land (vv. 1,3) would have been viewed as out of character by the people in exile.<sup>105</sup> The divine's chosen "holy" abode was understood to be in the Temple in Jerusalem. Robert Wilson concludes:

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<sup>103</sup> Zimmerli, Ezekiel 1, also interprets the response of Ezekiel to the theophany as an act of abasement. Ezekiel "...is overwhelmed by the divine majesty..." (p. 123).

<sup>104</sup> Daegeuk Nam, "The "Throne of God" Motif in the Hebrew Bible," Th.D. diss., Andrews University Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary (Ann Arbor, Michigan: University Microfilms International, 1989), pp. 254, 272 agrees to the interpretation of the portrayal of the divine character as mobile in Ez. 1.

<sup>105</sup> See Cooke, Ezekiel, p. 30 who advocates that the appearance of YHWH outside the land of Judah among the exiles would give them an element of hope.



...the appearance of the divine glory in Babylon has ominous overtones. Seeing God present in Babylon, Ezekiel and his fellow exiles would have immediately wondered how God came to be in Babylon rather than in the Jerusalem temple, the place which God had chosen as an eternal dwelling. Had God perhaps rejected Israel's traditional sanctuary, and if so, what were the consequences of this rejection?<sup>106</sup>

Walther Zimmerli addresses the significance of the divine mobility concluding that the appearance of YHWH among the exiles would be viewed as highly unusual in the religious understanding of Ezekiel and the people of Israel (those in exile and those in Jerusalem).<sup>107</sup> As the descriptive account of the vision reveals, however, the divine character is distinctly mobile and has appeared in the midst of the exile. This detailed presentation of YHWH's mobility stands out in the description of the manifestation in chapter one. The description (vv. 5-27) within the frame of vv. 2 and 28 portrays YHWH transported to Ezekiel among the exiles by a flaming chariot (vv. 5-25).

The narrator of ch. 1 in the book of Ezekiel clearly guides us as the reader through this descriptive and detailed visionary experience of Ezekiel in order to reveal the significance of the vision. The details draw our attention to the presence and revelation of the divine character to Ezekiel (among the exiles, *b<sup>e</sup>tôk-haggôlāh*, 1:1). As the narrative shows, Ezekiel saw this vision of YHWH, not within or near the "holy city" or temple, but

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<sup>106</sup> Robert R. Wilson, "Prophecy in Crisis: The Call of Ezekiel," *Int* 38 (1984), pp. 125-126.

<sup>107</sup> Walther Zimmerli, *Ezekiel 1*, p. 54.

in the midst of his fellow exiles by the river Chebar in the land of Babylon.<sup>108</sup> YHWH and the temple entourage are visualized as approaching the prophet in exile (v. 4) from the region of the north. The narrator shows that Ezekiel's attention is drawn to the area above the living creatures by the sound as the holy array draws near (vv. 24-25).

The apparition is finally described as settling before Ezekiel. The stationary position of the theophany is inferred from v. 25 which draws to a close the description of the activity of the living creatures ("when they stood still, they let down their wings"). V. 28 identifies the nature of the vision (vv. 4-27) in proclaiming "thus was the vision of the likeness of the glory of YHWH (v. 28b).

The narrator's description and its sequence in the narrative shows that Ezekiel falls upon his face as he is struck by the understanding of the identity of the manifestation before him. His response to the theophany signifies his acceptance of the reality of the holy manifestation (v. 28b). The narrator's apparent delay in telling of a response to the divine presence (v. 28b) implies that Ezekiel was not aware of the identity of the theophany until he saw the human form sitting upon the throne above the living creatures and the platform. It seems that the

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<sup>108</sup> Ellen F. Davis, Swallowing the Scroll, p. 29 also sees the significance of the manifestation of YHWH outside the land of Israel. Davis observes that Ezekiel's description of the theophany is distinctly different from Isaiah's description because the "revelatory experience occurred in a situation in which such a thing was not thought to be possible: in exile, outside the land of Israel".

narrator uses the delay to show Ezekiel's surprise stemming from the peculiarity of YHWH's presence within a foreign land. The character Ezekiel is portrayed as one who does not expect an encounter with the divine presence in the midst of the exiles. Obviously we are to accept that YHWH's presence had for the most part been static with regard to his abode in the temple of Jerusalem. Ezekiel is shown in the narrative as sure that this too is the presence of YHWH, even though it is not within the temple. The image of the exodus is reflected in this theophany in a foreign land among a displaced people. The God in the narrative, as in the period of Moses and the exodus, has made his presence known in an unclean land. Although the event of YHWH's manifestation outside the chosen land has occurred, its significance remains unrevealed. In the description YHWH is clearly presented as mobile and not static. His movement and manifestation (even if through vision) has brought him to a portion of the chosen people in exile from their sacred land.<sup>109</sup>

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<sup>109</sup> For a different understanding of the significance of the vision see Greenberg, Ezekiel 1-20, pp. 58-59; 80-81 who claims that the vision signified the divine affirmation of Ezekiel in his conviction that the restoration of the exiles to the homeland was not as near as the prophets in exile proclaimed, but instead there was impending doom. YHWH therefore appeared to vindicate Ezekiel and bestow to him divine favor. It is clear that Greenberg's position differs from my own. However, there are those commentators who agree with my reading, e.g. Zimmerli, Ezekiel 1; Andrew, Responsibility and Restoration; Kaufmann, The Religion Of Israel, pp. 128-133.



### The Closure to the First Vision Pericope

The narrator concludes the first pericope with YHWH's verbal (2:1-3:11) confrontation with Ezekiel. It reveals that YHWH's movement to Ezekiel in exile is not without reason. There is a purpose for the vision's elaborate description of the movement of the divine character from Jerusalem to the land of exile. In the narrative YHWH has approached Ezekiel outside the temple and the land of Israel in order to bestow upon him the responsibility of a prophet (2:1ff.). Harry Orlinsky notes the significance of the call of Ezekiel to prophesy on YHWH's behalf outside the land of Israel. Orlinsky observes that the call is unique because Ezekiel is the first person to be commissioned as prophet outside the land since the conquest of the territory by Israel.<sup>110</sup>

Though some researchers, such as Greenberg,<sup>111</sup> may conclude that the vision pericope of 1:2-3:15 is only the call narrative<sup>112</sup> of the prophet Ezekiel, my understanding is that the call is the event which the narrator uses to show the importance of the motif of the movement of YHWH. Whilst not questioning that the call of the prophet occurs in this pericope, I would suggest that the call should be viewed and read in respect to YHWH's movement among the exiles. I make this suggestion because of the

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<sup>110</sup> "Where did Ezekiel receive the Call to Prophecy?" BASOR 122 (951), p. 35.

<sup>111</sup> Ezekiel 1-20, p. 80.

<sup>112</sup> Cornelius B. Houk, "A Statistical Linguistic Study of Ezekiel 1:4-3:11," p. 81 concludes that "the inaugural vision as a whole differs significantly from the call visions which follow".

narrator's description of the vehicle of YHWH and the attributes of the living creatures which clearly indicate the dominance of the theme of the movement of YHWH in the opening theophanic encounter in ch. 1. The narrator would mention the approach of YHWH in order to place the theophany before Ezekiel. If there were no theophany there would be no call of the prophet. The description which dominates the text of ch. 1, however, moves beyond the mere introduction of the theophany. The narrator's description of the vision emphatically proclaims that there was more to this vision than merely the confrontation of YHWH with Ezekiel.<sup>113</sup> YHWH is transported to the exiles in the land of Babylon by the vehicle which has been lucidly described in the first chapter. The event of the call is significant therefore in that it is the result of the moving presence of YHWH to the people and land of the exile.

The fact that the narrator tells us that YHWH calls Ezekiel to the role of prophet implies obviously that there is someone to whom Ezekiel is to prophesy. In the call the divine character tells Ezekiel that he is sending him "to the people of Israel, to a nation of rebels, who have rebelled against" YHWH (2:3). The reference to the "rebellious house" of Israel, used by the

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<sup>113</sup> I do not agree, therefore, with James Barr, "Theophany and Anthropomorphism in the Old Testament," VT 7 (1959), p. 32 who suggests that "the describing of the theophanic appearance is less important than the registering of the words spoken". It should be obvious through the content of Ez. 1 and my own analysis that the narrator's description of the theophany goes far beyond a normal account of a theophany. The detailed description emphasizes the significance of the divine character and the theocentricity of whatever may follow.

narrator in ch. 2, to designate the recipients of Ezekiel's message is an ambiguous term. We might ask whether the term means those who are within the land of Israel or the people in exile, or both?<sup>114</sup> The ambiguity is resolved in the divine character's command to Ezekiel to, "go, get to the exiles, to the sons of your people, and speak to them and say to them, 'Thus says the Lord YHWH'; whether they hear or refuse to hear" (3:11). Since, according to the narrative, it is the people in exile who are to hear the divinely given words of the prophet we can conclude that the people are included in the narrator's designation of the "rebellious house" of Israel.<sup>115</sup> This interpretation is reinforced by YHWH's proclamation regarding the previously mentioned exiles in 3:11b (i.e. "whether they hear or refuse to hear"). The narrator, with the phrase in 3:11b, identifies the exiles as if they are prone to rebellion. We may also conclude, however, that the inhabitants of the land of Israel are included within the narrator's designation. This conclusion is derived from the narrator's general terminology (i.e. "people of Israel", "a nation of rebels") which is used to designate the intended recipients of the prophecy (2:3). The divine character's statement that their fathers had "transgressed" against him would

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<sup>114</sup> Volkmar Hertrich, Ezechielprobleme, BZAW 61 (Giessen: Alfred Töpelmann, 1933), pp. 10, 28 notes the difficulty in resolving the identity of the "rebellious house".

<sup>115</sup> Some take the position that the exiles were not rebellious, e.g. John W. Wevers, ed., Ezekiel, pp. 24-25. However, the narrator of Ezekiel does not ever identify, or imply that the exiles are any better than the inhabitants of the land.



also imply that the character is speaking of the entire people of Israel.<sup>116</sup> For this reason, the title, I suggest, refers to all the people of Israel (i.e. the inhabitants of the land and the people in exile).<sup>117</sup>

The message in the narrative, which is directed against the rebellious people of Israel (i.e. the inhabitants of the land and the people in exile), is therefore to be heard by Ezekiel's fellow exiles. As an exile Ezekiel would have understood this rebellious people to be his fellow exiles since he himself was in exile. The narrative in the introduction (1:1) and in the opening of the vision (1:3) has shown that the exiles were the people of Israel who were nearest to Ezekiel. The question can be asked as to why this exiled group is to receive the words of God which are directed to the whole nation? The significance of this peculiar

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<sup>116</sup> In support of this inclusive reading see Moshe Greenberg, "Ezekiel," Encyclopaedia Judaica 6 (Jerusalem: Keter Publishing House, 1971), p. 1091; Walter Zimmerli, Ezekiel 1, p. 132; Barnabas Lindars, "Ezekiel and Individual Responsibility," VT 15 (1965), p. 461; John W. Wevers, ed., Ezekiel, pp. 25, 51; Carl G. Howie, "Ezekiel," p. 205; Herbert May, "The Book of Ezekiel," p. 79; John T. Bunn, Ezekiel, p. 242; Bernhard W. Anderson, Understanding the Old Testament 3rd edition (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1975), pp. 406, 410. However there are those who have a more restrictive reading, e.g. C. J. M. Weir, "Aspects of the Book of Ezekiel," VT 2 (1952), p. 99 who concludes that the "rebellious house" refers to only the people in exile in Babylon; William H. Brownlee, Ezekiel 1-19, p. 26 who argues that the "rebellious" in ch. 2 refers to the people in Judah; Robert H. Pfeiffer, Introduction to the Old Testament (New York: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1941), p. 536.

<sup>117</sup> Ch. 11 indicates that these people of Israel in exile have a stony heart. Their stony hearts must be turned away from their stoniness. This acceptance of including the exiles within the designation of the rebellious people of Israel does not interrupt the significance of the theme of the movement of YHWH among the exiles.

prophetic responsibility of speaking to one portion of a whole nation designated as "rebellious" is not revealed until the focus of the prophetic narrative moves to the temple in the second vision pericope.<sup>118</sup>

Paul Joyce makes a stimulating contribution to the understanding behind the ambiguity of the recipients of Ezekiel's message. Joyce concludes that though the identity of the people who are to receive the message fades into relative obscurity "we are forcefully reminded that the focus is upon the God who is known rather than upon those by whom he is known".<sup>119</sup> The narrator, therefore, keeps the identity of the recipients of the prophecy in the shadows in order to maintain his focus on the divine character.

#### Summary of Ezekiel 1:2-3:15

The God in the narrative is revealed in this mar'ô<sub>t</sub> 'ēlōhîm pericope as one who has moved in order to appear among the people in exile. The reason for YHWH's movement is not yet revealed in ch. 1. This vivid description of God as moving, and thus not

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<sup>118</sup> The culmination of this vision occurs in the event described in 3:12a, 14-15. The narrator tells that Ezekiel is lifted by the rûah and taken to the exiles at Tel-abib, who dwelt by the river Chebar. The glory of YHWH rose up at the same time the rûah lifted Ezekiel. However, the narrator implies that, as Ezekiel was transported to the exiles in Tel-abib, the glory of YHWH remained behind him (3:12).

<sup>119</sup> Divine Initiative and Human Response in Ezekiel, p. 94.

bound to the temple and land, however, stands in unique form<sup>120</sup> against the Deuteronomists who encouraged the belief that the earthly location of the God of Israel was within the temple of Jerusalem in the land of Israel. The move and appearance of the presence of YHWH was therefore of major significance in the plot of the narrative. Cooke observes that:

if He can thus travel outside the land of Judah to visit the exiles, though now it is to warn them of coming judgment, at another time it might be to restore them to their home. So far, an element of hope, though a faint one, enters into the revelation...<sup>121</sup>

The "visions" and oracles from YHWH which are soon to follow will reveal the significance of this event in the narrator's portrayal of the divine character.

#### CONCLUSION

The narrator, although using the prophet/priest Ezekiel as the one who receives this visionary contact with the divine character, spends the majority of the opening pericope focusing on the descriptive presence of YHWH. The emphasis on the theophany of the divine "in the midst of the exiles" *b<sup>e</sup>tôk-haggôlāh* (1:1), "there" *šām* (1:3), should not be lightly read over. The narrator shows that the God in the narrative has revealed himself to one who is not among the inhabitants of the

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<sup>120</sup> (i.e. in regard to the biblical literature of other exilic prophets).

<sup>121</sup> Ezekiel, p. 30.



"holy" city, Jerusalem. YHWH has, to the possible surprise of the prophet and us as the reader, revealed himself outside of his traditional abode. If we view the text from the perspective of YHWH, the question arises, "Why does the narrator, as shown through the description, emphasize the divine character's mobility?". Yet, not only is YHWH revealed as mobile among the exiles, he is shown to be surrounded by his entire entourage from the temple (vv. 4-27).<sup>122</sup> The emphasis upon the mobility of the divine character sets the stage for the activity which is to follow in the remainder of the narrative. We will read the chapters which follow therefore in search of the significance of the mobility of YHWH as revealed among the exiles. Hopefully we will discover the reason for the narrator's description of YHWH's mobility in the following chapters as we read them in light of the opening vision of chapter one.

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<sup>122</sup> See Kaufmann, The Religion of Israel, p. 437 for further understanding of the interpretation of the intermediate material (1:4-24) of the vision as the divine entourage and the chariot transporting YHWH.

## CHAPTER 2

### The Second Mar'ôṭ 'Ēlōhîm: YHWH's Abandonment of the Temple in Jerusalem (Ezekiel 8:1-11:24)

The narrator in the first vision introduced us to the divine character of the narrative. YHWH has manifested his presence to Ezekiel among the exiles in Babylon outside the land of Israel. Ezekiel is called to prophesy "words of lamentation and mourning and woe" to his people, the "rebellious house" (2:10). The events and the divine oracle of the first pericope raise numerous questions about the divine character: Why does YHWH go outside the land of Palestine to call this prophet? What relevance does his message have among the exiles in the land of Babylon? What is the rebellion of the "house" which has led the God in the narrative to manifest himself outside Palestine? Does the rebellion have some effect upon the divine character?

I suggest that the answers to these questions can be found in the second section of the narrative which the narrator has labeled with the phrase mar'ôṭ 'Ēlōhîm (8:1-11:25). In this chapter therefore we will be examining the relationship between the first (1:2-3:15) and the second (8:1-11:25) mar'ôṭ 'Ēlōhîm pericopes. In analysing them I propose to both reveal and highlight the parallels of description and the influence of the theme of YHWH's movement in the two pericopes. The narrator's development of this theme adds to the portrayal of the divine character with the events of the mar'ôṭ 'Ēlōhîm. This focus on

the theme of the movement of YHWH, as used by the narrator to develop the divine character, will lead us to the answers to the questions raised about the first "vision" pericope.

Mar'ôṭ 'Ēlōhîm of 8:1-11:25:  
Comparison with 1:2-3:15

After the phrase mar'ôṭ 'Ēlōhîm in the introduction to the narrative in ch. 1 the narrator does not refer to it again until ch. 8. The mar'ôṭ 'Ēlōhîm in ch. 8 is not of the same nature, however, as the "vision of God" which Ezekiel had by the river Chebar in ch. 1. We are told that Ezekiel says,

the Spirit lifted me up between earth and heaven, and brought me in mar'ôṭ 'Ēlōhîm to Jerusalem. (8:3)

Nor does the narrator say, as he did in the introduction to the narrative (1:1), that Ezekiel saw mar'ôṭ 'Ēlōhîm.<sup>1</sup> He does use the phrase "visions of God," however, which is unique to the narrative of Ezekiel. The phrase precedes the prophet's witnessing the theophany in a "vision". In 8:1-11:25, as in 1:2-3:15, Ezekiel also experiences more than just a "vision" of the theophany. He witnesses the "abominations" which are going on in the Jerusalem temple and he receives an oracle from YHWH. Even with all the other events in the vision, it is apparent that the subject is still the God in the narrative. The narrator shows God

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<sup>1</sup> Cooke, Ezekiel, p. 91 also interprets mar'ôṭ 'Ēlōhîm in 8:3 different than he did in 1:1. In 1:1 he understood it to mean a vision in which God is seen. In 8:3 he interprets it as "visions granted by God".



to be the main subject in Ezekiel's proclamation of the identity of what he sees on his spiritual arrival in Jerusalem:

Behold, there was the glory of the God of Israel,<sup>2</sup> like the vision that I saw in the plain. (8:4)

There is still some question regarding the narrator's choice of the plural form of the word "vision" when referring here to apparently one vision. Even though this question remains, it is clear that the focus of the event remains on God as revealed in the vision.

The narrator uses this vision pericope to inform us of the reason for God's movement and manifestation outside the traditional abode of the temple and the land of Israel and his presence before Ezekiel. The narrator clearly distinguishes this visionary encounter from the vision of ch. 1 by means of the date given in its introduction (8:1). In 8:1 the narrator dates this "vision of God" as occurring in "the sixth year, in the sixth month, on the fifth day of the month". The vision in ch. 1 was set "on the fifth day of the month", (presumably the fourth

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<sup>2</sup> The theophany in ch. 8 is said to be the same as Ezekiel saw in the plain in 3:23 where it has been identified as "the glory of YHWH...like the glory which I had seen by the river Chebar" in ch. 1. The acknowledgement of the theophany in ch. 8, though referred to as "the glory of the God of Israel" and not the "glory of YHWH" as in 1:28, shows that according to the narrator the divine character is the same. Alvin A. K. Low, "Interpretive Problems in Ezekiel 1," p. 255 suggests that the first reference recognizes that YHWH is related to a people and not a place. Whereas the second relates God to a geographical area. If Low's claim is correct the narrator's reference in 8:4 to the "glory of the God of Israel" appropriately reflects God's connection with the land. The narrator also refers to the glory as "YHWH" describing God's departure in 10:4, 18; 11:23. The reference to the "glory of the God of Israel" in 11:22, however, does not support Low's claim.

month) in "the fifth year of the exile of King Jehoiachin" (v. 2). According to the narrative one year and two months therefore have elapsed since Ezekiel's vision in ch. 1.

**The Reappearance of the Bronze-Like Form  
(i.e. the Glory of YHWH)**

The introduction of the second vision pericope continues in 8:2 with the appearance of a human-like form. The narrator uses similar language in the description of this human-like form<sup>3</sup> as he did in ch. 1 when he described the bronze-like human-form (which was revealed to be the likeness of the glory of YHWH). The connection between these two descriptions apparently indicates that the prophet is confronted in ch. 8 by the form which culminated the theophanic description in ch. 1.<sup>4</sup> If this is the case the presence of the glory of YHWH is revealed, then, in both of the pericopes.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Because of the clear parallel in the description of 1:27 with 8:2 it is safe to assume that the narrator is referring to a human-like form as he does explicitly in the description in 1:26.

<sup>4</sup> Julian Morgenstern, "Biblical Theophanies," ZA 28 (1914), pp. 43-44 notes the similarity between the bronze form in ch. 1 and in ch. 8. He does not conclude, however, that they are the same figure.

<sup>5</sup> For the parallel of 'ādām (1:26), 'ēš (8:1), with one another and also with the k<sup>o</sup>bōd YHWH see Andrew, Responsibility and Restoration, p. 49.; Greenberg, Ezekiel 1-20, p. 195; also his article "The Vision of Jerusalem in Ezekiel 8-11: A Holistic Interpretation", p. 154.; Zimmerli, Ezekiel 1, p. 236.; for disagreement see John W. Wevers, Ezekiel, p. 79.

Rowland makes a similar observation, saying that the character of the bronze figure in 8:2 speaks and acts as though he were YHWH himself. He contends that

the figure who appears in 8,2 is closely linked with the kabôd of God which the prophet saw by the banks of the Chebar and yet the human form can appear without the cherubim-throne. It is not so much a splitting-up of divine functions among angelic figures..., but the splitting of the form of God from the throne to act as an angelic mediator of God's purpose."<sup>6</sup>

However, Joseph Blenkinsopp does not agree that the bronze figure in 8:2 is identified as YHWH. Blenkinsopp maintains that the function of the bronze-man "precludes identification with [YHWH] himself" and yet he "speaks in the name of [YHWH] as the narrative progresses (8:17-18)".<sup>7</sup> Ronald M. Hals arrives at a similar finding to Blenkinsopp's. Hals observes that the "man" who speaks to the prophet is "distinct from [YHWH] in some ways, but at the same time identified with [YHWH]".<sup>8</sup>

Walther Zimmerli notes the close connection between the bronze figure in 8:2 and the enthroned figure in 1:27. Zimmerli concludes that since 'the divine character only visibly encounters' Ezekiel in the form of the "glory", however, "the 'man' here must refer to the figure of a heavenly messenger".<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> "The Influence of the First Chapter of Ezekiel on Jewish and Early Christian Literature," pp. 91-92.

<sup>7</sup> Ezekiel, p. 53.

<sup>8</sup> Ezekiel, FOTL, vol. 19 (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1989), p. 46; see also p. 51.

<sup>9</sup> Ezekiel 1, p. 236.



Most researchers have developed different conclusions with respect to the identification of the bronze figure in 8:2, but they each agree that there exists a close connection between the bronze figure and the "glory of YHWH". Is it unusual for the identity of characters to overlap as is the apparent case here in the narrative of Ezekiel? A careful reading of other stories in the Old Testament shows that it is not unique for the narrator of Ezekiel to use the bronze figure as a representative of God but who could be God himself also. The story in Genesis 32:22-30 tells of the patriarch Jacob who wrestles with what is apparently a supernatural "man". Jacob, because of his encounter with this figure, names the place of the encounter P<sup>e</sup>niy'el, "saying, "For I have seen God face to face, and yet my life is preserved."<sup>10</sup> Eichrodt argues that there are examples elsewhere in the Old Testament which provide similar characters as portraying the divine. He notes Genesis 21:18 and 22:11 where the emissary of YHWH is no longer distinguishable from YHWH,

but in his appearing and speaking clothes himself with [YHWH's] own appearance and speech...Consequently when the words of the mālak in Gen. 21,18 and 22, 11 make use of the divine "I", this is not to be regarded as naive self-identification on the part of the emissary with the one who has given him the orders but as a sign of the presence of God in the angel-phenomenon".<sup>11</sup>

Rowland makes a similar argument using Genesis 31:11 and 13 where Jacob is confronted by "an angel of God" (31:11) in a dream. As

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<sup>10</sup> Gen. 32:30 (RSV).

<sup>11</sup> Theology of the Old Testament, vol. 2, p. 24.

the "angel" is speaking, he identifies himself to Jacob saying "I am the God of Bethel" (31:13). Rowland proposes that in the tradition of the Old Testament there could be a supernatural figure<sup>12</sup> "which in some sense was regarded as communicating the presence of God himself".<sup>13</sup> In the case of the bronze figure in 8:2, it is very probable then that the bronze man should be identified as the divine character (i.e. YHWH).

The similarity between the two descriptions seems to have hindered the perception of other researchers in seeing the subtle, yet distinct difference between the bronze-like man of ch. 1 and the bronze-like man in 8:2. In ch. 1 the divine's entourage and the glory of YHWH approached the prophet. The human form which gleamed like bronze was seen in the vision borne by the living creatures (ch. 1) and was part and parcel of the vision itself. In ch. 1 the prophet exclaimed that this was the glory of YHWH. In ch. 8, on the other hand, the narrator does not mention the approach of the holy entourage when the appearance of the form gleaming like bronze is described.

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<sup>12</sup> Rowland classifies this figure as an "angel". However, as in Gen. 32:24 the figure is not identified initially as an "angel" but instead as a "man". I, therefore, choose to use the term "supernatural figure".

<sup>13</sup> "The Influence of the First Chapter of Ezekiel on Jewish and Early Christian Literature," p. 93. See also John Barton, Oracles of God (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), p. 123 who notes that in the OT "angels" are generally accepted by modern scholarship to be "understood as [YHWH] himself in an earthly theophany, not identified with 'an angel' in the later sense of one among the many denizens of the heavenly court".

Even though there are some who acknowledge the absence of the entourage around the human-like form in the opening of ch. 8, e.g. Rowland, "The Influence of the First Chapter of Ezekiel on Jewish and Early Christian Literature," p. 89,<sup>14</sup> they fail to note the narrator's mentioning of the figure before Ezekiel experiences this second vision (or sets of visions). It is clear that according to the narrative in 8:2 the gleaming figure transports the prophet, with the aid of the *rûah*, to the temple. It is there, however, in vision, that Ezekiel is said to encounter the holy entourage (now clearly understood to be the cherubim) and the glory of YHWH.

In view of this evidence the conclusion can be drawn that in the opening of ch. 8 the bronze-like man is shown to confront the prophet before Ezekiel experiences the "vision" (8:2, 3a).<sup>15</sup> This occurs when the man gleaming like bronze transports the prophet in vision to the temple where Ezekiel sees the divine entourage and the glory of YHWH. This separation of the vision from the prophet's encounter with the bronze-like man may be the narrator's way of indicating that the presence of the divine

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<sup>14</sup> Rowland does contend that "a comparison of the two verses...shows that we are dealing with the same figure". (p. 89). Others who note this distinction are Matthew Black, "The Throne-Theophany, Prophetic Commission and the 'Son of Man'," Jew, Greeks and Christians, ed. Robert Hamerton-Kelly and Robin Scroggs (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1976), pp. 59-60; and Cooke, Ezekiel, pp. 89-90.

<sup>15</sup> Cooke, Ezekiel, p. 92 accepts that the bronze figure is divine, however, he does not attempt to resolve the issue of the character's presence before the prophet entered in "visions of God".



character among the exiles in Babylon is to be understood as more of a reality than the first vision implied (1:2-3:15). If the bronze-man is interpreted as the visible form of the glory of YHWH, and Ezekiel is understood as present (i.e. before the "vision" in 8:4) in Babylon among the exiles, then it is obvious that the presence of the bronze-man, before the vision occurs, shows that the glory of YHWH is with Ezekiel in exile. YHWH's movement to be among the exiles in the first vision therefore is not only portrayed in the vision in ch. 1 but is used by the narrator to emphasize the real presence of the God in the narrative. This would explain the confusion caused by the man gleaming like bronze who has already been paralleled with the glory of YHWH, taking the prophet in "visions" to see the glory of YHWH (8:4). It would not be unusual for a character to reveal in vision a scene which included himself. In 8:2 it appears that we are to understand that this is the real presence of the glory of YHWH confronting the prophet and transporting him in visions to see the visionary glory of YHWH in the temple. The glory of YHWH seen in the temple is a visionary manifestation.

The identification of the glory in Ezekiel's encounter in ch. 1,<sup>16</sup> identified as the "glory of YHWH", is changed when he encounters the glory in ch. 8, which he identifies as the "glory of the God of Israel". The narrator has not only changed how the glory in ch. 8 is identified, but also does not indicate that

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<sup>16</sup> And likewise his encounter with "the glory of YHWH" in the plain in 3:23.

there was any response by Ezekiel to the "glory". In 1:28 Ezekiel falls upon his face before the theophany.<sup>17</sup> In 8:4 the manifestation does not appear to evoke such a response. It could be that the glory never departed from among the exiles following the manifestation of the glory of YHWH in the plain. In this case, Ezekiel would not respond to the portrayal of the glory of YHWH in the vision of ch. 8 since the prophet is already physically set among the exiles in the presence of the glory of YHWH. The first vision would therefore indicate the abiding presence of the glory of YHWH among the exiles.

For the narrator to describe YHWH's presence among the exiles in Babylon does not mean that he intends for us to conclude that YHWH is absent from Jerusalem. At this point in the narrative it is possible that YHWH is both in Jerusalem and among the exiles. As has been shown in the first chapter of my analysis, however, the narrator has placed YHWH's manifestation and presence among the exiles as occurring when Ezekiel witnessed the approach of the storm from the north. Therefore it is reasonable for us to conclude that the narrator has shown that YHWH was not present among the exiles before Ezekiel's encounter with YHWH by the river Chebar.

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<sup>17</sup> And likewise in 3:23.

### The Vision of the Desecration of the Temple

This subsection of the second "vision of God" pericope focuses on the narrator's description of the prophet's observations in the temple in Jerusalem. This is in order to show, according to the narrative, why YHWH has appeared among the exiles. It is necessary therefore to observe portions of the vision which have an underlying influence upon the theme of the movement of YHWH.

The vision begins when the man gleaming like bronze takes the prophet by a lock of his head (8:3a) and transports him, "up between earth and heaven" bringing him in "visions of God" to Jerusalem" (8:3b), and precisely to the gateway of the inner court of the temple. There Ezekiel sees "the glory of the God of Israel, like the vision that I (he) saw in the plain" (8:4). It is this glory which has been paralleled previously with the glory of YHWH seen by the river Chebar in 3:23b.

Ezekiel, in vision, now hears YHWH commanding him to look to the north of the gate where there is an altar with an image on it. The image on the altar has been erected by the people as an idol. Though the image of jealousy is not further identified, we can assume that because of its title the image itself provokes the divine character to jealousy.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Cooke, Ezekiel, p. 92 notes that sēmel "image" occurs only in Deut. 4:16, 2 Chr. 33:7, 15, and here in Ez. 8:3, 5. He observes that in 2 Chr. 33 the word is used in reference to "the image which Manasseh set up in the temple, called in [2 Kgs. 21:7] 'the graven image (pesel) of the 'ashera'". Brownlee, Ezekiel 1-19, p. 132



John T. Bunn suggests that since the first thing Ezekiel is shown is the "seat of the image of jealousy" its meaning is obviously important. He concludes that the image represents the dispossession of YHWH and is the reason that it made YHWH jealous. He notes:

Regardless of the exact nature of the god or what god was involved, the import is devastating. Pagan emblems, signs or statues, had been installed by a corrupt people in the holy place of [YHWH]. No greater blasphemy could have been perpetuated."<sup>19</sup>

The narrator is explicit in communicating the people's abomination. They have ignored the basic command of YHWH:

You shall have no other gods before me. You shall not make for yourself a graven image...you shall not bow down to them or serve them; for I YHWH your God am a jealous God... (Exodus 20:3-5; Deut. 5:7-9)

The divine character desires that Ezekiel see further the evil which is being practised in God's house:

Son of man, do you see what they are doing, the great abominations that the house of Israel are committing here, to drive me far from my sanctuary? (v. 6 RSV).

We are told that Ezekiel looks and sees that the people are doing abominable things<sup>20</sup> in the sanctuary of YHWH which profane this abode of the divine and force YHWH to leave his "precious

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suggests, as has Cooke, that the image of jealousy in 8:3, 5 is related to the "image of 'ashera".

<sup>19</sup> Ezekiel, p. 254.

<sup>20</sup> For various categories of "abomination" see M. H. Lovelace, "Abomination," IDB, vol. A-D, pp. 12-13. To'evah is used predominately by Ezekiel to refer to "abomination".

place".<sup>21</sup> The implication in the narrative is that at the time of YHWH's departure from the temple the building will be nothing more than a reminder of YHWH's absence. It will no longer be the sanctuary of YHWH and the symbol of YHWH's presence. The narrator reveals that the divine presence is preparing to move from the temple because of the atrocities of the people (ch.10).

There are numerous conclusions regarding the rites described as the "greater abominations" which the prophet is to see.<sup>22</sup> The speculation of the identity of these rites in the narrative are not any more helpful in communicating that they are abominations before the divine character. Ralph Klein, though not concerned with the full identity of the abominable practises going on in the temple, makes an insightful observation pertaining to the scene. He notes that the abomination performed in the room of pictures by the elders of the house of Israel is accompanied by

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<sup>21</sup> The narrator has with regard to YHWH already referred to the temple as God's "precious place" in 7:22-23 where YHWH is described as proclaiming, "I will turn my face from them, that they may profane my precious place; robbers shall enter and profane it, and make a desolation. Because the land is full of bloody crimes and the city is full of violence'."

<sup>22</sup> E.g. Theodore H. Gaster, "Ezekiel and the Mysteries" JBL 60 (1941), p. 290 who advocates that this is a key Canaanite ceremony of the marriage of Ras Shamra, (i.e. the Canaanite feast of Ingathering); D. M. G. Stalker, Ezekiel, p. 101. Cooke, Ezekiel, p. 94 says that this indicates the worship of Tammuz and Shamash, see also pp. 97, 99, 100; Brownlee, Ezekiel 1-19, pp. 136, 137. Brownlee suggests that this shows the peoples association of YHWH with Tammuz (p. 139). H. W. F. Saggs, "The Branch to the Nose," JTS 11 (1960), p. 329 suggests that the rite of putting the branch to the nose is paralleled to the worship of the sun-god of Mesopotamia. See on the same subject N. M. Sarna, "Ezekiel 8:17: A Fresh Examination," HTR 57 (1964), p. 352; Herbert G. May, "The Departure of the Glory of [YHWH]," JBL 56 (1937), pp. 309-321.



the offenders' claim that: "YHWH does not see us. YHWH has abandoned the land". Klein points out that the citation of the elders is not explicitly disputed, "as are the sayings in chapter 11 and in other passages later in the book".<sup>23</sup> He claims, however, that the description of the events in ch. 8 functions, "in a number of respects as an implicit rebuttal of this saying".<sup>24</sup> Klein's observation proves to be convincing since the citation claims that the elders freely committed abominations as they worshiped because they claimed that their actions were not viewed by YHWH. Klein accurately observes that "the prophet is asked four times, 'Do you see?' with the obvious implication that even he could indeed see them!"<sup>25</sup> The narrator makes it clear that the prophet not only views the abomination practiced by the elders in the temple, but sees even more abomination practiced at the inner court of the house of YHWH. Klein wisely notes:

If the prophet is able to 'see' so much from his exilic home hundreds of miles away, or when present in the temple only in a vision, how much more will [YHWH] be able to see all that the elders and the others are doing.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Ezekiel the Prophet and His Message, p. 56.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid. See also C. R. Fontaine, Traditional Sayings in the Old Testament: A Contextual Study (Sheffield: The Almond Press, 1982), p. 252 who notes that the Proverb situation is "Lord has forsaken land" and "Lord does not see". This is correlated with the context situation which is "God still involved" and "will punish". The intent is evaluative.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., pp. 56-57.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., p. 57.



The narrator's implicit dispute of the citation "YHWH does not see" is also evident in his description of YHWH's wrathful response with the divine character claiming, 'My eye shall not spare' (8:18; 9:10). The narrator's reference to the eye of YHWH indicates that what YHWH has seen provokes his divine wrath. The abominations are not hidden from YHWH. According to the narrative the divine character sees and, likewise, he will respond to the abominable behaviour.

#### YHWH's Response

In 8:6 the narrator hints at the answer to the question of the reason for YHWH's manifestation among the chosen people in exile. He says  $l^e rāh^a qāh mē'al miqdāšī$ . The infinitive  $l^e rāh^a qāh$  does not have a subject explicitly stated in the verse.<sup>27</sup> The ambiguity caused by the lack of an identified subject leaves the expression open to interpretation. Does it mean that the people have distanced themselves from God? Or does it mean that YHWH is distancing himself from Jerusalem because of the "great abominations" which the people are performing there?

Hals suggests that it would be incomprehensible to think YHWH can be forced to abandon the temple because of the

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<sup>27</sup> The confusion regarding the identity of a subject for the infinitive  $l^e rāh^a qāh$  is noted by most reader's. The ambiguity is resolved either by relating the verb to the event of the departure of the divine character in 11:22-23 or relating it to the setting up of an altar outside the sanctuary by the people in 8:3b, 5.

atrocities which the people are practising there. He asserts that YHWH's removal of himself from "his only earthly place of residence with no provision for an ongoing cultus would be unimaginable, a kind of divine suicide".<sup>28</sup> Hals fails to recognize, however, that YHWH has not abandoned his earthly residence with no provision for enabling the continuance of the cultus. In the opening of the narrative YHWH has manifested himself among the exiles in the land of Babylon.

Zimmerli argues that the verb relates to the men setting up an altar outside the sanctuary. He reads 8:6 suggesting that the context implies the abomination is shown from a priestly perspective regarding "the physical distance of the altar from the holy area".<sup>29</sup> In other words the people have placed themselves at a distance from God by going to the outside of the entrance and worshiping the "image of jealousy".

Zimmerli is not alone in reading the subject of 8:6 as the people who are doing the abominations. Greenberg argues that the idiom *rāḥaq mē'al* always takes the subject of the verb to be the people, when people and God are involved. According to Greenberg the practice of worship outside the sanctuary, as indicated by the image of jealousy at the entrance of the gate to the inner court, was "in disregard of the divine presence inside it".<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Ezekiel, p. 72.

<sup>29</sup> Ezekiel 1, p. 240, see also p. 218 note 6d. See for the same interpretation Ralph W. Klein, Ezekiel, p. 55.

<sup>30</sup> Ezekiel 1-20, pp. 168-169.

Greenberg notes that the exegetes who make God the subject interpret the phrase as anticipating the departure of the glory of YHWH from the temple.<sup>31</sup>

Cooke observes that the subject is not expressed explicitly in the phrase in 8:6. He notes that one might translate it "that they should go far from my sanctuary", as has Zimmerli and Greenberg. Cooke argues, however, that "it is better to make [YHWH] the subj[ect], as the whole series of visions prepares the way for His departure from the temple, 11<sup>22f.</sup>".<sup>32</sup>

Eichrodt, as does Cooke, notes the ambiguity in v. 6b because of the absence of a subject. Eichrodt concludes the most probable interpretation "is that [YHWH] is being driven out of the place consecrated to him".<sup>33</sup>

Since the identity of the subject of 8:6 is not clear, one could ask which of the two interpretations is most plausible? If the subject is the people and it relates to their placement of an altar to the image of jealousy at a distance from the holy area, is it reasonable to conclude that YHWH is disturbed because the abominable image is not in the sanctuary? Brownlee, in response to this interpretation, argues

one would suppose, . . . , since the image (or, the altar honoring the goddess, as Zimmerli interprets) is an

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid., p. 169.

<sup>32</sup> Ezekiel, p. 93.

<sup>33</sup> Ezekiel, p. 123.



object of revulsion, the farther away from the temple  
the better!<sup>34</sup>

Brownlee, therefore, concludes that the most probable subject of the infinitive  $l^e r\bar{a}h^o q\bar{a}h$  is YHWH. Brownlee's argument is reasonable and, as Cooke and Eichrodt have concluded, it is supported by the departure of YHWH, which is soon to follow, from the temple and Jerusalem. Bunn agrees that YHWH is the most probable subject. He asserts that the abominable ways of the "rebellious house" have defiled the holiness of the temple, "and therefore a holy God could neither abide with them nor within the Temple. Wickedness by its very presence repulses holiness".<sup>35</sup>

One clue to the clarity of interpreting the phrase in 8:6, which is overlooked by both groups, is given by the narrator's emphasis on the enormous amount of abominations of the people in ch. 8. In 8:6 Ezekiel is asked to see the great abominations performed in one place and also at the same time is informed that he will soon behold even greater abominations, not necessarily in the same location. In 8:9 the emphasis (vv. 10-12) is again placed by the narrator on the "vile" abominations committed by certain elders rather than on the location of the act. Following this scene, emphasis is placed by the narrator on the behaviour rather than on the place.

"You will see still greater abominations which they  
commit." (8:13 RSV)

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<sup>34</sup> Ezekiel 1-19, pp. 132-133.

<sup>35</sup> Ezekiel, p. 259.

In 8:14 women are described as "weeping for Tammuz" a vegetation god, clearly an abomination; and yet the narrator says that still "greater abominations" would be shown. Then in v. 16 the narrator describes the abomination of twenty-five men worshiping the sun. In the entire chapter the emphasis on the abominable behaviour of the people is explicit. In v. 17 the divine character is shown to ask Ezekiel:

Is it too slight a thing for the house of Judah to  
commit the abominations which they commit here... (RSV)

Since the narrator has described four movements<sup>36</sup> of Ezekiel in the chapter, it is apparent that the reference to "here" in v. 17 means the temple and its surrounding area. Despite the protestation of Hals, Zimmerli, and Greenberg, there can be little doubt that the narrator has shown that the abominations, and not the specific location of the act, other than its opposition to the sanctity of the temple, is of importance. The description of these abominations and the following departure of the divine character from the temple and the city of Jerusalem in ch. 11 supports the interpretation of *l<sup>e</sup>rāḥ<sup>a</sup>qāh mē'al miqdāšî* as relating to YHWH's distancing of himself from the abominable behaviour of the "house of Judah". Therefore the attestation of the "inhabitants of Jerusalem" in 11:15 that the exiles have gone far from YHWH is a play on the word *rāḥaq* because YHWH is soon shown to go far from the inhabitants.

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<sup>36</sup> (i.e. the first in 8:3b, 5; the second in 8:7-8; the third in 8:14; and the fourth in 8:16).

## Comparison of the Vehicle of YHWH in Chs. 1 and 10

The description of the preparation for the departure of YHWH from the temple depicted in ch. 10 is significant regarding the theme of the movement of the God in the narrative. As we read this account of the divine movement in ch. 10 we are reminded of the scene in ch. 1. The narrator uses the same images and descriptions to show us God's preparation to move from the temple (ch. 10) as were used in the description of the divine movement into the land of the exiles by the river Chebar (ch. 1). These parallels between chapters 1 and 10 can be seen as the texts are charted side by side.<sup>37</sup>

With respect to the parallel imagery and content of chs. 1 and 10, a comparison of their description of the vehicle of YHWH may prove beneficial to our analysis of the portrayal of the divine character in the narrative of Ezekiel. We will compare the text referring to the divine vehicle of ch. 1 therefore with the text of ch. 10. I propose that the narrator has descriptively connected the two manifestations in ch. 10. This connection enables us to understand better the reason for the movement of the divine character among the exiles as described in the first "vision of God" (specifically in ch. 1) by revealing the circumstances which have led to his exilic manifestation and move.

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<sup>37</sup> See Appendix 2, "Parallels of Chapters 1 and 10".



The description of the divine vehicle in ch. 10 begins in v. 1 with the platform which is over the heads of the cherubim. This description parallels the location of the platform over the heads of the living creatures in ch. 1 (vv. 22 and 26). The conclusion may be drawn that the manifestation in ch. 10 in the temple is the same as the manifestation which was seen by the prophet by the river Chebar (ch. 1). The narrator initially indicates that the connection between the elements of the vision established in ch. 1 are present here in ch. 10. This connection established between the movement of YHWH within the temple and the movement of YHWH among the exiles is important with regard to clarification of the opening description of the theophany in ch. 1.

The connection between the two visions is further revealed as the narrator's description moves to that which is above the platform resembling a throne of sapphire (10:1). This image of a likeness to a sapphire throne has previously been observed in 1:26. However, the difference in the "throne" in ch. 10 from that of 1:26 is that its description is not followed by a description of an occupant. The narrator simply states that there was what appeared to be a sapphire throne. The obvious reason for the narrator's failure to mention an occupant on the throne is that we are to understand that the throne upon the platform is presently unoccupied. In this description the divine character has not yet mounted the vehicle which bears the throne of sapphire.

The significance of the parallels in descriptions of the vehicle in chs. 1 and 10 is that the narrator has shown that the vehicle the prophet saw among the exiles in the land of Babylon is the very same vehicle that he now sees in the temple in Jerusalem. The throne (or seat in the vehicle) in ch. 10 is unoccupied because YHWH still is at his place in the temple. He has not entered the vehicle of the divine to be transported away.<sup>38</sup>

### The Identity of the Living Creatures

The narrator within the detailed description of ch. 10 clarifies the identity of the living creatures of ch. 1. What Ezekiel previously saw is identified as cherubim. The connection between the two is explicitly made in 10:15, 20, 22. These creatures, known in their natural environment (the temple) as cherubim, have appeared outside their traditional place of abode in ch. 1.<sup>39</sup>

This identification of the living creatures as the cherubim in ch. 10 has caused many researchers to question the narrator's

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<sup>38</sup> It is not unusual to identify the manifestation as a "vehicle" since it has been described as the transportation of the divine character. E.g. see Brownlee, Ezekiel 1-19, p. 149.

<sup>39</sup> Crawford H. Toy, "The Babylonian Element in Ezekiel," JBL 1 (1881), p. 64 claims that the cherubs were of Babylonian origin. Whether Toy's claim is correct does not change the significance of Ezekiel's observation of the cherubim in the temple in Jerusalem and their identification as the living creatures which he saw in Babylon. The narrator notes, whatever the origin of the figures, that they (i.e. cherubim and living creatures) are the same thing.

hesitancy in identifying the living creatures as cherubim in ch. 1.<sup>40</sup> Moshe Greenberg,<sup>41</sup> however, raises an interesting and convincing point in his conclusion with regard to this question. Greenberg suggests that the hesitancy in identifying the living creatures as the cherubim in ch. 10 can be resolved by understanding the paradoxical notion of the religion where YHWH is seated upon the throne in the temple while at the same time YHWH is seated upon the heavenly throne. The cherubs therefore which stand as statues in the temple, replicas of the heavenly cherubim, form the throne, which itself is an image of the heavenly throne.

This distinction between the two forms of cherubim provides a solution to the question of why the narrator has Ezekiel identifying the creatures in his vision of the divine in ch. 1 as hayyôṭ and later recognizing and identifying them as k<sup>e</sup>rubîm in

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<sup>40</sup> E.g. Cornelius B. Houk, "The Final Redaction of Ezekiel 10," JBL 90 (1971), p. 46. who claims that ch. 10 is a "unified, purposeful effort to make use of the vision in ch.1." Anthony D. York, "Ezekiel I: Inaugural and Restoration Visions?," VT 27 (1977), pp. 97-98. who suggests that originally chs. 1 and 43 were integrated as the opening mar'ôṭ 'lōhîm. He adds, however, upon final editing of the book, "the restoration prophecy was transposed to its present place, but its introduction and vision remained at the beginning with the consequences that the two similar visions were fused, with various indications of this evident in the extant text." Zimmerli, Ezekiel 1, p. 102 maintains that "the use of the masculine suffixes in 1:5-12 is determined by the masculine k<sup>e</sup>rubîm of ch.10, whilst the feminine suffixes wrongly used in 1:15-21 are determined by 1:5-12".

<sup>41</sup> "The Vision of Jerusalem in Ezekiel 8-11: A Holistic Interpretation," The Divine Helmsman: Studies on God's Control of Human Events, Presented to Lou H. Silberman, ed. J. L. Crenshaw and S. Sandmel (New York: KTAV, 1980), p. 155; see also Greenberg, Ezekiel 1-20, pp. 183, 195-197.



ch. 10. The narrator shows that Ezekiel does not draw the parallel between the creatures in ch. 1 with the statues of k<sup>e</sup>rub<sup>i</sup>m. The connection was not made until Ezekiel viewed the "living" k<sup>e</sup>rub<sup>i</sup>m with respect to the statues of k<sup>e</sup>rub<sup>i</sup>m, in the vision of the temple.<sup>42</sup> It was at this time therefore that Ezekiel could clearly make the connection between the replicas of the k<sup>e</sup>rub<sup>i</sup>m and the "living" k<sup>e</sup>rub<sup>i</sup>m which the statues depicted.<sup>43</sup>

There is one relevant observation regarding the "cherubim" referred to in chs. 9 and 10. The MT makes a subtle distinction by referring to them at times in the singular and at other times in the plural. The narrator, in describing the movement of YHWH in the temple, causes some confusion by making this distinction in verses 10:4a [9:3a] and 10:18. The narrator describes what appears to be an unnecessary move by YHWH from the threshold of the house to the cherub (10:4a) and back again (plural, 10:18). In 10:4a the narrator states,

And the glory of YHWH went up from the cherub to the threshold of the house.<sup>44</sup> RSV

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<sup>42</sup> Cooke, Ezekiel, p. 114 arrives at the same conclusion. He says that when Ezekiel saw the living creatures, this time in the temple of Jerusalem, "he realized what they were".

<sup>43</sup> See Moshe Greenberg, "The Vision of Jerusalem in Ezekiel 8-11: A Holistic Interpretation," p. 155

<sup>44</sup> We have previously been informed in 9:3 that "the glory of the God of Israel had gone up from the cherub it was on to the threshold of the house".

Whereas, in 10:18 he states,

And the glory of YHWH went forth from the threshold of the house, and stood over the cherubim. RSV

Curiously the narrator uses the singular reference, cherub, in 9:3 and 10:4a, and the plural cherubim in 10:18.

Greenberg considers that his distinction between the cherubim which are statues in the holy of holies in the temple dwelling in Jerusalem and the "living" cherubim which the statues depict helps to resolve some of the ambiguities caused by these verses. He contends that the k<sup>e</sup>rûb mentioned in 10:4a [9:3a] is in reference to the statues which stood in the temple on the ark cover.<sup>45</sup> Greenberg maintains that the glory of YHWH rises up from upon the statues which support the earthly throne to the threshold of the temple, but in 10:18 YHWH mounts up upon the "living" k<sup>e</sup>rubîm which function as YHWH's vehicle as a means of transport.

The chief weakness of Greenberg's conclusion is his failure to include the narrator's use of the singular and plural, cherub and cherubim, in 10:2.<sup>46</sup> In 10:2 the narrator informs the reader of YHWH's command to the man clothed in linen to "go in among the wheels under the cherub and fill your hands with coals of fire from between the cherubim". It is apparent from the context of

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<sup>45</sup> Ezekiel 1-20, p. 196. See also Ex. 25:18-22 in reference to the cherub statue in the temple.

<sup>46</sup> Greenberg, Ezekiel 1-20, p. 181 claims that in 10:2 the singular "cherub" "is an error by haplography - the ending ym omitted due to its similarity to the beginning of the next word wml'".

the verse that the terms "cherub" and "cherubim" refer to the same things. It is questionable therefore whether Greenberg's distinction is appropriate in this case.

It is evident from the events within the pericope that the prophet would notice both the living cherubim themselves and the statues of them in the temple where he has been transported in vision. The narrator's description of Ezekiel's observation of the movement and eventual transporting of the glory of YHWH certainly grants that there were living cherubim in the temple (10:5, 15). Furthermore, Ezekiel's presence within the temple would possibly give him a view of the cherubim statues on the ark. Although the text does not make this point explicitly, the impetus has been provided, since Ezekiel does observe the glory of YHWH even before it is veiled by the cloud in the inner court (9:3).<sup>47</sup>

Greenberg's distinction between the living cherubim and the statues of cherubim in the pericope is therefore useful in showing the relation between the identification of the living creatures in ch. 1 with the living cherubim in ch. 10. It does not, nevertheless, alleviate the peculiarity of the narrator's use of the singular and plural references to cherubim in chs. 9 and 10.

In view of what has been said about the identification of the living creatures as cherubim, it is not surprising to see that the narrator also emphasizes the concept of movement in his

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<sup>47</sup> The cloud does not veil the glory of YHWH until 10:3-4.



description of the cherubim in ch. 10 as he did in his description of the living creatures in ch.1. In ch. 1 each creature has a wheel beside it (1:15), a symbol of movement. Further mobility is provided by the wings of the creatures. When the wings of the creatures lift them up from the earth the wheels lift up with them. The narrator makes the same connection between the wheels and cherubim in ch.10 (vv.16-17). The action and movement of the cherubim is followed by the wheels. Here too if the cherubim lifted up from the earth, the wheels were lifted up from the earth as well. If the cherubim stood still, the wheels stood still.

#### **YHWH's Means of Movement**

The living creatures/cherubim are connected in both chs. 1 and 10 with the glory of YHWH which abides over them. Their movement thus implies YHWH's movement. The narrator's emphasis of and detailed description of the movement of the living creatures/cherubim in both chs. 1 and 10 would therefore be justified.

In 10:18 the glory of YHWH "went forth from the threshold of the house, and stood over the cherubim" (i.e., YHWH has mounted his "chariot"). He is prepared to move. The cherubim next lift up from the earth, moving toward "the door of the east gate of the house of YHWH" with "the glory of the God of Israel over

them"(10:19). According to the narrative the divine character is transported as the cherubim move.

**The Significance of the Connection  
of the Movement of YHWH in  
Chapters 1 and 10**

The parallels shown between ch. 10 and ch. 1 reveal the connection between the movement of YHWH in the "visions of God" experienced by the prophet. In ch. 1 the narrator seems to emphasize that the vision of God appeared to the prophet while he was in the midst of the exiles (b<sup>e</sup>tōk-haggōlāh v.1).

The significance of the manifestation of YHWH among the exiles (ch. 1) is revealed when we see the connection between the exilic manifestation and the "vision" in the temple (ch. 10). The divine character has been lifted up, transported by the cherubim, from the temple in order to move from the bloody and perverted land (9:9). The situation in the land of Israel and Judah has exceeded its limits. YHWH must distance himself from the atrocities which have occurred among the inhabitants of the land. YHWH's response to the abominable ways of the people is revealed in ch. 10 when the narrator describes the lifting up of YHWH from the "holy" temple.

Ronald Hals ontologically considers the relationship between chs. 1 and 10 to have led to the message of hope for the exiles that YHWH's presence was not confined to the Jerusalem temple. It

shows furthermore that YHWH is not detached from the work of the destruction of Jerusalem. Hals claims that

it is plain that the vision report deliberately raises the issue of the continuity between grace and judgment, between the way God's people cannot exist apart from his presence and the way that very presence at the same time must justly be the vehicle of their doom.<sup>48</sup>

These remarks are especially interesting with respect to the events which are soon to occur. The divine character's presence and his absence determines the fate of his people as shown in the narrative. The narrator appears to hint that the fall of the city will occur through YHWH's severance from the city. The narrative also will show that the forthcoming restoration of the city likewise occurs through YHWH's presence among the exiles.<sup>49</sup>

Seeing the significance of the presence of YHWH in all his glory among the exiles and his absence from Jerusalem is crucial to understanding the two visions. YHWH's presence showed that the attitudes of the inhabitants in the land towards their good fortune and the attitudes of the exiles towards their demise were questionable. The visions together show that the tables have been turned.

The portrayal of YHWH's movement from the inhabitants of the land and presence among the exiles and its significance is shown in the narrator's description of the evacuation of the divine character from the sanctuary. Are we to conclude that the God in

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<sup>48</sup> Ezekiel, p. 63.

<sup>49</sup> See for a similar understanding Alvin A. K. Low, "Interpretive Problems in Ezekiel 1," p. 14.



the narrative, with the accompanying cherubim, has departed Palestine and approached the exiles because of the wicked behaviour of the inhabitants? If this is the case, YHWH's movement among the exiles is set in better perspective.

#### **The Attitude of the Wicked and the Response of YHWH**

The narrator's portrayal of the divine character, developed around the theme of YHWH's movement as far as we have reached in the vision, has been revealed through the narrator's emphasis in describing the characters and events of the vision in language and style which promotes the concept of movement. The significance of this theme as a central literary means of binding the "visions" of the text, however, is not explicitly revealed until ch. 11 in the vision in which Ezekiel is shown the wicked counselors.

The significance of YHWH's move and manifestation away from the temple among the exiles therefore does not culminate in the description of the vision in ch. 10. It is YHWH's proclamation in the vision of ch. 11 (i.e. 11:16-21) which explicitly claims and summarizes the movement of the divine character. This divine proclamation is in itself a clear summary of the "visions of God" pericopes.<sup>50</sup> The vision showing the behaviour of the wicked

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<sup>50</sup> The summary given in 11:16-21 also encompasses the *mar'ôṭ* 'ēlōhîm pericope of chs. 40-48 which describes the return of YHWH to the city of Jerusalem and the temple and the restoration of the exiles to their homeland.

counselors has therefore an important role to play within the connection of the second "visions of God" (chs. 8-11) pericope with the first pericope (1:2-3:15).

The "vision" continues with the narrator's telling of the prophet's observation of the wicked ways of the counselors in Jerusalem. One of the peculiar features of this section of the vision is that the character Ezekiel recognizes two of the wicked counselors and identifies them by name. One is Jaazaniah, the son of Azzur, and the other is Pelatiah, the son of Benaiah (11:1b). Pelatiah is not introduced without reason.

The fact that Ezekiel now stands, in vision, at the east gate of the house of YHWH before twenty-five men (11:1) who are accused by YHWH of giving wicked counsel (11:2) leads to the divine declaration of what will be done to them and the city of Jerusalem.

As a result of the event which is described by the narrator in ch. 11, the *rûah* of YHWH falls upon the prophet (11:5). YHWH commands Ezekiel to move beyond mere observation of the behavior of the wicked. He is now commanded to prophesy. The words of prophecy uttered by Ezekiel are directed against the wicked counselors who have been seen in the vision (11:4). The narrative's presentation of the prophecy reveals that the wicked shall be punished by YHWH. The divine character's purpose for the punishment is also revealed as YHWH is said to proclaim through the mouth of the prophet, "and you (plural) shall know that I am YHWH" (11:10). Thus, according to these words, YHWH will

establish the acknowledgement of the divine from those who shall experience the wrath through judgment. The narrator has the God in the narrative repeating the intended result of the punishment with clarity,

This city shall not be your caldron, nor shall you be the flesh in the midst of it; I will judge you at the border of Israel; and you shall know that I am YHWH; for you have not walked in my statutes, and you have not executed my ordinances, but have acted according to the ordinances of the nations that are round about you. (11:11-12 RSV)

Following YHWH's promise of judgment, the narrator says that Ezekiel exclaimed, "and it came to pass, while I was prophesying, that Pelatiah the son of Benaiah died" (11:13a). Pelatiah's death evokes a response from Ezekiel. He cries out to YHWH, "Ah Lord YHWH! will you make a complete end of the remnant of Israel?" (11:13b).

This scene in the narrative is significant in that it leads to the divine character's declaration against the inhabitants of the land and in favour of the people in exile.

Son of man, your brothers, even your brothers, the men of your redemption, the whole house of Israel, all of them,<sup>51</sup> are those whom the inhabitants of Jerusalem have said, 'They have gone far from YHWH; to us this land is given for a possession.' Therefore say, 'Thus says the Lord YHWH: Though I removed them far off among the nations, and though I scattered them among the lands, yet I have been a sanctuary to them for a while in the lands where they have gone.' Therefore say, 'Thus says the Lord YHWH: I will gather you from the peoples, and assemble you out of the lands where you have been scattered, and I will give you the land of

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<sup>51</sup> See Paul Joyce, Divine Initiative and Human Response in Ezekiel, p. 112. Joyce notes that it is significant that the exiles are defined in 11:15 "in the very corporate phrase 'the whole house of Israel, all of them'".



Israel.' And when they come there, they will remove from it all its detestable things and all its abominations. And I will give them one heart, and put a new spirit within (them) you; I will take the stony heart out of their flesh and give them a heart of flesh, that they may walk in my statutes and keep my ordinances and obey them; and they shall be my people, and I will be their God. But as for those whose heart goes after their detestable things and their abominations, I will give their deeds upon their own heads... (11:15-21)

Zimmerli claims that 11:14-21 is an independent unit used as an answer to the question posed in v. 13 of what he has previously identified as a foreign addition of 11:1-13.<sup>52</sup> The argument for this understanding is that the section does not fit in with the progression of events. In ch. 9 the narrator has described the "executioners" as having accomplished their task in the city of Jerusalem. In 10:7 the "man clothed in linen" takes fire from the cherubim and sets out to burn the city. In 10:15 and 18 the transporters of God are described as rising up along with the divine character over them. According to this argument, the narrator's introduction of the meeting of the twenty-five men in 11:1-13 and YHWH's oracle of hope in 11:14-21 disrupts the story.

Although it is possible that 11:14-21 is an addition to the "original" text, it is a fact that it now stands as part of the narrative. Therefore, this final form of the text is in reality the only legitimate source for my analysis. The presence of 11:14-21 compels me to wonder what this section contributes to the development of the portrayal of the divine character. Since

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<sup>52</sup> E.g. Ezekiel 1, pp. 231, 256.

the scene has been of despair and judgment, so far in the pericope, it is significant with regard to our interest in the portrayal of the divine character that the narrator concludes the scene with these words of hope. Through YHWH's response in 11:15-21 the narrator shows the cause for YHWH's movement as it has been revealed so far in the "visions".

Though the narrator has YHWH quoting the inhabitants of Jerusalem in 11:15 "they (i.e. those in exile) have gone far from YHWH; to us this land is given for a possession" the words have not been revealed elsewhere as having been directly spoken by them. It is possible that the narrator is expressing Ezekiel's bias toward the attitude of his compatriots who remain in the land of Israel. Ezekiel himself is the one who is shown to conclude that this is the attitude of his people. Ezekiel's exposition, attributed to YHWH, therefore is his response to his personal deducting that the Jerusalemites have this pious attitude. Ezekiel, himself in exile, reveals in this exposition God's favour on the people in exile. It is likely that we are to understand that Ezekiel, as one in exile, would be eager to discredit those in the homeland, and at the same time reveal a brighter future for himself and his fellow exiles.<sup>53</sup> The text in 11:15-21 reveals, in the divine character's words, that the rebellious inhabitants of the land have foolishly and falsely

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<sup>53</sup> As seen correctly by Douglas Ralph Clark, "The Citations in the Book of Ezekiel: An Investigation into the Method, Audience, and Message," Ph.D. diss., Graduate School of Vanderbilt University (Ann Arbor, Michigan: University Microfilms International, 1984), pp. 57, 246.

boasted over their good fortune of remaining in Jerusalem (11:15). According to the narrative the abominable and irreverent behaviour of the inhabitants of Jerusalem has revealed the fallacy of their claim to good fortune. Their claim that the people in exile have gone far from YHWH (11:15) is prophetic of their own ways. In reality, their abominations and detestable ways have resulted in YHWH's distancing of himself far from them. Though the inhabitants of Jerusalem boast that they have been given the land as a possession (11:15) the narrator has YHWH's word proclaiming and promising, contrary to their claims, that the people in exile will be given the land of Israel (11:17).<sup>54</sup>

The narrator's use of the divine character's response to the prophet's cry in 11:13, therefore, shows more than simply a divine accusation against a particular group of people. The divine words also reveal the narrator's portrayal of the exiles' understanding, of the arrogance and animosity, towards them, attributed to the people who inhabit the land. Joseph Blenkinsopp suggests that the accusation against the attitude of the inhabitants of the land is based in the "intimate association between deity, cult, and land in antiquity".<sup>55</sup>

Blenkinsopp presents an important argument concerning the association of the "deity, cult, and land". He contends that deities had their areas of jurisdiction which were coincident

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<sup>54</sup> The importance of the land is commonly observed by commentators, e.g. Zimmerli, Ezekiel 1, p. 261.

<sup>55</sup> Ezekiel, p. 63.



with the boundary of the people who supported the deity. Blenkinsopp observes this fact in 1 Samuel 26:19 where David curses those who have caused his separation from his land saying to him "go, serve other gods". David's presence in Philistine territory has cut him off from sharing in "the heritage of YHWH".<sup>56</sup>

Through YHWH's words, the narrator's refutation shows that the arrogant attitude of the rebellious inhabitants is in total contrast to the actual reality of their presence in the land. They are not the blessed ones, the narrator says, because they were not taken into exile. As shown in the narrative, contrary to the inhabitants' opinion, the people of Israel who are in exile, taken from their land, are not cursed and separated from their God. The words of the divine character which follow this initial response give true hope and assurance to the people in exile but not to the inhabitants of the land. The narrator has YHWH's words giving promise to the people who are far from their homeland and far from the temple sanctuary of their God. The despair attributed to the exiles by the waters of Babylon because of their separation from the land and noted by the Psalmist in Ps. 137 is here in Ez. 11 said to be unfounded.

Contrary to the depiction of the understanding of the rebellious inhabitants of the land of Israel the word of the divine character in the narrative reveals in 11:16 that YHWH is

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<sup>56</sup> Ibid. Blenkinsopp also notes 2 Kgs. 5:17-19 as support for the association of deity with the land.

and shall be a sanctuary to the people of Israel who are in exile. The words in 11:16 of YHWH's proclamation of hope and sanctuary to the people scattered abroad implies that this contact is of recent origin. It is possible that the narrator's words  $v\ddot{a}'\acute{e}h\acute{i} \text{ l\ddot{a}hem } l^{\text{e}}\text{miqd\ddot{a}\ddot{s}} \text{ m}^{\text{e}}\text{'at}$ <sup>57</sup> mean that YHWH has only just recently (in the past year and two months) become this sanctuary to the exiles through the movement and manifestation of YHWH before Ezekiel among the exiles in the first vision (1:2-3:15).<sup>58</sup>

The proposal is also considered by Ralph Klein that YHWH has in the encounter with Ezekiel by the river Chebar become "for a little while" a sanctuary for the exiles. Klein suggests that the

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<sup>57</sup> The use of the term  $m^{\text{e}}\text{'at}$  following the construct state of the noun  $\text{miqd\ddot{a}\ddot{s}}$  indicates that the term is used as an adverb. B.D.B. [Brown, Driver, and Briggs, A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978), pp. 589-590] divides the adverbial form of  $m^{\text{e}}\text{'at}$  into three categories. The first is in reference to place (e.g. 2 Sam. 16:1). The second is in reference of time (e.g. Job 10:20b). And the third category is in reference to degree (e.g. 2 Kgs. 10:18; Ez. 11:16). However, B.D.B. has determined these categories in respect to the interpretation of the context in which  $m^{\text{e}}\text{'at}$  is used. Therefore, these categories are not conclusive in their designation. The use of  $m^{\text{e}}\text{'at}$  in Ezekiel 11:16 could be interpreted in reference to time as well. The reading of  $v\ddot{a}'\acute{e}h\acute{i} \text{ l\ddot{a}hem } l^{\text{e}}\text{miqd\ddot{a}\ddot{s}} \text{ m}^{\text{e}}\text{'at}$  would therefore be, "and I have recently become a sanctuary to them" or literally "and I have been to them a sanctuary for a little while". If this reading is accepted, the reference could refer to the first encounter of the glory of YHWH with Ezekiel in 1:4-28 a year and two months before these words were spoken. Thus YHWH has been connected with the exiles through the prophet for a short period of time. This reading would infer that before the initial contact with Ezekiel in 1:4-28 the exiles had been far from YHWH. I would disagree therefore, with Greenberg, Ezekiel 1-20, p. 190; and Zimmerli, Ezekiel 1, p. 262 who maintain that the phrase is in reference to degree, meaning "a small/little sanctuary".

<sup>58</sup> For a similar position see Joseph Blenkinsopp, Ezekiel (Louisville: John Knox Press, 1990), pp. 63-64.

phrase in 11:16 can be understood as having a temporal interpretation. In this case, Klein agrees that the phrase would mean that YHWH has become close to the exiles for a period of time, which is perhaps, as he concludes, "until the time when he would reestablish his true sanctuary in Jerusalem".<sup>59</sup> Klein notes that whether the phrase in 11:16 is understood in the sense of degree or time, "it is clear that [YHWH] is affirming that geographical distance from Jerusalem does not necessarily mean distance from God".<sup>60</sup>

Klein agrees, therefore, that the claims of the inhabitants of Jerusalem are explicitly opposed to the promises of the God in the narrative by the divine character's claim to be a sanctuary in the midst of the exiles.<sup>61</sup> Ironically movement has occurred; yet the movement has not been of the peoples from YHWH into exile, but the movement of YHWH from the city of Jerusalem and his manifestation among the exiles.

Both Cooke and Stalker, by contrast, maintain that the interpretation of 11:16 should be in reference to degree. The phrase would thus read, "I have only been to a small extent a sanctuary to them".<sup>62</sup> If Cooke and Stalker's interpretation is

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<sup>59</sup> Ezekiel: The Prophet and His Message (Columbia, South Carolina: University of South Carolina Press, 1988), p. 66.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

<sup>61</sup> See Andrew W. Blackwood, Jr., Ezekiel: Prophecy of Hope, p. 88 who agrees that the inhabitants of the land of Judah erroneously thought "their physical proximity to a place of worship imparted some spiritual virtue to them".

<sup>62</sup> Stalker, Ezekiel, p. 114. See Cooke, Ezekiel, p. 125.



correct, the phrase stands insignificantly in the context of the narrator's emphasis on the presence and absence of YHWH as has been developed in the movement motif thus far in the narrative.<sup>63</sup>

John T. Bunn adds an interesting point to the discussion of 11:16. He notes that the concept of sanctuary was traditionally understood by Israel to refer to the structure which they provided for YHWH. In 11:16, however, YHWH's claim to himself be a sanctuary for the exiles disrupts the traditional understanding of Israel. In 11:16 sanctuary means "that temple and cult, structure and forms which tradition had produced to embellish worship of [YHWH] were, ...of secondary importance".<sup>64</sup>

By portraying the divine character as a sanctuary to the exiles in Babylon in light of the abominations being practised in the temple in Jerusalem, the narrator has placed YHWH's manifestation of his presence by the river Chebar in perspective. Though YHWH's appearance in ch. 1 came as a surprise to the prophet, the vision in 8-11:25 provides a reasonable explanation for YHWH's manifestation. The narrator shows, as far as the narrative is concerned, that God's earthly presence is not bound to any specific structure or geographic region. We no longer need to wonder why God has made this contact with Ezekiel in exile in the narrative. The narrator's description of the atrocities

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<sup>63</sup> Some even take the position that the phrase is related to the presence or absence of a sanctuary of some sort in the land of Babylon, e.g. Peter Ackroyd's, Israel Under Babylon and Persia (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1970), pp. 26-27, 85. I can find no justification for this view, however.

<sup>64</sup> Ezekiel, p. 262.

practised by the inhabitants of the land, and specifically by the inhabitants of the city of Jerusalem, show that the God in the narrative is unable to remain in the midst of this rebellion against him because he is holy and it is unholy.

The narrator in the two vision pericopes reveals that the behaviour of the people certainly has an effect on the God in the narrative. The manifestation of YHWH in the land of exile is portrayed by the narrator as God's attempt to re-establish his contact with the portion of the people who are separated from the sanctuary of Jerusalem. As is shown in 11:19-20, this renewed relationship will enable the God in the narrative to maintain the contact with his people, even though they are a portion of the people outside the land of Israel. In the presentation of the vision events of Ezekiel therefore YHWH can no longer remain in the temple and the city of Jerusalem. The narrator reveals that the atrocities of the people have forced the divine character to leave his sanctuary. It is not explicitly shown that God leaves the temple in order to go to the exiles. Yet the move of God from the temple and city, along with the manifestation of YHWH among the exiles in ch. 1, implicitly indicates that this is what God will now do.

It is evident from enumerating the events in the two vision pericopes that the narrator has implied that God's presence has been established among the exiles for a purpose. This reading is supported by 11:18 where YHWH is described as proclaiming, "they (i.e. the exiles) will remove from it (i.e. the temple) all its

detestable things and all its abominations". In telling of the abominations in ch. 8, the narrator has explicitly portrayed the Jerusalemites as having placed detestable and abominable things within the temple and the land. The narrator has portrayed YHWH as refusing to remain in the temple and Jerusalem as long as the detestable things and the abominations are there (8:6). Are we to understand this to mean that the divine character is unwilling or unable to return to his chosen earthly abode until these things have been removed? It is reasonable to suppose that this is the case based on the information in 11:18 where YHWH informs us that upon the exiles' return to the land (i.e. Jerusalem and the temple) "they will remove from it all its detestable things and all its abominations".

It seems therefore that the narrator shows that the divine character's promise of restoration to the people in exile is linked to their responsibility to remove the things which have led to his departure. If this is what we are to accept as the narrator's intention, the restoration of the exiles to the promised land therefore is YHWH's means of return to the temple and the land as well.<sup>65</sup> The narrative would therefore show that the exiles are YHWH's hope of restoration to the divine abode in the temple of Jerusalem.<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> This fact counters the suggestion of Andrew, Responsibility and Restoration, pp. 54, 96 which sees the exiles as the sole benefactors of the restoration.

<sup>66</sup> This understanding is supported throughout the following chapters in the divine character's proclamation that it is for YHWH's name's sake that all has been done. In reference to the



In 11:21 we are told of YHWH's proclamation that the restored exiles who chose to follow the detestable ways of the rebellious inhabitants of Jerusalem will have their deeds placed upon their heads in the same way that the rebellious inhabitants themselves have been held accountable for their abominable and detestable ways (9:10). As has been shown in the narrative, those who choose to rebel too shall be scattered to the winds (5:10). They shall fall by the sword (5:12). They shall have their wicked ways punished. YHWH will move far from them (11:22). It is the very abominable and detestable ways of the people of Israel who inhabited the land which caused YHWH to evacuate the divine sanctuary in the first place (8:6), according to the narrator.

#### **The Culmination of the Second "Vision of God" Pericope**

The information in the text has so far been helpful in answering various questions raised in the narrative regarding the divine character. It remains to be shown whether or not YHWH does depart from the temple and does distance himself from the abominations which are there. The narrator has described the preparation of the glory of YHWH's move from the temple and from among the rebellious inhabitants of Jerusalem in ch. 10. The

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name's sake of YHWH in the Book of Ezekiel see Ez. 20: 9; 20:14; 20:22; 20:44; 36:20 "they have profaned my holy name"; 36:21 "But I had pity for mine holy name"; 36:22; 36:22; 36:23 "I will sanctify my great name"; 39: 7 "So I will make my holy name...pollute my holy name"; 39:25 "will be jealous for my holy name"; 43: 7 "for ever, and my holy name"; 43: 8 "have even defiled my holy name".

narrator's description of the preparatory activities of YHWH's departure from the temple closed by informing us that the glory of YHWH, mounted upon the cherubim, has moved to the east gate of the house of YHWH (10:19). The scene is not finished, however; the narrator has more to tell. YHWH's actual departure from the temple (11:22-23) does not occur until immediately following YHWH's words of promise directed towards the people in exile and the repetitious words of judgment directed toward the inhabitants of Jerusalem in 11:14-21. Following the oracle in 11:14-21 the narrator states that the holy entourage "went up from the midst of the city, and stood upon the mountain which is on the east side of the city" (11:23). We are then told that Ezekiel witnesses the departure of the glory of YHWH from the temple to the mountain range east of the city. The theme of YHWH's movement in this second "visions of God" pericope draws to a close with YHWH's presence no longer being in the temple or city; but moving east in the direction of Babylon.<sup>67</sup>

The "visions of God" end as the prophet is relocated among his fellow exiles (11:24). At this time Ezekiel says, "and the *rûah* lifted me up and brought me in the "vision" (*mar'ēh*) by the *rûah* of God into Chaldea, to the exiles. And the "vision"

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<sup>67</sup> Robert Henry Pfeiffer, Introduction to the Old Testament, p. 535, suggests that the reference in 1:1 to the opening of the heavens reveals that the divine character has departed the defiled temple in Jerusalem "to go to heaven". Pfeiffer's interpretation agrees in the end with the fact that YHWH does approach the exiles in Babylon even though there has been an interlude in heaven between the departure from Jerusalem and the arrival in Babylon. See also Shalom Spiegel, "Ezekiel or Pseudo-Ezekiel?" HTR 24 (1931), p. 286 who arrives at a similar conclusion as Pfeiffer.

(mar'ēh) which I had seen went up from upon me" (11:24). As Ezekiel returns to his senses, we are told by the narrator that he responds to this second vision (chs. 8-11) differently than the first (chs. 1:2-3:15). On his return he does not sit dumbfounded; his mouth is opened. The pericope of the "visions" (mar'ôṭ) concludes with Ezekiel stating, "And I told the exiles all the things that YHWH had showed me" (11:25). This claim by Ezekiel indicates that, according to the narrative, the exiled people of Israel shall have the opportunity to hear or refuse to hear (3:11).

**Summary Of The First And Second  
Mar'ôṭ 'Ēlōhîm Pericopes**

The narrator's description of Ezekiel's visionary experience in the "visions of God" in 1:2-3:15 is of importance to the promotion of our understanding of the narrative that YHWH is not bound to the land of Israel and the temple in Jerusalem. The narrator has stressed this understanding as he emphasized, in the description of the vision, the images which showed movement of the theophany. This vision in and of itself did not reveal the underlying circumstances which led to the presence of the divine manifestation among the exiles, however. More information was needed from the narrative to reveal the significance of YHWH's move and presence among these exiled people of Israel. Ezekiel's second visionary encounter, described in the "visions of God" of 8:1-11:25, provides the missing information which reveals the



integral circumstances which surrounded Ezekiel's first visionary encounter in the "visions of God" of 1:2-3:15. The connection between these two pericopes reveals the significance of the motif of YHWH's movement. The second pericope of the "visions of God"; read in connection with the first "visions" pericope, helps to clarify the confusion about the opening vision (1:2-3:15).

In the narrative the significance of the movement of YHWH, and YHWH's presence among the exiles, is established as the narrator reveals what Ezekiel sees in the "visions of God" of 8:1-11:25. In this vision Ezekiel sees the abominations practiced by the people of Israel who inhabit the land. He is informed by the divine character that the God in the narrative would not stay, and could not stay, in the midst of this rebellious people. He hears YHWH proclaim judgment upon the inhabitants for their abominable and detestable ways. He sees the movement of YHWH and the living cherubim within the temple. He hears YHWH proclaim that the divine has been for a small measure a sanctuary to the exiled people of Israel. Ultimately he sees the departure of YHWH upon the cherubim from the precious sanctuary and the city. This vision pericope (8:1-11:25), then, describes the circumstances which reveal the reason and purpose of YHWH's movement and manifestation among the exiles (1:2-3:15).

The narrator's description of the second visionary encounter in 8:1-11:25 provides the basic information which enables the vision of 1:2-3:15 to be understood more clearly. The presence of the glory of YHWH, seen by the prophet on the fifth day of the

month in the fifth year of the exile of King Jehoiachin, is his observation of and encounter with the glory of YHWH. Ezekiel sees the glory of YHWH, traditionally understood by the people of Israel during the period of this proclamation to abide within the temple of Jerusalem, and largely within the land of Israel, seated upon the living cherubim. The vision seen by Ezekiel in 8:1-11:25 disrupts this understanding of the localization of YHWH, however, informing us that YHWH and the holy entourage are no longer able to dwell in Jerusalem because the people had rebelled against God. YHWH is forced to clearly establish contact with the people of Israel scattered away from the city of Jerusalem and the land of Israel now living in exile.

The narrator challenges the concept of the localization of God in the first vision's description of YHWH and his vehicle (1:4-28). In this pericope the narrator reveals in descriptive detail that YHWH is not bound to the temple and city of Jerusalem. He says in 1:4-28 that Ezekiel sees YHWH as mobile and in transition outside of the land of Israel. The theology of the localization of God in the temple is not falsified until the narrator shows in the "visions" of chs. 8 through 11 that the manifestation before Ezekiel by the river Chebar is of the divine glory which dwelt in the temple in the city of Jerusalem. As shown in 11:14-16, YHWH has established his presence with the people of Israel scattered in the exile, not with the people of Israel who inhabit the land. The divine character's words in the narrative reveal a distinct misunderstanding among the

inhabitants of Jerusalem with regard to the presence and localization of God. The exiles have not been taken far from YHWH (11:15). According to the narrative YHWH has mobilized himself to be in their midst (11:16).

The narrator shows that it is this message which Ezekiel is to proclaim to the exiles in Chaldea. It is obvious in the narrative that the exiles are not to place their hope in the glory of the city of Jerusalem, nor in the temple.<sup>68</sup> Charles Francis Whitley says that under the circumstances of the exile, and the atrocities which were going on in Jerusalem,

it was necessary that Ezekiel should denounce the religious practices in Jerusalem and predict the imminent fall of the city and the consequent deportation of her king and her people (17:19-21).<sup>69</sup>

Whitley suggests that it is:

not surprising that we should hear him, while in the presence of the exiles, utter oracles against Jerusalem in the hope that he would persuade them of the doomed state of the city and dissuade them from indulging in their vain hopes of returning there."<sup>70</sup>

From this standpoint, the narrator shows that YHWH reveals to the scattered people of Israel, through Ezekiel's proclamation of what he saw within the "visions of God," that the abominations of the people who inhabit the city of Jerusalem have forced YHWH to

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<sup>68</sup> See Paul Joyce, Divine Initiative and Human Response in Ezekiel, p. 19; Zimmerli, Ezekiel 1, p. 269; Moses Buttenwieser, "The Date and Character of Ezekiel's Prophecies," HUCA 7 (1930), pp. 1-2. Joyce, Zimmerli, and Buttenwieser agree that the exiles placed extreme hope on the stability of Jerusalem.

<sup>69</sup> The Exilic Age (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1957), p. 93.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid.



move from the midst of this rebellious people.<sup>71</sup> The narrative does not stop here and leave the exiles in despair because of the divine character's message, for though Jerusalem and the temple shall be abandoned, YHWH shall make his presence known among them. As shown in 11:16-20 the exiles do not need to set their hopes on returning to YHWH and the sanctuary of the temple because YHWH has become a sanctuary to them in the land of their captivity (11:16). YHWH has moved to be in their midst. This is not all that the narrative shows that the exiles have to comfort them in their foreign home, since the narrator has the divine character also to proclaim that they will return to Jerusalem and the land of Israel. It is apparent also that we are to understand that the God in the narrative needs them as his means of returning to the city of Jerusalem and the abode of the temple (11:18). Andrew accurately points out that YHWH refraining from totally destroying and abandoning the people of Israel (i.e. inhabitants of the land and the exiles) is for his own welfare. Andrew determines that YHWH's "refrain from destroying Israel implies that it is only through Israel that [YHWH] can be known".<sup>72</sup> Orlinsky also alludes to the necessity of YHWH to refrain from totally eliminating Israel. Orlinsky suggests that the covenant is forever binding, "never to be broken under penalty of severe punishment and, theoretically at least, even

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<sup>71</sup> See Walter Brueggemann, Hopeful Imagination (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986), p. 57; and Zimmerli, Ezekiel 1, p. 253 who concede that the atrocities are unbearable by God.

<sup>72</sup> Responsibility and Restoration, p. 98.

complete rejection".<sup>73</sup> Orlinsky wisely uses the term "theoretically" in reference to YHWH's ability to completely reject Israel if the covenant is broken. Theoretically it may be possible for such a rejection to occur, but, as is evident in the narrative of Ezekiel, YHWH's total rejection is not shown. As Andrew has noted, in the narrative the divine character maintains even the minimal contact with his people because it is through them that he is known.<sup>74</sup>

The above remarks help in our understanding of why YHWH has manifested himself among the exiles as shown in the narrative. The narrator subtly shows that the exiles are needed by the divine character since the God in the narrative has abandoned the temple and left the city of Jerusalem to be destroyed. We are told that the exiles will be responsible for the removal of the detestable things and all of the abominations of the land which were initially shown to force YHWH to leave the abode of the divine. The second "vision" pericope informs us that YHWH has moved from Jerusalem to be among the exiles in order to revive the spirits of the exiles and use them to remove that which forced the glory of YHWH to abandon the temple. The God in the narrative is in need of the services of the people of Israel in exile. The significance of YHWH's movement away from one portion

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<sup>73</sup> Ancient Israel (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1954), pp. 28-29.

<sup>74</sup> See Abraham J. Heschel, God in Search of Man (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1955), pp. 68, 136, 413 for an ontological discussion of God's need for humanity.

of the people of Israel to be among another portion of the people is then set into perspective.<sup>75</sup>

The analysis of the two "visions of God" pericopes demonstrates the narrator's use of the "visions" to establish the motif of the movement of YHWH. The divine character is portrayed as a character in a paradoxical relationship with a people whom he needs in order to be known himself. By rendering YHWH as both present among the exiles and as one who is absent from his temple and people in Jerusalem, the narrator sets the stage for the future restoration of both the people in exile and God. Even though the narrator has made it clear that the God in the narrative is the one who has abandoned the temple and the city of Jerusalem and likewise has portrayed this God as the one who will cause the impending destruction, he manages to round out his portrayal of the divine character favourably. The narrator does not allow us the opportunity to conclude that the actions of the divine character might be unfavourable. The news of despair is made palatable by the culminating news of hope and promise. Likewise, the divine character in the narrator's portrayal so far has been shown to be active for reasons which, at present, raise questions regarding God's motivations. Is it possible that the character of YHWH is vulnerable in the eyes of the narrator of Ezekiel? It is this question upon which the following chapter will focus.

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<sup>75</sup> Greenberg, Ezekiel 1-20, p. 59 makes a similar observation.



## CHAPTER 3

### The Vulnerability of YHWH The Marriage Defiled (Ezekiel 16:1-43a, 59-63)

#### Introduction

The allegory in ch. 16 of a man in covenant with an unfaithful and adulterous women is among the most interesting uses of metaphor to portray God in relationship with Israel in the narrative of Ezekiel. The narrator clearly goes beyond the passing employment of the metaphor to make his point about Israel's behaviour and its effect on the divine character. The description of the union of the man and woman shows in comparison that YHWH initiated the contact between Israel and himself and that he has continuously given to it to sustain the covenant relationship. The intimacy implied in the marriage metaphor raises the question of why the narrator uses it to portray the relationship between YHWH and his people. How is the intimate<sup>1</sup> marriage metaphor therefore applicable to the relationship between YHWH and his people? What does this allegory reveal about the divine character?

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<sup>1</sup> This concept of intimacy in the marriage metaphor is taken up by, e.g. Helmer Ringgren, "The Marriage Motif in Israelite Religion," Ancient Israelite Religion. Essays in Honor of Frank Moore Cross, eds. Patrick D. Miller, Jr., Paul D. Hanson, S. Dean McBride (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987), p. 426; John Mauchline, (Exegesis) The Book of Hosea IB, vol. 6, ed. George Arthur Buttrick (New York: Abingdon Press, 1956), pp. 568-569 maintains that the metaphor of marriage enshrined the intimacy of the covenant relationship between YHWH and his people.

Henry McKeating astutely notes, in researching the sanctions against adultery in ancient Israel, that:

When...stories are told with an overtly ethical purpose...they can tell us a good deal. When they are told for quite a different purpose, and only mention ethical issues in passing, they may tell us even more. For what an author sets out to tell us will doubtless always be of interest, but what he assumes we do not need to be told may be even more revealing.<sup>2</sup>

Certainly, we can benefit by reading the story and filling in some of the gaps that the narrator has not considered necessary to tell. In an attempt to focus on the portrayal of the divine character as he is shown in the allegory in ch. 16, the information the narrator assumes we bring to the text may be, as McKeating says, "more revealing".

This study of ch. 16 will determine whether or not this section of the narrative contributes to the development of the portrayal of the divine character and also to the revelation in the text of the vulnerability of YHWH. The two "vision" pericopes in chs. 1-3:15 and chs. 8-11 have shown that YHWH is affected by the abominations of his people. Chapter 16 descriptively reveals that the bond established between YHWH and the people has created the atmosphere in which the God in the narrative has opened himself up to being profaned and defiled. The divine character has associated his name with a people who can respond rebelliously to him as is seen in ch. 8. The possibility that the people may rebel shows that YHWH has entered into a relationship

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<sup>2</sup> "Sanctions against Adultery in Ancient Israelite Society, with Some Reflections on Methodology in the Study of Old Testament Ethics," JSOT 11 (1979), p. 66.

in which his reputation as God can be affected by the response of his people to the covenant. The behaviour of the people toward YHWH and the covenant will, therefore, either honour him or defile his honour.

### The Image of Marriage

In Ezekiel ch. 16 the narrator uses the metaphor of an unfaithful wife to depict the people of Israel in relationship to YHWH to illustrate the rebelliousness of the people. Such an image is not unique to the composer of this prophecy. Ellen Davis notes that the metaphors and imagery used in the narrative of Ezekiel are often taken from earlier sources. She notes: "Ezekiel calls forth and develops figures from earlier prophetic and poetic texts".<sup>3</sup> J. Stanley Chesnut notes that within the prophetic writings and in other portions of the Old Testament there are several uses of the "marriage" analogy.<sup>4</sup> Of the many uses of this metaphor, Hosea's description is among the most known.<sup>5</sup> The connection between the union of Hosea and the harlot

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<sup>3</sup> Swallowing the Scroll, p. 93.

<sup>4</sup> The Old Testament Understanding of God (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1968), p. 108.

<sup>5</sup> See Zimmerli, Ezekiel 1, p. 335.



to the union of the land (i.e. Israel)<sup>6</sup> and YHWH is made explicitly.

YHWH said to Hosea, "Go take yourself a wife of harlotry and have children of harlotry, for the land commits great harlotry by forsaking YHWH." (Hosea 1:2 RSV)

Hosea's union with such an unfaithful partner is established to portray the desecrated union that exists between YHWH and the people of Israel. The same point is made, in the oracle of YHWH in ch. 16 of the book of Ezekiel. The narrator of Ezekiel, however, goes into greater detail in his portrayal of the union of YHWH the husband and Israel the unfaithful wife.<sup>7</sup> In Ezekiel the metaphor of this ill fated marriage is used by the narrator to recount the history of the relationship between the divine character and Israel, going from the first meeting up to the present exile.

The allegory in Ezekiel ch. 16 is a powerful illustration of the abominations of the inhabitants of the once "holy" city of Jerusalem. The narrator tells that the God in the narrative proclaims to the prophet Ezekiel,

Son of man, make known to Jerusalem her abominations,  
and say, Thus says the Lord YHWH to Jerusalem...  
16:2-3 RSV

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<sup>6</sup> According to C. F. Keil, Hosea, ComOT, vol. 10, tr. James Martin (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1986), p. 38 ha'ārēs "the land" refers to "the population of the land". See Hosea 4:1.

<sup>7</sup> See also Hals, Ezekiel, p. 109., Zimmerli, Ezekiel 1, p. 336., Andrew, Responsibility and Restoration, p. 76.

The identification of the accused as only the city of Jerusalem is interesting. Does the narrator intend for us to understand that Jerusalem alone is accused of abominable behaviour?

Greenberg maintains that it is obvious the reference to the city of Jerusalem stands for all of the nation of Israel.<sup>8</sup> He argues, with reference to the covenanting in 16:8, "God entered into covenant only with a people, never with a city".<sup>9</sup> Eichrodt does not take so strong a stance as Greenberg, but he does claim that to Ezekiel the city of God (i.e. Jerusalem) "stands for the people of God, whose manner of living owed its character to the holy city and temple".<sup>10</sup> Zimmerli grants that in 16:2 Jerusalem represents "the center of the 'house of Israel'...which works with traditional material common to the whole of Israel".<sup>11</sup> Zimmerli, in addition, notes, in agreement with Greenberg, that "the city which is addressed... represents Israel".<sup>12</sup>

There are those, however, who conclude that the reference to Jerusalem refers only to Jerusalem. M. E. Andrew<sup>13</sup> and Joseph

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<sup>8</sup> Ezekiel 1-20, pp. 274, 301. See also Cooke, Ezekiel, who writes "Jerusalem, i.e. Israel", p. 159; Keil, Ezekiel, pp. 195, 196 concludes that Jerusalem is "the representative of Israel, the covenant nation".

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., p. 301.

<sup>10</sup> Ezekiel, p. 203.

<sup>11</sup> Ezekiel 1, p. 336

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., p. 337.

<sup>13</sup> Responsibility and Restoration, p. 74f.

Blenkinsopp,<sup>14</sup> on the one hand, do not even question whether Jerusalem might refer to more than the city itself. Brownlee, on the other hand, after considering the possibilities, concludes that the metaphor of the unfaithful wife refers to Jerusalem alone.<sup>15</sup>

The narrator, in the previous oracles of YHWH, however, has provided evidence which has shown that the accusations of God are addressed to all of Israel in the narrative. In chs. 6 and 7 the people of Israel remaining in the "promised" land are accused of the abominations that will be punished. In 6:2 we read that God commands the prophet to prophesy doom and destruction to "the mountains of Israel". The evidence shows that the destruction, that is to come upon "the mountains of Israel," will result in the laying of "the dead bodies of the people of Israel before their idols" (v. 5). According to the narrative the punishment is rendered by YHWH "because of all the evil abominations of the house of Israel" (v. 11). It is shown that YHWH's promise of retribution against the abominable behaviour of the "house of Israel" will "make the land desolate and waste, throughout all their habitations, from the wilderness to Riblah" (v. 14). From "the wilderness" of southern Judah to the far north in central Syria, to the place of "Riblah", destruction will come upon the "house of Israel". The oracle of YHWH in ch. 7, foretelling the

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<sup>14</sup> Ezekiel, p. 76f.

<sup>15</sup> Ezekiel 1-19, pp. 226, 237. See also Redpath, Ezekiel, p.68.



punishment of the people, is directed to "the land of Israel" (v. 2) and the "inhabitant of the land" (v. 7). According to these oracles of punishment, the recipients of the punishment clearly include more than simply the people who live in Jerusalem.

In view of this evidence, it is reasonable to conclude that the narrator, though identifying the culprit as the city "Jerusalem" in ch. 16, refers metaphorically to all of Israel. The accusations in ch. 16 are therefore directed towards the behaviour of the whole of Israel, and not just Jerusalem. The allegory reveals, though not explicitly told by the narrator, that the divine character is provoked to anger by his jealousy brought about by the abominable behaviour of his selected partner; all the people of Israel.

Although not directly connected with the accusations against "Jerusalem", the exiles in the narrative are indeed described as recipients of either an oral or written form of the allegory (e.g. 11:25). Ezekiel's commission in 3:11 to deliver God's message to his fellow exiles supports this conclusion. They too are accused in the narrative of committing abominations against YHWH. If the narrator intends for us to understand that all of Israel, in the metaphor of Jerusalem, were participants in this unacceptable behaviour, it would be a safe assumption that the exiles stand in judgment as well? Ch. 2 has identified the exiles and the inhabitants of the land as a people who have "rebelled against" YHWH. They are all a "rebellious house", according to the narrative. The harsh accusations against "Jerusalem" does not

exclude the people in exile. The narrative therefore does not imply that the people in exile have been faithful to the covenant relationship with YHWH. It only shows that the behaviour of the exiles, however unfaithful they may be and may have been, is not as abominable as the behaviour of the inhabitants of the land.

It is evident that, within the synopsis of the covenant relationship, that we are to include the exiles under the umbrella of the imagery of harlotry (i.e. unfaithfulness) because of their place in the family of the "chosen" people of YHWH. The people in exile were part of the corporate image of the unfaithful wife because they also were a part of the people who were originally the "abhorred"<sup>16</sup> bride when YHWH chose her as his covenant partner. Their lineage is the same as the lineage of their "brothers" and "sisters" who remained in the land of Israel following the period of exile.

The narrator shows the significance of this message for the exiles regarding the offensive behaviour of "Israel" (i.e. the judgment of their compatriots "Jerusalem"), since it is a reflection of their own unfaithful pilgrimage. Though the exiles have not been involved in the abominations, as described in ch. 8, and which are going on in the homeland, they would, as part of the people of Israel, be reminded that except for their exile they also would be accused. As part of the corporate people of Israel, they are also a part of Israel's unfaithfulness to the

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<sup>16</sup> See Ezekiel 16:5 where the narrator says: "For you were abhorred".

divine character. In ch. 16, the narrator's account of the divine character's accusations against Jerusalem for her abominations therefore emphatically accuse the Jerusalemites, the inhabitants of the land, and, even through corporate and cultic association, the exiles; all the people of Israel are included.

**The Name of YHWH Profaned by His Bride  
(Ch.16:1-43)**

The allegory begins with an attack against the origin of "Jerusalem" which is far from subtle, and apparently stemming from the narrator's depiction of YHWH's hostility towards the abominations of his partner. Although the allegory is addressed to "Jerusalem" it is nonetheless assumed that the narrator will also use it to show something of the God in the narrative. The narrator demonstrates that YHWH, as the accuser, is portrayed as the one who is involved with the accused partner. The relationship raises the question of, how will YHWH fare as a participating character in this allegory? Does the information not told by the narrator contribute at all to the portrayal of the divine character? It is probable that the answers to these questions will add to the significance of YHWH's presence among the exiles and his absence from the temple and Jerusalem.

The very lack of information in the allegory testifies to a certain kind of relationship between the initiator and the abhorred partner. The divine character's (i.e. YHWH) proclamation that the future "bride" (i.e. Israel) was abandoned and not



pitied by anyone (16:5) by contrast sets the stage for his forthcoming pity on the abhorred one.<sup>17</sup> As the narrator shows, it was the divine character who eventually responded to her presence even before her "beauty" had blossomed.

And I passed by you, and I saw you weltering in your blood, and I said to you in your blood, 'Live and grow up like a plant of the field'.<sup>18</sup> And you grew up and became tall and arrived at full maidenhood; your breasts were formed, and your hair had grown; yet you were naked and bare. 16:6-7 RSV

These verses seem to indicate that in the narrative it was YHWH's very command<sup>19</sup> over the future "bride" which fostered her growth and maturation. Zimmerli suggests that the hopelessness in the description of the "foundling child" on the day of the first encounter is set in contrast to the "brightness of the action of God". The only good which is portrayed, has nothing to do with the "child", but instead belongs only to the action of YHWH.<sup>20</sup> It is interesting that the narrator in the allegory does not tell us that the young woman was covered when she was commanded to "live"

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<sup>17</sup> In 16:5 *l<sup>e</sup>hum<sup>e</sup>lāh 'ālāyik* "to have compassion upon you" is used to refer to the missing motive which would have led to a response to the people. *hāmāl* is not a term of endearment.

<sup>18</sup> The MT repeats YHWH's blessing on the future "bride" in v. 6, *vā'ōmar lāk b<sup>e</sup>dāmāyik h<sup>a</sup>yî vā'ōmar lāk b<sup>e</sup>dāmāyik h<sup>a</sup>yî* ("and I said to you in your blood, live, and I said to you in your blood, live"). The repetition is interpreted as an emphatic manner of speaking. Greenberg, *Ezekiel 1-20*, p. 276 agrees that the repetition in v. 6 is probably used "to stress the great act of God's pity".

<sup>19</sup> The results of YHWH's command lead me to consider it a blessing of his future partner.

<sup>20</sup> Zimmerli, *Ezekiel 1*, p. 338.

but instead emphasizes that she still stands "naked and bare" before the world (v. 7b).

The intimacy of the relationship between the two characters of YHWH, the compassionate one, and Jerusalem (i.e. Israel), the abhorred one, is lucidly described in 16:8a. We read that the divine character proclaims,

When I passed by you again and looked upon you, behold, you were at the age for love<sup>21</sup>; and I spread my skirt over you, and covered your nakedness. RSV

The metaphor of marriage is applied explicitly here to the relationship between YHWH and Israel.<sup>22</sup> This encounter is more intimate than the previous one in which YHWH is shown to simply pronounce that the child is to "live", words which resulted in blessing. In spreading his skirt<sup>23</sup> over her, and covering her nakedness, the God in the narrative consummates the relationship

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<sup>21</sup> dōdīm occurs only in 16:8 of Ezekiel. It refers to the time for conjugal love. See Keil, Ezekiel, p. 201. Greenberg, Ezekiel 1-20, p. 277 states that dōdīm (v.8) refers specifically to sexual lovemaking (e.g. Ezekiel 23:17; cf. Proverbs 7:16; Song of Songs 4:10, 7:13).

<sup>22</sup> See Zimmerli, Ezekiel 1, p. 339.

<sup>23</sup> The narrator's use of the term kānāp "skirt" in 16:8 has sexual overtones. In Deut. 22:30 (MT 23:1) the text refers the uncovering of a father's kānāp in conjunction with the sexual involvement of a son with his father's wife. The same is found in Deut. 27:20. In Ruth 3:9 kānāp is used in a similar scene of the "marriage" covenanting as in Ez. 16:8. Even though the majority of texts (e.g. Gen. 1:21; Ex. 19:4; Deut. 32:11; etc) which use kānāp are referring to "wings", it is reasonable to suggest that in text such as Ez. 16:8, and likewise Ruth 3:9, that the spreading of the kānāp indicates sexual involvement between the one spreading his skirt and the one being covered.



between himself and his "bride" in an act of sexual intercourse.<sup>24</sup>

It is noteworthy that the narrator never shows the partner of the man to have agreed to the covenanting. The silence of the partner has been interpreted by some readers to indicate that the "maiden" had no choice in the matter. She was merely taken as a partner regardless of her agreement or otherwise to the terms of the "marriage" covenant.<sup>25</sup> This reading results in an unfavorable response to the accusations made by the "dominant" partner of the unfaithfulness of the other. If the "maiden" never agreed to the stipulations of the covenant, or for that matter, to the covenant at all, is she able to be unfaithful to it? This reading, likewise, adds to its argument that the absence of any verbal response of the accused in the allegory demonstrates the one sided nature of the covenant. The question can be asked whether it is necessary for the narrator to show the dialogue between the two characters of the allegory in order to communicate the point? Would the point of the allegory be better supported if the

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<sup>24</sup> Some have suggested that the "covering" of the woman with the man's garment only refers to the acquiring of her. E.g. Greenberg, Ezekiel 1-20, p. 277; Andrew, Responsibility and Restoration, p. 76. Even though Greenberg has interpreted dōdīm to refer to sexual lovemaking, he does not mention the sexual indications of the metaphor kānāp. However, Brownlee, Ezekiel 1-19, p. 225 has seen correctly that the sexual overtones in the surrounding context support the interpretation that the covering of the "woman" indicates that the act was of a sexual nature.

<sup>25</sup> Forum response by David M. Gunn on "Ezekiel ch. 16," Decatur, Georgia: Columbia Theological Seminary, 1990.



"female" character had any explicit decision to make in the matter?

From the standpoint of this study of the portrayal of the God in the narrative, the point of the allegory is firm, even though the narrator fails to indicate whether or not the "maiden" agreed and willingly entered the covenant with the initiating character (i.e. YHWH). It is clear certainly that from the perspective of the divine character the partner has been explicitly unfaithful. The accusations of infidelity or unfaithfulness are then, from this character's perspective, rightly addressed to the accused.

A feminist critique of ch. 16 is among the most recent of studies applied to the allegory. In the feminist reading, several aspects of the metaphor and imagery of marriage are suggestive of the male monopoly of ancient society. With regard to interpretation, likewise, scholars are accused by feminist researchers of ignoring "gender as a category of analysis".<sup>26</sup> Gale Yee claims in her stimulating analysis of ch. 16 that Ezekiel reinforces the negative female stereotypes of ancient society by referring to the evil committed by "Jerusalem" as infidelity on the part of the female partner in marriage.<sup>27</sup> Yee accepts that the literary purpose of Ezekiel 16:1-43 "is the castigation of the idolatrous cults and foreign alliances in

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<sup>26</sup> Gale A. Yee, "Spreading Your Legs to Anyone Who Passed: The Pornography of Ezekiel 16," TMs [photocopy], p. 6, 1990 AAR/SBL Annual Meeting, New Orleans, Louisiana.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., pp. 1-42.

which Jerusalem has become involved".<sup>28</sup> Yee adds, however, that besides being an obvious denunciation of foreign cults and treaties, the allegory "is a cautionary tale for the Israelite woman to remain faithful in marriage as it is defined in a patriarchal society".<sup>29</sup> She concludes that the use of the female as the negative example merely supports the concept of male dominance.

The chief limitation in Yee's analysis of ch. 16 is the persistent recourse to gender related issues without her asking whether the literary purpose of the allegory contributes to any character portrayals other than those of male and female. Yee is compelled by her feminist agenda and because of her goal to isolate the evidence of the male dominance in the society in which the allegory evolved to maintain that more is stated in the text than just the literary purpose.

The message of the allegory is evident even if the characters' genders were reversed. The allegory explicitly tells, in its sexist language, of YHWH's covenanting with "Jerusalem", resulting in its unfaithful response to YHWH. This is therefore an essential element in the narrator's portrayal of the divine character's actions in the narrative. In view of the actions of the God in the narrative portrayed in the first and second vision pericopes this allegory clearly shows that the divine character responds to the behaviour of his people; but now in anger and

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., p. 31.

jealousy. Whatever the case, however, YHWH's responses are shown by the narrator as the results of external stimulus.

The relationship between the two characters is not simply a sexual one, however; it is also a legal one, and constitutes a marriage covenant:<sup>30</sup>

Yea, I plighted my troth to you and entered into a covenant with you...and you became mine. (16:8 RSV)

The narrator therefore compares the relationship between YHWH and "Jerusalem" with the union of a man and woman in marriage. The metaphor of marriage implies that the relationship between YHWH and his people carries with it similar dynamics to the marriage covenant between a husband and a wife. Zimmerli alludes to one of the dynamics implied in the metaphor. He says that when YHWH "makes the girl his own" he "thereby becomes hers".<sup>31</sup> Is it possible that the narrator shows that the divine character, through his covenant, has become vulnerable? Vulnerability is a part of any interaction between two or more parties. The interaction itself indicates that each party is open to either positive or negative stimulus from the other. For the narrator to show that YHWH chooses to interact therefore, suggests that he has chosen to be vulnerable.

Following the narrator's description of the divine character's covenanting with his partner, we are told that YHWH

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<sup>30</sup> As seen by Helmer Ringgren, "The Marriage Motif in Israelite Religion," Ancient Israelite Religion, ed. Patrick D. Miller, Jr., Paul D. Hanson, S. Dean McBride (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987), p. 426.

<sup>31</sup> Ezekiel 1, p. 340.



then bathes his bride with water and washes off her blood (v. 9). What is the significance for the narrator referring to "blood" at this point in the allegory? William Brownlee wrongly suggests that the blood mentioned in v. 9 is the blood of the first coitus, a sign of the bride's virginity.<sup>32</sup> Brownlee argues, furthermore, that the blood mentioned in v. 9 is not likely a reference to the blood of the newborn child (v. 6). He suggests that this blood would have been washed away during the woman's baths preceding her marriage. Nor does Brownlee think that the blood (v. 9) can be menstrual blood,<sup>33</sup> for he argues Leviticus 15:19-24 and Ezekiel 18:6 forbid marriage at the time of menses.<sup>34</sup>

Brownlee's assertion that the blood which is washed away from the woman in v. 9 refers to the blood which is expected to be present at the time of the first coitus is a formidable point to make. For Brownlee to suggest that the blood could not refer to the blood which the woman as a child was *mitboseset* "weltering in" is unsupported by the text, however. The narrator has emphasized the blood of the child in the previous verses. He has not, however, mentioned or implied that the child has on her second encounter with her redeemer been washed and cleansed from her filthiness. One may assume that the woman would have bathed

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<sup>32</sup> Ezekiel 1-19, p. 225.

<sup>33</sup> E.g. Cooke, Ezekiel, p. 163 implies that the blood is connected with the maturity of the woman.

<sup>34</sup> Ezekiel 1-19, p. 225.

before her "marriage" or covenanting with her redeemer. One might have made a similar assumption regarding the nakedness of the child, except the narrator explicitly says that even when she had grown up and "arrived at full maidenhood" she was still "naked and bare". Does it not appear unusual that a grown woman stands unclothed in view of all who pass by? It is reasonable to suggest that the only aspect of the woman that has changed from the beginning of the allegory is that someone has pitied her and she has grown up. Because of the unlikelihood of the altered status of the grown woman before the act of covenanting, Brownlee's exclusion of the possibility that the blood of v. 9 carries with it some overtones of the blood of v. 6 is therefore insupportable.

The same criticism is levied against those who interpret the blood mentioned in v. 9 as referring to the blood of menstruation. Though one would assume that a woman at the 'itēk 'ēt dōdīm "age for love" would also be at the age to experience the menstrual bleeding, the text does not in anyway indicate that this is the blood referred to in v. 9. Brownlee's argument that the law forbids contact with a woman who is menstruating, agreeably implies that any such act would be viewed unfavorably by the recipients of such news. Considering the information given in the pericope of ch. 16:1-42, I conclude that, although the narrator has implied that the woman and her redeemer have had coitus, the blood mentioned in v. 9 refers not to the blood of the first coitus but refers to the blood which has remained upon

her from the day of her birth. Therefore with reference to this "blood" the narrator creates a contrast between the gā'al "abhorred" woman's (v. 5) defiled state (i.e. covered in blood) before the redeemer's covenanting and his cleansing and establishing her as one who is of m<sup>e</sup>lûkâh "regal estate" (v. 13) following the covenanting.

### Prestige Given to Abhorred One

In 16:10-13a the narrator describes that the bride Jerusalem (i.e. Israel) was graciously adorned by her partner. As noted in the previous section, the narrator thus contrasts her early state of abhorrence with her present state of admiration. Even though the woman is described as having her own physical beauty following the first encounter,<sup>35</sup> it is not until her partner clothes her in the finest of material and adorns her with precious jewelry<sup>36</sup> that her beauty attracts the admiration of others. The narrative claims that the surrounding nations no longer look upon her with disdain.

You grew exceedingly beautiful, and came to regal estate. And your renown went forth among the nations because of your beauty. 16:13b-14a RSV

The narrator is explicit that the woman's newly gained admiration from the nations, however, is not based on her beauty alone. Her

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<sup>35</sup> See v. 7 ba'ā<sup>~</sup>df 'ā<sup>~</sup>dāyfm.

<sup>36</sup> See vv. 10-13a.



partner's gifts added to her natural beauty, thus make her "perfect" *kālīl* in the eyes of others (16:14b).

In my opinion, the use of the metaphor of marriage not only illustrates the covenanting and expected faithfulness of the two characters (i.e. "Jerusalem" and YHWH) but also indicates that the two were affected by the actions of the other as would be a husband and wife in their relationship. Though the narrator does not directly tell us the effect of the covenant on the God in the narrative, we can assume that the divine character became known and thus joined to this covenant relationship with his people. A covenant has been made between YHWH and his people, between husband and wife. The dynamics of this relationship and their effects upon the divine character remain to be seen. The metaphor of marriage is not limited to its communication of the similarities between the allegorical couple and the divine and human character in the narrative of Ezekiel.

#### **The Abuse of YHWH's Blessing**

In the description of the atrocities and "abominations" of YHWH's people in the second "visions of God" pericope in chs. 8-11, culminating in the divine character's departure from his abode in Jerusalem, we have previously seen that the relationship has deteriorated. The abominable behaviour of the inhabitants of Jerusalem is portrayed as causing the God in the narrative to abandon his earthly temple and the city itself (8:6). The narrator continues to emphasize the deterioration of the

relationship in ch. 16 as he vividly describes the unfaithful and abominable behaviour of "Jerusalem" through the allegory of a selfish and unfaithful woman of harlotry who is married to a seemingly generous husband.

The beautiful wife is shown to trust in her own ways and seeks other men (16:15-22), in spite of the marriage covenant with her husband. What does this allegory portray of the covenant relationship between the divine character and his people? Who or what is it with whom his people are sharing themselves other than the God in the narrative? We may find resolution to these questions if we look at ch. 8 where Ezekiel is shown the great abominations which are being practised in Jerusalem. According to the text, other images which the people are worshipping have been set up in the temple of YHWH, within the very compound of YHWH's "holy" sanctuary. The description shows that the God in the narrative is no longer the only deity receiving the attention of his people. The people of YHWH have sought out other gods<sup>37</sup> in ch. 8 as the wife in ch. 16 has sought out other lovers. The people have taken the material blessings which the divine character has given them, and used them to make their images as the wife has done with the objects given to her by her husband. In ch. 8 the images provoke the God in the narrative to jealousy and anger just as the husband in the allegory in ch. 16 is provoked by his wife's betrayal.

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<sup>37</sup> It is agreed that "Jerusalem" also sought out foreign alliances. See ch. 17 for an explicit allegory regarding the political betrayal.

It is logical, then, to assume that the narrator in the allegory shows the betrayal of allegiance to the divine character by his covenant partner (i.e. the people). The obvious result of the people's betrayal is YHWH's anger and jealousy, as would be the expected response of a husband to the betrayal of the marriage covenant by his wife. As the wife in the allegory has proved herself unfaithful by ignoring the marriage covenant leading to her prosperity and beauty and seeking other partners, the narrator depicts "Jerusalem" as one also who has proved unfaithful through her idolatrous and abominable behaviour.<sup>38</sup>

Zimmerli rightly notes that,

the shameless immorality with which Jerusalem so disgracefully repaid ([vatarbî 'et-taznutek]<sup>39</sup>) the [rabah], which was addressed to her as a blessing in v 7 ([rabî...vatirbî]), turns into a detestable uncleanness what was once a divine gift and therefore holy. Thus the beauty of Jerusalem, which derived from [YHWH's] own hands, had become an abomination and uncleanness through its impious immorality with every passerby.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> In 16:17 the narrator reminds the people in the narrative once again as in v. 14b that they abused and gave away what the divine character had given them. The narrator uses key words which emphasize this point throughout the allegory (listed in sequence of occurrence): (v. 17) mizhābî "from my gold", mikkaspî "from my silver", 'āšer nātattî lak "which I gave you"; (v. 18) šamnî "my oil", q<sup>e</sup>tārtî "my incense"; (v. 19) lahmî 'āšer-nātattî lak "my food which I gave to you", he'<sup>e</sup>kaltîk "I fed you"; (v. 21) tišh<sup>h</sup>tî 'et-bānāy "you slaughtered my sons". For a similar position see Zimmerli, Ezekiel 1, p. 342; Keil, Ezekiel, p. 204.

<sup>39</sup> From 16:26.

<sup>40</sup> Ezekiel 1, p.343.



### The Faithful Husband

The illustrative synopsis in ch. 16 of the deterioration of the covenant relationship between the divine character and the people of Israel in the narrative implies that the divine character is provoked to jealousy and anger by the unfaithfulness of his partner, as would be a husband by an unfaithful wife. This portrayal of the divine character's wrath and jealousy (v. 38b), provoked by the harlot-like ways of the people, implies that the divine character's reputation (i.e. honour as the divine one in covenant) is threatened. Just as a husband can be shamed in the community by the unfaithful behaviour of his wife, we are shown that according to this portrayal the divine character's honour also can be blemished by the unfaithful behaviour of his people.

The narrator's description of YHWH's covenanting with the once abhorred people reveals that the God in the narrative has opened himself up to being affected by the people who are partners with him in covenant. The divine character's contact with the people is his means of recognition (16:62). As is shown in the narrative he has chosen to be known as the God of the covenant with the people. The narrator in the allegory emphasizes the union and the recognition of the divine character by God's "marriage" to his people. We can now understand the significance of the "marriage" metaphor in that it shows that if the relationship deteriorates, the knowledge of the God to the people

and the surrounding nations<sup>41</sup> will also. A god who is known through such a relationship becomes insignificant when this relationship is abandoned by the second party. The reputation of the God in the narrative would be intricately threatened by the situation.

The narrator sets up a contrast between the positive actions of the divine character and the negative behaviour of his "bride". She squanders the luxuries which she herself would never have received if it were not for her union with her husband. The ways of the unfaithful bride are inexcusable. The narrator indicates that the people are no longer aware of their abhorred beginning before their relationship with YHWH (16:22, 43). The implication is that they have forgotten that it was YHWH who initiated the covenant relationship and pitied them when no one else did. It was YHWH who blessed them with all their splendour. According to the narrative YHWH's covenanted people do not remember that they were despised by all before the divine character blessed them and entered into covenant with them. Their (i.e. the harlot's) forgetfulness and resulting unfaithfulness to the covenant relationship is shown to threaten the honour of the God in the narrative (i.e. the husband) as the God (i.e. the husband) in covenant with his people (i.e. his wife).

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<sup>41</sup> I include the surrounding nations in the recognition of the authority of the God in the narrative because of the reference in 16:41 that the punishment shall occur "in the sight of many women". Since Jerusalem and/or the entire Jewish nation is condemned in the allegory as the harlot, it is reasonable to assume that the female bystanders are the surrounding nations.

The unfaithfulness of the people which results in a threat to the divine character's reputation provokes him to anger (16:26b). The narrator shows that the God in the narrative is affected by the "bride's" behaviour. The divine character is described as bitterly accusing his covenanted "bride," proclaiming that she is an "adulterous wife, who receives strangers instead of her husband" (16:32). Her unfaithful ways are described as even worse than those of normal harlots because she is accused of soliciting the foreign alliances and foreign gods. It is apparent that we are intended to understand that the bride's obvious betrayal of the covenant will not go unpunished by her husband, and the unfaithfulness of YHWH's people also will be punished. The divine character's honour will not continue to suffer because of their idolatrous ways. The narrator has shown that the God in the narrative will redeem his reputation by admonishing his unfaithful partner (vv. 35-43a).

#### **The Retribution of the Unfaithful Bride**

The narrator makes it clear that the God in the narrative will not let such abominable behaviour go unpunished. The divine character proclaims,

And I will judge you as women who break wedlock and shed blood are judged, and bring upon you the blood of wrath and jealousy. (16:38 RSV)

The rebellious and unfaithful ways of God's people (i.e. their turning to other gods and other powers) have caused the God in



the narrative to be furious.<sup>42</sup> The narrative implies that YHWH's reputation as the initiator of the covenant is threatened by his people's abominable behaviour. The implied threat leads us to anticipate an action from the divine character. It is clear that in such a situation divine character must act to salvage the covenant and redeem his reputation. The adulterous ways of the "bride" will be punished. The God in the narrative proclaims to his unfaithful partner,

They shall bring up a host against you, and they shall stone you and cut you to pieces with their swords.  
(16:40 RSV)

The description of the divine promise of punishment in v. 40 is faithful to the fulfillment of the legal responsibility of those who have judged a woman to have defiled herself with the act of adultery (see Deuteronomy 22:21, 24).<sup>43</sup> The divine character is portrayed in v. 40 as revoking his first action of the blessing of life at the initial encounter with the "foundling child" and now threatening to hand Jerusalem over to death.<sup>44</sup>

The God in the narrative promises to "satisfy" his "fury" on the unfaithful people. This promise of "fury", however, is

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<sup>42</sup> See *h<sup>ā</sup>mātī*, v. 42.

<sup>43</sup> The phrase they will "cut you to pieces with their sword" is not found as part of the OT punishment for adultery. Brownlee, *Ezekiel 1-19*, p. 238, suggests that this phrase emphasizes the reality of an army which will come against Jerusalem. The majority of other commentators, e.g. Zimmerli, *Ezekiel 1*, p. 346; Greenberg *Ezekiel 1-20*, p. 287, appear unconcerned with the phrase.

<sup>44</sup> As seen correctly by Zimmerli, *Ezekiel 1*, p. 346 and Brownlee, *Ezekiel 1-19*, p. 238.

quickly followed by the narrator's assurance that YHWH's "jealousy shall depart" from them (v. 42). We are told that YHWH will be calm. His anger will be spent.

Greenberg interprets the move from "fury" to "calm" in v. 42 not as words of consolation but as "a notice that God will not rest until he has inflicted the extreme penalty".<sup>45</sup> It would be peculiar, however, if Greenberg were correct with his idea, that the "extreme penalty" (i.e. death) is never inflicted by the divine character on the unfaithful and abominable people. The narrator, in contrast to the unfaithfulness of the people, shows that the God in the narrative never betrays his covenant,<sup>46</sup> regardless of the people's response to his warnings.<sup>47</sup>

The narrator has shown that the relationship must be restored for the divine character to be known and recognized as one in covenant with his people (v. 62). The people of the covenant in the allegory (i.e. the wife) are to know that YHWH is the only covenant partner (i.e. the husband). We can assume that

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<sup>45</sup> Ezekiel 1-20, p. 288.

<sup>46</sup> Eichrodt, Ezekiel, pp. 209-210 suggests that the manner of presenting the expressions of God's wrath and jealousy denotes "the inexorable, yet wholly personal, manner in which he reacts against every attempt to deny or ridicule his giving of himself in fellowship".

<sup>47</sup> Henry A. Redpath, The Book of the Prophet Ezekiel, p. 80 is mistaken in concluding that the punishment is to bring about the repentance of Jerusalem. There is no indication that repentance was the intended result of the punishment of "Jerusalem". The purpose of lucidly describing the transgressions of "Jerusalem" is to reveal the contrast between the unfaithfulness of the people and the faithfulness of YHWH.

the people's commitment to YHWH will be shown by their faithful and obedient behaviour.

The narrator reveals also that the punishment of "Jerusalem" for its rebellious and dishonouring ways shall be a testimony and witness to the "women" who view her retribution.

And they shall burn your houses and execute judgments upon you in the sight of many woman... (16:41a RSV)

The punishment upon "Jerusalem" shall be exacted in the sight of many onlookers (v. 41a). This verse is a premonition of the events in the following chapters which are to befall the surrounding nations. The nations shall also see and know that YHWH is the faithful covenant partner (e.g. 25:7b, 11b, 17b; 26:6; 28:24b, 26b; 29:9b, 16b, 21b; 30:26b). Thus the divine character's reputation will be restored in their eyes as well. As the narrator has shown, if this is not accomplished, the divine character's self-chosen revelation as a God in covenant with his chosen people is lost. By the divine character's renewal of the covenant relationship, therefore, his reputation will be restored to its proper place in the sight of all peoples (i.e. the exiles of Israel, the inhabitants of the land of Israel, and the surrounding nations), as one in control of his people and faithfully worshipped by them.



### YHWH Responds: Intervention not Intercession

The existing paradox of punishing a people in order to have honour and of maintaining a faithful people in covenant is evident by the conclusion of the allegory. The narrator implies that the punishment may not be as severe as we might have expected.

I will make you stop playing the harlot, and you shall also give hire no more. (16:41b RSV)

Brownlee interprets 41b's reference to Jerusalem's discontinuance of playing the harlot as a sign that there will be a remnant who will survive the punishment and who will see the evils of their ways and repent. Those who see the folly of their ways and repent "will become the new Jerusalem of whom Isaiah prophesied (Isaiah 1:25-27)."<sup>48</sup> However, Brownlee's suggestion of an allusion to repentance is out of place. The narrator has not introduced the concept of repentance in the verse, nor can it be inferred from it. The people are clearly shown to have little, choice, if any, in the matter. Since repentance is not an option, how is it that the people shall stop playing the harlot? Are we to accept that death and total destruction are the only ways to correct the unfaithful behaviour of the people? Is it possible that the narrator's portrayal of the God in the narrative will show that he alters their ways by other means than these that the divine character has threatened?

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<sup>48</sup> Ezekiel 1-19, p. 238.

Although in vv. 44-58 the narrator begins to describe the abominable behaviour of "Jerusalem"<sup>49</sup> using the metaphor of three wayward sisters, the description only reinforces the portrayal of "Jerusalem's" behaviour as worse in comparison to any other negative examples which might be in use. Still, in all this, the basic interpretation of the meaning and function of the story remains essentially unchanged.<sup>50</sup> In my analysis we will not take into account this portion of the narrative, therefore, because it fails to add any significant material relating to the portrayal of the divine character in the pericope.

From v. 59 to the close of ch. 16 the narrative focuses on a favourable portrayal of the divine character despite the previous threats of destruction. The narrator shows the God in the narrative to be less severe in his words. We are told that YHWH remembers his covenant of old. The divine character will not fully levy the punishment prescribed upon his people, no matter

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<sup>49</sup> The narrator reminds us that he is referring to Jerusalem indirectly in 16:45: "Your mother was a Hittite and your father an Amorite". Previously in 16:2 "Jerusalem's" origin is given: "your father was an Amorite, and your mother a Hittite". Other than the reversed order the only major difference in the two descriptions of origin is that in 16:2 the pronominal suffix "your" is feminine singular, whereas in 16:45 the pronominal suffix "your" is feminine plural.

<sup>50</sup> Zimmerli, Ezekiel 1, p. 333 by contrast contends that vv. 44-58 introduce a different theme from vv. 1-43. He does agree that the two are not isolated from each other, however. In a comment representative of Zimmerli's approach, he propounds that the chapter was "formed in a process of successive supplementation of a kernel element, the ideas of which have been developed and expanded" (p. 334). Despite his claims, Zimmerli does indicate in his discussion of the aims of the two sections that they both show the degree of sinfulness of the "city".



how abominable their behaviour may be. We are led to ask, however, what the God in the narrative will do to redeem his threatened reputation if punishment is withheld. The "marriage" is not complete without a wife. According to the narrative YHWH's own choice that he be known in and through his relationship (i.e. covenant, "marriage") with the people requires that he continue and sustain that relationship.

The narrator tells that the YHWH will remain faithful to his covenant and remain the God of Israel even though his partner has turned away from him. YHWH will not rely on the old covenant, however, but will establish a more secure covenant with them instead. The new covenant will be an "everlasting" one. We are told that the divine character will forgive his unfaithful partner. The narrator makes this point very clear in 16:59-63:

Yea, thus says the Lord YHWH: I will deal with you as you have done, who have despised the oath in breaking the covenant, yet I will remember my covenant with you in the days of your youth, and I will establish with you an everlasting covenant...I will establish my covenant with you, and you shall know that I am YHWH, that you may remember and be confounded, and never open your mouth again because of your shame, when I forgive you all that you have done, says the Lord YHWH.

16:59-60, 62-63 RSV

It is evident that the narrator portrays the divine character as one who needs to be faithful to his covenant so that he is recognized as the God of the people of Israel. In contrast to the previous threat of destruction in the chapter, we now see that the God in the narrative will forgive the people for their abominations to maintain his covenantal relationship with them and to be known as their God.



## Conclusion

The divine character is portrayed in the allegory of ch. 16 as one who is affected by outside forces. For the God in the narrative to be portrayed as angry and jealous shows that something or someone has stimulated this response. The allegory shows the culprit to be the divine character's people, and the reason, their unfaithfulness.

The allegory does not stand alone by its portrayal of the God in the narrative as vulnerable. The narrator has previously shown the vulnerability of the divine character in the earlier portions of the narrative through his description of the activity of YHWH in the first and second "vision" pericopes. YHWH's revealed activity has been in response to the threat to his reputation. The God in the narrative has manifested himself among the exiles in the opening "vision" in response to the ways of the inhabitants in the land. The divine character has responded to the atrocities in "Jerusalem" in the second "vision" by abandoning the temple and the city.

According to the narrative YHWH's reputation has been blemished in the eyes of the people in exile because of their separation from their land and their alienation from the temple, the very centre of their cultus. The divine character's reputation has been damaged by the inhabitants of Jerusalem and the land of Israel through their abominable behaviour which has culminated by their turning away from him. His reputation has lost power in the minds of the surrounding nations as they have

observed, fostered, and participated in the abominable behaviour of his people which has led to their downfall. If the God in the narrative is to continue to be known (as the God in relationship and covenant with the people of Israel), we can conclude that he must respond in a way that this knowledge of him will be sustained. It is this response which is limited by the divine character's covenant and his faithfulness to it.<sup>51</sup>

In ch. 16, therefore, through the allegory of the marriage of a harlotrous wife with an apparently gracious husband, the narrator reveals how the God in the narrative has chosen to enter a covenant which leaves him open to the same vulnerability as does a man who enters into a relationship with a woman who has been unfaithful. Although relating to the metaphysical, it is interesting that this concept is termed by the Reformed theologian Hendrikus Berkhof as the "Defenseless Superior Power" of God. Berkhof maintains that YHWH, in choosing to enter the relationship with a creature who is free to chose obedience or disobedience, faithfulness or unfaithfulness, has limited his responses toward the creature. Berkhof notes:

Defenselessness does not as such exclude an active exercise of power; it does exclude a forcible exercise of power which wipes out the power of the opposite.<sup>52</sup>

It is this chosen "weakness" of the God in the narrative which

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<sup>51</sup> See Edmond Jacob, Theology of the Old Testament, p. 105 who states that "the initiator of the covenant cannot abandon those who are his partners".

<sup>52</sup> Christian Faith, tr. Sierd Woudstra (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1979), p. 134.

determines his ultimate response to the faithlessness of his people. It is apparent that by his own choosing, he can punish the people, but never destroy them. He can exile the people, but never leave them. For he is portrayed as one who has chosen to be known through the very relationship which has led to the threat upon his essence. As shown in the narrative, he will punish the obdurate ways of his people, but is unable to wait for this punishment to alter their behaviour to the point of their repentance. He will create a new heart for them, himself, and put a new spirit within them (11:19). So far the evidence supports the understanding that the divine character will enable them to be his people. These people are as necessary to his existence as he has been to theirs. We see in the narrative that the covenant relationship is thus the divine character's reaching out to be known; YHWH's very means of being significant as God.

The allegory of the unfaithful wife in chapter 16 is a literary device which the narrator uses to communicate the "big picture" to us as his reader. He elaborately illustrates the unfaithfulness of the people of Israel. They have broken the covenant by allowing images of other gods to draw their attention from YHWH. The splendour the divine character had given them, which they would not have had if it were not for the covenant between them and YHWH (16:14b), was used in their worship of other gods. They have been unfaithful to the God in the narrative as a wife is unfaithful to her husband when she commits adultery. I suggest that if the crime is judged to be the same as adultery,



it is safe to assume that the punishment also should be the same. The punishment of death is the set judgment for adultery. Death is the punishment which an unfaithful, "adulterous" nation would receive under similar circumstances. YHWH's wrath would appear to show that this is what will befall his unfaithful people. The allegory which has developed as an aggressive attack on the unfaithful culminates, instead, in a gracious and faithful promise to those who have previously been threatened with the fear of death. Their salvation will come from the one who has advanced the threat of attack on them. The divine character is portrayed as the one who will remain faithful to his covenant though his partner has not remained faithful(16:59-63). The narrator has managed to portray favourably the divine character even when the major portion of the pericope implies that he will annihilate his unfaithful partner.

## CHAPTER 4

### The Significance of the Name of YHWH in the Prophecy of Ezekiel (Ezekiel 20, 36)

#### Introduction

The preceding chapters have dealt with parts of the narrative of Ezekiel which have together contributed to the narrator's portrayal of the divine character. We have seen how the God in the narrative has manifested his presence among one group of people and made known his absence among another. We have seen also how the narrator has described YHWH's relationship with the people metaphorically as a relationship between husband and wife. In each case we have made a note of the narrator's explanation for YHWH's activity (i.e. "rebelliousness" [ch. 2], "great abominations" [ch. 8], unfaithfulness [ch. 16]). The question critical for our interpretation of the narrative, and for a proper understanding of the portrayal of the divine character is: what is shown as the purpose of the divine character's activity? The intention of this chapter is to focus on the events of chs. 20 and 36 in order to address the issue of the motive of the divine character. These two chapters have been chosen because of the narrator's use of the phrase "for my name's sake," attributed to the divine character, and because of the references to the profanation and vindication of YHWH's name.

### The Significance of the Name

The narrator of Ezekiel has portrayed the divine character as jealous and angry, at this point in the narrative. YHWH is jealous and angry because his people are unfaithful. They have followed the idols of their neighbours. The narrator has made it evident, in the portions of the text which allude to hope, that the people are undeserving of anything less than their destruction. However, parts of the divine oracles indicate that YHWH will restore a remnant of the people. Since the people are shown as undeserving of any level of preservation, we are compelled to ask why the God in the narrative harnesses his anger and preserves some of them? An awareness of the reason behind YHWH's actions will help to clarify the narrator's portrayal of this dominant character within the narrative. Chs. 20 and 36 give significant information which I suggest will shed some light on the divine character's motivation for all his actions in the text of Ezekiel.

In both chs. 20 and 36 the narrator refers extensively to the name of God in a style in which it appears to be synonymous with God himself. Both chapters describe the profaning of the divine name. Both chapters also show that the divine character acts for his name's sake. Ch. 36 even speaks of the "vindication" of God's name. It is evident that God's name is an essential element in the narrator's development of the divine character.



The name appears to function as if it were equally representative of the God in the narrative himself.

In order to appreciate the narrator's use of the name of God in his portrayal of the divine character, it is helpful to consider how names were understood. It is generally accepted by most scholars, though somewhat unsupported, that, historically, names were more than trivial labels to identify persons or objects.<sup>1</sup> The name and the person were apparently matched with care because of the close association of the person with the

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<sup>1</sup> E.g. G. H. Parke-Taylor, [YHWH]: The Divine Name in the Bible (Waterloo, Ontario: Wilfred Laurier University Press, 1975). Parke-Taylor even goes as far as to maintain that "names were profoundly significant in the ancient Semitic world...Without a name there is no real existence" (p. 1); Ernst Cassirer, Language and Myth (New York: Dover Publications Inc., 1946), p. 58; Niels Peter Lemche, "A Scandinavian Contribution to the Understanding of the Presence of God in the Old Testament." SJOT (1 - 1989), pp. 93-102; Walther Zimmerli, Grundriss der alttestamentlichen Theologie (Stuttgart: Verlag W. Kohlhammer, 1972), ET: Old Testament Theology in Outline (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark Ltd., 1978), p. 78; See also U Cassuto, A Commentary on the Book of Exodus tr. I Abrahams (Jerusalem: The Magnes Press, The Hebrew University, 1967), p. 37; Samuel Cohon, "The Name of God, a Study in Rabbinic Theology." HUCA 33, part 1 (1950-1951), pp. 579-604, specifically p. 589. Cohon concludes that the knowing of YHWH's name encompassed the essence of YHWH's being. For it is in the name of YHWH that YHWH is revealed (p. 587); G. van der Leeuw, Phanomenologie der Religion (Tubingen, 1933), pp. 129, 180, 266.; J. Pedersen, Israel, its Life and Culture (London-Copenhaguen, 1954), vol. 1, p. 245; Vide J.A. Wilson in J.B. Pritchard (Ed.), Ancient Near Eastern Texts (Princeton, 1950), p. 131; and George Foot Moore, Judaism in the First Centuries of the Christian Era, the Age of the Tannaim (Cambridge, 1954), vol.II, p. 101; Hans Bietenhard, "onoma." TDNT 5, eds., Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich. Bietenhard suggests that "the name is ...a power which is very closely associated with the bearer and which discloses his nature" (p. 243). William F. Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich, A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament state, in regard to the Greek use of onoma "name", that in the name is "a piece of the very nature of the personality whom it designates, that partakes in his qualities and his powers" (p. 571).

meaning of the given name. Niels Peter Lemche supports Mettinger's claim<sup>2</sup> that the name can be understood in three ways. Lemche notes that there is an "identity between the name and the reality which it designates". The name functions as "a testimony of the personality of its possessor". And the name functions "as a symbol or guarantee of the presence of the individual who carries the name".<sup>3</sup>

These scholars whose work has been in a small way devoted to the understanding of the significance of names have not been inclined to support their claims with material evidence. Therefore we must ask are their claims merely assertions with little evidence, if any, to support them?

The Old Testament shows that names were of some significance to the people identified by them. The narrator of the patriarchal narrative in Genesis supports this claim. The renaming of certain characters shows that the name was more than just a title indicating the person. In Genesis 17:5 the name **Avram** is changed to **Avraham** in order to represent the promise of God that he will be the "father of a multitude". In Genesis 32:26-28 **Ya'aqov** is renamed **Yisra'el** in order to represent his changed status. Isaiah frequently makes use of names and their significance in prophesied events. In the same way, in Daniel 1:6-7 the renaming

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<sup>2</sup> See Mettinger's monograph in Swedish on the name of God in the Old Testament: Namnet och Närraron. Gudsnamn och Gudsbild i Bäckernas Bok (Örebro: Bokförlaget Libris, 1987, 222s).

<sup>3</sup> Lemche, "A Scandinavian Contribution to the Understanding of the Presence of God in the Old Testament," pp. 93-102, especially p. 94.



of Daniel and his three compatriots indicate that their names had some importance among their captors.

Therefore it is reasonable to suggest that the narrator uses God's name as equally significant as the revealer of the divine character's identity in the narrative. Robert Dentan, although not speaking specifically of the God as a character in a narrative, agrees that both the name of God and God himself are related. Dentan concludes that "the name of God is a surrogate for God himself".<sup>4</sup> Paul Joyce agrees that "on a number of occasions in the Old Testament, the 'name' of [YHWH] appears to be used as a periphrasis for [YHWH] himself."<sup>5</sup> Joyce refers to Psalm 54:6 (e.g. 'I will give thanks to thy name, O YHWH, for it is good') as evidence in support of the representation of YHWH in the divine name. Joyce concludes: "We may discern an element of periphrasis in Ezekiel too, for when we read that [YHWH] acts to deliver Israel 'for the sake of his name', this seems to amount to a statement that he acts 'for his own sake'."<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> The Knowledge of God in Ancient Israel (New York: The Seabury Press, 1968), p. 189. Also, O. Grether, "Name und Wort Gottes im Alten Testament." BZAW 64 (1934), p. 9; Gerhard von Rad, "Deuteronomy's 'Name' Theology and the Priestly Document's 'Kabod' Theology," pp. 37-44, especially p. 38; Yitzhak Glucksman, "For the Sake of My Name." DD 11 (1983), pp. 169-175.

<sup>5</sup> Divine Initiative and Human Response in Ezekiel, p. 103, footnote 68.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.



## Ezekiel Chapters 20 and 36

The preceding chapters have dealt with some of the distinctive features of the narrative which have contributed to our understanding of the divine character. It has been my attempt, in those chapters, to come to a better understanding of the God portrayed in the narrative of Ezekiel by viewing the character as the narrator perceives him. My task in this chapter is to focus on the narrator's portrayal of the divine character through the image of the divine "name".

The narrator uses the name of God to communicate the temporal presence of the divine character. The "name" is synonymous with the God in the narrative. The recognition of the divine character as God and the association of his name with the people is shown by the narrator as the character's sustaining of his holy and authoritative status in the world. The concern which the divine character has for his name therefore is with all regards a concern for God's holy reputation.<sup>7</sup>

The divine character is referred to several times in the two pericopes of chs. 20 and 36. In both chapters the narrator repetitiously shows us that YHWH ("name") has been profaned.<sup>8</sup> In response to the profanation of the divine character the narrator

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<sup>7</sup> As seen correctly by Joyce, Divine Initiative and Human Response in Ezekiel, p. 102 who says "the profanation of the divine 'name' appears to consist essentially in the casting of doubt upon [YHWH's] power and effectiveness".

<sup>8</sup> See 20:9, 14, 22, 29; 36:20, 21, 22, 23<sup>2</sup>.

says in ch. 36 that YHWH will vindicate his "holy name" (36:23). Furthermore, the divine character concludes his account of each instance of his divine acts with the formula "you/they will know that I am YHWH".<sup>9</sup> The narrator declares in these chapters that God's name is "profaned". He shows that the "profanation" will not continue but that the divine character will "vindicate" his "holy name". The divine act which will bring about this vindication of God's name will culminate in the people's acknowledgement that he is YHWH. Thus, in the pericopes of chs. 20 and 36, the narrator shows the effect on the divine character, the response of the divine character, and also the purpose of the response. I suggest that the information in these pericopes added to the portrayal of the divine character will help in our understanding of the character in the events which have occurred in the narrative as a whole.

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<sup>9</sup> The subject of the significance of "knowing" God has been taken up by numerous commentators, e.g. Abraham Heschel, Between God and Man, p. 80 and God in Search of Man, p. 281; Bietenhard, "onoma," TDNT 5., p. 257; O. Grether, "Name und Wort Gottes im Alten Testament.", pp. 53-58; Denis Baly, God and History in the Old Testament (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1976), p. 165. J. Stanley Chesnut, The Old Testament Understanding of God (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1968), p. 18. Zimmerli, Old Testament Theology in Outline, p. 145; Don Cupitt, Taking Leave of God (London: SCM Press Ltd, 1980), pp. 38, 102. A comment by Cupitt is representative of most of these works: "we have no knowledge of God as he is in himself, for we know God only as he enters into our experience" (p. 38). Although the material is concerned specifically with a theological discussion of the significance of "knowing" the transcendent God, it helps us in better understanding the way in which the narrator of Ezekiel uses the "knowledge" in relation to the actions of the divine character in the narrative. According to the narrative, the divine character is known in and through his acts among the people.



The narrator's frequent use of the phrase "you/they will know that I am YHWH",<sup>10</sup> following the activity of the divine character throughout the narrative, shows that the "knowing" of God plays an important role in the portrayal of the motivation behind his response. Yitzhak Glucksman arrives at this understanding in reference to Psalm 106:9: "Nevertheless he saved them for his name's sake that he might make known his mighty power". Glucksman concludes: "In other words, it is God's activity within the universe that wins Him his prestige".<sup>11</sup> Zimmerli rightly maintains that the statement of recognition in Ezekiel is set as the intended goal of YHWH's activity among the exiles, nations, and the inhabitants of the land of Israel.<sup>12</sup> The divine character in Ezekiel therefore acts so that the people will know that "I am YHWH".

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<sup>10</sup> E.g. Ez. 5:13; 6:7, 10, 13, 14; 7:4, 9, 27; 11:10, 12; 12:15, 16, 20; 13:9, 14, 21, 23; 14:8, 23; 15:7; 16:62; 17:21; 20:\*12, 20, 26, 38, 42, 44; 22:16; 23:49; 24:24, 27; 25:5, 7, 11, 17; 26:6; 28:22, 23, 24, 26; 29:6, 9, 16, 21; 30:8, 19, 25, 26; 32:15; 33:29; 34:27; 35:4, 9, 12, 15; 36:11, 23, 36, 38; 37:6, 13; 38:23; 39:6, 7, 22, 28; also Ez. 20:5, 9; 35:11; 38:23 where the divine character proclaims that he will make himself known and 39:7 where YHWH will cause his holy name to be known. Outside Ezekiel this expression occurs only in Is. 19:21 (a variation of the phrase); 49:23, 26; 60:16; and in Jer. 16:21; 31:34 (variations of the phrase).

<sup>11</sup> "For the Sake of My Name," p. 174.

<sup>12</sup> "Ich bin Jahwe", Geschichte und Altes Testament. Beiträge zur historischen Theologie 16. Albrecht Alt zum 70. Geburtstag dargebracht (Tübingen: Verlag J.C.B. Mohr, 1953), pp. 179-209. Appears also in Gottes Offenbarung: Gesammelte Aufsätze zum Alten Testament, Theologische Bucherei 19 (München: Chr. Kaiser Verlag, 1963) pp. 11-40.



It is evident how, by virtue of this recognition of the divine character, the narrator shows that it is the very actions of the God in the narrative which will reestablish God to his uncommon and holy status.<sup>13</sup> God's name will be profaned no longer.<sup>14</sup> God's authority will be questioned or belittled no longer.<sup>15</sup> The divine character, through all of his actions in the narrative, will show that he is a God to be reckoned with.<sup>16</sup> His actions will make his name be known and respected once again. The narrator therefore has used the narrative itself to reveal what he means by the "name's sake" of YHWH by his use of the formula "you/they will know that I am YHWH".

#### YHWH's Name Will be Vindicated

The narrative of Ezekiel, so far, has revealed that the "rebellion" of the divine character's people has caused him to be

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<sup>13</sup> For a similar position, see Paul Joyce, Divine Initiative and Human Response in Ezekiel, p. 89, who concludes that the formula "you will know that I am YHWH" is always associated with the account of an action of YHWH. Cf. G. E. Wright, "God Who Acts: The Theology of Recital," Studies in Biblical Theology 8, Chicago, 1952, p. 44; Yitzhak Glucksman, "For the Sake of My Name," pp. 169-175; Walther Zimmerli, Ich bin Jahwe, p. 15; Georg Fohrer, Introduction to the Old Testament, p. 409; Raymond Abba, "The Divine Name [YHWH]," p. 327; Edmond Jacob, Theology of the Old Testament, p. 53; C. J. Labuschagne, The Incomparability of [YHWH] in the Old Testament (Leiden, Netherlands: E. J. Brill, 1966.), pp. 91, 117, 136.

<sup>14</sup> See Ez. 8:12b; 20:37b; 36:20a, 21, 22, 23.

<sup>15</sup> See Ez. 36:20b.

<sup>16</sup> See Ez. 36:23f., 33-36.

concerned for his "holy" reputation. The picture has been described lucidly by the narrator showing the abominations which are performed by YHWH's people in Jerusalem and the entire land of Israel. Furthermore the narrative has revealed the vulnerability of the divine character through his response which appears to be attributed to the profaning behaviour of his people. The threat which has occurred to the reputation of the God in the narrative is not accepted passively by the divine character. He will react to the threat. His "holy" reputation must be restored.

**Ezekiel Ch.20**  
**YHWH's Name's Sake**

**Introduction to the Oracle**

The progressive struggle in the relationship between the God in the narrative and the character Israel is addressed in ch. 20, as it was in ch. 16.<sup>17</sup> The narrator, however, in ch. 20, does not speak metaphorically as in ch. 16. The relationship is described in brief excerpts from the past. These excerpts are used to give a synopsis of Israel's continuous misconduct towards YHWH.

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<sup>17</sup> Zimmerli, Ezekiel 1, p. 405 also sees the similarity between ch. 16 and ch. 20. The difference between the two is that ch. 16 shows a figurative scenario using the image of Israel as the bride of YHWH. Cf. Keil, C. F. Ezekiel (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1986.) p. 264; Joon Surh Park, Theological Traditions of Israel in the Prophetic Judgment Speeches of Ezekiel (Princeton Theological Seminary-Dissertation, Princeton, New Jersey, 1978), p. 12, note 1.



This pericope, dealing with the relationship of YHWH with the people of Israel, begins with a reference to time as do the two "visions" in 1:3-3:15 and chs. 8-11. Since the narrator places a date at the beginning of the pericope he thus sets this oracle in reference to the time frame of the narrative. The narrator places this event "in the seventh year, in the fifth month, on the tenth day of the month".

The last date which was given in the narrative occurred in the second "vision of God" (i.e. 8:1). The event of the second "vision" is set "in the sixth year, in the sixth month, on the fifth day of the month". If we therefore set ch. 20's date in sequence with that of ch. 8 we arrive at a date for the oracle at approximately 2 years after the initial vision of the encounter between Ezekiel and the "glory of YHWH" (1:2-3:15).<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> It is argued by some that ch. 20 is not an integrated unit. Cf. Zimmerli (Ezekiel 1, p. 404) argues that the declaration of judgment has been "supplemented by a promise of salvation". Zimmerli bases his conclusion on the command of YHWH to the prophet in 20:4 to "judge" and to "make known the abominations of their fathers"; Wevers (Ezekiel, p. 151) maintains that v. 31 gives an answer to the question posited in the introductory question in v. 3, and thus is "the end of the original account." He suggests that vv. 33-44 are foreign to the period of 591-590 established in v. 1. Wevers claims, furthermore, that v. 32 has no connection to either of the two sections; Fohrer, Die Hauptprobleme des Buches Ezekiel also divides the chapter into two sections. However, he divides the text starting at v. 32. He sees the expansion of the chapter beginning at v. 33. Zimmerli does not accept Fohrer's point of division. Zimmerli claims that the presence of the oath formula which occurs sixteen times in the narrative but "never introduces a prophecy" supports his argument. Zimmerli maintains that the expansion should include v. 32.

I can find no justification for these views that the "promise of salvation" (vv. 33-44) does not belong in this oracle of judgment. It is significant for our analysis that these two are placed together in the MT. I therefore suggest that the two sections (i.e. the oracle of judgment and the promise of salvation)



## The Cause of the Oracle

The event thus begins when "certain of the elders of Israel" (20:1b) came to Ezekiel in order to inquire of YHWH. According to the narrative these elders are therefore present with the prophet in exile in Babylonia.<sup>19</sup> They, too, are a part of the people in exile who have been taken from their land, separated from their religious nucleus. It is significant, however, that they, though in exile, come to Ezekiel in order to inquire of YHWH. Their actions indicate that they have accepted, as the divine character foretold in the first vision pericope (2:5b), "that there [is] a prophet among them".

The elders' meeting with the prophet in order to seek out<sup>20</sup> YHWH is significant if we conclude from 11:15 that the people in exile understand and accept the claim of the inhabitants of the land that they have been alienated from YHWH because of the exile

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read together will reveal something more of the narrator's presentation of the overall activity in the narrative. I propose that the text be read as it presently stands, since any other reading would be purely speculative. Cf. Cooke, Ezekiel, p. 216.

<sup>19</sup> For a contrasting and somewhat dated interpretation of the location of the "elders" who come to Ezekiel see Henry A. Redpath, The Book of the Prophet Ezekiel (New York: Edwin S. Gorham, 1907), p. 95. Redpath interprets the inquirers to be from the inhabitants of Jerusalem. He is distinctly out numbered by contemporary scholars who unquestionably place the "elders" from among the exiles in Babylonia.

<sup>20</sup> Brown, Driver, and Briggs, Hebrew and English Lexicon, p. 205 lists "seek", "consult", "inquire of" to be the various meanings of  $\text{dāraš}$  in regard to its use with the direct object YHWH or  $\text{'ēlōhīm}$ .

itself. The very act of seeking out an individual who has been accepted as a prophet in order to encounter indirectly the god which the prophet represents is an acknowledgement of the presence of the god through the person of the prophet.<sup>21</sup> The narrator's description of this act therefore indicates that certain of the elders of the people of Israel now do not accept, if ever accepted, the idea proposed by the inhabitants of Jerusalem in 11:14 that YHWH does not manifest himself outside of the land of Israel.

#### YHWH is Present

The elders' acceptance of Ezekiel as one who represents YHWH among the exiles implies that they recognize God even while distanced from their land and temple. Their recognition of YHWH among the exiles is rightly given. In the narrative the reality of the presence of the divine character among the people in exile is clearly revealed by the narrator when the elders' meeting and inquiry of Ezekiel is shown to invoke the very "word of YHWH" (20:2).<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> See Edmond Jacob, Theology of the Old Testament, p. 243 who suggests that "the particular knowledge God grants to the prophet when he takes possession of him is destined to make him into a participant and representative of that supernatural force...the prophet must, in his whole bearing, make God's presence perceptible."

<sup>22</sup> Cf. Cooke, (Ezekiel, p. 213) says that it is the inquiry of the elders in exile which prompts the response from YHWH. While it is accepted that the "certain elders" who come to the prophet appear to cause the response of the God in the narrative, it is



The narrator does not inform us of the nature of the elders' inquiry.<sup>23</sup> The verbal response of the God in the narrative (20:3b "As I live...I will not be inquired of by you) to the unstated inquiry is, however, a clear indication that whatever the subject of the inquiry was, it was not pleasing to him. The narrator makes it emphatically clear that the divine character will not be inquired of by these elders.

The content of the divine oracle (20:5-31) which follows the divine character's refusal to be inquired of, if in response to the subject of the elders' inquiry, is a warning to them and all of Israel to avoid and thus break the cycle of the abominations

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interesting that the divine character's accusations are addressed to the entire nation.

<sup>23</sup> Some have speculated the nature of the elders' inquiry, however. Zimmerli, Ezekiel 1, p. 406 claims that the elders came to the prophet to inquire of YHWH about the end of the deportation of the exiles. He says this claim is supported by 36:37 where YHWH "lets himself be questioned" and "proclaims afresh the old patriarchal promise of the increase of the people". Cooke, Ezekiel, p. 213 suggests that the inquiry of the elders could mean in light of v. 32 that the elders were confronting the prophet with the issue of the assimilation of the exiles to their "heathen surroundings". However, Cooke, himself, concludes that the elders would obviously not confront a prophet with such issues. Cooke does mention that others have revived an old Jewish interpretation of v. 32 which states that the elders were confronting the prophet in order to inquire of their setting up an altar and temple to YHWH in Babylonia. Cooke, however, concludes that this interpretation "reads too much into the language of v. 32, while the context, vv. 28. 32b, seems rather to have in view the state of religion at home." Eichrodt, Ezekiel, p. 277 suggests that the elders desire to "organize regular sacrificial worship in Babylon, in order to regain the meeting of God in the sacrament of sacrifice". R. Hals rightly asserts that the subject of inquiry by the group of elders is not possible to discern (Ezekiel, pp. 138-139).



of their ancestors.<sup>24</sup> Though the content of what the elders sought to ask still remains unknown, the divine character's accusation and warning let us know that they are participants in a cycle of unfaithfulness to YHWH. The description implies that they have no place questioning God when their very behaviour has been tainted by their unfaithfulness. Even their acceptance and recognition of this prophet of YHWH does not prove that they will be faithful.

#### YHWH's Synopsis of the Relationship

The synopsis (20:5-31) of the history of the relationship between the people of Israel and YHWH begins among the people in captivity in the land of Egypt (20:5).<sup>25</sup> This is an appropriate

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<sup>24</sup> See Zimmerli, Ezekiel 1, p. 406.

<sup>25</sup> There are numerous suggestions made to explain the start of the synopsis in the captivity in the land of Egypt. Zimmerli has suggested "since the history of the patriarchs had already been stamped earlier with the idea of [YHWH's] free and gracious promise, mention of it is lacking in this account which is orientated towards a proclamation of judgment" (Ezekiel 1, p. 405). Greenberg argues that it would have been inappropriate for the prophet to have indicated that there were great abominations present during the period of the patriarchs. "Ezekiel could not well have started Israel's career of apostasy with the patriarchs, the archetypal pious recipients of God's blessings." (Ezekiel 1-20, p. 364). (See also Hals, Ezekiel, p. 141). R. E. Clements, Prophecy and Covenant (London: SCM Press Ltd., 1965), p. 52 concludes that the narrator of Ezekiel was overly familiar with the exodus tradition. Clements states "there is no doubt that Ezekiel...shows that for him the election of Israel at the exodus was the fundamental fact about its existence." Whatever explanation one may accept, the message of continuous unfaithfulness is clear in the synopsis. The people were encountered by YHWH in order to establish a relationship between the two. YHWH connected his name to the people as their God. Thus their behaviour would be a

place to begin since the people to whom this synopsis is given are themselves described as captives in a foreign land.<sup>26</sup> The narrator's opening words describing the divine character's encounter with the people in Egypt reveal that, as portrayed in the narrative, YHWH initiated<sup>27</sup> the relationship between himself and the people by choosing Israel as his partner (20:5).<sup>28</sup> The divine character's commitment in the relationship is proclaimed when he makes an oath<sup>29</sup> "to the seed of the house of Jacob" that he, YHWH, will be their God (20:5).

The narrative has indicated that YHWH's oath results in the divine's association with the people. As the oath implies, the divine character will be known as their God and they will be known as his people. The association of God with the people leads to the understanding that whatever happens to the people of YHWH will either support God as a divine authority or place it in 

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reflection of the character of their God.

<sup>26</sup> Walther Zimmerli, Old Testament Theology in Outline, p. 24 draws an interesting parallel between the deliverance of the exiles and that of the great deliverance of the exodus.

<sup>27</sup> See Abraham J. Heschel, The Prophets 2 (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1962), p. 219.

<sup>28</sup> The reference in v. 5 to God "choosing Israel" is only used here in Ezekiel. However, it is also used in Deut. 4:37, 7:7, 10:15, 14:2; Jer. 33:24; and Is. 41:8, 9; etc. (See Cooke, Ezekiel, p. 214; Wevers, Ezekiel, p. 152.)

<sup>29</sup> The literal rendering of 'eššā' yādî (20:5a, 5b, 6, 15, 23, 28, 42; 36:7; 44:12; 47:14) is "I lifted my hand". This gesture is generally accepted as an act employed in taking an oath. See Zimmerli, Ezekiel 1, pp. 386f., 407-408.; Cooke, Ezekiel, p. 214.; Keil, Ezekiel, p. 266.; Wevers, Ezekiel, p. 152.; Paul Kalluveettil, Declaration and Covenant (Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1982), p. 14.



question. Likewise, we can conclude that whatever the people do will also either strengthen or threaten his divine reputation. It is apparent that when the divine character swore to the people of Israel that he, YHWH, was their God the two entered into covenant with one another.<sup>30</sup> Zimmerli makes a valuable observation with regard to the divine's self-disclosure of his name to the covenant partner. He maintains that YHWH, in the self-disclosure, "reveals the mystery of his being, allows himself to be invoked by his people, and, at the same time, leaves himself vulnerable".<sup>31</sup> The narrator's description of the divine character's disclosure of his name and thus its accessibility to his people now implies that his name is impermeable to misuse no longer. Zimmerli's observation, concerning the significance of the association between YHWH and the people, is helpful here as we attempt to better understand the motive behind the divine character's activity. Zimmerli offers these words in conclusion:

From now on his name is pledged to this people, into whose history it has entered. Through it, it may be honored, but through it also it may come to dishonor, without his being able to guard against such an eventuality on account of his faithfulness and the promise he has made. In his act of election God takes the risk of such possibility endangering his honor.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> See Eichrodt, Ezekiel, p. 267. The binding of YHWH's word "I am YHWH your God" with the people is an allusion to the covenant oath and is contained within covenantal declaration of Exodus 20:2a. See Zimmerli, Ezekiel 1, p. 408.

<sup>31</sup> Ezekiel 1, p. 408. See also Walther Zimmerli, Old Testament Theology in Outline, p. 124. Zimmerli claims that the giving of the divine name was a willful act by YHWH which opened up a dimension of peril for him.

<sup>32</sup> Ezekiel 1, p. 408.



Although Zimmerli's observation is at present predominantly theological inference, the narrator, in ch. 16, has shown that the divine character is dishonoured somewhat by the behaviour of his people. Can we expect the narrator to show us here in ch. 20 that YHWH's name is affected by the people's behaviour as well? The association between the God and his people in the narrative can be seen to have the possibilities for disaster in regard to the reputation of the divine character, but not only because of the behaviour of the people. It is possible that the actions of the divine character might in and of themselves contribute to the honour or dishonour of his reputation.<sup>33</sup>

In the oracle of God the narrator proceeds to show the continued reoccurrence of the reality of the disaster which the association between the divine and the people could cause to the reputation of YHWH. The abominations seen by Ezekiel in ch. 8 are shown to be only one scene in the continuous cycle of abominable behaviour and rebelliousness of the people here in ch. 20. The divine character in ch. 20 proclaims that though he warned his people while in Egypt to avoid "the detestable things their eyes feasted on" (20:7a, 8b), they did not take heed of his warning.

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<sup>33</sup> The concept of the "reputation" of God is commonly used by commentators with reference to the book of Ezekiel, e.g. Blenkinsopp, Ezekiel, p. 88.

According to the narrative they rebelled against YHWH's command<sup>34</sup> and defiled<sup>35</sup> themselves with the idols of Egypt (20:8).<sup>36</sup>

The disobedience of the people, revealed in the narrative's account of their captivity in Egypt, is shown to kindle YHWH's wrath against them (20:8b). At this point one would expect YHWH's wrathful response to follow; especially since the divine character proclaims that he will "bring to pass" (l<sup>e</sup>kalôṭ) the result of the anger within him (20:8b). YHWH's wrath, however, is not poured out upon those who justly deserve it. YHWH proclaims

But I acted for the sake of my name (l<sup>e</sup>ma'an š<sup>e</sup>mî),  
that it should not be profaned in the sight of the  
nations among whom they dwelt, in whose sight I made  
myself known to them in bringing them out of the land  
of Egypt. So I led them out of Egypt and brought them  
into the wilderness. (20:9-10 RSV)

The narrator therefore shows that the divine character did not respond to the rebelliousness of his people as their idolatry deserved.<sup>37</sup> He is portrayed as controlling his anger for the sake

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<sup>34</sup> hišlîkû "cast away" is a hiphil imperative expressing a command.

<sup>35</sup> The verb tāmē' "defile" used here in v. 7 with respect to the peoples' involvement with the idols of Egypt is the same verb used in 43:7, 8 for the "defilement" of YHWH's name brought about by the abominations which the people had done.

<sup>36</sup> The novelty of the idea that the people worshipped idols in Egypt is noteworthy. This is commonly observed by commentators, e.g. Blenkinsopp, Ezekiel, p. 88; Eichrodt, Ezekiel, p. 266; Greenberg, Ezekiel 1-20, p. 365; Cooke (Ezekiel, p. 215) rightly notes that no where else in the OT is there an allusion to Israelite idolatry in Egypt.

<sup>37</sup> The great threat to the divine character in the narrative of Ezekiel is his peoples' practice of idolatry. Idolatry is the cause of the profaning abominations among YHWH's people. The emphasis of the threat to YHWH is made clear by the narrator's use



of his name<sup>38</sup> not for their sakes.<sup>39</sup> Yet, it was not for the sake of his name in regard to his own people that he chose to keep his name from being "profaned".

The narratives description of the peoples' rebellion against the divine character and their defilement of themselves with the idols of Egypt is shown clearly to provoke YHWH's anger. The divine character's anger, however, though inflamed by the behaviour of his people, does not come against them in the land of Egypt. The God in the narrative controls his anger in order to

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of the terms *gillûlîm* "idols" and *šiqus* "detestable things" throughout the book of Ezekiel. In ch. 20 the term *gillûlîm* "idols" occurs 8 times out of its total 39 occurrences in the corpus of the narrative. Surprisingly it is used only 9 other times in the OT (Lev. 26:30; Deut. 29:17; 1 Kgs. 15:12, 21:26; 2 Kgs. 17:12, 21:11, 21, 23:24; Jer. 50:2). *šiqus* "detestable things" occurs 3 times in ch. 20 out of its 8 occurrences in the narrative. *šiqus* occurs only 19 other times in the remainder of the OT. Surprisingly Ezekiel still uses the term *šiqus* more so than any other writer. Cf. Zimmerli, Ezekiel 1, p. 408; Old Testament Theology in Outline, pp. 118-119; Cooke, Ezekiel, p. 215; Park, Theological Traditions of Israel in the Prophetic Judgment Speeches of Ezekiel, pp. 90, 145. I can see no reason for supposing with Eichrodt, Ezekiel, pp. 274-276 that the references to idolatry do not have a relevant place within ch. 20.

<sup>38</sup> Zimmerli, Ezekiel 1, suggests with regard to 20:9 that YHWH had bound his name to Israel before the eyes of all the nations. "The destruction of Israel, to whom [YHWH] had promised deliverance from Egypt in conjunction with the revelation of this name, would mean profanation of this name over which all the world would then surely begin to mock" (p. 409). Cf. Eichrodt, Ezekiel, p. 267; J. Stanley Chesnut, The Old Testament Understanding of God, p. 88.

<sup>39</sup> Wevers (Ezekiel, p. 154.) notes that 20:9's reference to YHWH acting for his name's sake means YHWH acted for the sake of his reputation. Wevers concludes: "His name was by his self-revelation to Israel inextricably bound to their fortune. [YHWH's] reputation would be rendered common if his people had been left in Egyptian bondage. [YHWH's] character would necessitate punishment, but his reputation demands that he put off the evil day."



protect his name "that it should not be profaned in the sight of the nations among whom they dwelt".<sup>40</sup>

The profanation of the divine character's name, therefore, according to the narrator, did not occur in the land of Egypt even though his people acted rebelliously against him.<sup>41</sup> The narrator implies that YHWH's control over exercising his anger and wrath results in avoiding the profanation of his name. It is apparent that if the God in the narrative had poured out his wrath upon them and spent his anger<sup>42</sup> against them, then his own actions would have profaned him. The divine character is thus shown to be the very one who can profane his name and likewise he is shown to be the one who can protect it from being profaned. The words of the divine character thus show the paradox which dictates his response toward the behaviour of his people. While it is their actions which cause him to be angry, YHWH does not let his anger cause him to profane his name in the sight of the nations.<sup>43</sup> The God in the narrative is concerned about how he is seen by the nations since they would witness the destruction of

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<sup>40</sup> The recognition of the divine character's concern for his name among the nations is seen by many commentators, e.g. Cooke, Ezekiel, pp. 215-216; Keil, Ezekiel, p. 268; Redpath, The Book of the Prophet Ezekiel, p. 96.

<sup>41</sup> Interestingly, this point is overlooked or dismissed by commentators. Cf. Cooke, Ezekiel, p. 216f; Zimmerli, Ezekiel 1, p. 409f.

<sup>42</sup> See 20:8b.

<sup>43</sup> This interpretation of the divine character as the one who can profane himself by his own actions is overlooked by commentators, e.g. Zimmerli, Ezekiel 1; Cooke, Ezekiel; Eichrodt, Ezekiel.

the people of Israel if his wrath were poured out upon them. The narrator shows that YHWH's control of his wrath and anger therefore enables the nations to witness the survival of YHWH's people rather than their destruction. We can assume that the impact of YHWH's response for his name's sake would communicate to the nations that YHWH was still the holy God of his people and in power of their destiny. As long as Israel survived the surrounding nations would have no reason to doubt the authority of their God; a doubt which would profane the sacred reputation of YHWH.

As the narrator has previously mentioned, the divine character bound his name to the people when he encountered them and became their God. In order for the God in the narrative to maintain his reputation as the holy God of his people, he therefore does not destroy them because of their rebellious ways but instead delivers them from their captivity. We might infer that if YHWH did carry out his wrath and destroyed his people, as their unfaithfulness deserved, he would have no people and thus would be viewed as a divinity with little authority.<sup>44</sup>

The result of the God in the narrative acting for his name's sake is that the people are delivered from their captivity in Egypt even though they have been rebellious toward him. The narrator says that the divine character, instead of punishing them, leads them out of Egypt into the wilderness. We are told

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<sup>44</sup> For a similar position, see Zimmerli, Ezekiel 1, p. 409; Cooke, Ezekiel, pp. 215-216; Greenberg, Ezekiel 1-20, p. 365.

that they, however, continue to rebel against YHWH in the wilderness and profane the sacred observances which he gave them.

The narrator reveals that YHWH's wrath was once again kindled against his people because of their rebelliousness. They still did not acknowledge him, but instead "their heart went after their idols" (20:16b). The narrator shows that YHWH's anger, towards the idolatry of his people, is so great that if poured upon them it would "destroy them" (l<sup>e</sup>kalôṭām) (20:13b). However, as in his response to his people's rebelliousness in the land of Egypt, the God in the narrative proclaims

But I acted for the sake of my name (l<sup>e</sup>ma'an š<sup>e</sup>mî),  
that it should not be profaned in the sight of the  
nations, in whose sight I had brought them out. (20:14  
RSV)

The narrator reveals, as he has already shown in ch. 20, though the people are not faithful to the God in the narrative, that he refrains from letting his wrath pour out upon them. It is evident that the divine character's wrath, if released, would totally destroy them.

Nevertheless my eye spared them, and I did not destroy  
them or make a full end of them in the wilderness.  
(20:17 RSV)

The rebelliousness of the people, as their rebellion in the land of Egypt, is not shown to profane the divine character's name. The narrator tells that YHWH controls his anger and does not pour out his wrath on his people in order to keep his holy name from being profaned. The narrator makes it clear that YHWH's response is not to his betrayal by his people but for the sake of



his name which he gave to them. The clear motive of the God in the narrative, as 20:14b reveals, is to ultimately protect his sacred name from being profaned "in the sight of the nations, in whose sight I have brought them out". As we have seen in the narrative the divine character acts in order to maintain his sacred reputation which is anchored in the relationship established when he first encountered Israel and said "I am YHWH your God".

The narrator informs us that the third act of apostasy occurred in the wilderness as did the second. However, at this time it is the children of those who were led out of Egypt who do not heed the word of YHWH. They too are warned against following the ways of their parents.

Do not walk in the statutes of your fathers, nor observe their ordinances, nor defile yourselves with their idols. (20:18 RSV)

The narrator sets in opposition to the divine character's warning of not following the ways of their parents his call to be faithful and obedient to him.

Walk in my statutes, and be careful to observe my ordinances, and hallow my sabbaths. RSV

The divine character is described as reiterating his oath made in the initial encounter of ch. 20's synopsis; proclaiming to the children in the wilderness "I am YHWH your God". If the people follow YHWH's ways, he is said to proclaim their obedience will be "a sign between me and you, that you may know that I YHWH am your God" (20:20b).

The narrator reveals that the divine character's warning is clear and his call is proclaimed. Yet, according to the narrative, even the children of the earlier rebellious generation rebel against YHWH (20:21a). They are shown to do exactly what God warned them not to do. We are told that they profaned the sacred sign between YHWH and themselves proving their renunciation of YHWH as their God. The children's renunciation of YHWH is seen in the obverse of 20:20b. If the observance and obedience to the sabbaths of YHWH are "a sign between me and you, that you may know that I YHWH am your God", then their ignoring of these observances and their disobedience would thus be an obstruction to the acknowledgment of YHWH.

The children's obstruction to the acknowledgment of YHWH, as shown through their rebellion against his call to follow his statutes and ordinances, incites the divine character's wrath against them (20:21b). But for the third time in the synopsis of the history of the relationship between YHWH and his people the narrator proclaims the divine character's response:

But I withheld my hand, and acted for the sake of my name (l<sup>e</sup>ma'an š<sup>e</sup>mi), that it should not be profaned in the sight of the nations, in whose sight I had brought them out. (20:22 RSV)

The narrator's portrayal of the divine character is consistent in showing God's response to the obdurate ways of his people. Each time, thus far, the divine character has withheld his hand from carrying out the weight of his wrath upon those who rebelled against him. It is not left up to speculation that the God in the

narrative has withheld his wrath for the sake of his name. The absence of any merit on behalf of the people is blatantly obvious. According to this synopsis there is no reason other than YHWH's own personal concern for his reputation which prevents the outpouring of his wrath. It is the protection of his sacred reputation, his name's sake, from being profaned among the nations which cause the divine character's response. The narrative leads us to assume that it is fortunate for Israel that these nations and their regard for Israel's God was of importance to him. If this were not the case, Israel would have been exterminated from the very beginning of the relationship, according to this portion of the narrative.

#### **Rhetoric of the Divine Character**

Three times so far in the pericope of ch. 20 the narrator has portrayed the divine character as redeeming the people and offering them blessing if they would observe his statutes and ordinances. Each time the people are shown to ignore the statutes and ordinances and take up idols. In the description of the three events the narrator portrays the divine character favourably as the one who continues to offer the people blessing. God's favourable portrayal is set in contrast with the unfavorable portrayal of the peoples' rebellion against the divine character.

In 20:25-26 the portrayal of God appears to suddenly shift to a unfavourable portrayal.



Moreover I gave them statutes that were not good and ordinances by which they could not have life; and I defiled them through their very gifts in making them offer by fire all their first-born, that I might horrify them; I did it that they might know that I am YHWH. 20:25-26 RSV

This proclamation of the divine character appears barbarous and somewhat out of character in the pericope. Most commentators seem to accept that vv. 25-26 are a legitimate claim of the divine character.<sup>45</sup> If vv. 25-26 are taken as a serious claim of the God in the narrative, it is clear that he gave the people what they already have been shown to possess; the inability to follow his statutes and ordinances. I am not convinced that these two verses should be taken as a serious claim, however. The narrator has not shown in the three previous events where God has given the people statutes and ordinances that they were corrupt. The people are shown as having a choice to follow God's statutes and ordinances or to turn from God and take up idols. In context it is apparent that the narrator uses this section as a rhetorical device to illustrate the absurdity of thinking that the people were unable to follow God's statutes and ordinances because they were beyond human potential and capability. The irony is evident, following the peoples' three rejections of God's statutes and ordinances, that when the narrative claims that the one time these were intentionally given as corrupt and impossible to follow, they are

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<sup>45</sup> E.g. Greenberg, Ezekiel 1-20, p. 369 accepts that vv. 25-26 as a serious claim of the divine character that is "essentially the same as God's hardening of Pharaoh's heart so that his ruin might be a lasting object lesson"; Zimmerli, Ezekiel 1, pp. 411-412; Cooke, Ezekiel, p. 218.

shown as obeying in accordance with God's prescription the offering "by fire all their first-born". The rhetoric is emphasized in the declaration of the purpose of the action: "that I might horrify them; I did it that they might know that I am YHWH". This declaration leaves us wondering what would the divine character accomplish from horrifying the people; surely not the recognition he has been shown to seek in the previous section of the pericope.

### A Message for the Exiles

The words of the divine character make a transition in 20:27 which personalizes the content of the oracle for the exiles by reminding them that it was their fathers of whom he has shown to have repeatedly rebelled against him. YHWH proclaims to his present inquirers, "in this again your fathers blasphemed<sup>46</sup> me, by dealing treacherously with me"(20:27b).

In 20:27-31 the narrator emphasizes that the rebelliousness of the people was continuous towards the God in the narrative.

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<sup>46</sup> *gādap* "blaspheme" occurs only 7 times in the OT (Num. 15:30; 2 Kgs. 19:6, 22; Ps. 44:17 [E.16]; Is. 37:6, 23; Ez. 20:27).

It is noteworthy that 5 of the 7 references to "blaspheme" in the OT are in reference to other nations (i.e. "Assyria" [2 Kgs. 19:6, 22; Is. 37:6, 23], "the nations" [Ps. 44:17]). 1 reference refers to "sojourners" or "natives" (i.e. Num. 15:30). Whereas only the reference in Ez. 20:27 refers solely to the people of Israel as those who have blasphemed (i.e. "fathers" of the exiles of the people of Israel [Ez. 20:27]). It is apparent that the narrator of Ezekiel was more aggressive in his portrayal of the people of Israel than were the other writers who chose to use the term "blaspheme".

The people are portrayed as continuing in their rebellion and disobedience even when they were brought into the land which YHWH had promised them. The proclamation of the divine character, at this point, is addressed to the people in exile. However, through the words of the divine character, we are told that the prophet is commanded to say to the "house of Israel",

Thus says the Lord YHWH: Will you defile yourselves after the manner of your fathers and go astray after their detestable things? When you offer your gifts and sacrifice your sons by fire, you defile yourselves with all your idols to this day. (20:30-31 RSV)

The labeling of the recipients of this accusation as the "house of Israel" (v. 27) raises the question of who the narrator is identifying by this title?

The narrator's identification of the "house of Israel" as the recipients of YHWH's words against those involved in idolatrous practices is somewhat ambiguous. It is possible that we are to interpret that the title refers in the narrative to the inhabitants of the land of Israel. The exiles could be included also in the reference to the "house of Israel". The narrator, however, does elaborate on the identity of the people included in the "house of Israel". In 20:34 the narrator says, with respect to "the house of Israel," that the divine character "will bring you out from the peoples and gather you out of the countries where you were scattered". Since the people also are identified as those who have been displaced from their land, it is evident that the inhabitants of the land are not included in the title. The reference to the "house of Israel", therefore, could only



refer to the people in the narrative who have been exiled from their land.<sup>47</sup>

Cooke<sup>48</sup> notes that it is apparent that the God in the narrative accuses the exiles of idolatry in his warning to the "house of Israel". The cycle of rebelliousness obviously has continued, according to the divine character's response to the elders in exile, even among them as representatives of the "house of Israel". Because of their personal participation in the cycle of rebelliousness the God in the narrative proclaims, "as I live, says the Lord YHWH, I will not be inquired of by you" (20:31b).

If we are to understand that God's people are following in the footsteps of their rebellious ancestors, are we to understand, likewise, that they are provoking YHWH's wrath through their present forms of idolatry? The narrator has shown in the three examples in the synopsis that the people's rebelliousness provokes YHWH's anger against them. However, the divine character is portrayed as controlling his anger in each instance of rebellion in order to keep from profaning his "holy name". These events raise the question of whether or not we should assume that the God in the narrative will continue to

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<sup>47</sup> Zimmerli, Ezekiel 1, p. 415 , although speaking with reference to the historical setting of the text, suggests the title, "the house of Israel," could refer to the exiles of Judah from 597 and possibly the earlier exiles of the North Israelites. Even if this interpretation is granted - and the evidence adduced is far from compelling - the focus of the narrative on the contrast between the detestable behaviour of these exiles and the favourable actions of the divine character is clear to us as readers.

<sup>48</sup> Ezekiel, p. 220.

respond to the rebelliousness of the people by controlling his anger in order to not profane his name? The answer remains to be seen as the narrator continues to develop the portrayal of the divine character.

### The Rebelliousness Exists Among the Exiles

20:32 starts a section of ch. 20 which some scholars conclude does not belong with 20:1-31.<sup>49</sup> There are those who do suggest, however, that v. 32 is an answer to the unanswered question of the content of the inquiry of the elders who came to the prophet at the beginning of the pericope.

What is in your mind shall never happen, you say, 'We will be like the nations, like the tribes of the lands serving wood and stone.' RSV

Since this verse immediately follows the divine character's address to the "inquirers" some commentators<sup>50</sup> conclude that this is what the narrator shows to be the matter of inquiry. John T. Bunn suggests that the elders' inquiry had to do with embracing idolatry because of its placement within this section of the narrative on the idolatry of Israel throughout its history.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> E.g. Zimmerli, Ezekiel 1, p. 413; Greenberg, Ezekiel 1-20, p. 377 even though his concern is with the coherence of the overall design, agrees, with respect to vv. 32-44, "that there is disjointedness in the oracle that throws doubt on its unity".

<sup>50</sup> E.g. Cooke, Ezekiel, p. 220 suggests that the elders came before the prophet with the "intention to adopt heathen objects of worship".

<sup>51</sup> Ezekiel, ed. Clifton J. Allen (Nashville, Tennessee: Broadman Press, 1971).

Bunn concludes that the elders of the exile felt that their separation from the temple and the land, and their traditional religious practices, indicated to them that YHWH had abandoned them. "He was no longer their God; therefore they wished to seek and embrace another deity...They in essence wished to embrace idolatry."<sup>52</sup> It is obvious, however, that the designation is missing of "idolatry" (i.e. "serving wood and stones") as the content of the "inquiry". The narrator simply shows the divine character to refer to "what is upon your spirit" or as the RSV translates "what is in your mind". The content of the inquiry of the "certain elders" apparently is insignificant according to the narrative. The intention of the synopsis and the accusation by the God in the narrative of what is "in the minds" of the people is to show clearly that the present generation who have found themselves in exile are no different from their ancestors. The exiles themselves are also part of the continued cycle of rebelliousness of God's rebellious people.

**YHWH's Act For His Name's Sake:  
The Rebellious Cycle Will Stop**

Following the divine character's attestation in v. 32 that the assimilation of his people into the practice of idolatry of the nations will never occur, the narrator proclaims that God will intervene "with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, and

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid., p. 290.



with wrath poured out". The divine character says that he will reign over them (v. 33). YHWH himself will be their king. The narrative makes it clear that there will be no place nor need for any other servitude.

The narrative's message is clear in that the divine character will bring his people out from their exile (20:34).<sup>53</sup> The language of the narrator implies that there will be a new exodus.<sup>54</sup> The exiles who are gathered and brought out of the countries where they are scattered will be set in the "wilderness of the peoples"(20:35).<sup>55</sup> The "wilderness of the peoples" will

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<sup>53</sup> Wevers (Ezekiel, p. 159.) concludes that 20:34 refers to "not just the Judeans in Babylon but probably also those exiled to Assyria (2 Kgs. 17.6) and Egypt (2 Kgs. 25.26; Jer. 44) as well." Therefore, according to Wevers, we are to understand that all of the people of Israel who have been exiled from the land of Israel (i.e. the kingdoms of Judah and Israel) are to be gathered in a second exodus. Wevers' conclusion, however appealing it may be, is not supported by the evidence in the narrative. The oracle in ch.20 is addressed specifically to the "certain elders" of the first exile of Judah. The people of the second exile of Judah are obviously not included since the fall of Jerusalem has not yet occurred (according to the narrative the fall is not reported until "the twelfth year of our exile, in the tenth month, on the fifth day of the month in 33:21).

<sup>54</sup> The imagery of the exodus is noted by Walther Zimmerli, Old Testament Theology in Outline, p. 212.; Edmond Jacob, Theology of the Old Testament, pp. 192-193.

<sup>55</sup> The reference in v. 35 to "the wilderness of the peoples" is not found elsewhere in the OT. Other references which identify "the wilderness" are: <sup>1</sup>)Gen. 21:14 "of Beer-sheba"; <sup>2</sup>)Gen. 21:21, Num. 10:12, 12:16, 13:3, 26, 1 Sam. 25:1 "of Paran"; <sup>3</sup>)Ex. 13:18 "of the Red Sea"; <sup>4</sup>)Ex. 15:22 "of Shur"; <sup>5</sup>)Ex. 16:1, 17:1, Num. 33:11, 12 "of Sin"; <sup>6</sup>)Ex. 19:1, 2, Lev. 7:38, Num. 1:1, 19, 3:4, 14, 9:1, 5, 10:12, 26:64, 33:15, 16 "of Sinai"; <sup>7</sup>)Num. 13:21, 20:1, 27:14, Num. 33:36, 34:3, Deut. 32:51, Josh. 15:1 "of Zin"; <sup>8</sup>)Num. 33:8 "of Etham"; <sup>9</sup>)Deut. 2:8 "of Moab"; <sup>10</sup>)Deut. 2:26 "of Kedemoth"; <sup>11</sup>)Josh. 18:12 "of Beth-aven"; <sup>12</sup>)Jud. 1:16, Ps. 63:1 "of Judah"; <sup>13</sup>)1 Sam. 23:14, 15, 1 Sam. 26:2 "of Ziph"; <sup>14</sup>)1 Sam. 23:25 "of

function as a protective buffer between the land of exile and the return to the land of Israel. The new "wilderness" is similar in function to the "wilderness of the land of Egypt" in the first exodus (20:36). The God in the narrative "purges out the rebels from among" the people gathered in the wilderness as God did in the wilderness of the first exodus. (20:38a). The rebels, who are among the exiles, shall not enter the "land of Israel" (20:38b). They are denied access to the land as those who rebelled against YHWH were denied access to the promised land after their deliverance from the bondage of the land of Egypt (Numbers 14:21-23, 31-35). Following the event of the elimination of the rebels in the wilderness of the peoples in the narrative, the narrator says that the divine character creates the māsōret habrīt "the bond of the covenant" with the purged people (20:37). The entering into of a covenant in the wilderness is also similar to the covenant established in the wilderness of the first exodus. The God in the narrative proclaims "and then you will know that I am YHWH" (20:38b). This claim shows that God's intervention will result in the peoples' acknowledgment of his divine authority.

In 20:39 the oracle of YHWH addresses the issue which led to the initial proclamation. The divine character proclaims,

As for you, house of Israel, thus says the Lord YHWH:  
Go serve every one of you his idols, now and hereafter,

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Maon"; <sup>15)</sup> 2 Sam. 2:24 "of Gibeon"; <sup>16)</sup> 1 Kgs. 19:15 "of Damascus"; <sup>17)</sup> 2 Kgs. 3:8 "of Edom"; <sup>18)</sup> 2 Chr. 20:16 "of Jeruel"; <sup>19)</sup> 2 Chr. 20:20 "of Tekoa"; <sup>20)</sup> Ps. 29:8 "of Kadesh"; <sup>21)</sup> Is. 64:10 "Thy holy cities are a wilderness, Zion is a wilderness"; <sup>22)</sup> Ez. 20:36 "of the land of Egypt".



if you will not listen to me; but my holy name you  
shall no more profane with your gifts and your idols.  
RSV

In this verse the narrator portrays the frustration and wrath of the God in the narrative toward the people because of their rebelliousness. The narrator also shows the divine character to proclaim that the unfaithfulness of his people continues even though YHWH has expressed his condemnation of their disobedient ways.

The profanation of the divine character's name is different in v. 39 from the profanation addressed in vv. 9, 14, 22.<sup>56</sup> The narrator has shown previously YHWH's actions for the sake of his name to have kept his "holy name" from being profaned. The profaning therefore never occurred. However, in v. 39 the narrator shows the profanation as an existing reality. The accused "house of Israel" are profaning God's "holy name" with their gifts and their idols (v. 39b).

The claim of v. 39 that the behaviour of the people will change, whether they hear or refuse to hear, reveals that the divine character will no longer allow them to profane his "holy name" through their idolatrous behaviour. If, at this time, it is the idolatrous behaviour of YHWH's people which profanes his "holy name" we can conclude that v. 39a is not to be taken literally as YHWH's submission into allowing those who have

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<sup>56</sup> Zimmerli, Ezekiel 1, p. 416 notes in passing this difference. He, however, does not elaborate on the matter. Cooke, Ezekiel, pp. 221-222 and Eichrodt, Ezekiel, pp. 281-282 do not note the active profanation in v. 39 as opposed to the avoidance of profanation in vv. 9, 14, 22.



ignored his oracle to continue in their idolatry. V. 39a therefore is recorded as the divine character's sarcasm against the possibility of the continuation of those practices which "profane" his "holy name". How could the narrator follow v. 39a with v. 39b, "my holy name you shall no more profane with your gifts and your idols," if v. 39a were understood any other way? It is evident therefore that the divine character sarcastically states in v. 39a that though the rebels may assume they will practise idolatry, as their ancestors have done, YHWH will prohibit the continuation of the cycle.

The distinction made between the profanation which is occurring in v. 39 among the "house of Israel" and the profanation which was avoided by YHWH's control of his wrath in vv. 9, 14, 22 is noteworthy. The narrator has shown that the people of YHWH have acted rebelliously toward the divine character throughout their covenant relationship. Yet, the rebellious behaviour of the people in Egypt and of the two generations in the wilderness does not profane the "holy name" of God. The profanation of the divine character's name is avoided therefore by God's control of his response toward the people. The narrator makes it clear that the behaviour of the people should have resulted in the out pouring of YHWH's wrath (vv. 8b, 13b, 21b). The divine character, however, proclaims that the people's behaviour will go unpunished because he does not choose to profane his name.

The profanation of God's name, however, is not simply an avoided possibility in the pericope of ch. 20. The narrator shows that the people who are addressed by the divine character, in v. 39, have actually profaned the name of God. This existing profanation in v. 39 is distinct from the other references to the profanation of God's name in ch. 20 because YHWH is not portrayed here as responsible. The profanation is distinct also because the narrator does not associate it with being performed "in the sight of the nations".

It is important to note that the idolatrous behaviour of the people, as a related matter to the distinction made between v. 39 and vv. 9, 14, 22, is shown also to be different. The narrator has made it clear in v. 8 that the people took up the "idols of Egypt". In v. 16 the first generation of people in the wilderness rejected YHWH's ordinances and statutes and "went after their idols". In v. 24 the second generation of the people in the wilderness also rejected YHWH and turned to "their fathers' idols". The three events each describe the people's rejection of YHWH and acceptance of idols. In v. 39, however, the idolatry is not shown to be a rejection of YHWH but rather is an immoderate attachment or devotion to the God in the narrative. The profanation of YHWH's name in v. 39 occurs because of the illegitimate worship of YHWH.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> Cf. Greenberg, Ezekiel 1-20, p. 374 notes that in v. 39 the profanation of the "holy name" occurs because "the rejected forms of worship were directed toward YHWH; cf. the "desecrations of the name" in Lev 18:21; 20:3 ("Molech" sacrifices of children...); 21:6 (priestly misconduct); 22:32 (impropriety in sacrificial

## Promise of Redemption

The divine character's assertion that the cycle of rebellion of the people of Israel will stop makes the narrator's transition easier to the promise of redemption in 20:40-44. The God in the narrative proclaims, to the same people previously identified as "rebellious", that they will be restored to their land.

There all the house of Israel, all of them, shall serve me in the land; there I will accept them, and there I will require your contributions and the choicest of your gifts, with all your sacred offerings. As a pleasing odor I will accept you, when I bring you out from the peoples, and gather you out of the countries where you have been scattered; and I will manifest my holiness among you in the sight of the nations. And you shall know that I am YHWH, when I bring you into the land of Israel, the country which I swore to give to your fathers. And there you shall remember your ways and all the doings with which you polluted yourselves; and you shall loathe yourselves for all the evils that you have committed.<sup>58</sup> And you shall know that I am YHWH, when I deal with you for the sake of my name (l<sup>e</sup>ma'an š<sup>e</sup>mî), not according to your evil ways, nor according to your corrupt doings, O house of Israel, says the Lord YHWH. (20:40-44 RSV)

The oracle clearly suggests that something will happen which will cleanse the "rebellious" exiles. According to the oracle the exiles as representatives of "all the house of Israel" will be restored to the land when they are cleansed by God. The events which are to take place are portrayed as the obvious acts of the

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procedure)."

<sup>58</sup> This phrase ūn<sup>e</sup>qōtotem bipnêkem is used again in Ez. 36:31 (ūn<sup>e</sup>qōtotem bipnêkem). It also was used in Ez. 6:9 in 3rd person (v<sup>e</sup>nāqōttū bipnêhem). Outside the Book of Ezekiel the verb (qūt) occurs only twice in the Psalms and twice in Job.



God in the narrative. The divine character is shown to emphatically proclaim *hōšif'î 'etkem* "I bring you out", *qibaštî 'etkem* "I gather you". According to the narrative YHWH's actions will create in the people a knowledge that he is YHWH, the one who is active in their lives. The narrator does not suggest, however, that the people themselves will turn from or repent of their abominable ways. The peoples' act of repentance is not required as a condition for redemption according to the synopsis of their rebellious history. YHWH will restore them regardless of their response to his condemnation. The reason for the divine character's acts is not on behalf of the people but instead on his behalf. Zimmerli concludes, with respect to YHWH's acts and their purpose in Ezekiel, that,

The peoples must recognize that [YHWH] is acting in all this and is making himself known in his authentic being to the world...In the acts of God knowledge of [YHWH] is what matters..."<sup>59</sup>

According to the narrator of Ezekiel, YHWH has acted so far in the narrative for the sake of his "holy name"<sup>60</sup> which will be "sanctified" when his people are restored to the land and to their faithful worship of him (20:41b). When the people are restored they will know that YHWH is an active God deserving the

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<sup>59</sup> Der Mensch und seine Hoffnung im Alten Testament (Göttingen, 1968), ET: Man and His Hope in the Old Testament. Studies in Biblical Theology. 2/20 (Naperville, Ill.: Alec R. Allenson Inc., 1971), p. 118.

<sup>60</sup> See 20:9, 14, 22, 44.

respect and obedience of the covenant people.<sup>61</sup> Their restoration will guarantee that the acknowledgment of YHWH will continue among his people. YHWH's "holy" reputation will be restored to its level of respect by the people's survival and their worship of him.

**Ezekiel Ch.36  
YHWH's Name's Sake**

**Purpose**

In ch. 20 the narrator revealed the motive of the divine character's acts throughout the relationship (i.e. covenant) between the God in the narrative and his people. In ch. 36 the narrator uses the motive of ch. 20 and personalizes the oracle of YHWH for the people in exile. The purpose of my analysis of this section on ch. 36 is to see the divine motive, according to the narrator of Ezekiel, for the divine character's response to the active rebellion in Israel and among the exiles. The focus of this section on ch. 36 will be on the portions of the pericope which contribute to the portrayal of the divine character in the narrative.

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<sup>61</sup> See Paul Joyce, Divine Initiative and Human Response in Ezekiel, pp. 89, 94, 97.

## The Vindication of YHWH

In formulating this oracle, the narrator refers to the first character addressed as "the mountains of Israel". This character is used as a catalyst for the narrator's development of the divine character in the pericope. In ch. 36 the prophet Ezekiel is commanded first to prophesy to the "mountains of Israel".<sup>62</sup> In the oracle the prophet Ezekiel is told to speak with regard to the "enemy" who has subdued the land of Israel and made it a mockery in the sight of the rest of the nations (36:2-4).<sup>63</sup> In

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<sup>62</sup> I can find no justification for the view of Zimmerli, Ezekiel 2, p. 232, that the MT division between chs. 35 and 36:1-15 is to be ignored and the verses should be read as a "homogeneous unit"; Hals, Ezekiel, pp. 254-257; Andrew, Responsibility and Restoration, pp. 175, 179 who adds, to Zimmerli's basis for the placement of 36:1-15 with ch. 35, that the word-event formula does not occur until 36:16. However, Cooke (Ezekiel, p. 385) does not attempt to set any part of ch. 36 with ch. 35. He suggests that ch. 36, itself, is divided into two halves. The first half (vv. 1-15) contains an address to the mountains of Israel, the second half (vv. 16-38) contains an address to the people.

<sup>63</sup> There are some discrepancies regarding the interpretation of the identity of the character designated by the phrase "rest of the nations" in vv. 3 and 4. Redpath, Ezekiel, pp. 193, 195 interprets the phrase in v. 5 to be "the population [presumably of Israel] that remained [in Israel] after the Babylonian deportations". If the people of the nation of Israel, who have been left in the land after the exiles are implied in v. 5 one must question why the narrator curiously refers to them using the plural haggôyim? If this is the case it is then also puzzling why the narrator follows the reference to the rest of the haggôyim with the statement "and against all Edom, who gave my land to themselves as a possession"? Zimmerli, Ezekiel 2, pp. 236-237, does not associate the reference to the "rest of the nations" with the people of Israel who remained in the land following the exile. Keil, Ezekiel, pp. 101-102 notes that what was said concerning Edom in 35:5, 10 is predicted of the "enemy" in 36:2. He concludes therefore that the two are the same; Eichrodt, Ezekiel, p. 490. Cooke, Ezekiel, p. 387, interprets this phrase to be those people who surround the nation of Israel. His position is reinforced in v. 5 where there



addition the divine character says that he speaks in

hot jealousy against the rest of the nations, and against all Edom, who gave [his] land to themselves as a possession with wholehearted joy and utter contempt, that they might possess it and plunder it. (36:5 RSV)

The narrator, therefore, implies that it is the divine character's "hot jealousy"<sup>64</sup> which causes him to respond to the assault of the nations and to the plight of the "land of Israel" (36:6a).

Behold, I speak in my jealous wrath, because you have suffered the reproach of the nations; therefore thus says the Lord YHWH: I swear that the nations that are round about you shall themselves suffer reproach. (36:6b-7 RSV)

According to the oracle, the situation will be reversed. The present powers who have taken possession of the land and who have mocked the "land of Israel" shall themselves become a mockery through YHWH's intervention.

The oracle of the plight of the "mountains of Israel" also contains YHWH's oath that the nations which have attributed to the reproach of the "land of Israel" "shall themselves suffer reproach". YHWH's oath that the nations shall suffer, however, is not the only promise which the God in the narrative gives to the "land of Israel". The situation shall also improve for the "mountains of Israel". The divine character promises that the

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is a verbal strike made against the neighboring nations. Cooke (p. 388) states, "The word nation (goi) is rarely applied to Israel and Judah in exilic and post-exilic prophecy".

<sup>64</sup> Wevers, Ezekiel, p. 264 suggests that YHWH's "hot jealousy" in 36:5 "refers to his zeal for his honour."

"mountains of Israel" shall be restored to their former glory (36:8-15).

**The Worship of Idols:  
Profanation of the Name of YHWH**

The fact that in ch. 36 "the mountains of Israel" are unaccused of any misconduct does not show that their behaviour has been favourable to the divine character. The narrator has shown previously in ch. 6 that "the mountains of Israel" have been accused of idolatry.<sup>65</sup> The identity of the accused in ch. 6, as the same as the one who is to be restored in ch. 36, is evidence that the two accounts refer to oracles addressed to only one character.

The imagery, which the narrator uses in this oracle of ch. 36, is explicitly similar to the imagery which was used in the oracle against the "mountains of Israel" in ch. 6.<sup>66</sup> It may be helpful in acquiring an understanding of the oracle in ch. 36 therefore to note the similarities which it has with the earlier oracle in ch. 6; and furthermore to view the context in which these similarities appear in ch. 6.

The similarity between the two chapters is evident in the opening of the divine oracle in ch. 6. In the narrative the

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<sup>65</sup> See Ez. 6:4b, 6b, 9b.

<sup>66</sup> As seen correctly by, Zimmerli (Ezekiel 2, p. 236); Cooke, Ezekiel, pp. 385-386; Hals, Ezekiel, p. 258; Andrew, Responsibility and Restoration, p. 179; Wevers, Ezekiel, p. 267.

prophet Ezekiel is told to prophesy against the "mountains of Israel" (6:2). Soon after, the narrator is more specific in the divine character's words of condemnation proclaiming that the prophet should speak out against "the mountains and the hills, to the ravines and the valleys" where the people of Israel have built altars to idols (6:3bf.).

In the oracle of ch. 36 YHWH speaks of hope for the same places (36:4, 6f.) that were condemned in ch. 6.<sup>67</sup> We must question, because of the similarity between the two chapters, whether or not the narrator implies that the two also share, as in ch. 6, the message of idolatry. Does the narrator show that the idolatry is the basis of the problems of the "mountains of Israel" in ch. 36 since the imagery of the "mountains of Israel" is identical with the imagery of the "mountains of Israel" in ch. 6 which are associated with the practice of idolatry? In view of the parallels which exist between the two chapters, it is reasonable to suggest that idolatry is the basis of the problems in both pericopes. If idolatry is the activity communicated in both texts it strengthens the irony that YHWH's jealousy led to his promised judgment of destruction upon the "mountains of Israel" in ch. 6<sup>68</sup> and it is his jealousy once again which is the

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<sup>67</sup> "Thus says the Lord YHWH to the mountains and the hills, the ravines and the valleys..." (36:4), "Therefore prophesy concerning the land of Israel, and say to the mountains and hills, to the ravines and valleys..." (36:6).

<sup>68</sup> The narrator shows in 6:9 that the divine character is infuriated by the wanton behaviour of his people in their departure from him and their turning to idols. This verse is a subtle allusion to YHWH's jealous fury.



basis for his promise of hope in ch. 36. According to the two oracles, the divine character's reputation and the threat which is brought upon it by the exile of his people and also by the attitude of the surrounding nations is the basis for YHWH's response in both cases (ch. 6 and ch. 36). In ch. 6 the God in the narrative acts therefore out of jealousy caused by his people's worship of other gods and in ch. 36 the divine character acts out of fury because of the nations mockery of his power as a God. In the narrative the exile of YHWH's people, caused by their idolatrous behaviour, and the attitude of the surrounding nations toward the divine character, therefore, threatens the divine reputation.

The events which will happen in order to silence the voices which mock the "mountains of Israel" are described in 36:8-15. The oracle is clear in its intention. Although the divine character's promise of ultimate restoration obviously will renew the hope of the exiles, the fulfillment of the promise will not happen by chance nor is it to be accredited to anything or anyone else other than YHWH. The narrator is clear in communicating that YHWH, himself, will cause the events to occur which will bring about the improvement in the plight of the land and the people.<sup>69</sup> According to the narrative the divine character's intervention in

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<sup>69</sup> This divine cause and effect is made clear in the narrator's continuous reference to the active force in the events being YHWH. The divine character proclaims to the land that "I am for you, and I will turn to you, and you shall be tilled and sown" (36:9); "and I will multiply men upon you" (36:10a, 11a); and "I will cause you to be inhabited as in your former times" (36:11b).

the situation of the land and the people will cause them to recognize him as a legitimate God (36:11b).

In the oracle of hope in ch. 36 the narrator further reveals that the association between the land of Israel and the people of Israel shall be reestablished (36:12). The people of Israel, who have been detached from their land and are living in exile, will be restored to their homeland. They will possess the land of Israel once again as the people of Israel. The divine character's promise of the restoration of the land with the people is followed by an allusion to what has contributed to the estrangement of the two (36:13-15).

Thus says the Lord YHWH: because men say to you [the mountains of Israel], 'You devour men, and you bereave your nation of children,' therefore you shall no longer devour men and no longer bereave you nation of children, says the Lord YHWH; and I will not let you hear any more the reproach of the nations, and you shall no longer bear the disgrace of the peoples and no longer cause your nation to stumble, says the Lord YHWH. RSV

It is possible that this explanation given for the restoration which will occur between the land and the people is in reference to the earlier situation of idolatry practised upon the mountains in the land and the circumstances of judgment which were both mentioned previously in ch. 6. The common imagery used in both chs. 6 and 36, as mentioned above, apparently implies that the idolatry of ch. 6 is what has caused the situation which resulted in the mockery of "the mountains of Israel" by the "rest of the nations" in ch. 36.

The narrator has shown that YHWH's words in ch. 6, directed to the "mountains of Israel," associates them with idol worship practised on them by the people of Israel. The God in the narrative proclaims that he shall destroy the "high places" where they have erected altars to these idols (6:3b-4). The idols themselves shall be "broken and destroyed" (6:6b) as it were by the very power of YHWH.<sup>70</sup> The events which are to take place in the near future, and the narrator's emphasis that the divine character is the force behind them, will cause the people (6:7, 10, 14) and the "mountains of Israel" (6:13) to acknowledge that he is YHWH. The narrator emphasizes that the foretold events, attributed to the God in the narrative, will show that he is the active and existing power which his rebellious and obdurate people are to acknowledge. The message is clear that there will be no idols upon the "mountains of Israel" nor among the "people of Israel". They will worship YHWH alone and acknowledge him as the sufficient God of Israel.

The idolatry, referred to in ch. 6, provides the background for the accusations in ch. 36 which the narrator attributes to certain men with regard to the "mountains of Israel".

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<sup>70</sup> The narrator has implied that the events, which are foretold, will be brought about by the divine character. This understanding is arrived at through the narrators use of the first person pronoun as the subject of the verbs in the proclamation of God. (e.g. "Behold I will bring a sword upon you" [6:3b], "I will destroy your high places" [6:3b], "I will cast down your slain before your idols" [6:4b], "I will lay the dead bodies of the people of Israel before their idols" [6:5a], "I will scatter your bones round about your altars" [6:5b]).



You devour men, and you bereave your nation of children. (36:13 RSV)

The question remains whether or not, in 36:13, the idol worship had anything to do with bereaving the nation of its children (36:12b, 14b) since the idolatry shown in ch. 6 supports the material in ch. 36? The inference is that the two possibly are related.

The "mountains of Israel" are also credited with causing the nation to stumble (36:15b).<sup>71</sup> Even though there are some who disagree over the use of the word takšilî,<sup>72</sup> it is evident that the narrator shows that the negative cause will no longer continue. Is it possible that the idolatry practised in the high places is the cause of the nation's stumbling or it's bereavement of her children, since it was idolatry which led to the punishment and scattering of the people in ch. 6? Other researchers have mentioned that the cult practices, which took place at the altar to the idols, might have included human (i.e. adult and child) sacrifices.<sup>73</sup> Since human sacrifices were made

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<sup>71</sup> Zimmerli (Ezekiel 2, p. 239) claims that 36:14-15 does not refer to the surrounding nations of Israel, unlike the preceding verses, but instead refers to the "despondency on the part of the exiles who are concerned with the question: 'Will in fact a newly bestowed history in the land work out any differently from the first history?'"

<sup>72</sup> E.g. Eichrodt, Ezekiel, p. 489, note n; Cooke, Ezekiel, p. 388.

<sup>73</sup> Bunn, Ezekiel, p. 339. Bunn interprets the image of the land devouring men and children as "a reference to human sacrifices offered the gods of fertility associated with the land and its productivity". Bunn concludes that "the renewal of the land with its fruitful increase will be so great that such acts will cease (vv. 13, 14)".

in the practise of idolatry, and these sacrifices included children, the narrator might imply that the nation through its idolatry is bereaved with regard to the loss of some of its children. The connection of the mountains, hills, ravines, and valleys with the places of idolatrous worship would also be a clear mark of a stumbling block in a land and among a people who were commanded to be faithful to YHWH. While attempts to convincingly identify idolatry as the cause of the stumbling or bereavement would make these references in ch. 36 more understandable, no evidence in the narrative satisfactorily strengthens the connection.

With respect to the text's elaboration on what is meant by the bereavement of the nation of its children, Zimmerli maintains that it is related to the imagery of a devouring beast.<sup>74</sup> Cooke notes that the reference in v. 12 to the bereavement of the inhabitants of the land of children is used with respect to the ravaging of the land by famine or wild beasts.<sup>75</sup> Both Zimmerli's and Cooke's interpretations are shown in 5:17

"I will send famine and wild beasts against you, and they will rob you of your children." RSV

This interpretation also is reinforced by vv. 29-30 of ch. 36

"And I will deliver you from all your uncleannesses; and I will summon the grain and make it abundant and lay no famine upon you. I will make the fruit of the tree and the increase of the field abundant, that you may never again suffer the disgrace of famine among the nations." RSV

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<sup>74</sup> Ezekiel 2, pp. 238-239.

<sup>75</sup> Ezekiel, p. 388.

In accordance with the evidence in the pericope of ch. 36, I conclude, as Zimmerli and Cooke, that the bereavement of the nation of its children communicates that the land had not supported the people who inhabited it.

#### YHWH's Motive for Action

The significance of the portrayal of the divine character through the "name's sake" of YHWH is lucidly revealed in 36:16-38. Here the narrator describes the divine character's activity as a response to the profanation of his name (36:20, 21b, 22b, 23b) which caused him to be concerned for it (36:21a). YHWH's concern for his "holy name" culminates in the vindication of the "holiness" of his "great name" (36:23a) (i.e. "vindicate" YHWH's "holiness") in order that all will know that he is YHWH, the holy God of Israel (36:23b, 38b). The reason for the divine character's activity is emphatically proclaimed in 36:22:<sup>76</sup>

Thus says the Lord YHWH: It is not for your sake, O house of Israel, that I am about to act, but for the sake of my holy name, which you have profaned among the nations to which you came. RSV

The narrator reinforces this motive of the God in the narrative, as if 36:22 were not clear enough, by stating in 36:32,

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<sup>76</sup> Andrew, Responsibility and Restoration, p. 185 claims that 36:22 is probably the most provocative address of the entire book of Ezekiel. There are other references to the response of YHWH for his own sake or his name's sake such as is found Isaiah 43:25. Although the references outside of Ezekiel may be somewhat similar, they are not as harsh as what are revealed in the book of Ezekiel. See also Zimmerli, Ezekiel 2, p. 247.



It is not for your sake that I will act, says the Lord YHWH; let that be known to you. Be ashamed and confounded for your ways, O house of Israel. RSV

The narrator has illustrated so far in the oracle of YHWH in ch. 36 that the threat which has come upon the name of God in this pericope occurs because of the unfaithful and disobedient behaviour of the people.<sup>77</sup> They have been shown to profane the name of the divine character by their very presence among the nations to which they have been exiled as a result of God's judgment for their misconduct in their own land. In the narrative the remnant<sup>78</sup> which was preserved by YHWH to be sent among the nations (6:8-10) profaned his name in the sight of the foreign nations. The profanation of the "holy name" of God, which was avoided in the major portion of ch. 20, has occurred in ch. 36. In ch. 20 the God in the narrative acted in order to keep his "holy name" from being profaned.

With respect to the information given in ch. 36, the narrator shows that the "holy name" of God is profaned among the nations by the "house of Israel" (36:22). The narrator, however, does not specifically mention any acts which the "house of

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<sup>77</sup> It is obvious, though the oracle is directed to the "mountains of Israel", that the unfaithfulness and disobedience of the "people of Israel" is also reflected. For it was the people who erected the altars to the idols. And it was the people who turned from YHWH to worship the idols defiling the land of Israel (36:18).

<sup>78</sup> The word "remnant" is not used in the text of ch. 6. However *v<sup>o</sup>hōtarti bihyōt lakem p<sup>o</sup>litā hereb baggōyim* communicates the same thing as "remnant".

Israel" committed which profaned the divine character's name.<sup>79</sup> In ch. 20 the dispensing of YHWH's wrath on the people of Israel is identified as what would have profaned the name of the divine character. The retribution was avoided at that time by the God in the narrative for the sake of his "holy" reputation. The fall and destruction of Jerusalem and the second exile of the people of Judah, which the divine character avoided in ch. 20, eventually does occur.<sup>80</sup> In the narrative the anger of YHWH was poured out upon the "house of Israel" therefore in spite of his earlier behaviour for his name's sake (33:18). The narrator clearly shows in the oracle in ch. 36 that the God in the narrative caused the "house of Israel" to be torn from their land and driven into exile (36:19). According to ch. 20 the divine character therefore caused his "holy name" to be profaned. The narrator, however, accuses the "house of Israel" for the profanation of the name of God in ch. 36.

It is noteworthy that in 36:22 the people who are accused for profaning the "holy name" of God are those who have been exiled. The exile is the result of the divine character's wrath which he harnessed in ch. 20 in order that he, himself, would not

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<sup>79</sup> 13:19 refers to the profanation of YHWH caused by the "daughters of your people" (13:17) who dispense death and life without divine authorization. See for a similar opinion Zimmerli, Ezekiel 1, pp. 296-297. Zimmerli suggests that the actions of these women defiled the honour of the divine character by bringing it "down to the level of their ungodly decisions" (p. 297); Cooke, Ezekiel, p. 147.

<sup>80</sup> See 33:21 where the narrator says Ezekiel receives the news.



profane his "holy name". It is evident that the profanation, which would be the result of YHWH's acting upon his anger, is avoided by the God in the narrative in ch. 20. After the fact of the exile (the result of YHWH's acting upon his anger) in ch. 36, however, the profanation of God's name is attributed to be the fault of the people. The divine character is portrayed in ch. 36 as one who promises to restore his wayward people to their land.

There is a certain paradoxical element put forth in the portrayal of the divine character in the texts of chs. 20 and 36. As previously noted, the divine character is described as controlling his anger and not sending his people into exile in ch. 20 in order to protect his "holy name" from being profaned by his own actions. But in ch. 36, following the fall of Jerusalem and the second exile (33:21), the divine character is not identified as the one responsible for the profanation of his name. The narrator does identify the people in exile, however, as those who are responsible for the profanation of God's name. In ch. 36 the narrator portrays YHWH as the one who will "vindicate the holiness of my great name" (v. 23) and the one who will restore to their land his people, who have been scattered among the nations. The portrayal of the divine character in both chs. 20 and 36 shows the God in the narrative as free from fault.

It is evident that the narrator has shown the God in the narrative to be gracious for his own sake in ch. 20 in order to protect his "holy name" when he does not carry out his wrath towards Israel. In ch. 36, the narrator shows that the divine



character's anger has been poured out upon Israel and that he has profaned his name with respect to the evidence in ch. 20. The reality of the profanation of God's name in ch. 36, however, is not attributed to the divine character as the possibility of profanation is in ch. 20, but instead is attributed to the "house of Israel". In ch. 20 YHWH's exile of his people would have profaned his name. In ch. 36 Israel is accused of profaning God's name by the fact that it is in exile. The narrator tactfully writes in ch. 36 that the divine character is not at fault for the profanation of his name but instead has the God in the narrative accusing Israel as the culprit in his proclamation "But I had concern for my holy name, which the house of Israel caused to be profaned among the nations to which they came" (36:21). The divine character is therefore portrayed favourably even when the portrayal contradicts the evidence in the preceding text.<sup>81</sup>

The divine character is portrayed in ch. 36 as one whose reputation is lowered in the sight of the nations because his people are accused of profaning his "holy name" in their exile.

But when they came to the nations, wherever they came, they profaned my holy name, in that men said of them, 'These are the people of YHWH, and yet they had to go out of his land'. (36:20 RSV)<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>81</sup> This interpretation of the portrayal of the divine character in chs. 20 and 36 is overlooked by other commentators.

<sup>82</sup> v. 20 has its first verb (i.e. *yābô'* "he came") in the masculine singular and the following verbs in the plural (i.e. *bā'û* "they came"; *vayhall'û* "they profaned"; *yasa'û* "they went"). Cooke suggests that the singular verb is probably a mistake but indicates that the Rabbis find this significant. They interpret the singular *yābô'* to refer to God, "in the sense that God went into exile with

Zimmerli agrees that the exile itself is a profanation of the "holy name" of God. He claims that,

the fact of the exile...revealed to the nations that [YHWH] can no longer hold together the two entities, Israel and the land, on both which his name lay. What Moses, according to Nu 14:16, held up to [YHWH] in prayer as a thing to be feared now became reality. The nations are speaking of a powerless [YHWH]...or, what is far worse, as Moses feared according to Ex 32:12, of a malicious and destructive YHWH.<sup>83</sup>

Zimmerli's conclusion is based on the obvious result of the deterioration of YHWH's reputation among the nations which worship other gods; and determine the power of such gods according to the fate of the people who are allied to them.<sup>84</sup>

In such a situation the divine character's vindication of his "holy name" is initiated by his regathering of the "house of Israel" from their exile (36:24). We might infer that the

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Israel; thus Kim. quotes in illustration 'In all their affliction He was afflicted'; and Rashi refers to Midrash R. Lam. (Introd.15, fol.38), which gives the imaginative comment, 'When Israel was in exile, God used to go round the houses of the nations to hear what they were saying. And what were they saying? "The God of this people punished Pharaoh and Sisera and Sennacherib and the like." The retort to this is, "But He is always young!" The words [i.e. of the heathen] made Him too old (to do wonders in the present), so Ez. 36<sup>20</sup>.'" (Ezekiel, p. 389).

<sup>83</sup> Zimmerli, Ezekiel 2, pp. 246-247.

<sup>84</sup> Cooke, Ezekiel agrees that YHWH "cannot allow the exile to be permanent", even though it was the punishment of Israel for her disloyalty, "because it leads to the profaning of His Name". (p. 388) Their disobedience will not continue. YHWH, on his behalf, shall purify and change them from within that they will be obedient to him (see Cooke p. 389). See also Bunn, Ezekiel, p. 340. Bunn maintains that "the fact of the exile seemed proof to the enemy nations that [YHWH] was incapable of protecting his own possessions - both people and land...Ezekiel is attempting to point out a misreading of a historical event on the part of heathen nations and to disprove their false assumptions."



restoration of the exiles will show the surrounding nations that the God in the narrative is active among his people and also that he has not abandoned them even though they have not turned from their "rebellious" ways. This restoration will be a direct assault upon the declaration accredited to the inhabitants of the nations that YHWH was under subjection to the powers of their land because of the exile of his people.<sup>85</sup>

It would be natural for a people who are surrounded by various gods of various nations to determine the authority of such gods by the events which take place in these nations and the apparent fate of the peoples who serve such gods. The divine character's reputation would thus be threatened under such circumstances because of the events which have happened in his land and because of the exile of his people. The events in the narrative seem to indicate that the nations, which have subdued the land and YHWH's people, assume that their gods were victorious over the God of Israel and also that their gods held YHWH under their subjection.<sup>86</sup> The divine character would then be viewed as common. The dominant nations would see YHWH as less than their gods because of the fate of the people of Israel.

The narrator's favourable, though somewhat biased, portrayal of the divine character in ch. 36 is reinforced by his claim that

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<sup>85</sup> See Ez. 36:20b.

<sup>86</sup> Wevers, Ezekiel, p. 272 agrees that "[YHWH's] punishment was being misunderstood as divine impotence, a failure to protect what was his." (p. 273); Eichrodt, Ezekiel, p. 495; Cooke, Ezekiel, p. 390; Keil, Ezekiel, pp. 108, 110; Redpath, Ezekiel, p. 195f.



the God in the narrative will vindicate his "holy name".

And I will vindicate the holiness of my great name, which has been profaned among the nations, and which you have profaned among them; and the nations will know that I am YHWH, says the Lord YHWH, when I vindicate my holiness before their eyes. (36:23 RSV)

The narrator implies that the profanation of God's name, caused by the exile, was also intensified by the abominable behaviour of the people of Israel while among the nations. The vindication will cleanse YHWH's people of all their "uncleannesses" and all their "idols" (v. 25). Regardless of the events which led up to the profanation of God's name, the narrator makes it clear that the divine character's reputation will be redeemed. God's "holy name" will be vindicated.<sup>87</sup>

Zimmerli concludes that 36:23 reveals the three beneficiaries in the event of the divine character's act of redemption. The first beneficiary of YHWH's redemptive act is himself. The narrator reveals that the God in the narrative is holy through his act. The second beneficiary is Israel, the sinful nation, who is the catalyst which proves God's holy faithfulness.<sup>88</sup> The third beneficiary is the nations, "before whose eyes this assertion of [YHWH's] holiness happens so that they too may acknowledge it".<sup>89</sup> Zimmerli's last two beneficiaries from the redemptive act of YHWH are both involved in the

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<sup>87</sup> Cooke, Ezekiel, pp. 389-390.

<sup>88</sup> See also Bunn, Ezekiel, p. 340.

<sup>89</sup> Zimmerli, Ezekiel 2, p. 248; see also Reventlow, "Die Völker als Jahwes Zeugen bei Ezechiel," Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft 71 (1959), pp. 33-43.

strengthening or redeeming of the divine character's blemished reputation.<sup>90</sup> The "holy name" of the God in the narrative therefore will be vindicated through his redemptive act involving both Israel and the acknowledgment from the nations that it was he who brought about the redemption.

#### Will the Cycle of Rebelliousness Continue?

Even though the divine character will restore the people and land to their former glory and will also make the nations a reproach in the eyes of all who behold them, the problem remains of the disobedience and unfaithfulness of the people of Israel. The restoration to the homeland of the people of Israel who have profaned the name of YHWH in the midst of the nations does not automatically render them obedient and faithful to YHWH. They, as the narrator has so blatantly shown in chs. 2, 8, 16, and 20, are a "rebellious house". It would seem most likely to assume that the people who have been rebellious will be repentant once YHWH has restored them to their land. The possibility, however, would remain of their turning once again as rebels away from YHWH. Having observed in the narrative the continued pattern of the people's rebellion, the rekindling of the divine character's anger would, as before, result in the profanation of his "holy name". Will the rebelliousness continue? Will the "holy name" of the divine character be profaned again?

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<sup>90</sup> See Eichrodt, Ezekiel, p. 496.

### Repentance? Love?

The narrator announces that the "house of Israel" defiled their homeland when they dwelt there (36:17). Their wrong behaviour, which defiled the land, is vividly described by the narrator in the metaphor of the unclean woman.

When the house of Israel dwelt in their own land, they defiled it by their ways and their doings; their conduct before me was like the uncleanness of a woman in her impurity. (36:17 RSV)

Zimmerli<sup>91</sup> concludes that the land was given to the people as a possession; making the people responsible for whatever happened in and to their land. As shown in the narrative the divine character did not let the house of Israel's misconduct go unpunished. His wrath which was kindled by their unfaithfulness was poured out upon them (36:18). One may expect to find, as a result, that the judgment of YHWH upon the "house of Israel" turns them from their wrong ways to faithfulness and obedience to YHWH. This is not the case however. As the people are scattered to the nations they continue to profane the "holy name" of YHWH. They intensify the threat to YHWH's reputation by their behaviour in the sight of the surrounding nations (36:21).<sup>92</sup> They do not repent. They do not become the faithful followers of YHWH in the land of their exile. They do not see or acknowledge YHWH's

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<sup>91</sup> Ezekiel 2, p. 246.

<sup>92</sup> See Zimmerli, Ezekiel 2, p. 246.



involvement in any of the events which have taken place in their lives or in their land.

The situation raises the question of whether or not the divine character will be able to maintain his holy reputation (the recognition of his "holy name") if he merely restores the land to a "rebellious" people, who if consistent in their behaviour, will again evoke his divine wrath? The narrator has shown in ch. 20 that if YHWH pours out his wrath on his people when they are rebellious the result is the profanation of his name. It would be simple to suggest that the idea of a sincere repentance would be one possible answer to this problem. The narrator has repeatedly shown, however, that YHWH does not restore the people because of any obvious repentance. The peoples' response to YHWH's judgment in the narrative has been their continued "rebelliousness". Repentance has no place in the narrative of Ezekiel. Since the narrator has not indicated or implied that the people repent it is highly probable therefore that the divine character will face the dilemma regarding the profanation of his holy name again.

Zimmerli rightly notes that the message in Ezekiel has nothing to do with YHWH's love or the people's repentance. He writes,

There is no mention of mercy, love, covenant  
faithfulness, the justice that brings salvation. This  
whole vocabulary is missing from the book of Ezekiel...

[The above mentioned terms]...are sought in vain in the book of Ezekiel.<sup>93</sup>

Zimmerli's conclusion can readily be seen just within the perimeter of ch. 36. In this portion of the narrative the "house of Israel" is portrayed as having no positive part in the process of YHWH's actions. According to the oracle of YHWH in ch.36 it is the people's negative behaviour which has led to the divine character's wrath and results in the threat to his reputation. This threat leads to the divine character's responsive action for the sake of redeeming his "holy" reputation.

Scholars have inappropriately placed such motives as "repentance" and "love" within the activity of the divine character in Ezekiel.<sup>94</sup> Keil, for example, concludes that "the promise itself [in ch. 36] is meant to entice Israel to repent and return to God."<sup>95</sup> Hals unjustifiably attempts to force upon

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<sup>93</sup> Ezekiel 2, pp. 247-248. Andrew, Responsibility and Restoration, pp. 185-186, suggests that the only reason for YHWH's restorative action in ch. 36 lies in YHWH himself and is "expressed in such a way to seem that [YHWH] is concerned only for his own reputation, to the exclusion of caring for the people." Andrew weakens his support of this statement, however, as he claims that though YHWH states that he acts on his own account and not on account of the people, the statement is followed YHWH's claim of what he will do for his people. Andrew inaccurately suggests that more is implied in the text than the divine's concern for his "name's sake".

<sup>94</sup> E.g. Georg Fohrer, "Remarks on Modern Interpretation of the Prophets", JBL 80 (1961), pp. 309-319, especially pp. 314, 319, who says with respect to the prophets in general that "salvation is always made dependent upon a radical repentance of sin and return to God" (p. 314); Henri Cazelles, "Shiloh, the Customary Laws and the Return of the Ancient Kings", Proclamation and Presence (1970), pp. 239-251.

<sup>95</sup> Keil, Ezekiel, p. 112.

the text the issue of YHWH's "free and unmerited" graciousness.<sup>96</sup> The concept of "graciousness" is not in question. Hals applies this "graciousness" in such a way, however, as to strongly imply YHWH's overpowering love. Why do some commentators find it necessary to force the concepts of "repentance" and "love" on a text when the divine character's acts are portrayed as improving the situation of his people? Their conclusions might be preferable for those who feel uncomfortable with the message as it stands. When a narrative, as in Ezekiel, shows that the divine character only acts for his sake, they may see a need to add such concepts as love and repentance which have obviously been avoided by the narrator.

Walther Eichrodt is even more adamant about forcing these concepts upon ch. 36. Eichrodt concludes that God's compassion and love for his people, is not refuted in 36:22 by the statement that YHWH responds only for the sake of his "holy name". Eichrodt suggests that,

what is now at stake is to ensure that the profound seriousness of this love should not be obscured by egotistic self-pity, and that human wishes should not prescribe involuntarily to that love what way it ought to take, since such notions would lead to a complete misunderstanding of its deeper nature.<sup>97</sup>

In other words Eichrodt places within his interpretation of v. 22 the concept of YHWH's love which the narrator has methodically avoided using. Eichrodt's reference to YHWH's love is surprising

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<sup>96</sup> Ezekiel, p. 265.

<sup>97</sup> Eichrodt, Ezekiel, p. 496.



since the narrative of Ezekiel has not shown the motivation for the divine character's response as being that of his love or compassion for his people.

Furthermore, Eichrodt adds to his reading of ch. 36 the concept of the people's "repentance". He concludes that Israel becomes aware of the depth of her disloyalty and realizes she "cannot receive the divine gift except in the most profound humility and the bitterest of repentance".<sup>98</sup> A statement, such as this, aligns Eichrodt with the other scholars who have struggled to impose the concept of "repentance" in a text where it does not belong.

Many commentators take the position on the basis of 14:6 and 18:30-32, that the chance for repentance is offered to the rebellious people by the divine character.<sup>99</sup> While repentance is referred to in 14:6 and 18:30, the major portion of the narrative fails to show any element which portrays this as a possibility.

The narrator refers to "repentance" for the first time in the narrative in 14:6. However, in chs. 4 through 7 he has described the peoples' rebellion and the divine character's approaching judgment with no implication that repentance is now an option. Likewise, in ch. 8 the narrator has described the

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<sup>98</sup> Ibid., p. 504.

<sup>99</sup> E.g. Zimmerli, Ezekiel 1, p. 308 (14:6), p. 386 (18:30-32); Brownlee, Ezekiel 1-19, p. 202 (14:6), pp. 281, 290-291 (18:30-32); Eichrodt, Ezekiel, p. 182 (14:6), pp. 245-247 (18:30-32); Cooke, Ezekiel, p. 202 (18:30-32); Blenkinsopp, Ezekiel, p. 72 (14:6), p. 84 (18:30-32); Greenberg, Ezekiel 1-20, p. 336 (18:30-32); Klein, Ezekiel, pp. 99-101 (14:6), pp. 107-108 (18:30-32).

abominations performed by the people in the temple never mentioning a call for repentance before the impending description of judgment in ch. 9. Even when the God in the narrative is shown to abandon the sanctuary in ch. 11 there is missing any allusion to repentance. The absence of any call to repentance in these descriptions of rebellion and the descriptions of the divine character's judgment raises the question of whether the narrator refers to "repentance" in 14:6 only to show that the option has passed. If this is the case, as I suggest the evidence supports, the narrator rhetorically shows that repentance is no longer possible.

In 18:30-32 the narrator again uses the imperative "repent". Here the "house of Israel" has been accused of claiming that God's ways are not just when according to the narrative their ways are corrupt. The divine character proclaims that he will judge the "house of Israel". When the imperative is used in 18:30 we are left to wonder how can the "house of Israel" repent when they blame their behaviour on God. In context it appears that the narrator is once again referring to repentance rhetorically to show that the people themselves choose to die. Therefore even in these verses there is no call for repentance; there is only a reminder that repentance at one time was an option.

As previously mentioned, the narrator of Ezekiel does not portray a God who responds to the predicament of his people out of love. The narrator also does not portray a God who responds to his people because of their turning from their rebellious ways

and their faithful obedience to him (i.e. "repentance"). According to the narrator, YHWH is only motivated to respond to the people and events within the narrative for the sake of his "holy name". The text of Ezekiel reveals nothing more than this, no matter how cold and detached some may feel YHWH's response.

**Purification of the Rebellious:  
Changing the Unfaithful to Faithful**

In view of what has been said about the divine character in ch. 36, it is not surprising that the narrator continues to validate the actions of God. YHWH's vindication (v. 23) of the holiness of his "great name"<sup>100</sup> will not only benefit him, but also will benefit the "house of Israel" (v. 24). The exile, which is the result of the divine character's wrath, will be reversed. The people will be gathered (v. 24) from the nations and countries instead of scattered among them (v. 19). This image of the God in the narrative restoring and cleansing the wayward people demonstrates how the narrator with bias portrays the divine character as without fault.

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<sup>100</sup> V. 23b equates YHWH's "holiness" with the "holiness of my great name" in v. 23a. The name is thus shown to be representative of YHWH himself.



### Cleansing of Impurity with Water

The point is made clear that the "house of Israel's" cycle of rebelliousness toward YHWH will stop. YHWH will have cause no longer to profane his "holy name". Even though the "house of Israel" is portrayed as having failed to acknowledge YHWH with their unwavering devotion, the divine character is portrayed as one who will set things right. The problem of the "house of Israel's" disobedience and unfaithfulness to the God in the narrative, which in the past is described as the cause of his divine wrath, will be eliminated.<sup>101</sup>

I will sprinkle clean water upon you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses, and from all your idols I will cleanse you. (36:25 RSV)

The verb *zāraq* "sprinkling" used in v. 25 with "clean water" is predominantly used to refer to the "sprinkling" of blood. Some scholars suggest that the event of the purification of the people by water in ch. 36, although the normal element of blood is not used, is strengthened by the image of purification by blood normally associated with *zāraq*.

*zāraq* is used in reference to the "sprinkling" of blood 25 times out of its 35 occurrences in the Old Testament (e.g. Exodus 24:6, 8; Leviticus 1:5, 11; Numbers 18:17; 2 Kings 16:13, 15; 2

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<sup>101</sup> Zimmerli (Ezekiel 2, p. 247) argues that the oracle in ch. 36 is YHWH's response to the apparent question of the people: "How can the holy one possibly forgive again his sinful people whom he has had to drive away on account of his holiness?" See also Andrew, Responsibility and Restoration, pp. 183-184.

Chronicles 29:22<sup>3</sup>; Ezekiel 43:18). However, 3 out of the 10 remaining occurrences of zāraq are used in reference to the "sprinkling" of water (e.g. Num. 19:13, 20; Ez. 36:25). Since the zāraq "sprinkling" of water in Numbers 19:13, 20 clearly refers to the process of purification or cleansing, it is logical to conclude that the zāraq of water in Ezekiel 36:25 refers to the same process. The inference therefore that the frequent association of blood with zāraq strengthens the imagery of purification makes little difference in interpreting its use in Ezekiel 36:25. The narrator's imagery is clear in his intention to communicate the cleansing or purification of the people from their uncleanness or impurity.<sup>102</sup> The conclusion as stated above is supported by the only other references to the zāraq "sprinkling" of water in the Old Testament. Furthermore, the process of religious purification is substantiated by the context in which the zāraq "sprinkling" of water is used in ch. 36 of Ezekiel. Although the element which is sprinkled is different here in Ezekiel 36:25, it is obvious that the zāraq "sprinkling" of water is interpreted as a ritual act for the divine purpose of religious purification.<sup>103</sup>

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<sup>102</sup> For a similar position, see Bunn, Ezekiel, p. 340; Zimmerli, Ezekiel 2, p. 249; Keil, Ezekiel, p. 110; Eichrodt, Ezekiel, p. 498.

<sup>103</sup> I see no reason for supposing with Cooke, Ezekiel, pp. 390-391, that the sprinkling of water does not allude to any rites such as those referred to in Ex. 30:17-21, Lev. 14:52, Num. 5:17, 19:9, 17.

The narrator therefore portrays the divine character favourably by showing that the God in the narrative will do with the "house of Israel" what they, themselves, have not been willing to do. They have been unclean and have continued to live in the ways which fostered their uncleanness. Yet, the divine character will himself cleanse them of all their impurities with the sprinkling of clean water. YHWH will wash them and make them whole once again.

#### Creation of a New Heart and New Spirit of Obedience

The narrator favourably portrays the divine character showing that God will protect his "holy name" by changing the "house of Israel".

A new heart I will give you, and a new spirit I will put within you; and I will take out of your flesh the heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to observe my ordinances. You shall dwell in the land which I gave to your fathers; and you shall be my people, and I will be your God. And I will deliver you from all your uncleannesses. (36:26-29a RSV)

According to the text, the "house of Israel" will not have the freedom to act abominably anymore. The change will create a people who will obediently walk in YHWH's statutes and observe YHWH's ordinances (v. 27). The God in the narrative no longer will have a reason to pour out his wrath on his people and profane his "holy name".



The promise of the new heart and new spirit in 36:26 has been mentioned previously in the analysis with regard to 11:19. 18:31 also refers to a new heart and new spirit, however here, the people are told to get them for themselves. The reference to the new heart and new spirit in 18:31 therefore differs from that in 36:26 and 11:19 because YHWH is the one who will bestow these upon the "rebellious" people. In 36:26 and 11:19, as opposed to 18:31, the reception of the new heart and new spirit is not left to the responsibility of the people. Therefore, 18:31 is accepted as a rhetorical statement emphasizing what is required of the people in order for them to turn from their present condition of obduracy and be obedient to YHWH.<sup>104</sup>

By comparing 11:19 with 36:26 one can easily see that both verses are almost identical.

v<sup>o</sup>nātati lāhem lēb 'ehād v<sup>o</sup>rūah h<sup>a</sup>dašāh 'etēn  
 b<sup>o</sup>qirb<sup>o</sup>kem vah<sup>a</sup>sirōti lēb hā'eben mibšārām v<sup>o</sup>nātati  
 lāhem lēb bāsār (11:19)

v<sup>o</sup>nātati lākem lēb hādāš v<sup>o</sup>rūah h<sup>a</sup>dāšāh 'etēn  
 b<sup>o</sup>qirb<sup>o</sup>kem vah<sup>a</sup>sirōti 'et-lēb hā'eben mibšarkem  
 v<sup>o</sup>nātati lākem lēb bāsār (36:26)

One difference between the two verses is that the pronominal suffix in 11:19 is hem ("them" mas.pl.) whereas the pronominal suffix in 36:26 is kem ("you" mas.pl.). Another difference is the reference to the one heart in 11:19 as opposed to the new heart in 36:26

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<sup>104</sup> See pp. 234-235 for my discussion of 14:6 and 18:30-32.

The repetition in both the proclamation of the divine character in 11:19 and 36:26 is explicitly clear in its message that the "house of Israel" will not be allowed to return to its former ways of rebelliousness. The new heart and new spirit will cause the people to be obedient to God and also will enable the God in the narrative to avoid any actions which might lead to the profaning of his "holy name".<sup>105</sup> The obedience of the "house of Israel" will redeem the blemished reputation of the divine character. It is evident that the profaned reputation of the God in the narrative will be vindicated as his people acknowledge him as their God through their new behaviour.

The promise of the divine character in 36:9-11 that the land will be restored to its former glory is repeated in 36:33-35.

Thus says the Lord YHWH: On the day that I cleanse you from all your iniquities, I will cause the cities to be inhabited, and the waste places shall be rebuilt. And the land that was desolate shall be tilled, instead of being the desolation that it was in the sight of all who passed by. And they will say, 'This land that was desolate has become like the garden of Eden; and the

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<sup>105</sup> I see no reason for supposing with Eichrodt, Ezekiel, pp. 500-501, that the new spirit graciously given by YHWH "gives man power to shape his life in accordance with God's commandments". Eichrodt's interpretation takes the focus off of YHWH's intervention and places the emphasis upon man. Eichrodt has taken a liberty with the text which the narrator has intentionally avoided. As the context appears to imply, Ezekiel's message emphasizes the divine character's intervention regardless of any change on the part of the people for his actions. The assertion by Zimmerli, Ezekiel 2, p. 249, that the "spirit" in the Old Testament is a "power which gives a man strength to do new things...The new thing here is the obedience which is now possible with regard to [YHWH's] commands and the new way of life" similarly fails to follow the focus of the narrative on the divine character. See also Andrew, Responsibility and Restoration, p. 186; Keil, Ezekiel, pp. 111-112; Womers, Ezekiel, p. 274.



waste and desolate and ruined cities are now inhabited and fortified.' (36:33-35 RSV)

These verses indicate that the restoration will cause an awareness of the authority of the God of Israel among the people of the nations. The nations, who have mocked the "house of Israel" and who also have challenged the honour of YHWH, will see and know that it is YHWH who has restored his people and revived the land.

Then the nations that are left round about you shall know that I, YHWH, have rebuilt the ruined places, and replanted that which was desolate; I, YHWH, have spoken, and I will do it. (36:36 RSV)

The narrator has indicated clearly, therefore, that the divine character's actions are for his sake. According to the narrative, the divine character acts in order to redeem his "holy" reputation as the God of Israel in the sight of the nations who have questioned his divine authority.

The promise of restoration and the oracle itself culminates in the divine character's assurance to respond to the request of the "house of Israel" with regard to his increasing the quantity of its population (36:37-38). The God in the narrative consents to answer its request in order that "they will know that [he] is YHWH" (36:38b).<sup>106</sup> The narrative shows that, even in this minor act, the divine character's purpose is to foster an awareness and

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<sup>106</sup> Cooke, *Ezekiel*, p. 386, concludes that the reference to the acknowledgement of YHWH by the surrounding nations refers to his supremacy. Cooke also suggests that this recognition of YHWH's supremacy over other gods would be affirmed by the Hittite and Akkadian use of the term "to know".



acceptance of his authority.<sup>107</sup> The God in the narrative acts and reacts for the sake of his holy reputation. All people who are in any way affected by God's acts will accept his divine authority. The narrator shows that it is through the divine character's actions, for the sake of his "holy name," that he vindicates his threatened reputation among the nations and also among his people. As the narrative explicitly communicates, they will know that he is YHWH, vividly present in the midst of his people wherever they may be, for the sake of his "holy name".

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<sup>107</sup> See Abraham Heschel, The Prophets 2, p. 44.

## CHAPTER 5

### Hope: Divine and Human (Ezekiel 37:1-28)

The preceding chapters have treated some of the distinctive portrayals of the divine character in the narrative of Ezekiel. These excerpts from the narrative have shown the divine character's reputation as vulnerable and threatened. The "visions of God" pericopes in 1-3:15 and 8-11:25 show the divine character as one who has manifested his presence among the exiles and abandoned the inhabitants of the land. The narrator confirms that YHWH's presence among the exiles is significant, with the divine character's departing promise to be a sanctuary to the exiles, and his assurance that they will be restored to their land (11:16-17).

There is a common theme which plays an intricate role in each of these visions. YHWH's presence, or its obverse, is what is emphasized in each visionary event. The narrator's objective clearly shows that it is YHWH's presence which indicates YHWH's continued faithfulness to the covenantal relationship. The context implies that in order for the God in the narrative to judge the residents of the land, based on his departure from their midst (i.e. his absence), he must manifest himself among the remnant of his people in exile. The visions show that the divine character needs this contact with his people to maintain their acknowledgment that he is an authoritative God.

Equally important to the portrayal of God in the vision pericopes is the portrayal of the divine character in chs. 20 and 36. In these two pericopes the narrator identifies YHWH's strategy as for the purpose of his name's sake. The divine character is portrayed as one who acts for his name's sake (i.e. his divine reputation) in order to avoid or stop it being profaned. The narrator's description of the God in the narrative associating his name with the people (20:5; 36:28; 11:20; 14:11; 37:27)<sup>1</sup> shows that the divine character has chosen to be known as the relational God, in covenant with a particular people. The narrator's claim that the divine character is the God of the people of Israel establishes the intimate association of YHWH's honour with the fate of his partner. In the narrative the divine character seeks to maintain this relationship in order to sustain the people's recognition of him as one with competent divine authority.<sup>2</sup> The divine character acts in the narrative in order to vindicate his holiness which is viewed as common, by the events which have occurred.

This understanding of the intimate link between the divine character's reputation and the people is neither radical nor new.

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<sup>1</sup> See Lev. 26:12; 2 Chr. 7:14; Is. 52:6; Jer. 11:4; 30:22; 31:1, 33; 32:38; Zec. 8:8; 13:9.

<sup>2</sup> See Gerhard von Rad, Old Testament Theology, 1. New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1962, pp. 180-182. Von Rad correctly observes that the often used formula in the Book of Ezekiel "and they will know that I am YHWH" reveals "the indissoluble welding-together of (YHWH's) name and his self-revelation just as clearly as does the preface to the decalogue, which also interprets the name in the light of the redemptive historical act" (pp. 185-186).



The Sifre on the Book of Deuteronomy states,

Similarly Scripture says: This is my God, and I will glorify Him (Exd.15:2) - when I acknowledge Him, He is glorious, but when I do not acknowledge Him, He is (not) glorious, if one may say such a thing - For I will proclaim the name of the Lord; ascribe ye greatness unto our God (32:3) - when I proclaim His Name, He is great, but when I do not, (He is not great,) if one may say such a thing - Therefore ye are my witnesses, saith the Lord, and I am God (Isa.43:12) - when you are my witnesses, I am God, but when you are not My witnesses, I am not God, if one may say such a thing - Unto thee I lift up mine eyes, O Thou that art enthroned in the heavens (Ps.123:1) - were it not for me, Thou wouldst not be enthroned in the heavens, if one may say such a thing. So too in this case (And there was a king in Jeshurum), all the Tribes of Israel together - (He is King) when they form one (unified) group; (He is) not (King) when they form several groups.<sup>3</sup>

It is evident in the pericopes viewed in this analysis of Ezekiel that if the divine character is not faithfully followed and hallowed by his people he is inadvertently recognized as an incompetent divinity. Likewise, whatever retribution is used by the God in the narrative, as his response to the behaviour of the people will affect the reputation of the divine character. If the logic of the Sifre on the Book of Deuteronomy is followed, the people's failure to acknowledge the divine character in Ezekiel would result in God's absence.

The portrayal of the divine character's response to the threat on his reputation is also shown in ch. 37. The narrator relates the divine oracle in ch. 37 in a manner which is equally as elaborate as the descriptions of the visions identified by the

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<sup>3</sup> Sifre A Tannaitic Commentary on the Book of Deuteronomy, Pisk.a 346, tr. Reuven Hammer, New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1986.

phrase "visions of God".<sup>4</sup> It too is a vision, though not specifically identified as such by the narrator. This vision contributes to our formulation of a better understanding of the significance of YHWH's presence among the people in exile in the narrative. The event described in the vision also vividly shows what the divine character will do in order to vindicate his "holy name" which has been profaned by the exile of his people.

The narrator shows, in the elaborate images of the vision of dry bones in ch. 37, the means by which the divine character will regain his hold on the people in exile,<sup>5</sup> and will miraculously restore them to their promised life.<sup>6</sup> According to the vision in ch. 37 they will no longer feel dead to their people, lost in their captivity, or cut off from their very identity as the people of YHWH. For the divine character will intervene in their situation for his name's sake.

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<sup>4</sup> As seen also by Zimmerli, Ezekiel 2, p. 256; Eichrodt, Ezekiel, p. 506.

<sup>5</sup> The rebelliousness of the people of the exile along with the inhabitants of the land is referred to in 2:6, 8, and 9. It is in these verses that the narrator includes the exiles as part of the people who are labeled the "rebellious house".

<sup>6</sup> See 11:17 for YHWH's promise to the exiles.

The Regeneration of the Dry Bones  
Ezekiel 37:1-14

The narrator's description of Ezekiel's vision of the regeneration of the dry bones begins in a manner similar to the two previous "visions of God" pericopes.<sup>7</sup> According to the narrator the prophet Ezekiel says "the hand of YHWH was upon me" (e.g. the visions in 1:3b; 8:1b; 40:1b; and likewise in 37:1a).<sup>8</sup> This phrase is used in order to indicate the priority and significance the forthcoming event is intended to have for the recipients of the prophet's words.<sup>9</sup> The prophet is saying that his brothers and sisters should listen well, for what they are about to hear comes directly from YHWH.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> (And the third "visions of God" pericope in chs. 40-48.)

<sup>8</sup> It is obvious that this vision of the regeneration of the dry bones is lacking an opening date, as is seen in the three "visions of God". There are various suggestions put forward by others regarding the absence of such a date and the possible reasons for its absence, e.g. Zimmerli, Ezekiel 2, p. 259; Eichrodt, Ezekiel, p. 506; John Wevers, Ezekiel, London:Nelson, 1969, p. 277. Since the date of the occurrence of this vision is not recorded, we will, however, accept that the narrator felt that the date of the vision was unnecessary. The element of time can be inferred to a degree from the events which have occurred previously. Ch. 37 follows the information in 33:21 where the news of the fall of Jerusalem has been given to Ezekiel. This information is helpful, since ch. 37 speaks of the restoration after the fact of the fall.

<sup>9</sup> For a similar position, see Andrew, Responsibility and Restoration, p. 190; Eichrodt, Ezekiel, p. 507.

<sup>10</sup> The phrase "the hand of YHWH" used often in the OT is generally accepted as an expression of one of three things, e.g. Von Rad, Old Testament Theology, Vol.1, p. 60; M.E. Andrew, Responsibility and Restoration, p. 90; Werner E. Lemke, "Life in the Present and Hope for the Future", Int 38 (1984), p. 165; Eichrodt, Ezekiel, p. 507. It can refer to YHWH's awesome power (e.g. Ex. 13:9; Deut. 32:39). It may refer to YHWH's judgment upon



The narrator's use of the *rûah* as the means of transport of the prophet Ezekiel from the initial point of contact (i.e. the hand of YHWH upon him) to the place of the future visionary event is another illustration of the similarity of the vision of the regeneration of the dry bones with the "visions of God" in 1:4-3:15 and 8:1-11:25. As in the close of the first vision, (3:12) and the opening of the second vision (8:3), so also in the vision of the dry bones (37:1), the prophet is transported by the aid of the *rûah*<sup>11</sup> from one place to another.

Wevers concludes that the opening of the "vision"<sup>12</sup> should not necessarily be understood as an ecstatic transport such as the prophet experienced in 8:3 and 11:24, "since the prophet is already in Babylonia".<sup>13</sup> Wevers has avoided referring to 3:12 and 14 intentionally for the same reason. The transporting of the prophet in 3:12 and 14 also occurred in the land of Babylon.

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the transgressor (e.g. Ps. 32:4). Or it may refer to the divine contact with an individual resulting in a prophetic state of inspiration (e.g. 1 Kgs. 18:46). The narrator's use of the phrase "the hand of YHWH" in the Book of Ezekiel falls into the third category. The narrator reveals some form of divine contact (i.e. an oracle or a vision) each time the prophet indicates that "the hand of YHWH" was upon (i.e. 1:3; 3:14, 22; 8:1; 33:22; 37:1; and 40:1).

<sup>11</sup> 37:1 does add that the *rûah* at this point is the *rûah* of YHWH. Whereas in 3:12, 14; 8:3; 11:1; and 43:5 the narrator only refers to the transporter as *rûah*. The only other occurrence of the *rûah* of YHWH in the Book of Ezekiel is in 11:5. However, in 11:5 the prophet is not transported.

<sup>12</sup> (i.e. "the hand of YHWH was upon me", and "he brought me out by the Spirit of YHWH and it caused me to rest in the plain" [37:1]).

<sup>13</sup> Ezekiel, p. 277.

According to Wevers the prophet's location in the plain was not part of the vision. Wevers claims that "what is visionary is the bone-strewn surface".<sup>14</sup> It is quite possible, contrary to Wevers' conclusion, that although the prophet may already be in Babylonia, we are to understand that he was ecstatically transported from one point in Babylon to another (e.g. River Chebar to Tel Abib; Tel Abib to the plain). The relocation of the prophet from one point in the land of Babylon to another is seen to happen in a strange way as well as his movement outside the land of his exile. The extraordinary transporting of the prophet would be the narrator's reason for using similar imagery in each of the prophet's encounters with the divine character and his movement caused by the encounter.<sup>15</sup>

We are told by the narrator that the prophet is transported to *habiq'āh*.<sup>16</sup> *habiq'āh* is the same word used in the narrative for the location which Ezekiel was commanded to go to in order to once again meet the glory of YHWH and also to receive another portion of his prophetic instructions (3:22-27) following the first "vision of God" pericope. It is possible that the narrator

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> See for a similar conclusion Andrew, Responsibility and Restoration, p. 191.

<sup>16</sup> *habiq'āh* is translated by the RSV in 37:2 as "the valley" with an annotation that it can also be translated "the plain". Curiously, the RSV reverses its order of priority in translating *habiq'āh* in 3:22 and 23. In these verses the translator chose to translate *habiq'āh* as "the plain" noting in the annotation that *habiq'āh* could also be translated "the valley". It is reasonable to suggest that *habiq'āh* should be translated the same in each of the verses.

shows the prophet was commanded to go in 3:22 to the same place to which he was divinely transported in 37:2.<sup>17</sup> If this is the case, the *habiq'āh* to which we are told Ezekiel walked while in the land of exile, is the same *habiq'āh* to which the *rûah* of YHWH transported him in order to reveal the visionary event of the regeneration of life into the dry bones. The narrator has previously shown that it is in the plain in the land of the exiles therefore that the prophet encountered the glory of YHWH (3:22) as he saw it by the river Chebar in the first of the "visions of God" pericopes. It is in this same plain that the narrator sets the scene where Ezekiel, aided by the Spirit of YHWH, sees the vision of the dry bones in ch. 37.

In the narrative the prophet is led on his journey among the bones by the divine character.<sup>18</sup> The divine character's part in the vision becomes evident when the narrator says that he commands Ezekiel to prophesy to the remnants of death and decay. The prophecy is clear in its intention to show favourably the divine character. YHWH will cause the bones to come together and flesh to cover the skeletons once again (37:6). The divine character is portrayed, furthermore, as one who will put breath

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<sup>17</sup> See Zimmerli, Ezekiel 2, pp. 254, 259; and Wevers, Ezekiel, p. 277.

<sup>18</sup> The narrator states that "he led me round among them" (37:2). It is obvious that Ezekiel is overcome by the "spirit of YHWH" and that the one who speaks to Ezekiel in the vision is also YHWH. Since the narrator's reference to the one referred to as "he" in the visionary event is not directly identified, I suggest that YHWH is the one who leads the prophet around in the vision of the regeneration of the dry bones.



into the corpses that they may once again live (37:5, 6b). The reason for this miraculous regeneration is proclaimed by YHWH in the end of the prophecy. The God in the narrative is said to declare that after the dead are regenerated they "shall know that I am YHWH" (37:6b).

Michael Fox accurately interprets the leading of the prophet among the bones by the divine character as setting the stage for the climactic event of the regeneration of the bones.<sup>19</sup> It is probable that the prophet is made aware of the gravity of death and despair through his walk in the midst of all the bones. It is this awareness which will make the event of their regeneration more awe filled in the eyes of the prophet and the exiles. Fox rightly observes that the exiles' acknowledgment of YHWH is brought about because of God's display of his control over history as revealed in his astonishing act of the regeneration of the dry bones (37:14b).

The narrator reveals that the regeneration of the bones begins as soon as Ezekiel prophesies as commanded by the God in the narrative. The event foretold by the divine character in 37:4-6 becomes reality as the prophet is obedient in proclaiming YHWH's message to the remnants upon the plain (37:7-10). The prophet witnesses the anatomical reconstruction of the bodies which, minutes before, lay as dry bones upon the floor of the plain. Bones are joined together by the sinews (37:7b-8a).

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<sup>19</sup> "The Rhetoric of Ezekiel's Vision of the Valley of the Bones", HUCA 51 (1980), p. 10.

Skeletons are covered with flesh and skin (37:8b). The *rûah* enters these restored bodies and regenerates them to living beings (37:9-10). The narrator reveals that the restored bodies are clearly alive by stating that as "the breath (*rûah*) came into them, and they lived, [they] stood upon their feet" (37:10). The immense number of bones previously shown when the prophet first walked through the plain is now evident since the narrator shows in 37:10b that the regenerated bones compose what he refers to as "an exceedingly great army" (*ḥayil gādôl m<sup>e</sup>'ōd m<sup>e</sup>'ōd*). The identity of this "exceedingly great army", which has been raised up from the dry bones, is still unknown. Clearly the prophet has participated in and witnessed a miraculous event showing the omnipotent power of the divine character. The vision, alone, however, has little significance with regard to the plight of the covenant people and the restoration of the divine character's reputation among them.

The connection between the visionary event and the future of the divine and human relationship is presented in 37:11-14, as the narrator shows that YHWH offers the interpretation of the vision. The narrator says that the divine character informs Ezekiel, "Son of man, these bones are all the house of Israel" (37:11). The designation of the bones as "all the house of Israel", however, does not clearly indicate whether it will be the inhabitants of the land along with the exiles or just the exiles who will be regenerated by the divine character's impressive power. Is it possible, in lieu of the description of

the destruction of the city and people which was forecast by the God in the narrative in 5:1-7:27, that the divine character intends to restore the entire house of Israel?

In chs. 5-7 the narrator has shown that the prophet is commanded by YHWH to prophesy the ultimate end of the unfaithful inhabitants of the land of Israel. The God in the narrative proclaims, "now the end is upon you, and I will let loose my anger upon you" (7:3). Yet the divine character's words which follow this verse seem to reveal that "the end" of the people is not truly the end, for the result of his wrath, and the effect of his punishment upon the inhabitants of the land of Israel, will be that they "will know that I am YHWH" (7:4). How can those whose lives are brought to an end "know" that God is YHWH? Are we to understand that it is their destruction which shall open their eyes to the reality of YHWH?

It is clear that the narrator in 7:13a certainly indicates that the divine character's threat to the very lives of these unfaithful inhabitants will result in the end of life for all the multitude.

For a seller shall not return to what he has sold,  
while they live, for the vision<sup>20</sup> is to all her

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<sup>20</sup> The RSV's translation of *hāzôn* as "wrath" in 7:13 is unacceptable. I concur that *hāzôn* in 7:13 should be translated "vision" because of its reference to the visionary account and depiction which the prophet experienced in chapter 5 and following of the anger of YHWH which would be vented toward the inhabitants of the land. Thus the *hāzôn* "vision" referred to in 7:13 is directed towards all the inhabitants of the land. It is an all inclusive "vision". The "vision" which portrays the weight of YHWH's anger shall not be altered. *hāzôn* occurs again in 7:26 where it is clear that it should be translated "vision", as the RSV.



multitude, it shall not turn back...

The text seems to imply that life will abruptly end if the parallel is to be followed. Even the obscurity of 7:13b leaves some room for a reasonable interpretation that the lives of those who have transgressed shall crumble under the weight of YHWH's anger (v<sup>e</sup>'iš ba'vônô hayyātô lō' yithzzāqû). Does the narrative imply that these people who were destroyed will be restored along with their compatriots in exile? Will their bones come together literally? Will flesh once again cover their skeletons? Will they have a second chance in life?

Andrew argues that the vision has nothing to do with "an expression of faith in resurrection from the literal dead, but of something far greater than that, of faith in life for people who want to die".<sup>21</sup> According to chs. 5-7 the majority of the people who resided in the land of Israel will be among those who are literally dead. Jerusalem's fall, which the text has indicated as already having occurred in 33:21, was foretold in the divine character's proclamation in chs. 5-7 as the end of the majority of people who inhabited the land of Israel. According to the prophecy, their deaths have occurred. The forecast events of the divine character's wrath and punishment upon the abominable people have already become a present reality in 33:21. Jerusalem

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<sup>21</sup> M.E. Andrew, Responsibility and Restoration, p. 189. Zimmerli, Ezekiel 2, p. 264 notes that the image of the deceased depicted in the dry bones is not to be taken literally to represent those who have in reality died in the judgment of Jerusalem; Wevers, Ezekiel, p. 279.

and her inhabitants have experienced the events that the divine character foretold in chs. 5-7. Jerusalem has certainly fallen according to the narrative. In agreement with Andrew's conclusion, therefore, the inhabitants of Jerusalem and the land of Israel who have suffered death<sup>22</sup> are not here included in the narrator's reference to "all the house of Israel". Andrew's reference to the "people who want to die" would be obviously the people who are living in exile.<sup>23</sup>

Gerhard von Rad concludes that the despair symbolized by the dry bones represents the people of the land who witnessed the departure of the "glory of God" from the temple as described in ch. 11.<sup>24</sup> He suggests that they are the ones who are truly dead in the metaphorical sense of the term. Von Rad's suggestion is limiting with respect to the people who are to be restored. His reading identifies only the residents of Jerusalem as the people who will be lifted from their despair.

Wevers suggests that "the occasion for the vision is the hopeless despair of the exiles".<sup>25</sup> His assertion is reasonable,

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<sup>22</sup> According to biblical texts outside of the Book of Ezekiel "multitudes" survived the siege and fall (see 2 Kgs. 25:11 and 2 Kgs. 25:21b). Cf. Peter Ackroyd, Exile and Restoration, London: SCM Press Ltd, 1968, pp. 22f, 31. However, according to the narrator's account of what was to happen within the narrative of Ezekiel, the majority of the inhabitants were destroyed along with the city (see chs. 5-7).

<sup>23</sup> Eichrodt, Ezekiel, p. 509 agrees.

<sup>24</sup> Old Testament Theology vol. 2 (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1965), p. 234.

<sup>25</sup> Wevers, Ezekiel, p. 277.

but one must question the ambiguity of even the identity of the "exiles". Does Wevers mean to include both the people taken from the land in the first exile (1:2), and the people who were later driven out in the second exile (5:2, 10, 12), when he refers to "the exiles"? The few survivors of the fall of Jerusalem as revealed in chs. 5-7, who were scattered to the nations could possibly be included as a part of "the exiles". Both groups of exiles apparently would be overcome with hopeless despair. Is it reasonable to assume though that the second exiles, who were scattered among the nations as punishment by the divine character, would be given a new hope of their regeneration and return to the promised land?

Wevers suggests that the "exiles" are not the only people referred to by the phrase "all the house of Israel" even though, as he states, the "hopeless despair of the exiles" is the occasion of the vision. He claims that "the vision is interpreted as pertaining not simply to the Babylonian exiles, but to the whole house of Israel".<sup>26</sup> Wevers concludes apparently that there are still residents of the nation in the land. The narrator of Ezekiel, however, has not shown this.

Wevers has attempted to clarify the ambiguity of the identity of those who will be restored as shown in the coming together of the dry bones in 37:1-10. He has overlooked portions of the text, however, which would contribute to another conclusion other than his own. As an example 37:14, as the

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid., p. 279.



conclusion of this vision, the narrator has the divine character proclaiming,

I will put my Spirit within you, and you shall live,  
and I will place you in your own land; then you shall  
know that I, YHWH, have spoken, and I have done it,  
says YHWH. RSV

As this verse attests, the identity of the restored people has something to do with their having been displaced from their land. According to the narrative the divine character's judgment on the residents in the land of Israel, following the first exile, did not result in the event of the displacement of all the residents of Israel in exile. Many of the residents of the land of Israel were killed in the land. Although they are clearly a part of the "house of Israel", obviously they are not included in this vision's foretelling of the restoration of "all the house of Israel".

37:12b also indicates that the restored people will be those who have been taken from their land; those who are in exile. The divine character proclaims "I will bring you home into the land of Israel". The reference to "all the house of Israel" should be read as referring to only those who have been removed from their homes and from their homeland. It is still possible therefore that the few who were allowed to survive the sword, and go as captives into exile at the time of the fall of Jerusalem are included in the narrator's reference to "all the house of Israel". They would be the very ones whose attitude is portrayed by the Psalmist in Psalm 137

By the waters of Babylon, there we sat down and wept,  
when we remembered Zion...our captors required of us  
songs...saying, "Sing us one of the songs of Zion!" How  
shall we sing YHWH's song in a foreign land?...  
Remember, O YHWH, against the Edomites the day of  
Jerusalem, how they said, "Rase it, rase it! Down to  
its foundations!" (vv. 1, 3, 7 RSV)

The second group of exiles would have witnessed first hand the brunt of the divine character's anger over their abominable and detestable ways. They would be the ones sent into exile, after YHWH's departure and judgment on Jerusalem, in order to be a living testimony to the foreign nations where they lived so that all would know that God is YHWH. Their lament would be depicted appropriately in Psalm 137.<sup>27</sup> It is interesting that the Psalmist makes no mention of a hope of restoration for these exiles. He shows only their plea that YHWH will do to their captors as he has done to them.<sup>28</sup>

The narrator in 37:11b contrasts the hope of divine intervention, which he has shown in the vision, with the hopeless claim of "all the house of Israel" that "our bones are dried up, and our hope is lost; we are clean cut off". In the narrative the first group of exiles and those of the second exile have both been "cut off" from their land. As the narrator has revealed in 11:15b, however, the first group of exiles is shown to have some sense of separation from YHWH and the land, as is shown in the

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<sup>27</sup> See Ackroyd, Exile and Restoration, p. 32 who also compares the cry of the Psalmist with that of the exiles in ch. 37.

<sup>28</sup> See Ps. 137:7f.

boastful attitudes of the inhabitants of Jerusalem before the fall of the city.<sup>29</sup>

If the narrator is showing in ch. 37 that the God in the narrative will restore all the people (all exiles), then the event indicates that the divine character's actions are not in response to the people's behaviour. This portrayal would reinforce the narrator's portrayal in chs. 20 and 36 that the divine character acts only for the sake of his name. If YHWH is partial toward one group of exiles over the other, the event indicates that the behaviour of the people does have some effect on the actions of the divine character. YHWH would be portrayed therefore as one whose motives go deeper than mere concern for his holy name. Since the identity of those who are to be restored contributes to the portrayal of the divine character, I suggest that we look at the evidence outside the pericope of ch. 37 which refers to the people of the second exile.

In ch. 5 the narrator has shown, in the oracle, that a few of the inhabitants of the land of Israel, following the first exile, will survive the terrible destruction which was to come upon the land (i.e. 5:10b). We are told that they will be scattered to all the winds. They will be exiled out of their land; taken to be among the people of the surrounding nations. The people who are scattered to the wind in the oracle, however, will also have the sword unsheathed after them (5:12b). Some of

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<sup>29</sup> See Werner E. Lemke, "Life in the Present and Hope for the Future", p. 172.



them apparently will be pursued and killed while on the run. There will, however, be those who survive. In 6:8-10 the divine character is said to proclaim,

Yet I will leave some of you alive. When you have among the nations some who escape the sword, and when you are scattered through the countries, then those of you who escape will remember me among the nations where they are carried captive, when I have broken their wanton heart which has departed from me, and blinded their eyes which turn wantonly after their idols; and they will be loathsome in their own sight for the evils which they have committed, for all their abominations. And they shall know that I am YHWH. RSV

Does the reference to these survivors of YHWH's jealous anger mean that we are to include them in the vision of hope in ch. 37 as part of the group who will be returned to their land; or are we to accept that they are destined to remain outcasts and only wanderers in foreign lands?

The survivors of the inhabitants of the land as it will be following the divine character's judgment are also mentioned by the narrator in 12:10-16. Here we are told that the prophet Ezekiel is commanded by YHWH to act out a mock exile to an audience of fellow exiles. He is informed by the divine character that the significance of the act is to show that the prince in Jerusalem, and all the house of Israel who are there in it, shall themselves go into exile and into captivity (vv. 10-11). The sword also shall be used against them as they are scattered (v. 14). They shall not all die by the sword, however. The narrator adds to the scenario another claim of the divine character:

But I will let a few of them escape from the sword, from the famine and pestilence, that they may confess

all their abominations among the nations where they go,  
and may know that I am YHWH (v. 16 RSV)

We see that though "the end" has been declared, a handful will be preserved to acknowledge the authority of YHWH.

I suggest that these few survivors of YHWH's destruction are included in narrator's expression the "house of Israel" in the oracles of the coming judgment, and are understood as part of the exiles who are to receive the promise of hope and restoration seen in the vision of the putting back of life into the dry bones (ch. 37). The divine character will vindicate his reputation as he interrupts the punishment of the second exiles who have profaned his "holy name".

My conclusion is that the rekindling of hope and the promise of restoration that the God in the narrative gives to "all the house of Israel" in the vision of the regeneration of the dry bones in ch. 37, is directed both to the first group of exiles who have watched and heard all that the prophet has said of the events which their compatriots in their homeland have faced, and also to those exiled as punishment in the second exile. The exiles, though all identified as "rebellious" in ch. 2, will experience the divine character's promised restoration. The divine character will redeem his reputation in and through their restoration.

The vision of the regeneration of the dry bones of ch. 37 ends with the narrator's description of YHWH's oath that the divine character will do what he has revealed in the vision (37:14). When the prophecy has been fulfilled, the exiles will

know that the God in the narrative is the one to be credited for their restoration. The divine character has intervened for his name's sake, and they have benefited from his intervention.<sup>30</sup> The narrator emphasizes that all of the divine character's activity on their behalf is for the sole purpose of their acknowledgment that it was YHWH who brought about the turn of events. It is apparent, according to the narrative, that through their acknowledgment and awareness of the divine character's role as their redeemer, he too (i.e. his reputation) is redeemed. No longer will they have reason to doubt the significance of YHWH. He has re-established his contact with them. No longer will they feel cut off and separated from their God. They have no reason to wonder and ask what good is a God from whom you can be separated and who could be separated from you? As promised in the second "vision" pericope, the God in the narrative has become a sanctuary to his people in exile (11:16). The narrator has descriptively revealed their promised restoration by the God in the narrative in this vision in ch. 37.

The divine character is therefore portrayed as one who is concerned with his people's recognition of his honour and authority. The abominations of the inhabitants of Jerusalem and the entire land of Israel, following the first exile, have been

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<sup>30</sup> See Peter R. Ackroyd, Exile and Restoration, p. 105. Ackroyd writes "The exiles and any others who might think that they are the righteous because they have been spared are made aware that the saving action which they or their descendants are to experience derives not from any rightness in them but only from what God is (33.23ff.)."



shown, in chs. 20 and 36, to have caused the God in the narrative to destroy the residents in the land of Israel and exile them with the result that his "holy name" was profaned. The divine character abandons the inhabitants of the land in his anger (ch. 11), and manifests himself among the first group of exiles. The vision of the regeneration of the dry bones shows that the divine character's presence among the exiles is to rekindle the hope remaining in their spirits. He will restore both them, and all his people, including the second group of exiles, to their land, and thus he will vindicate his holy reputation. Even though the behaviour of the people of the second exile led to the divine character's wrath which profaned his name, he will restore them as well and also his reputation to its proper position of authority.

The narrator has not shown in the vision in ch. 37 that the people in exile will be restored because of any merit of their own. The only motive explicitly given for the act of restoration is to cause the people to recognize the authority of the divine character. As previously seen in chs. 20 and 36, the narrator has explicitly shown that the God in the narrative has acted not for the sake of the people, even though they do benefit from his acts, but only for his name's sake.

In the narrative the divine character's reputation was threatened by the profanation of the exile.<sup>31</sup> The God in the

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<sup>31</sup> Lemke, "Life in the Present and Hope for the Future", p. 176, rightly notes that the exile was a "defilement," as it were, of God's own holy name and honor... Given Israel's present exile,

narrative had to respond for his name's sake in order to maintain his contact and relevance among his people.<sup>32</sup> If the situation in the land of Israel, among the exiles and in the nations, had been left unattended without a response from the divine character to the threat upon his reputation, he would have remained profaned and thus be viewed by all characters as less than holy. In the vision of ch. 37 the narrator powerfully reveals that the divine character chose to vindicate his reputation and maintain his relationship with his people. YHWH has established his presence among the exiles in order to redeem his profaned name and renew his relevance among the people.

The vision of the plain of dry bones is a description of a dramatic event which the narrator uses to further emphasize the turning point in the message of the narrative of Ezekiel.<sup>33</sup> The

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the nations might be tempted to make fun of (YHWH)-God and to question his existence and power. Mindful of his own honor, therefore, and not necessarily for Israel's sake, God had decided to restore his people to their own land. By this act his name, which had been defiled among the nations, would again be made holy in their sight. By doing the seemingly impossible, the nations would have to acknowledge that (YHWH) is a powerful and living God."

<sup>32</sup> See Eichrodt, Ezekiel, p. 510; and Zimmerli, Ezekiel, p. 266.

<sup>33</sup> It is an almost universally accepted position that ch. 33 forms the fulcrum of the narrative because of the news of the final fall of Jerusalem in 33:21, e.g. Eichrodt, Ezekiel, pp.459-460: God's act of judgment still occupied the foreground, we have now reached a point where the eye can look forward to a fresh approach by [YHWH] to his people, and catch a glimpse of the further side of the period of judgment, the point where a new hope and a new obedience may take shape. And, bound up with the power of speech bestowed anew upon the prophet, comes the certainty that his mouth is now to transmit new messages from [YHWH], messages

prophet is no longer obligated and required to speak elaborately and adamantly of the fall and destruction of the nation, but is able now to proclaim the glorious restoration of a people in deep despair and utter rejection.<sup>34</sup> The divine character is portrayed as the redeemer who "graciously" restores his despairing and desolate people even though he is the one who has caused the situation leading to their despair.<sup>35</sup>

**YHWH's Motive: Divine Stability  
(Ezekiel 37:15-28)**

The second pericope of ch. 37 also contributes to the development of the divine character in the narrative. The narrator immediately follows the ecstatic vision of the regeneration of the dry bones with a divine oracle which shows

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which will not have to proclaim the wrathful retribution exacted by the Holy One, but which will be able to do service in building up a new people of God. Blenkinsopp, Ezekiel, p. 145; Zimmerli, Ezekiel 2, pp. 182, 189; Hals, Ezekiel, p. 3; Cooke, Ezekiel, p. 366, says that 33:21 "marked the fulfillment of his [Ezekiel's] warnings, and set him free to take up the task of reconstruction".

However, I suggest that the turning point which agreeably starts in ch. 33 stretches beyond the information of the fall of the city and is made clear in the narrator's description of the vision of the regeneration of the dry bones. In ch. 37 the narrator uses the vision as a means of emphasizing the contrast between the exiles' feelings of death and despair with the divine character's promise of regeneration and hope.

<sup>34</sup> See Eichrodt, Ezekiel, p. 507; Lemke, "Life in the Present and Hope for the Future", p. 166.

<sup>35</sup> See Ez. 24:20-26 where the narrator makes it clear that the God in the narrative causes the profanation of his sanctuary.



the great effort made by the God in the narrative to keep his covenant relationship with the people.<sup>36</sup>

The oracle begins with the divine character's word coming to the prophet Ezekiel as he is described as visualizing the establishment of a united Israel through the re-unification of the divided land. The re-uniting of the two divisions is allegorically played out with two sticks joined together; one with the name of Judah written on it and the other with the name of Joseph written on it. The divine character proclaims in 37:19,

I am about to take the stick of Joseph (which is in the hand of Ephraim) and the tribes of Israel associated with him; and I will join with it the stick of Judah, and make them one stick, that they may be one in my hand. RSV

The narrator emphasizes the oracle's focus on the activity of the God in the narrative as the source which will bring about the promised events. In v. 19 the divine character is shown to emphatically proclaim that it is he who takes the two sticks and unites them together as one (kōh-'āmar 'āḏōnāy YHWH hinnēh 'ānī lōqēah). This emphasis is made again by the narrator in v. 21 using the same words, except that, at this point, he refers to the divine character's taking of the Israelites out from among the nations where they are in exile (kōh-'āmar 'āḏōnāy YHWH hinnēh 'ānī lōqēah). The emphasis is clearly that all the participants will know that it is YHWH who has intervened.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> The relationship is retained even though it is through a new and everlasting covenant of peace (37:26).

<sup>37</sup> See Zimmerli, Ezekiel, p. 275.

The content of this pericope shows that the earlier days when all of Israel was one nation will again return. This new, united nation will be created from the people restored from the first and second exile, apparently even including the exiles of the northern kingdom (37:16b). Andrew agrees that the implication in this pericope is that the exiles of Judah met descendants of the northern Israelite exile.<sup>38</sup> Andrew suggests that the "reunion consists in a gathering of all Israelites from their exile, their being brought back together to their common land".<sup>39</sup> If this is the case, the inclusion of the exiles of the two kingdoms, as having met in their exile, would have significantly and elaborately helped to portray the divine character's act of creating one kingdom. This total regathering of God's people adds to the importance of the actions of the divine character in chs. 20 and 36 for the sake of vindicating his "holy name". Since the exile of God's people is shown in ch. 20 as that which profanes the divine character's name, the gathering of all exiles would bring to an end the profaning of his name.

The pericope of the gathering and reunification of the exiles (37:15-28) is not detached from the pericope of the vision of dry bones (37:1-14). The promise of restoration given in the vision of 37:1-14 is restated in the second pericope.<sup>40</sup> In this section of the narrative the divine character proclaims that the

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<sup>38</sup> Responsibility and Restoration, p. 195.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., p. 196.

<sup>40</sup> See Wevers, Ezekiel, p. 281.

exiles<sup>41</sup> will be gathered from their captivity and brought back to their own land (v. 21). This promise reflects the intent of the vision of the restoration of the dry bones (37:12b)<sup>42</sup> and of the promise of God to the exiles in the second "vision" pericope (11:17b).<sup>43</sup> The bones were brought together (*vatiqr<sup>e</sup>bû*) in the vision in 37:1-14, and now too the nation is brought together (*v<sup>e</sup>qārab*) in 37:17.<sup>44</sup>

The fulfillment of the repeated promise of restoration will be just a minor act in comparison to the divine character's claim to purify and reorientate the people of the exile into obedience to his ordinances and statutes (37:24b). The narrator shows that the divine character is willing to intervene in extreme ways for the redemption of his divine reputation. In the narrative YHWH's word is clear, he will sanctify Israel so that the nations will know that he is YHWH.

I will save them from their backslidings in which they have sinned, and I will cleanse them; and they shall be my people, and I will be their God...They shall follow my ordinances and be careful to observe my statutes...I will make a covenant of peace with them; it shall be an everlasting covenant with them, and will set my sanctuary in the midst of them for evermore. My dwelling place shall be with them; and I will be their

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<sup>41</sup> 37:21 identifies the exiles as the people to which the oracle is addressing using the phrase "people of Israel who have gone among the nations".

<sup>42</sup> (i.e. "I will bring you home into the land of Israel.")

<sup>43</sup> (i.e. "I will gather you from the peoples, and assemble you out of the countries where you have been scattered, and I will give you the land of Israel.")

<sup>44</sup> See for a similar point Zimmerli, Ezekiel 2, p. 274.



God, and they shall be my people. Then the nations will know that I YHWH sanctify Israel, when my sanctuary is in the midst of them for evermore. (37:23b, 24b, 26-28 RSV)

Cooke refers to the defilement of the sanctuary in 5:11 by the "detestable things" which the residents of the land placed there as he analyzes 37:23.<sup>45</sup> He accepts the fact apparently that 37:23 refers to the backslidings of the people who have fallen, along with Jerusalem, in YHWH's judgment upon those who resided in the land of Israel. If Cooke is correct in his association of the backsliders with the people who defiled the sanctuary in 5:11, then those who have been "cut down" by the God in the narrative are the fortunate recipients of the divine character's promise of restoration to the land and reunification of the nation. They are the very same people to whom the God in the narrative proclaimed that he would not "spare" them or have "pity" on them (5:11). Now the narrator shows that the divine character will finally raise up the people he cut down. Since the first exiles, of which Ezekiel is portrayed as being a part, are included within the people who are to be restored and reunited, however, the question is posed as to what detestable things they have done? Are they included as those who are backsliding?

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<sup>45</sup> Ezekiel, p. 402. Cf. Zimmerli, Ezekiel 2, p. 275. I believe that, if the recipients of the restoration and reunification are the people who are "among the nations" (37:21), it is problematic to conclude that the fallen Jerusalemites are participants in the renewal of the people. Yet the "detestable things" (šiqqûsayik) referred to in 5:11 are associated with the behaviour and activity of the Jerusalemites, not the exiles.

Zimmerli<sup>46</sup> attempts to resolve the same issue by noting 7:20; 11:18, 21; and 20:7f, 30 which he claims refer to the "detestable things" of 37:23. His analysis still appears to exclude the first group of exiles from those who have done detestable things. 7:20 is a reference to the residents in Jerusalem following the first exile. 11:18 refers to the "detestable things" that will be left behind by the Jerusalemites and the inhabitants of the land, referred to in 5:11 and 7:20. These "detestable things" will be removed by the exiles once they are restored to their land. 11:21 is a warning from the God in the narrative to the restored exiles not to follow the behaviour of their compatriots and suffer their judgment because of imitating their behaviour and doing the same "detestable things" in the temple. Ch. 20 is full of references to the abominations of the ancestors of all Israelites (i.e. Judah and "the Israelites associated with him" [b<sup>e</sup>nē yisrā'ēl h<sup>a</sup>bērāv] and Joseph and "the whole house of Israel associated with him" [kol-bēt yisrā'ēl h<sup>a</sup>bērāv]). The narrative reveals that the ancestors of the nation which is now divided also did "detestable things" which we are told the divine character commanded that they stop doing.

The pericope in ch. 20, showing the behaviour of their "fathers" in the exodus (20:7f), is given in response to the inquiry of the elders of Israel in exile who have gathered before

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<sup>46</sup> Ezekiel 2, p. 275.

Ezekiel.<sup>47</sup> This pericope therefore implies that the elders too are a part of the people who do "detestable things". We might suppose that they themselves may not be participants in the "detestable things" of the Jerusalemites and the other inhabitants of the land, yet it is clear that they belong to the people who have their roots intertwined with "detestable things".<sup>48</sup>

This connection between the behaviour of the people in the past and the exiles' behaviour as a people in the present is further revealed in 20:30, where the elders in exile, following the scene of the exodus, are confronted with a question regarding their behaviour. The narrator tells that the divine character inquires of them,

Will you defile yourselves after the manner of your fathers and go astray after their detestable things? When you offer your gifts and sacrifice your sons by fire, you defile yourselves with all your idols to this day. And shall I be inquired of by you, O house of Israel? RSV

This verse indicates that the first group of exiles in the narrative, here referred to as the "house of Israel", are also continuing their involvement with "detestable things", though not in the temple, as portrayed of the Jerusalemites and the rest of the inhabitants of the land. The "detestable things" referred to in 37:23 very clearly relate to the behaviour of the first group of exiles who are obviously included as the recipients of the

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<sup>47</sup> This point is also noted, by Ackroyd, Exile and Restoration, pp. 33, 42.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., p. 109.



promise of restoration and reunification, and also the second group of exiles who have been accused previously. Apparently we are to understand that both groups are the people who are to be brought in from among the nations because they are the people who are among the nations.

Zimmerli's association of the "detestable things" in 37:23 with those in 5:11; 7:20; and 11:18, 21 leads him to include only a portion of the people who are to be restored and reunited in the land of Israel. I conclude that both groups of the exile, however, are directly or indirectly accused of having participated in doing "detestable things", and both groups will be restored to the land by the divine character. The divine character acts for the sake of his name, as has been shown throughout the narrative, not for the responsiveness and obedience of the people.

The pericope closes in showing the stability and security which both the divine character and the people will attain as a result of YHWH's act. The divine character is portrayed as one who will restore the exiled people and, at the same time, create (v. 23) in them the obedience which is required on their part to preserve his honour and presence among them always. The narrator informs us that they will be YHWH's people, and he will be their God (vv. 23b, 27b).<sup>49</sup> The highest climax of the promise of the

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<sup>49</sup> Eichrodt, Ezekiel, p. 515 notes that this reunification and restoration will lead to the sanctification of the divine character's name. Eichrodt, however, links the act of divine sanctification with divine "compassion". He also adds that God's compassionate act will cause the people to bow down in obedience

God in the narrative comes in v. 26b where he promises that his sanctuary will stand in the midst of the people for ever (l<sup>e</sup>\`ôlām).<sup>50</sup> It is this promise of the "new" sanctuary of YHWH in which the narrator sets the stage for the extensive "vision of God" in chs. 40-48 which reveals the divine's permanent presence among his people in the land of Israel.<sup>51</sup>

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to him. The crucial point which Eichrodt has missed is the narrator's omission of either of these points. When a motive for the actions of the divine character has explicitly been given his actions are said to be for his name's sake.

<sup>50</sup> For a similar position, see Zimmerli, Ezekiel 2, p. 276.

<sup>51</sup> See Zimmerli, Ezekiel 2, p. 276.; Ackroyd, Exile and Restoration, p. 180.

## CHAPTER 6

The Third Mar'ôṭ 'Ēlōhîm:  
For YHWH's Name's Sake,  
The Name of the City Shall be Forever More  
"YHWH is There"

### Introduction

The divine character in the narrative of Ezekiel has been favourably portrayed by the narrator in spite of the events of both the two exiles of his people and the fall of Jerusalem. My task has been to show how, in these negative events, the narrator has portrayed the divine character's actions as ultimately resulting in a favourable presentation of the character and as indirectly resulting in a favourable outcome for the surviving people.

The opening "vision of God" in chs. 1:2-3:15 described the presence of the glory of YHWH among the exiles in the land of Babylon outside the temple and the land of Israel. The divine character is elaborately portrayed as manifesting himself to his people in captivity. The abominations in Jerusalem and the land of Israel are described in the second "vision of God" in chs. 8-11. The narrator says that the God in the narrative is being forced to abandon the temple and the land of Israel because of the abominations of the inhabitants of the land (8:6). It is possible that the abominable behaviour of the Jerusalemites contributed to the reason for the divine character's exilic manifestation, therefore, according to the narrative. The move of the God in the narrative from the temple in Jerusalem is



elaborately described as the narrator gives a full account of the departure of the glory of YHWH in ch. 11. The movement of the glory of YHWH in the narrative has not ended, however. In the final "vision of God" in chs. 40-48 the narrator has more to add to the theme of the movement and the presence of the God in the narrative. The narrator, through the content of this "vision", indicates that this pericope is related to the events of the "visions of God" in chs. 1:2-3:15; 8-11; and ch. 37. After the promise of restoration has been made in ch. 37, the narrator prepares for the grand finale, closing the narrative with this major vision showing that the divine character will restore the people and the nation of Israel as he has said. In this vision we will see that the God in the narrative will return to Jerusalem with all "the house of Israel".

#### Introduction to the Third Mar'ôṭ 'Ēlōhîm

The third "vision" pericope is full of numerous observations and proclamations regarding the purification of the temple, city, land, and people, plus the restoration of the presence of the glory of YHWH in the city of Jerusalem in the midst of the land of Israel. I suggest that each of these events, whether verbal or visual, will show the divine character's movement and actions and will result in a favourable portrayal of the God in the narrative. My analysis of this "vision" will focus therefore on portions of this detailed "restoration" in order to observe the

significance of the theme of the divine character's movement and the narrator's portrayal of the God in the narrative as it relates to the preceding text.

The Prologue of the Third Mar'ôṭ 'Ēlōhîm  
Ezekiel 40-48

The closing "vision"<sup>1</sup> consists of chs. 40-48 in Ezekiel. The narrator opens, as in the visions of 1:2-3:15 and 8:1-11:25, with a date which relates to the exile. In this vision, however, the exilic date is reinforced by the additional date with its reference to the fall of Jerusalem.<sup>2</sup> The additional detail given in the date formula is of importance since it emphasizes that the vision occurred after the second exile.

The narrator further parallels the three "visions" pericopes with the formulary phrase of the character Ezekiel, "the hand of YHWH was upon me" (40:1; 37:1; 8:1; 1:3). The third vision pericope opens with the introduction,

In the twenty fifth year of our exile, in the beginning of the year, on the tenth of the month, in the fourteenth year after the fall of the city, in essence this very day, the hand of YHWH was upon me, and he brought me there. In visions of God he caused to bring me to the land of Israel and he set me upon a very high mountain, upon it was a likeness of a structure of a city on the south. (40:1-2 RSV)

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<sup>1</sup> The vision is introduced by the phrase mar'ôṭ 'Ēlōhîm. This is the third of only three occurrences in Ezekiel (see 1:1; 8:3; 40:2).

<sup>2</sup> The news of the fall of Jerusalem made it to Ezekiel "in the twelfth year" of his exile (33:21).

According to the narrator's dates in the narrative, 19 years after Ezekiel's second vision experience, and 13 years after Ezekiel learns of the fall of the city of Jerusalem, he then receives the third<sup>3</sup> of his vision experiences.

The opening of the third vision has missing components which are found, however, in the openings of the first and second visions. The narrator had previously compared the second vision with that of the first (8:4; 3:23; 1:1, 3). The text introducing the second vision distinctly said that this vision was like the vision that Ezekiel saw previously in the plain of the land during his exile (8:4), which was like the glory which he had seen by the river Chebar as related in the opening of the first vision (3:23). The connection between this vision and the previous visions is not made until 43:3 ("And the vision I saw was..., like the vision which I had seen by the river Chebar") when we are told that Ezekiel observes the return of the glory of YHWH to the previously described temple (40:5-42:20).

There are some who question the integrity of the opening chapters of the third "vision" pericope. Zimmerli, as a redactionist, argues that 40:1-4 and 43:1-3 were originally an integrated unit as the prologue. He suggests that the division arose when the "school" of Ezekiel sought to focus on the holy of holies. It was then they added what Zimmerli calls "the great guidance vision" in which Ezekiel is taken around the restored temple and informed of its measurements. Zimmerli claims that,

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<sup>3</sup> Ch. 37 was not directly identified as a vision in the text.



The necessary further details were added in 41:5-15a in a rather artless, list-like fashion. The whole measurement process was finally rounded off by a concluding section in 42:15-20.<sup>4</sup>

Although Zimmerli's contributions to the study of Ezekiel are considerable, the fact remains that it is impossible to accurately determine the original structure of a text other than the text which lies before us as the reader. Since the text of the new temple tour does exist between 40:5 and 43:1 (the section that Zimmerli accepts as the prologue) it is possible that its location says something more than Zimmerli's conclusion that it is out of place.

Parunak suggests that the division of the formulaic prologue in chs. 40-43 is due to the narrator's need to describe the setting in which the tour of the new temple of chs. 43-46 will occur.<sup>5</sup> If Parunak is correct the narrator intends for us to understand that there is a difference between this temple and the one previously mentioned in the description of the vision of the Jerusalem temple in chs. 8-11. Does the narrator's description of the temple imply that this temple in chs. 40-48 is new and therefore does not yet exist? If this is the case the description is given in order to clarify that this was a new temple distinct from the temple which the divine character abandoned in ch. 11. If Parunak's explanation is accurate, a portion (40:1-4) of the

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<sup>4</sup> Walther Zimmerli, Ezekiel 2, p. 412.

<sup>5</sup> H. van Dyke Parunak, "Structural Studies of Ezekiel," Ph.D. diss., Harvard University (Ann Arbor, Michigan: University Microfilms, 1978), pp. 508-509.

formulaic prologue introduces chs. 40-42,<sup>6</sup> and the remaining portion of the prologue introduces chs. 43-48.<sup>7</sup> Parunak contends that,

It is as though the author, at the start of 40, begins to give a vision on the plan of 8-11. But before he even completes the prologue, he realizes that he cannot assume that his audience will understand the setting of the new vision as they did that of 8-11. Thus he pauses to describe the new temple, before resuming his prologue and the oracular temple tour in chapter 43.<sup>8</sup>

The chief weakness in Parunak's analysis is his failure to support his assertion that the narrator would interrupt the prologue in order to make a point of clarification. The narrator has not interrupted any previous introductions to explain or elaborate on a specific point that may have needed some clarification. Furthermore, the descriptive detail given to the prophet in the temple tour in 40:5-42:20 is clearly too extensive to be an interruption of the prologue. I therefore conclude that 40:5-42:20 is the narrator's description of the first of Ezekiel's visions of the new temple. 43:1 is the introduction to the vision of the glory of YHWH entering this new temple. My reading sees the narrator's description of the temple tour not as

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<sup>6</sup> (i.e. the date formula : 40:1, reference to the "hand of YHWH" : 40:1, the heading "mar'ôṭ 'lōhîm" : 40:2, the bronze-like man : 40:3, and the transport from Babylon to the temple in Jerusalem : 40:2).

<sup>7</sup> (i.e. the reference to the "glory of the God of Israel" : 43:2, related to the vision by the river Chebar : 43:3, use of the verbs nāsā' (lift up) and bō' (come, brought) with the rūah as subject and Ezekiel as object).

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., p. 509.

an interruption of the prologue therefore, but rather as a vision in and of itself.

### The Temple Tour of the Third Mar'ôṭ 'Ēlōhîm

The temple tour is used by the narrator to develop the theme of the movement of the God in the narrative and, likewise, the portrayal of the divine character. Although each event may appear unrelated, the narrator subtly indicates their significance in showing the divine character.

We are told by the narrator that the first event that happens in the third visionary experience is that Ezekiel is transported and moved to a very high mountain. The name of the area to which the prophet has been moved is not explicitly stated by the narrator. The description which follows, though, indicates that the city which Ezekiel sees before him is the city of Jerusalem.<sup>9</sup>

As the narrator describes Ezekiel standing upon the mountain overlooking the city, we are told that the prophet sees a familiar image of the man which he saw in the two vision pericopes of chs. 1:2-3:15 and chs. 8-11. The man with bronze-like appearance is seen standing "with a line of flax and a measuring reed" in the east gateway of the temple (40:3). In the

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<sup>9</sup> This conclusion is also arrived at by M.E. Andrew, Responsibility and Restoration, p. 204; Zimmerli, Ezekiel 2, p. 538; Jon Douglas Levenson, Theology of the Program of Restoration of Ezekiel 40-48 (Missoula, Montana:Scholars Press, 1976).



narrative the bronze-like man informs the prophet of the purpose of the vision. He proclaims,

Son of man, look with your eyes, and with your ears hear, and set your heart to all which I shall show you, for you are brought here in order to show you; declare all that you see to the house of Israel. (40:4)

The narrator makes it clear in 40:5 that the third of the major visions seen by Ezekiel is in front of the temple. The narrator describes the measuring of the temple and its surrounding structure by the bronze-like man in 40:5-42:20. In this portion of the vision the bronze-like man transports Ezekiel to the various sections of the temple, measuring their dimensions as they go. The description of the measuring done by the bronze-like man begins at the gateway facing east and progressively moves inward to the inner sanctum of the holy of holies. Through the character of the bronze-like man the narrator describes the architectural detail of the holy of holies; the very place where we would expect the glory of God to dwell. Since the divine character was shown to have abandoned the holy of holies and the temple in ch. 11, it is significant that in the description of the holy of holies in 41:3-4 the presence of the glory of God is not mentioned. It is obvious that the presence of the glory of God is not to be found within this structure. The narrator apparently intends for us to see that the holy of holies is empty of the holy one.

The description of the measuring of the temple is resumed in 42:1. At this time we are told that the bronze-like man brings the prophet to the chambers opposite the temple and the building

on the north side. He proceeds to measure the building (42:1-10a), then moves to the chambers on the south side opposite the yard and the building, and measures them also (42:10b-12).

The narrator's description of the measuring stops only to tell of the bronze-like man's focus on the holiness of the chambers (42:13-14). Each time the holiness of an area has been mentioned, in this portion of the narrative, the focus is upon the priests who are to minister to the presence of the glory of God. As described in the narrative, these chambers are

where the priests who approach YHWH shall eat the most holy offerings; there they shall put the most holy offerings: the cereal offering, the sin offering, and the guilt offering, for the place is holy. (42:13b RSV)

The narrator's reference in this verse to the "priests who approach YHWH" implies that when the duties are carried out there must be a god present to approach. The verse does not say that the priests are at this time working in the temple, but it indicates that when the time comes, the chambers, which have been shown to Ezekiel, will be used for the specified duties of the priests. Since the narrator's description has indicated that there is neither a god nor priests present in the temple, the vision is in anticipation of the coming of the glory of YHWH in 43:4.

The description of the measuring of the temple continues in 42:15. The measurement is now taken of the area surrounding the temple, starting from outside the east gate to the north side, south side, and then to the west side in order to make a distinction and separation between the holy and the common

(42:15-20). The measurement of the area concludes as the prophet and the bronze-like man return to the east gate of the temple (43:1), where the measurement of the temple and surrounding area began (40:6). Therefore, according to the narrative, the prophet has accompanied the bronze-like man observing the temple and its measurements, from the traditional point of view, from the most common of its areas to the most holy of its areas. The temple tour has shown the area and the building to be an empty structure waiting to be occupied.

Such researchers as Zimmerli<sup>10</sup> and Andrew<sup>11</sup> conclude that the description of the measurement of the new temple is structured to focus on the holy of holies. Zimmerli says

"in the continuation of the leading of the prophet, which has its goal not at the altar, but in the temple building to the west of the altar and there in the most westerly room of that building, the holy of holies".<sup>12</sup>

Zimmerli concludes "everything is orientated towards that spot"<sup>13</sup>, the very core of the sanctuary. The sanctity of the area is explicitly identified in 41:4 by the narrator when the bronze-like man informs Ezekiel that the place before them is "the holy of holies" (zeh qōdeš haqq<sup>o</sup>dāšim). Zimmerli concludes that "the tenor of the whole account has been directed towards the showing

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<sup>10</sup> Ezekiel 2.

<sup>11</sup> Responsibility and Restoration.

<sup>12</sup> Ezekiel 2, p. 355.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.



of the location of the realm of the sacred at its highest".<sup>14</sup> It appears that we are to understand that the bronze-like man is claiming that the area before Ezekiel is the holiest of places within the temple. Andrew further suggests that the significance of the holy of holies is emphasized in that it is the point where the bronze-like man goes beyond showing the prophet the temple and gives his first words of explanation.<sup>15</sup>

There are also elements of the new temple structure which appear to reveal something of the accessibility of the presence of the divine character. In the temple of chs. 8-11 the narrator revealed that the God in the narrative was forced to abandon the temple because of the abominations which were practised there. The only information we have regarding the defilement of the temple described in ch. 8 is that it has a hole in the wall of the court (v. 7) and is defaced on the inside with graffiti of "all kinds of creeping things, and loathsome beasts, and all the idols of the house of Israel" (v. 10). The narrator also informed us that there was an image of jealousy north of the altar gate, in the entrance (vv. 3, 5). Even though a description of the measurements of the defiled temple is absent, is it possible that the narrator intends for us to accept that something was wrong with the structure of the temple in ch. 8, which enabled the people to commit the abominations in the sanctuary? If this were the case, the narrative implies that the old structure of the

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid., p. 356.

<sup>15</sup> Responsibility and Restoration, p. 206.

temple was not suitable for the defence of the divine character's sacred and holy presence. Logically when the structure of your house is indefensible you change its structure. The temple is restructured therefore to eliminate the areas which would be accessible for the practise of abominations. The area of holiness has been expanded and the new structure will protect it from profanation.<sup>16</sup>

### YHWH's Absence in the Temple Tour

As the narrator describes the new temple, the absence of the divine character is obvious. This point is evident in the four statements made by the bronze-like man in this pericope. Each of

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<sup>16</sup> The prominent features of the new temple in ch. 40 are enormous gates 13 cubits in breadth (approximately 19 feet) with an opening of 10 cubits in breadth (14 1/2 feet). These gates of the new temple are an obvious contrast to the structures of the temple mentioned in 2 Kings 15:35 and Jeremiah 26:10 and 36:10 which are merely referred to as the "upper gate" and the "new gate". If the new temple is structured in such a way as to keep abominations away from the divine character's holy presence, these gates would serve as fortifications for the protection of YHWH's holiness.

Zimmerli, Ezekiel 2, p. 381, agreeably addresses these new structures in a similar manner.

"The three gates are not orientated towards the geometrical center of the square, but towards the temple which lies on the west side of the inner court. Its rear thus (in contrast to 1 Chr 26:18) has no entrance of its own, no "road" (mslh) nor gate in alignment with it. It in fact leaves no place for a building such as the prvrin of 2 Kgs 23:11 in which symbols of a foreign cult could be housed. This western side is blocked off by the restricted area immediately behind the temple building and by the shapeless "structure" which is nowhere explained by means of a particular indication as to its purpose."

the four statements refer indirectly to the necessity of the presence of the divine character.

Throughout the vision of the measuring of the temple the bronze-like man speaks only four times. He first speaks in 40:45-46 with regard to the chambers of the priest who "come near to YHWH to minister to him". He speaks again in 41:4 where he informs the prophet that the inner room, where the bronze-like man stands, is "the holy of holies" of the temple. He speaks for the third time in 41:22b with regard to "the table which is before YHWH". He speaks for the fourth time in 42:13-14 with regard to the north and south chambers opposite the yard which he states are "holy chambers, where the priests who approach YHWH shall eat the most holy offerings". Each of these four statements suggests that the holy presence of YHWH is necessary for the temple to be complete. The duties of the priests who are to "come near to YHWH to minister to him" convey that the God in the narrative shall be present in order to be ministered to. The holy of holies is the place within the temple where one would expect the presence of YHWH to abide. The "table which is before YHWH" indicates that the divine character shall be within the temple in order to have the table before him. And, as mentioned earlier, the "priests who approach YHWH" with regard to the holy offerings, indicate that the God in the narrative shall be present in order to be approached. Though each of these verses suggest that the holy presence of the divine character is expected, none imply, however, that the glory of God is actually,



at this time, present within the temple or the city. The narrator in the entire description shows quite the opposite. In the temple tour the narrator shows that the divine character is nowhere to be seen.

The narrator had revealed in his description of the temple and its holy places that the God in the narrative is absent. In the description he has abstained from making any reference to the actual presence of the divine character. We have followed the bronze-like man in the narrative as he has shown the temple to the prophet from the outside inward and the inside out without any reference to the glory of God. The presence of the God in the narrative, however, had been descriptively shown in the description of Ezekiel's vision which he had by the river Chebar in the land of the exiles (41:2-28). The divine character's presence was descriptively shown in Ezekiel's vision of the temple in ch. 10. In the first vision then, the God in the narrative is manifested among the exiles away from the temple; and in the second vision he is shown departing from the temple, moving towards the east (possibly towards the exiles in the direction of Babylon). Where is the presence of the divine character, we ask, in the third vision pericope?

#### **The Manifestation of the Presence of the Glory of YHWH**

In view of what has been said about the portrayal of the divine character in other pericopes, it is not surprising that

the absence of the God in the narrative in the vision of the temple tour is part of the narrative process used to highlight the imminent vision of the approaching presence of the divine. The emphasis on the structure of the earthly dwelling of the divine character, and the clear avoidance of expressing the divine's presence, set the stage for the coming of the God in the narrative to the new temple. As soon as the narrator tells us that the prophet is brought back to the east gate the figure, which has been missing, comes onto the scene (43:2).

The divine character's absence from the temple, as implied in the temple tour, is clearly revealed in the description of his manifestation in 43:2. The narrator describes the approach of the glory of the God of Israel from the east. The return of the God in the narrative from the east is congruent with the departure of the divine character in the direction of the east in 11:23. The easterly return of the glory of YHWH shows the vision pericope of chs. 40-48 to be the counterpart of the vision pericope of chs. 8-11.<sup>17</sup> The absence and return of the divine character indicates that the God in the narrative has not been in the temple for the past 19 years (i.e., since his departure in 11:23). As the narrator has shown in the opening section of the first vision pericope of 1:2-28, and as stated by the divine character in the second vision pericope in 11:16, God has been among the exiles in

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<sup>17</sup> M. E. Andrew, Responsibility and Restoration, p. 207, agrees that the two pericopes are counterparts. Cf. Jon Douglas Levenson, Theology of the Program of Restoration of Ezekiel 40-48, p. 10.

Babylon. In the narrative the divine character has not been in the temple of Jerusalem since the abandonment of the temple described in ch. 11. The event of the coming of the glory of the God of Israel to the temple in 43:2 is related both to the promise of restoration made to the exiles in ch. 37, and to the departure of the divine character from the temple and the city of Jerusalem as revealed in the second vision pericope (8:1-11:25).

The activity and presence of the divine character in both the first vision in chs. 1:2-3:15 and the second vision in chs. 8-11 are connected to the activity of the divine character in 43:3.

And the vision I saw was...like the visions which I had seen by the river Chebar; and I fell upon my face.  
(43:3 RSV)

The narrator emphasizes then that the presence of the God in the narrative, which Ezekiel is said to see coming to the new temple, is the same as the presence of the divine character the prophet saw in Babylon.

The narrator is explicit in his declaration in 43:4-5 and 44:4 that the glory of YHWH (i.e. the glory of the God of Israel) enters the new sanctuary.

As the glory of YHWH entered the temple by the gate facing east, the rûah lifted me up, and brought me into the inner court; and behold, the glory of YHWH filled the temple. (43:4-5 RSV)

And behold, the glory of YHWH filled the temple of YHWH; and I fell upon my face. (44:4 RSV)

The narrator's expression that "the glory of YHWH filled the temple" is not unusual since the divine character's presence is



described similarly in the Exodus story (i.e. Exodus 40:34) and of 1 Kings 8:11 and 2 Chronicles 5:14; 7:1-3. The coming of the divine character's presence, at this time, also communicates the absence of the God in the narrative previous to this manifestation. The narrator has revealed through the three vision pericopes that the very presence of the God in the narrative has been described as appearing outside the temple and the land, then as departing the temple and the city of Jerusalem, and finally as entering the new temple.

#### The Bronze-Like Man and the Glory of YHWH

In the first vision pericope the man with the appearance of bronze and fire was said to be the "likeness of the glory of YHWH" (1:26-28). Even though the Hebrew word for bronze is different in chs. 1 and 8 (ḥašmal) from the word used here in chs. 40-48 (n<sup>o</sup>ḥošet), it is evident that in the third vision pericope the narrator subtly continues to reinforce the divine nature of the bronze-like man through his activity within the temple tour.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> This interpretation counters the suggestion of Zimmerli, Ezekiel 2, p. 348, that

the idea that (YHWH) himself was present in the man has been refuted, on good grounds, by Rautenberg. The man's function is limited to leading the prophet and measuring the temple building and the commentary of what he saw emanated, in that earlier passage, from (YHWH) himself." (p. 348).

See also Von Willy Rautenberg, "Zur Zukunftsthora des Hesekiel," ZAW 33 (1913), p. 92 who argues that the man is not the same as

In the narrator's description of the temple tour the prophet is brought, by the bronze-like man, to various areas and places within the temple. Yet, when it comes to measuring the areas designated as the "holy" place of the temple, the prophet is left behind as the bronze-like man enters in order to measure its dimensions. The exclusion of the prophet from following the bronze-like man into the "holy" area is seen in 41:3-4.

Then he went into the inner room and measured the jambs of the entrance, two cubits; and the breadth of the entrance, six cubits; and the sidewalls of the entrance, seven cubits. And he measured the length of the room, twenty cubits; and its breadth, twenty cubits, beyond the nave. And he said to me, "This is the most holy place." (41:3-4 RSV)

The implication of the prophet being left behind as the bronze-like man enters the most "holy" place is that Ezekiel is not allowed to enter this "holy" place because he is not God or the high priest. On the other hand the bronze-like man is not hindered from entering the most "holy" place of the temple. This evidence does support the conclusion that this bronze-like man is himself the divine character and thus able to enter. It would appear that the bronze-like man in the third vision is the same as the man of bronze and fire in the first vision.

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YHWH because of his late appearance following the transporting of Ezekiel in 40:2. Rautenberg (p. 98) says that a decisive factor in his interpretation that YHWH is not the same as the bronze-like man is that the divine is referred to in the third person. The weakness of Rautenberg's argument is evident since the divine character frequently refers to himself in third person as do the people of Israel in other text. Thus Rautenberg's evidence, identified by Zimmerli as "good grounds" for support of his argument that YHWH and the bronze-like man are not the same, is weak in comparison to the ambiguity of the two supernatural characters in the third major vision in chs. 40-48.

The presence of the bronze-like man and the glory of YHWH simultaneously in the prophetic narrative, however, is somewhat confusing with regard to the synonymy of the characters. Following the temple tour the prophet observes the return of the divine character to the temple, while, at the same time, the bronze-like man is standing beside him. The problem caused by the simultaneous presence of the two characters is resolved as the narrator integrates the two in the events of the narrative in the third vision pericope. This parallel between the two characters becomes slightly confused in 43:6, however, after the God in the narrative has entered the temple, and when Ezekiel hears him speaking from within the temple. The narrative is clear in showing that the bronze-like man is standing beside Ezekiel when he hears the voice of YHWH speaking from the temple (43:6). There is no doubt that the voice coming from the temple is of YHWH, for he makes such claims that only the God in the narrative himself can make.

Son of man, this is the place of my throne and the place of the soles of my feet, where I dwell in the midst of the people of Israel for ever. And the house of Israel shall no more defile my holy name, neither they, nor their kings, by their harlotry, and by the dead bodies of their kings, by setting their threshold by my threshold and their doorposts beside my doorposts, with only a wall between me and them. They have defiled my holy name by their abominations which they have committed, so I have consumed them in my anger. Now let them put away their idolatry and the dead bodies of their kings far from me, and I will dwell in their midst for ever. (40:7-9 RSV)<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> See also 43:18.



It is reasonable to suppose that the bronze-like man is only related to the divine character with regard to his vision function as escort in the third vision pericope. He is the means by which God directs and guides the prophet's vision experience before the presence of the glory of YHWH appears in the proper sequence of the story. The bronze-like man functions as the divine character until the character of YHWH officially enters into the telling of the narrative.

The context of the first vision pericope is different with reference to the bronze-like man in that there was no activity necessary other than the manifestation of YHWH. In ch. 1 the bronze-like man is himself seen seated upon the throne of sapphire above the platform borne by the living chariot (i.e. the living creatures). In the first vision pericope the bronze-like man is the form seen by the prophet as the likeness of the glory of YHWH. After the first encounter with the glory of YHWH in ch. 1 the additional activity of the prophet inside the visionary experience is facilitated by the bronze-like man. The bronze-like man is somewhat detached from the story as the very presence of the glory of YHWH in the vision pericopes of chs. 8-11 and 40-48 because he is described as directing the prophet in the visions occurring before the actual encounters with the visionary manifestation of the divine character. In this way, the narrator uses the character of the bronze-like man to guide Ezekiel to the points in each of the two visions where he sees and hears YHWH at the intended time of the vision encounter.

The narrator's presentation of YHWH's speech follows in 43:7-27. YHWH knows the dimensions of the altar of the temple (43:13-17), but it is the bronze-like man in the narrative who has the line of flax and a measuring reed for calculating the dimensions of the temple (40:3). So the two characters share in their knowledge of the dimensions of the new structure. In 43:18 the narrator states that "he" said "son of man, thus says the Lord YHWH". The bronze-like man's reference to YHWH in the third person does not imply that "he" is separate from the divine character ("the Lord YHWH"). In 43:19 the "Lord YHWH" is speaking, in the first person, of the priests "...who draw near to me to minister to me, says the Lord YHWH". As the speech continues, YHWH is spoken of once again in the third person: "You shall present them before YHWH...and offer them up as a burnt offering to YHWH" (43:24). The divine character's speech ends in the first person stating "I will accept you, says the Lord YHWH" (43:27).

The intertwined nature of the two characters continues as the narrator tells us that "he" "brought me (Ezekiel) back to the outer gate of the sanctuary" (44:1). In 44:2 the God in the narrative says to the prophet,

This gate shall remain shut; it shall not be opened,  
and no one shall enter by it; for YHWH, the God of  
Israel, has entered by it; therefore it shall remain  
shut. RSV

Therefore in the context of these verses the narrator equates YHWH with the "man" who transported the prophet in the measuring

of the temple.<sup>20</sup> At the same time, YHWH has been shown to speak of himself in the third person. Though it is somewhat confusing to have YHWH speaking of himself as if he were another character of the narrative, the narrator has used this technique.

Menahem Haran<sup>21</sup> attempts to resolve the question of the connection, or lack of one, between the bronze-like man and the God in the narrative by postulating a redactional history. Haran suggests that chs. 40-48 should be viewed as consisting of two distinct sections which have been linked together. These sections are the "descriptions of visions" and "prescriptions of laws". In the first type (i.e. the visions sections) the narrator merely reveals what Ezekiel sees as he is led from place to place by the "man with the appearance of bronze". Haran categorizes these sections by their usual use of the

phrases which indicate the movement of Ezekiel through various parts of the restored temple (e.g. "and he brought me", "and he brought me out", "and he brought me back", "and he led me").<sup>22</sup>

In the second type (i.e. the law sections) the narrator relates the words of the divine character given to Ezekiel. These sections are usually headed by the formula "Thus says the Lord

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<sup>20</sup> Eichrodt, Ezekiel, p. 560 notes the integration of the two characters in ch. 44. Eichrodt says "the Lord who spoke directly to his prophet retires behind the divinely-sent interpreter of his command; his transcendence is thus heightened."

<sup>21</sup> "The Law-Code of Ezekiel XL-XLVIII and its Relation to the Priestly School", HUCA 50 (1979), pp. 45-71.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., pp. 47-48.



YHWH" (43:18; 44:9; 45:9, 18; 46:1, 16; 47:13).<sup>23</sup> The law sections are set apart from the visions sections, therefore, by the presence of the voice of the divine character.

Haran points out that the formula which normally introduces the sections of the "prescriptions of laws" is sometimes missing. The law sections are obvious by context, however, and are still assumed to be YHWH's words, as is shown by the first person suffixes of nouns and the first person verb forms.<sup>24</sup> Haran concludes that

such expressions, all of which allude to God as the speaker, occur extensively in the law sections, but in fact are missing from the visions.<sup>25</sup>

Haran's explanation for his conclusion, as earlier mentioned, is not so simple to discern in the text. It is obvious where a section of the speech of the God in the narrative begins when the formula, "Thus says the Lord YHWH", is used. It is not so obvious where these speeches of YHWH end, however, and another portion of the "vision section" begins. In 43:18, for example, the character identified as "he" addresses Ezekiel as "son of man"<sup>26</sup> and adds as a preface to what "he" says "thus says the

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid., p. 48.

<sup>24</sup> (e.g. "my throne" 43:7, "my holy name" 43:7, 8, "I will accept you, says the Lord YHWH" 43:27, "my sanctuary" 44:7, 8, 9, 11, 15, 16, "to minister to me" 44:15, 16, "my guard", "when the people of Israel went astray from me", "to serve me", "my people" 44:23, 45:9).

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., p. 49.

<sup>26</sup> Ezekiel is addressed as "son of man" in 40:4 by the bronze-like man.

Lord YHWH". Haran's argument would identify the "he" as YHWH. Yet this is not clear when the speech stops and the character identified only as "he" leads the prophet back to the outer gate of the sanctuary where "he" explains why the gate is shut. Then once again the character "he" leads Ezekiel to the front of the temple where the prophet observes the "glory of YHWH" filling the temple. At this time the narrator makes it clear that YHWH speaks to Ezekiel addressing him as "son of man", but without the preface "thus says the Lord YHWH". The words of the character identified as "he" overlap with the words of the one speaking to Ezekiel from the temple (43:6b). In the same way, both the character of the bronze-like man and YHWH address the prophet as "son of man". The text itself has thus implied, through the ambiguity of the characters of the "bronze-like man" and the God in the narrative, that the two are both evidence of the one "divine character".<sup>27</sup>

The clouding of the distinction between guide and God also occurs in 46:16-19ff. when the formula is used "thus says the Lord YHWH" (v. 16) and, with no indication that the character has changed, reveals that "then he brought (Ezekiel) through the entrance...to the north row of the holy chambers for the priests" (v.19). It is clear that the God in the narrative is the one speaking because of v.18 where he refers to his people as "my

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<sup>27</sup> (e.g. "and he said to me, 'Son of man, thus says the Lord YHWH...you shall present them before YHWH...And when they have completed these days onward the priests shall offer upon the altar your burnt offerings and your peace offerings; and I will accept you, says the Lord YHWH'" 43:18, 24-27).

people". Yet the guide has clearly been established as the man gleaming like bronze. The two characters, YHWH and the bronze-like man, here also appear to be two extensions of the same divine character.

The narrator's description in ch. 47 begins with the supernatural guide (i.e. the bronze-like man) bringing Ezekiel to the door of the temple (47:1) where he sees water "issuing from below the threshold of the temple toward the east". At this point Ezekiel is transported to various positions along the flow of the water as the "man" measures the depths of the water (47:2-6a). The narrator has made no reference to the divine character, as of yet. The transporter then speaks to Ezekiel explaining the purification and new life which this "living water" brings to the land (47:6b-12). Unexpectedly the "man's" explanation of the function of the water is stopped by the formula "thus says the Lord YHWH" (47:13). We must wonder where YHWH has mysteriously appeared from with regard to the events of the narrative. The narrator makes it clear in v. 14 that the divine character is the speaker when we are told,

And you shall divide it equally; I swore to give it to your fathers, and this land shall fall to you as your inheritance. RSV

The proclamation appears to have its closure in 47:23 in the phrase, "says the Lord YHWH". The distinction between the proclamations of the God in the narrative and others loses its clarity, however, when the narrator closes the proclamation in 48:29, which has referred to YHWH only in third person, with the



phrase "says the Lord YHWH" referring to the divine character as the speaker. Haran's argument that the speeches of the God in the narrative are bracketed by these phrases would not be in accord with my observation and conclusion that the lines between the characters are not so easily distinguished. He says that this phrase, "says the Lord YHWH", emphasizes the end of a section, "though it is not in itself a special sign of an ending".<sup>28</sup>

Within the perimeters of Haran's section of "prescriptions of laws" we can see that the text itself is not so clear in its focus on the speaker. The text is somewhat clear in revealing that YHWH is speaking, but at the same time is unclear with regard to the point at which the words of the divine character have ended.

The problem in distinguishing the supernatural characters in portions of the third "vision of God" pericope is also shown in the context of 44:28-45:8. The preceding section has closed with the phrase "says the Lord YHWH" (v. 27), yet v. 28 begins once again using the first person reference to YHWH as the speaker, "I am their inheritance...I am their possession". The speech continues on through ch. 45, yet it refers to YHWH in the third person, "it shall be for the priests, who minister in the sanctuary and approach YHWH to minister to him" (45:4). The narrative has not indicated that there is another character

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<sup>28</sup> "The Law-Code of Ezekiel XL-XLVIII and its Relation to the Priestly School", p. 49.

present other than the divine character (YHWH) and the prophet Ezekiel.

**Consecration of the Dwelling of YHWH  
(Temple, Land and People)**

We are not to interpret that the approach of the glory of YHWH and his entering into the new temple implies that the people can continue to lead lives of rebellion. According to 43:10-12 the people of Israel must have an altered attitude because of the divine character's renewed presence. The God in the narrative requires that they be informed of the importance and necessity of keeping the laws and all the ordinances of the temple (43:11-12). If my interpretation of the previous chapters is accepted, the demands are given in order to maintain the sanctity of the restored earthly dwelling of the glory of YHWH. The narrator emphasizes that not only is the holy of holies to be understood as sacred but now the whole territory upon the top of the mountain shall be most holy (43:12). According to the narrative the divine character shall dwell here for ever. This claim is explicitly given in 43:7 when the divine character says to Ezekiel,

this is the place of my throne and the place of the soles of my feet, where I will dwell in the midst of the people of Israel for ever. RSV

The narrator shows that the divine character's promised everlasting presence in the new temple among his people (those at this time in exile according to ch. 37) will cause them to "be ashamed of their iniquities" (43:10b). The actions of the divine

character will cause the people to remember their abominations which caused his departure from the old temple. They are to avoid the abominations which caused the God in the narrative to abandon the temple and the land as were revealed in the second vision pericope. The God in the narrative is recorded as proclaiming to the people of the future restoration that:

the house of Israel shall no more defile my holy name, neither they, nor their kings, by their harlotry, and by the corpses of their kings, by setting their threshold by my threshold and their doorposts beside my doorposts, with only a wall between me and them. They have defiled my holy name by their abominations which they have committed, so I have consumed them with my anger. Now let them put away their idolatry and the corpses of their kings far from me, and I will dwell in their midst for ever. (43:7b-9 RSV)

Is the narrative once again intending for us to understand that the structure of the new temple provides a means of defence of the "holy" name of the divine character? If the entire mountain top is to be revered as holy then there will be little chance of the forbidden abominations and desecrations entering the earthly dwelling of the divine itself. The God in the narrative proclaims in 43:12,

This is the law of the temple: the whole territory round about upon the top of the mountain shall be most holy. Behold this is the law of the temple. RSV

It is evident that the divine character will protect his holiness by extending the perimeter of the most holy, referred to as the "holy of holies" in 41:4b, by identifying the entire "top of the mountain" as the "most holy".

No sooner has the divine character spoken of the holiness of the entire area of the top of the mountain, than the narrator



informs us that the temple must also be consecrated before it can become the earthly dwelling of the God in the narrative. The narrator's description of the consecration of the new temple is similar to the divine character's command to Moses for the consecration of a new altar (Ex. 29:36) and of the tabernacle (Ex. 40). The consecratory rites purify the structure for "holy" use. The narrator indicates in 43:18-26 that the divine character requires this consecration of the temple before he will accept the people again.

And when they have completed these days, then from the eighth day onward the priests shall offer upon the altar your (plural) burnt offerings and your (plural) peace offerings; and I will accept you (plural), says the Lord YHWH (43:27 RSV)

Zimmerli<sup>29</sup> suggests that the consecration of the altar in Ezekiel 43:20, and especially the application of blood, also connects this event with that of the consecration of the altar in Exodus. Both texts use the two verbs "purify" (*hitte'*) and "expiate" (*kipper*) with regard to the event. "Purify" (*hitte'*) occurs again in Ezekiel 45:18 with reference to the purification of the sanctuary. Zimmerli concludes,

Thus, in the context of the consecration of the altar in Ezekiel 43 it is a question not only of a sanctifying of what was previously profane, but of a removal of the sinful substance which is contrary to God and which clings to the altar which has been man-made of earthly material. May one go one step further and think, in the context of the historical situation, of the sin which lies upon the people and on the site

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<sup>29</sup> Ezekiel 2, p. 433.

of their temple (Ezekiel 8) and which is now to be set aside?<sup>30</sup>

The consecration of the new temple then is used as a reminder of the desecrations which led to the divine character's departure from the earlier temple in chs. 10-11. The narrative shows that the abominations which were practised in the temple by the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and the detestable things (e.g. the image of jealousy, 8:3) which they had placed in the temple or painted on the walls of the temple, are now past. The new temple is purified and thus freed from any contamination from the evil practised in the earlier temple. Thus it is only after the designated period of consecration and sacrifice that the God in the narrative will accept the people and so the sanctuary in their midst as his permanent earthly dwelling.

I suggest that the narrator's mentioning of the divine character's requirement of the consecration of his dwelling is given to show not only the purity of the new temple, as opposed to the desecrated structure abandoned in ch. 11, but also to emphasize the newness of the temple and the new beginning implied in the relationship. We see in the declaration of the God in the narrative that the people had not only committed abominations which caused him to abandon the temple (8:6), but they had in reality broken the covenant: "You have broken my covenant, in addition to all your abominations" (44:7b). In the narrator's eyes the consecration and sanctification of the temple are

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

required therefore to re-establish the covenant relationship which has been broken by the rebellious behaviour of the people of Israel.

### **The Living Water of Purification**

The proclamation of the divine character on the consecration and sanctification of the temple is followed by the narrator's description of the prophet's observation of a river flowing from below the threshold of the temple (47:1-12). The description of a river flowing from the earthly dwelling of the divine character is unique in the literature of the Old Testament. The only other texts containing a similar image are found in Zechariah 13:1 where the prophet prophesies that on the day of YHWH a fountain shall be "opened for the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem to cleanse them from sin and uncleanness", and in Zechariah 14:8 where, on that day, "living waters shall flow from Jerusalem". This "living" river, seen by Ezekiel flowing from below the threshold of the temple, is a sign of the renewal of life in the narrative. The "living" water will cause stagnant and salt water to become fresh (47:8, 9). The water of the "living" river will cause aquatic life to flourish (47:9-10). The life given by the waters from this river flowing from the temple will spread even to the banks and cause the growth of trees, fruit, and vegetation (47:12). The temple, as the consecrated source of the river, will make the fruit for food and the leaves of the vegetation for healing. Life will be given and life will be



sustained by the powers of the waters of the river. Though the narrator of Ezekiel (ch. 47) does not parallel the texts of Zechariah in its explicit reference to cleansing, cleansing is implied by the changes which occur as the waters flow through the land. The narrator, in 36:8 and 36:14, has shown the land (i.e. "mountains of Israel") to have failed to support the people of Israel. The land is told by the divine character that it will "no longer devour men and no longer bereave your nation of children" (36:14). The God in the narrative promises that it will shoot forth branches and yield fruit for the people Israel who are soon to come home (36:8). This evidence shows that the land will therefore be "cleansed" of its desolation and given new life.

The image of purification in Zechariah is seen in the cleansing which explicitly takes place in Ezekiel 36. In the narrative of Ezekiel the "house of Israel" is promised by the God in the narrative, following the address to the "mountains of Israel", that it will be sprinkled with water and cleansed from its uncleannesses (36:25). I suggest that the water in ch. 47 which is seen to flow from the temple, though clearly giving life, is also cleansing the land from its impurities which hindered life.<sup>31</sup> The image of water flowing from the temple and its ability to cause life would also show that the land is cleansed by the pure water. The flowing water would serve as the ritual purification (i.e. mikvah) of the land (47:1-12). The

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<sup>31</sup> As suggested by M. E. Andrew, Responsibility and Restoration, p. 213.

image of water is often used in Old Testament literature to communicate cleansing and purification as is shown in the texts of 1 Kings 7:23f. and 2 Chronicles 4:2f. The narrator of Ezekiel, himself, has previously portrayed the divine character using the image of water as a means of cleansing the "house of Israel" from their uncleanness derived from their contact with idols (36:25). It is very reasonable to consider that this defiled land, described in the abomination vision of chs. 8-11, is purified, as it is depicted by this image of the water flowing through land. Everything with which this "living water" comes in contact will have new and restored life.

Levenson would like to interpret the idea of the water, which is seen flowing from the temple in Ezekiel ch. 47, as being in line with that of Isaiah 33:20-24 where the divine character is described by the images of "broad rivers and streams". Levenson interprets these images as "a symbol of the divine guardianship over the mountain and the faithful."<sup>32</sup> He insists that the Isaiah text:

includes the notion of a future healing of the presently ailing people and thus conceives of the river as a token or instrument of regeneration, not only with respect to morality, as is the issue of the first passage (Isaiah 8:6-7), but also with respect to nature and its infirmities. In short the Zion of the future is an agent of healing for both nature and human nature. The river which issues from it is an earnest of the coming serenity of the redeemed. Its placidity is a

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<sup>32</sup> Theology of the Program of Restoration of Ezekiel 40-48., p. 11.

proleptic revelation of Israel's restored condition in the coming age.<sup>33</sup>

It appears to me that Levenson reads more from the Isaiah text than is conveyed in the text itself. The text in Isaiah is missing all the elements of life giving and cleansing which is given in the Ezekielian water. The only element that I see as common in the two texts is the image of water.

The narrator's description in Ezekiel 47:1-12 of the water flowing from the temple into the land as a river which makes stagnant water turn fresh upon contact with it (except the marshes and swamps, 47:11) is a metaphorical way of indicating the total renewal of the land. In this portion of the vision the narrator shows a new beginning of the relationship of the God in the narrative and the people with one another and the land. It is appropriate that the narrator's description of the divine character's designation of the boundaries of the land (i.e., 47:13-20) and its division among the tribes of Israel (47:21-48:29) follows the description of the river of life flowing from the new temple. For now we see that the glory of YHWH will abide for ever in the midst of the people.<sup>34</sup> The cleansed people shall inhabit a renewed and vibrant land, and shall worship the divine character who has come to dwell in the consecrated new temple.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid., p. 12.

<sup>34</sup> See 43:7b.

<sup>35</sup> Zimmerli, Ezekiel 2, pp. 509-515 interprets the flowing water in ch. 47 to signify YHWH's presence which is initially looked upon as insignificant. Yet, the significance of the divine character's presence gradually grows to mighty proportions, as the



### The Promise of the Abiding Presence of YHWH

While the divine character has been portrayed as in movement so far throughout the narrative, the emphasis in this third "visions" pericope is placed upon his abiding presence (43:7b). After the divine character's declaration of the commanded consecration of the temple, the prophet is brought to the front of the sanctuary. It is here that Ezekiel again sees the glory of YHWH fill the temple (44:4). As he did in 43:3, he responds to the presence of the glory of YHWH by falling on his face as he did in the first vision pericope when he saw the glory of YHWH by the river Chebar in the land of Babylon (1:28). The presence of the glory of YHWH by the river Chebar is thus parallel to the presence of the glory of YHWH filling the temple in Jerusalem. The narrator shows that the divine presence in both locations evokes the same response from the prophet. The parallel response of Ezekiel to the appearance of the glory of YHWH in both the first and third vision pericopes could be the narrator's means of communicating the fact that the appearance of the glory of YHWH in the midst of the exiles was as real and overwhelming as the appearance of the glory of YHWH in the temple of Jerusalem. The parallel between the two manifestations of the God in the narrative would show that the divine character seen outside the land of Israel was recognized as being the same as having his

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trickle of water from the threshold of the temple gradually grows to a mighty river. Thus the growing presence of the God in the narrative is made evident.

presence in the temple. The divine character, in all his glory, was among the exiles.

The prophet is described as responding to the presence of the glory of YHWH in the same fashion when he sees the divine character in the plain in the land of exile

I...went into the plain, and behold, there too was the glory of YHWH standing, like the glory which I had seen by the river Chebar, and I fell upon my face. (3:23 RSV)

The same response has occurred earlier in the third vision pericope when Ezekiel saw the glory of YHWH returning to the temple in his approach from the east (43:2). This response seems to be parallel to the appearance of the glory of YHWH to the prophet in exile in the first vision pericope (1:28) in his approach from the north (1:4). Both texts communicate the idea that the glory has approached the prophet. In the first vision pericope the fact is shown of the approach of the God in the narrative to Ezekiel in exile in the land of Babylon. In the third vision pericope the fact is shown of the approach of the God in the narrative to Ezekiel and the temple in Jerusalem. The remaining two texts which show Ezekiel's response to the presence of the glory of YHWH also appear to be parallel. In the first vision pericope, following the first appearance of YHWH, Ezekiel sees the glory of YHWH for the second time within the heart of the land of exile in the plain. He falls on his face as if the presence has a similar significance to him as the first appearance. This text's parallel occurs in the third vision

pericope following the presence of the divine character on his return to the temple (43:2).<sup>36</sup>

The narrator shows soon after the glory of YHWH fills the temple, using the same imagery of earlier biblical literature to emphasize the settling of God in the earthly dwelling. In these parallels the narrator frames the narrative of Ezekiel with the sacred manifestation and presence of the glory of YHWH in both the land of exile and later in the temple of Jerusalem. These four appearances of the glory of YHWH stand in parallel to one another because they alone have been shown as significant enough to evoke from the prophet the response of falling on his face. It is not exactly clear what the narrator intends to communicate with Ezekiel's response. The narrator shows that Ezekiel does respond to the presence of the God in the narrative, however, whatever his response may mean.

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<sup>36</sup> The narrator is consistent in his portrayal of Ezekiel in showing that the presence of the glory of YHWH evokes a response from him as it did in the opening vision of chs.1-3:15 and in the presence of YHWH in the plain in 3:23. In 43:3 Ezekiel also responds to the presence of the glory of YHWH; this time by falling upon his face. Throughout the Old Testament people responded to the presence of the glory of YHWH in the same way. Abram "fell upon his face" when in Gen. 17:3 YHWH first appeared to him. Moses "hid his face" when he encountered the presence of YHWH in the burning bush in Ex. 3:6. In Num. 16:22 Moses and Aaron "fell on their faces" before YHWH. Joshua "fell to the earth upon his face" before the ark of YHWH in Josh. 7:6 (see also Lev. 9:24; Num. 20:6; Jud. 13:20; 1 Kgs. 18:39; 1 Chr. 21:16). The narrator's use of this phrase indicates the real presence of YHWH before Ezekiel; just as real as the presence which was before Abram and Moses. The response of Ezekiel to the presence of the glory of YHWH not only correlates his encounter with that of Abram and Moses, but also with the encounter in the opening vision pericope, and the encounter in the plain.



Curiously enough, the narrator does not indicate that Ezekiel responded to the presence of the glory of YHWH in the second "vision" pericope. When Ezekiel is transported in vision to Jerusalem to the gateway of the inner court of the temple, the text only states, "and behold, the glory of the God of Israel was there, like the vision that I saw in the plain" (8:4). Ezekiel does not respond to the presence of the divine character by falling on his face. The narrator does not indicate that Ezekiel made any response to this appearance of the glory of YHWH.

The narrator refers to the glory of the God of Israel again in the second "vision" pericope in 9:3 when he mentions that "the glory of the God of Israel had gone up from the cherub on which it rested to the threshold of the house". He does not indicate that observing the glory of God at this point evoked any response from the prophet. He merely makes the point that the glory of the God of Israel is in motion. In 10:4 the narrator then declares, in addition to the move previously mentioned in 9:3, that the house (i.e., the temple) "was filled with the cloud, and the court was full of the brightness of the glory of YHWH". Yet again there is no declaration of a response from the prophet. The glory of YHWH is observed again in 10:18-19 as it is seen to mount up on the living chariot and move to the east gate of the house of YHWH. The narrator says that the prophet merely observes the activity. In this text Ezekiel has no response to the presence of the glory of YHWH. The final observation of the glory of the God of Israel within the second vision pericope occurs in 11:22-23.

The narrator here declares that the glory of YHWH, mounted upon the living chariot, departs the temple and the city of Jerusalem moving to the eastern mountain range outside the city. Not even the very departure of the glory of YHWH is shown to evoke a response from the prophet. It is as if each of these manifestations of the glory of YHWH are understood to be different from the manifestation and presence of the glory of YHWH seen in the first and third "vision of God" pericopes. Though the prophet is described as encountering the glory of YHWH numerous times in the second "vision of God" pericope, he has no response to the divine presence.

Does the narrator's description of Ezekiel's failure to respond to the appearance of the glory of YHWH in the vision imply anything other than the narrator's inconsistency in describing or mentioning the response of the prophet to the divine presence? If such inconsistencies were interspersed throughout each of the three visions one might accept that the failure to describe any response from the prophet is insignificant. As previously mentioned, however, the narrator is consistent in his communication that Ezekiel fell upon his face when the glory of YHWH was observed in the first and third visions.

The focus of the third "vision" pericope on the abiding presence of the divine character is reinforced as the narrative continues. Yet it should be mentioned that the divine character's presence is not here limited only to the sanctuary. The divine

character's proclamation in 43:7, 9 stretches the perimeters of the his abiding presence. The God in the narrative proclaims, "I will dwell in their midst for ever" (43:9). Zimmerli rightly concludes:

It should be observed here that in this expression there is nothing about (YHWH's) dwelling in his temple, but of his dwelling in the midst of his people Israel.<sup>37</sup>

The finality of the move of the God in the narrative and thus his everlasting presence ('ôlām, 43:7b, 9b) in the midst of the people is apparently testified to in 44:1-2.

Then he brought me back to the outer gate of the sanctuary, which faces east; and it was shut. And YHWH said to me, "This gate shall remain shut; it shall not be opened, and no man shall enter by it; for YHWH, the God of Israel, has entered by it; therefore it shall remain shut.

No man, the narrator says, shall ever open and enter the sanctuary from the east gate which was used by the divine character (43:4) in his entrance into the new sanctuary. The gate has been shut and shall remain closed. The implication of the closed gate is that the God in the narrative shall never again abandon the sanctuary or remove his presence from the midst of the people as is reported in 11:23. The divine character's presence will be forever ('ôlām, 43:7b, 9b). His return to be in the midst of the people is final; no other move will be necessary.

The emphasis on the continued presence of the God in the narrative is communicated again in the regulations for the

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<sup>37</sup> Ezekiel 2, p. 416.



offerings of the people (46:1-15). The prince shall make a daily burnt and cereal offering to the divine character (46:13-15), morning by morning (*babōqer babōqer*). In this way the narrator reveals that the God in the narrative wishes to be honoured 'ôlām *tāmīd* (for ever continuously, 46:14) as he himself has promised to dwell in the midst of the people l<sup>e</sup>'ôlām (for ever, 43:7b, 9b).

The scene of the divine character's abiding presence in the midst of the people appropriately concludes the third major vision and thus the entire prophetic narrative.<sup>38</sup> "From now on" (*mīyyôm*) "the city", not just the sanctuary, shall bear a new name. This name will proclaim to all people the abiding presence of YHWH. The divine character's movement and unexpected presence will no longer surprise his people for he shall abide among them for ever. The city itself bears in its new name the promise of the presence of the God in the narrative. Its name shall be "YHWH is there" (48:35b).<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Parunak, "Structural Studies of Ezekiel", p. 525 also suggests that the theme of the movement of the divine character is drawn to an appropriate end with the new name of the city which "recalls the presence of the glory of the Lord, whose movements have tied together the three mar'ot 'elohim, and thus the entire book."

<sup>39</sup> Zimmerli, *Ezekiel 2*, p. 538 sees the importance of the entire city bearing the name "YHWH is there" which "goes far beyond the mention of the profane Jerusalem within the area of the [*t<sup>e</sup>rômāh*], which is all that 48:1-29 concedes."

(The Nāsî' of YHWH the 'Ôlām)

The divine character's abiding presence is revealed in a unspoken way with regard to the narrator's use of the term nāsî' ("prince") as it refers to the "authority figure" in the restored land. The divine character does not refer to the "ruler" of the people as melek ("king") anywhere in the third vision pericope (chs. 40-48).<sup>40</sup> In 37:22, the God in the narrative says "one king shall be king over them" (melek 'ehād yihyeh l<sup>e</sup>kullām l<sup>e</sup>melek). And in 37:24 the divine character says that this king shall be his servant David ('abdî dāvid melek 'âlêhem). Yet, even in this exception, the narrator identifies the term melek used of David with that of nāsî' (37:25b).

The melek who is the nāsî' of ch. 37 is portrayed as one who will be a part of the divine promise incorporated into the period of restoration and salvation. The same is true of the nāsî' ("prince") of ch. 34. The references to the nāsî' ("prince") in chs. 40-48 also appear to refer to the "prince" as part of the promise of restoration. It appears this future "ruler" will

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<sup>40</sup> The ruler is identified 17 times as nāsî' ("prince") in 44:3; 45:7, 16, 17, 22; 46:2, 4, 8, 10, 12, 16, 17, 18; 48:21 (twice), 22 (twice). The narrator only uses the plural of melek ("kings" m<sup>e</sup>lakim) in 43:7, 9 in reference to those who will no more defile YHWH's "holy name".

function, however, only as a vassal to YHWH.<sup>41</sup> Levenson also suggests,

The office has little or no independence. It is a token of divine rule, a symbol of the fidelity of the nation to its ultimate ruler.<sup>42</sup>

Levenson draws this conclusion from the image of the God in the narrative as shepherd in ch. 34. The narrator claims that the divine character will gather and tend the scattered flock of Israel. Levenson further concludes,

YHWH as king is a shepherd to Israel; YHWH as shepherd tends Israel with the firm but just rule of a king. Thus, the elaborate metaphor of the shepherd in ch. 34 describes what in a regal context critics call the "enthronement" of YHWH...It is the repudiation of Davidic kings and the promise to raise up a Davidid whose relationship with his king and king-maker will preclude further abuses. God does not send his messiah to rule; he rules through his messiah.<sup>43</sup>

Levenson claims that the God in the narrative will rule the restored exiles through the messianic vassal. He rightly supports his interpretation by the divine character's references to the

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<sup>41</sup> I am not persuaded by the arguments of Eichrodt, Ezekiel, p. 477, who suggests that the title "prince" is used to break the association of the chosen of YHWH from "the Canaanite origin of the title" melek "and its associations with despotism and absolute rule". Even though the divine character is not directly identified as "king" of Israel in the narrative, it is possible to infer from Ez. 20:33b that God will be king when the divine character (identified as the "Lord YHWH") says "I will reign over you" ('emlôk 'alêkem). Elsewhere in the OT YHWH is explicitly identified as "king" (see Deut. 33:5; 1 Sam 12:12 where the narrator refers to the time when YHWH was king over Israel; Ps. 10:16; 29:10; Is. 43:15; 44:6; Zep. 3:15).

<sup>42</sup> Theology of the Program of Restoration of Ezekiel 40-48, p. 84.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., p. 87.



ruler as "prince" (nāšî') and not "king" (melek). According to Levenson's conception, the God in the narrative himself is the reigning "king" (melek) of the restored people and the renewed land.<sup>44</sup>

Levenson has sought to harmonize 34:23's "one shepherd", YHWH's "servant David", with 34:15 which shows the narrator's claim that the divine character himself will be the "shepherd of my sheep". However, I do not agree with Levenson's interpretation that 34:23 shows that the God in the narrative will rule "through his messiah". In my view the context of ch. 34 shows that the divine character becomes the "shepherd" only as the interim between the bad shepherds (34:1-10) and the Davidic shepherd. According to the narrative, even after the Davidic shepherd, the people remain the Lord YHWH's flock (34:31). Yet it is his servant David who feeds and rules them (34:23).

Klaus Koch<sup>45</sup> has a different interpretation of the narrator's use of the term nāšî' in Ezekiel. Koch concludes that the use of term nāšî' in reference to the "ruler" of Israel indicates the presence of Babylonian hegemony. The narrator reveals that Israel's future "ruler" will be merely a "prince", not a king. The nāšî' will continue to be a vassal of the

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<sup>44</sup> G. C. M. Douglas, "Ezekiel's Vision of the Temple", p. 424 also concludes that the term nāšî' ("prince") is used with reference to the expected deliverer in Ezekiel's prophecy because YHWH himself is king over the people.

<sup>45</sup> The Prophets 2, tr. Margaret Kohl, 1983, (London: SCM Press Ltd), 1980, p. 116.

Babylonian overlord as the earlier "ruler" Zedekiah. Koch bases his conclusion on the curiosity that

the oracles about the nations have not an angry word to say about Babylon. On the contrary, threats are directed against Nebuchadnezzar's main opponents...<sup>46</sup>

Koch suggests that Ezekiel, even though himself in Babylonian captivity, is portrayed as accepting Nebuchadnezzar as the legitimate figure raised up by YHWH for the people of Israel.

Though the peculiarity is evident of Ezekiel's avoidance of attacking the Babylonian authority, Koch's argument fails to note that the narrator does not explicitly say that the Babylonian ruler is accepted as king. It is inconceivable, likewise, that the narrator would portray Ezekiel as accepting that Babylonian authority ultimately was to control the affairs of the restored people and the renewed land, in view of the glorious promises of the exiles restoration to the land and the renewal of the land itself.

Cooke notes that it is significant that the narrator identifies the head of the restored people with the title "prince", not king. It is evident that the title "king" is used in reference to Jehoiachin (e.g. 1:2), and to the earlier rulers (e.g. 43:7), and even in 37:22, 24 to the one who will reign over the restored people.<sup>47</sup> In the major restoration vision in chs.

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> 37:24 is problematic since it says that the "servant David shall be king over them" and 34:24 says that the "servant David shall be prince among them". The narrator is consistent, in the major vision of restoration in chs. 40-48, in identifying the ruler over the people as "prince".

40-48 the title "king" is avoided. Cooke suggests the vision legislates the principle "that [YHWH] alone is King of Israel".<sup>48</sup>

Cooke notes with regard to the *nāšî'* in chs. 40-48:

A special dignity is indeed accorded to the prince in the temple services, but he may not enter the inner court, and certainly not exercise the priestly rights which the king claimed (44<sup>3</sup>n.). He is endowed with a territory of his own, but again his rights are limited; the regulations on the subject are designed apparently to check the growth of a landed aristocracy, and to assert the principle that Jahveh is ultimately the Owner of Palestine, 46<sup>16-18</sup>.<sup>49</sup>

Cooke's argument is supported by the narrator's focus on the stability which the divine character's presence and authority will bring to the people and the new kingdom. It seems to fit that God in the narrative will be the ruling authority over the restored people. YHWH will be "king". It is apparent that the kingdom will be secure because the divine character's presence will abide among his people for ever.<sup>50</sup> We can now better understand the significance of the name of the restored dwelling, "YHWH is there", which stresses the stability this relationship will bring. The narrator's designation of the "ruler" as *nāšî'* therefore reveals that it is the God in the narrative who is the present and existing ruler among his people.

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid., p. 84.

<sup>49</sup> Ezekiel, p. 497.

<sup>50</sup> Eichrodt, Ezekiel, p. 578 notes that the conditions placed on the "prince" in the restoration vision of chs. 40-48 show that the "prince" "should not be allowed by the new age to develop political power" because the abiding presence of the God in the narrative ensures the protection of the people.



### The Purpose of the Movement and Presence of YHWH

The focus on the divine character by the narrator not only shows the activity of the God in the narrative but also reveals the purpose for the activity. In chs. 40-48 following the re-allotment of the renewed land among the restored and cleansed people the movement of the divine character halts in the "vision". The narrator has given a unique picture of the activity of the divine character in each of the three visions. YHWH's movement towards the exiles, his movement away from the temple, and his approach to the new temple and consecration of it emphasize the narrator's focus on the presence of the God in the narrative. In the narrative YHWH's presence has been seen to be affected by the behaviour of the people. The behaviour of the rebellious house of Israel has caused the circumstances which either led to the threat or themselves threatened the reputation of the divine character. The narrator has shown the divine character's movement to be made only for his sake, not for the sake of the people.

The movement of the God in the narrative to be present among the exiles described in the "vision" in 1:2-3:15 has been clarified by the "vision" in 8:1-11:25 of the departure of the divine character from the temple. The God in the narrative has manifested his presence there,<sup>51</sup> among the exiles, in order to

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<sup>51</sup> See 1:3. The narrator emphasizes that it was "there" among the exiles that the manifestation of YHWH occurred.

redeem his reputation by restoring them to their homeland.<sup>52</sup> The people in exile benefit from the divine character's actions for his name's sake. The God in the narrative also, it is to be noted, is able to return to the chosen land and to his new temple through the restoration of the people of Israel in exile. The dependence of the divine character on the people is evident in that it is they who are to remove the "detestable things and all its abominations" (11:18) which initially led to his departure from the sanctuary (8:6). In the "visions" in ch. 37 and chs. 40-48 the divine character's presence is shown as restored, and his holy reputation has been shown to be vindicated in the restoration of the exiles.

Andrew and Koch both claim that the purpose of the movement of the God in the narrative, and his presence among the people in the "vision" pericopes, are to bring about a response of repentance from the people. Andrew suggests that it is the reaction of the people to YHWH which enables them to be the "recipients of restoration".<sup>53</sup> Koch maintains that human repentance is the turning point of destiny.<sup>54</sup>

Are Andrew and Koch right in suggesting that "repentance" is the purpose of Ezekiel's message? Does the God in the narrative call for a response from the people in order to bring about the restoration, or does the divine character cause the reaction

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<sup>52</sup> See ch. 4, "The Significance of the Name YHWH...", above.

<sup>53</sup> Responsibility and Restoration, p. 217.

<sup>54</sup> The Prophets 2, p. 85.

through the restoration? The narrator of Ezekiel portrays the latter idea. In the narrative God restores the people to the renewed land and enters the new temple before the people have changed their ways. Repentance has nothing to do with the restoration of the exiles to the land and the restoration of the temple (i.e. "the turning point of destiny"). The narrator informs us that it is the concern of the God in the narrative for his holy name (36:20-23) which results in the restoration of the people in exile to the land and his abiding presence in the new temple among the people that will cause them to see their ways and to be ashamed (36:31-32).

According to the narrative, Andrew and Koch have missed the point of the narrator's message. The people's reaction does not cause the restoration. The people's repentance is not a condition for their restoration. On the contrary, it is the restoration which will force the people to react. They will personally benefit from the results of the divine character's actions for the sake of his "holy name". The divine character's concern for his reputation and his proper recognition among his people and the nations has resulted in a favourable situation for his people. They will experience restoration personally because of the divine character's concern for his reputation.

Ch. 16 reinforces the narrator's point that the God in the narrative is eager to maintain a relationship with the people, even though they are disobedient and rebellious:

Yea, thus says the Lord YHWH: I will deal with you as you have done, who have despised the oath in breaking



the covenant, yet I will remember my covenant with you in the days of your youth, and I will establish with you an everlasting covenant...I will establish my covenant with you, and you shall know that I am YHWH, that you may remember and be confounded, and never open your mouth again because of your shame, when I forgive you all that you have done, says the Lord YHWH.  
(vv. 59-60, 62-63 RSV)

These words show that the God in the narrative will forgive the people for their ways though they have broken the very covenant between themselves and him. The condition of repentance is absent in Ezekiel; the divine character will forgive on his own account. This favourable outcome for the people of the divine character's self-interest will cause the obdurate people to be so ashamed that they will not open their mouths again against God.<sup>55</sup>

#### The Three Mar'ôṭ 'Ēlōhîm Viewed in Perspective

As we have seen the narrative began with the description of Ezekiel's encounter with the glory of YHWH in the land of exile (1:4-3:15). The narrator elaborately described the approach and visual characteristics of the manifestation and presence of the God in the narrative in the foreign land of Babylon. The divine character, in all his glory, was distinctly present outside the temple and the land of Israel. In the presentation of this manifestation the narrator made it clear that the divine character's presence was among his exiled people. The full significance of YHWH's presence among the exiles in the narrative

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<sup>55</sup> Cf. Fohrer, History of Israelite Religion, pp. 320-321; Zimmerli, Ezekiel 2, pp. 418-419.

was not revealed until chs. 8-11 when the divine character is said to have shown Ezekiel the circumstances which caused the divine move (8:6).

In chs. 8-11 the narrator vividly showed that the divine character's presence among the exiles as shown in 1:2-3:15 was not just an example of divine omnipresence. For in the "vision" in chs. 8-11 we saw that the divine character moved away from the temple in Jerusalem. The narrator revealed that the divine character could be absent as well as present. It is evident in the narrative that YHWH has left the "chosen" dwelling and land because of the atrocities which the inhabitants have committed. The behaviour of the people caused the God in the narrative to be angry. If he had acted upon his anger they would have been scattered and destroyed. Later in the narrative the divine character's "holy name", the divine's reputation, was profaned because the God in the narrative did eventually act out his anger and sent his people into exile. The profanation of the divine character's reputation was compounded by the people's behaviour while in exile. The God in the narrative established his presence among the exiles in order to vindicate his "holy name", and to establish his presence among his people.<sup>56</sup> The exiles did not need to look towards Jerusalem for their redemption (37:11). The glory of YHWH was no longer there. The glory of YHWH had become a sanctuary to them in their exile (11:16b).

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<sup>56</sup> As seen also by Siegfried Herrmann, Die prophetischen Heilserwartungen im Alten Testament: Ursprung und Gestaltwandel, BWAT (Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer Verlag, 1965), p. 272.

The "vision" pericope in chs. 8-11 is informative, then, about the events which led to the presence of the glory of YHWH in the "vision" in 1:2-3:15. As in the first and second "visions", the narrator uses this "vision" pericope in chs. 8-11 to form the foundation for the coming of the glory of YHWH to the new temple in chs. 40-48.

Zimmerli understands the events of chs. 40-48 to be seen in perspective with the events described in chs. 8-11.<sup>57</sup> However, he fails to show the significance which the pericope of the "vision" in chs. 8-11 gives to the pericope of the "vision" in chs. 40-48. Zimmerli's attempt to address the majority of the issues in the texts has hindered him from showing and possibly seeing the coherence between the "vision" pericopes. Each of the "vision" pericope's portrayals is enhanced by the portrayal in the preceding or following "vision" pericope. In this way the "vision" in 1:4-3:15 is better understood after having read the "vision" in chs. 8-11, and chs. 8-11 give the basis for an understanding of the "vision" in chs. 40-48.<sup>58</sup>

The theme of the divine character's movement and presence has been used by the narrator as the common link between the events of each of the "vision of God" pericopes. The "vision" pericopes of the narrative communicate a coherent message of the

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<sup>57</sup> Ezekiel 2, pp. 327 f.

<sup>58</sup> Parunak, "Structural Studies of Ezekiel", p. 507, arrives at a similar conclusion as Zimmerli. He suggests that, "just as the motifs of chapters 1-3 were adapted and imbedded in chapters 8-11, so the temple tour motif of chapters 8-11 is adapted (from a theme of judgment to one of blessing) and imbedded in 40-48."



importance of the presence of the God in the narrative among a people whose behaviour does not lead to a profanation of his name or itself profane his "holy" name. This message is revealed when the narrative is read with an interest in the portrayal of the divine character.

As the narrative has shown the divine character has moved and established his divine presence among his exiled people as a means of initiating the vindication of his reputation (i.e. his "name's sake"). The exiles in the narrative are to hear and see, through the visions of Ezekiel and the oracles of YHWH, the abominations of their people. They are to hear of the very fall of the city of Jerusalem. Even though the news is disheartening the message is also conveyed that the God in the narrative has not abandoned them. The divine character is portrayed as one who is in their midst. It is not for their sake, however, that the God in the narrative has moved to be present among them. Their ways, even in exile, have not shown them to be faithful to the divine character. The God in the narrative is described as one who will purify the gathered exiles, however, and use them to vindicate his "holy name" and return to the "promised land". The narrator has continued to portray the divine character, even though he acts for his name's sake, as one whose actions are always presented favourably. Seen through the eyes of the narrator, the actions of the divine character in the narrative are based on the vulnerability of his reputation in the covenant relationship.

## CONCLUSION

### The Central Points of the Narrator's Portrayal of the Divine Character

The narrative of Ezekiel has focused on the unique relationship between the divine character, YHWH, and the people of Israel. The intent of my research has been to view the portrayal of the divine character in this covenantal relationship. In each of the preceding chapters I have approached the text with this intention in mind. Within my analysis I have noted how YHWH reacts to the particular situations. I have noted, likewise, how the narrator, in whatever situation and in spite of the true cause of the event, has favourably portrayed the divine character. It is appropriate that I should give some attention to the central points of the narrator's portrayal of the divine character since my focus has been upon them as an anomaly in the narrative.

#### Reading of the Covenant Relationship

The central points to the narrator's portrayal of the divine character are, as previously noted, developed in the interactions between the God in the narrative and the "house of Israel". The interactions between these two characters are due to the agreement entered into by them, according to the narrative. The agreement had been established as a covenant between the two

parties. The significance of the covenant as the basis for the activity between YHWH and his people is clearly seen in the narrator's numerous references to the covenant core expression, "You will be my people, and I will be your God" (11:20b; 14:11; 36:28b; 37:23b).<sup>1</sup> This phrase, or some part of it, was used elsewhere in the Old Testament in describing the cutting of the covenant with Abram (Gen. 17:8) and Moses (Ex. 6:7).<sup>2</sup> In the phrase it is evident that the recognition of the people by YHWH as his people is linked with the people's recognition of YHWH as their God. Critical to the reading of the narrative of Ezekiel is the recognition of YHWH as the divine authority. The reality of the deterioration of the covenant relationship, on the account of the people, shows the problem of their acceptance of YHWH as their God.

Throughout the Old Testament there are numerous scenes which reveal God through the covenant relationship in his contact with his chosen people. For whatever reasons, in viewing the story of this covenantal relationship there are two characters which the narrator will focus upon: God and the covenant people. Although it is accepted that one can read the text with attention being given to both these characters, it is usually the intent of the narrator to draw the reader's attention to one or the other. The narrator of a given story of the covenant relationship,

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<sup>1</sup> See also for references to the covenant relationship 11:20a; 16:8b; 16:59-62; 20:5b; 20:11; 34:30-31.

<sup>2</sup> E.g. Ex. 29:45; Lev. 11:45; 26:12, 45; Num. 15:41; Jer. 24:7; 31:33; 32:38. Hosea uses the negative of the phrase in 1:9.



therefore, will present that story either anthropocentrically or theocentrically depending on the intent. The narrator, in other words, will convey either an interest in and an emphasis on the position of the chosen people and others surrounding this group who may at times be affected by the covenant relationship, or he may convey an interest in the position of the divine character, YHWH, in the covenant relationship. The narrator's emphasis on theocentricity of the narrative of Ezekiel is evident in my analysis.

### YHWH as a Participant in the Covenant

#### The Passibility of YHWH

The focus on either of the two characters will reveal the effect which the covenant relationship has on them. There are times, according to numerous Old Testament texts,<sup>3</sup> at which the divine character is shown to be affected by the behaviour of his chosen people or the attitude of the surrounding nations.<sup>4</sup> These texts show God interacting with the world he created and with

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<sup>3</sup> See for example the texts where the divine character changes his actions (šqb) in response to the behaviour and attitude of his people: Deut. 30:1-3; Jos. 24:20; 2 Kgs. 23:26; 2 Chr. 12:12; Job 42:10; Jer. 12:15; 18:8; Jon. 3:10. See also Ez. 8:17; 16:26 where the divine character is provoked (hiphil kā'as), and Jud. 2:12; 1 Kgs. 14:9, 15; 16:33; 22:53 (54 MT); 2 Kgs. 17:11; 22:17; 23:19.

<sup>4</sup> See Yitzhak Glucksman, "For the Sake of My Name." DD. 11 (1983), pp. 169-175. Glucksman notes Leviticus 19:12 which states, "You shall not swear by my name falsely, thereby profaning the name of your Lord". He interprets this verse to show that YHWH's name can be profaned by the behaviour of the people.

those who inhabit this created world. The narrator presents this human and divine drama to show that the God in the narrative is not detached from the consequences of the events and circumstance which his people are said to create and in which his people are involved.<sup>5</sup> Thus, according to some biblical texts, the divine character (i.e. God) is not impassible, in every aspect of his being.

This portrayal of God as passible is expressed by Abraham J. Heschel with regard to the consciousness of the prophet.<sup>6</sup> Heschel observes

To the prophet...God does not reveal himself in an abstract absoluteness, but in a personal and intimate relation to the world. He does not simply command and expect obedience; He is also moved and affected by what happens in the world, and reacts accordingly. Events and human actions arouse in Him joy or sorrow, pleasure or wrath. He is not conceived as judging the world in detachment. He reacts in an intimate and subjective manner, and thus determines the value of events. Quite obviously in the biblical view, man's deeds may move Him, affect Him, grieve Him or, on the other hand, gladden and please Him. This notion that God can be intimately affected, that He possesses not merely intelligence and will, but also pathos, basically defines the prophetic consciousness of God.<sup>7</sup>

Heschel is not alone in his conclusion. J. Stanley Chesnut argues that YHWH was known in the Old Testament as one in personal

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<sup>5</sup> Abraham J. Heschel, God in Search of Man (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1955), pp. 21-22.

<sup>6</sup> Abraham J. Heschel, The Prophets Part 2 (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1962), especially pp. 37, 39.; and see also Between God and Man (New York: Harper, 1959); God in Search of Man.

<sup>7</sup> The Prophets part 2, pp. 3-4. See also Heschel, Between God and Man, p. 116.



relationship with humans, not transcendent or removed from the world of experience. Stanley concludes

To the Israelites he was known more for what he did than for what he was. Thus we find that verbs, rather than abstract nouns, are most often used in the Old Testament in reference to God.<sup>8</sup>

### Impassibility?

Crucial to my understanding of the biblical portrayal of the divine character is the observation that in the text God is a character in the story. Although the systematic theologians refer to the biblical perspective they do not make the distinction between the philosophical-theological God and the divine character to be found in a biblical text.<sup>9</sup> I need to make clear,

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<sup>8</sup> J. Stanley Chesnut, The Old Testament Understanding of God, p. 50.

<sup>9</sup> There are numerous theologians who have argued that YHWH is impassible. Richard Creel, Divine Impassibility (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), argues that God is not in any way affected by the world or what goes on in it. Creel claims that God can be impassible and still appear to address the specific circumstances present in the world and among his people. Creel concludes that God

should be thought of as eternally willing a set of mutually exclusive possibilities the actualization of some of which is contingent upon human action. Hence, God should not be thought of as implementing now this decision and now that. He should be conceived as eternally willing and doing everything that he ever wills and does. (p. 22)

Swinburne, The Coherence of Theism, disagrees with Creel. Swinburne suggests that

If God had thus fixed intentions "from all eternity" he would be a very lifeless thing; not a person who reacts to men with sympathy or anger, pardon or chastening because he chooses to there and then (p. 214).

Swinburne claims that a biblical conception of God reveals a God



therefore, that my observations are in reference to the divine character in a biblical narrative. This analysis, therefore, pertains to the central points in the narrator's portrayal of the divine character in the narrative of Ezekiel.

The portrayal of the divine character in the narrative of Ezekiel shows that God seeks to be faithfully recognized as the divine authority among his people. The narrator has shown that the people can threaten and even break the covenant with the divine character by choosing to rebel against him (2:3f; 3:7; 8:3-17; 16:17, 36b, 38a; 20:8, 16, 24, 31, 38, 39; 36:18, 25; 37:23; 43:9). If the people's rebellion is allowed to continue the God in the narrative will not be recognized as the significant God of Israel. YHWH's response to the people's rebellion through the destruction of Jerusalem and the exiles of a remnant of his people (6:8-9; 9:8; 11:13b), likewise, causes the profanation of the divine character's holy reputation<sup>10</sup> (20:9, 14, 22; 36:20). In the narrative of Ezekiel the rebellious behaviour of YHWH's people is described as breaking the covenant and thus implies that they do not acknowledge the divine

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who is "in continual interaction with men, moved by men as they speak to him, his action being often in no way decided in advance" (p. 218).

Creel's only response to the conclusion of Swinburne quoted above is that he knows of no good reason to hold that responses in this sense are a necessary condition of a personal relationship between God and creature.

There can be mutual awareness, caring, deciding, and willing between beings without it being the case that these activities are initiated temporally by both participants in the relationship. (p. 32)

<sup>10</sup> (i.e. "name").

character's holiness and authority. Furthermore, in the narrative the divine character's retributive responses to their behaviour results in the questioning of YHWH's holiness and authority not only among his people but also among the peoples of the nations. The narrator's portrayal of the divine character shows YHWH to be dependent upon the recognition of his people as their God in order to maintain his significance as one who is divine and holy.

It is apparent from reviewing this evidence that the people's recognition of the God in the narrative establishes his temporal existence. It follows, then, that the people's failure to acknowledge YHWH as their God causes the divine character to lose his significance in time. The people's recognition and acknowledgement of the God in the narrative or their failure to recognize and acknowledge the divine character does not eliminate God. A God who exists outside the knowledge of a people (specific or general), however, is an irrelevant God. It is the avoidance of this irrelevance of the divine character that the narrator has attempted to accomplish in his portrayal of the God in the narrative of Ezekiel.

#### **The God Portrayed in Ezekiel**

The narrative derives much of its interest from the way in which the narrator anomalously portrays the divine character. In my analysis of Ezekiel I have shown that the narrator portrays in this prophetic narrative the vulnerability of YHWH. His God is

definitely passible. The divine character in Ezekiel, as opposed to the understanding of some theologians, is far from being detached from his creation. The God in the narrative is only known through his activity within the temporal framework of his creation. The narrator in Ezekiel emphasizes the profanation which the divine character (13:19) and his "holy name" (36:21, 22, 23; 39:7 ) have suffered because of the abominable behaviour of his people and his very own actions in response to his provoked anger.<sup>11</sup> According to the narrative the divine character can be provoked, profaned, and defiled. The effect of portraying the divine character in such a way is that the reputation of the God in the narrative is shown as vulnerable and in jeopardy.

#### YHWH's Motive

The effect upon the divine character, however, is too readily associated with YHWH's love by some commentators.<sup>12</sup> Paul Fiddes, for example, sees the suffering of God as central to YHWH's love. He concludes:

it is only through the prophetic awareness of God's suffering that the prophet perceives his nation's neglect of God's love and understands the true meaning

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<sup>11</sup> Isaiah and Jeremiah have only one reference each in regard to the "profanation" of YHWH's "name". See Is. 48:11; Jer. 34:16; Amos 2:7; Mal. 1:12.

<sup>12</sup> E.g. H. Wheeler Robinson, Two Hebrew Prophets (London: Lutterworth, 1948), p. 96; Keith W. Carley, Ezekiel Among the Prophets (Naperville, Ill.: Alec R. Allenson Inc., SCM), p. 59; Abraham J. Heschel, The Prophets 2, p. 10; W.F. Lofthouse, "Hen and Heshed in the Old Testament." ZAW (1933), pp. 29ff.



of [hesed]. Their religious experience takes the form not of projecting suffering onto God, but of having suffering disclosed to them. Here too is a vivid example of suffering as the communication of love.<sup>13</sup>

Fiddes is perhaps too quick to associate the suffering of God in the Old Testament with his love for his people. The obverse of this has been seen to be the case in the previous chapters of my research on the narrative of Ezekiel.<sup>14</sup> The narrator has shown that in Ezekiel the God in the narrative suffers for his name's sake. Hence, according to the narrator of Ezekiel, YHWH suffers and responds to his suffering for what might be termed selfish reasons.<sup>15</sup>

H. Wheeler Robinson also sees that God is affected by the behaviour of his people. Robinson writes:

He [God] is also a God who carries the burden of His people, knows the failure of His purpose for them, sorrows over them with a love that prevails over wrath, and in all their afflictions is Himself afflicted.<sup>16</sup>

It is interesting, however, to note that Robinson, as do his fellow theologians who attest to the affect on YHWH because of the covenant relationship, feels it necessary to relate YHWH's

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<sup>13</sup> Paul S. Fiddes, The Creative Suffering of God. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), pp. 21-22, see also p. 25.

<sup>14</sup> See ch. 4 "The Significance of the Name YHWH in the Prophecy of Ezekiel." (Ezekiel 20, 36).

<sup>15</sup> Paul Joyce, Divine Initiative and Human Response in Ezekiel, p. 103, is one of the few who notes the overwhelming self-interest of the divine character here in Ezekiel.

<sup>16</sup> H. Wheeler Robinson, Suffering Human and Divine (London: Student Christian Movement Press, 1940), p. 163.

suffering to his divine love. In the narrative of Ezekiel, however, love has no place in the formula.

It is evident that love (hesed) is often shown to be the motive for the divine character's response to the people in other portions of biblical literature.<sup>17</sup> This concept is absent, however, in the narrative of Ezekiel. The God in the narrative is affected by the behaviour of the people and responds to them for his own sake only. The divine character portrayed by the narrator of Ezekiel has little resemblance to the God which Fiddes and Robinson portray. Fiddes asserts that as he understands, "God changes himself through suffering, out of his self-giving love for us which takes form in forgiveness."<sup>18</sup> While it may be the case that hesed is accepted in biblical texts as an attribute of YHWH, the portrayal of the divine character in Ezekiel is concerned only with the vindication of his reputation.<sup>19</sup>

### The Theocentricity of Ezekiel's Message

The narrator of Ezekiel has taken care to present the various pericopes of the narrative in such a way as to focus on the divine character. Even at the points within the narrative

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<sup>17</sup> See Ex. 15:13; 20:6; 34:6-7; Num. 14:18; Deut. 5:10; 7:9, 12; 1 Sam. 7:15; 1 Kgs. 8:23; 1 Chr. 16:34; Neh. 1:5; 9:32; Ps. 33:5; 44:26; 51:1 (v. 3 MT); 100:5; Is. 54:8-10; 63:7; Jer. 9:24 (v. 23 MT); 16:5; 31:3; 33:11; Dan. 9:4; Hos. 2:19 (v. 21 MT); Joel 2:13; Jon. 4:2.

<sup>18</sup> Fiddes, The Creative Suffering of God, p. 169.

<sup>19</sup> See Zimmerli, Old Testament Theology in Outline, p. 213.

where the people are addressed the focus nearly always comes back to the effect of their behaviour on YHWH.

Simon De Vries also claims that the focus of the narrative of Ezekiel is predominantly upon YHWH.

Ezekiel's primary concern seems to have been the vindication of [YHWH's] honor. This involved the upholding of his holiness and justice over against Israel's sin...Ezekiel's view of history and of the Covenant is decidedly theocentric. [YHWH] does not punish first of all out of wrath and does not pardon first of all out of pity, but to vindicate his integrity in purifying and yet upholding his covenant people.<sup>20</sup>

The theocentricity of the prophetic narrative of Ezekiel is also attested to by Paul Joyce. Joyce argues, using as an example Ezekiel 36:20ff., that the focus of the text is overwhelmingly on the vindication of YHWH as depicted in the restoration of Israel.<sup>21</sup> In support of Joyce's observation, the narrator's description of the event of the restoration of the "house of Israel" in chs. 40-48 in the same way focuses on the divine character. Although the people of the "house of Israel" are restored to their homeland in the narrative, their restoration is shown as undeserved. At the same time, though, the restoration of the "house of Israel" brings about the vindication of the divine character's profaned and defiled reputation.

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<sup>20</sup> "Remembrance in Ezekiel." Int 16 (1962), pp. 58-64, p. 59.

<sup>21</sup> Divine Initiative and Human Response in Ezekiel, p. 97; also pp. 89, 94, 105. Zimmerli, Old Testament Theology in Outline, 207, also contends that the narrator is concerned predominately with the defence of the honour of YHWH's "holy name".



The God portrayed in the divine character in Ezekiel is not an unprovoked God. The God in the narrative is not detached from his creation, but instead is actively and presently involved with it.<sup>22</sup> The divine character as he is portrayed by the narrator of Ezekiel is not without need, but instead is in need of an obedient and faithful people.<sup>23</sup> This divine character is not a sovereign who has entered into a one-sided treaty with a weak and feeble people, but instead is portrayed as dependant on the people's recognition of him as their God.<sup>24</sup> The narrator of the

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<sup>22</sup> See Heschel, Between God and Man, p. 122.; and God in Search of Man, p. 198.; and The Prophets 2, p. 6-7.; Robert C. Dentan, The Knowledge of God in Ancient Israel, pp. 231-232.; R. H. Pfeiffer, Introduction to the Old Testament (New York: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1941), pp. 356-359.; Von Rad, Old Testament Theology 1, pp. 48-56.; Roland de Vaux, "The Revelation of the Divine Name YHWH." Proclamation and Presence (London: SCM Press Ltd., 1970, pp. 48-75), p. 75.; R. E. Clements, Prophecy and Covenant (London: SCM Press Ltd., 1965), pp. 105-106.

<sup>23</sup> See 11:11-12, 19-20; 16:38; 20:11-13a, 18-21a; 36:27-28; 37:24b.

<sup>24</sup> There are numerous interpretations of the conditions of the covenant on YHWH. See for example: E. W. Nicholson, God and his People in Covenant and Theology in the Old Testament. Oxford: Clarendon Press; New York: Oxford University Press, 1986, p. 18. Nicholson claims that "under the preaching of the eighth-century prophets... the b<sup>e</sup>rit now came to designate an agreement (Bund) with reciprocal obligations. The presence of law rendered the content of the b<sup>e</sup>rit an agreement based upon conditions to be observed by both parties." See for a similar claim Eichrodt, Theology of the Old Testament 1, p. 52; Chesnut, The Old Testament Understanding of God, p. 57. R. E. Clements, Prophecy and Covenant, p. 69. Clements says the covenant was not a contract of equal partners "but it means nevertheless that the covenant was a two-sided relationship". Abraham J. Heschel, The Prophets 2, pp. 67-68. Edmond Jacob, Theology of the Old Testament, p. 211 claims that "when God is one of the two partners of the covenant, obviously there can be no question of a bilateral contract". Harry M. Orlinsky, Ancient Israel (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1954), p. 29. Orlinsky argues that "the very notion of a

text of Ezekiel thus focuses on the divine character in respect to the central points of his theology. Even if one grants that the "house of Israel" plays an important role in the events in the text, one cannot miss seeing that the focus always comes back to the divine character. Ellen Davis agrees that God is in the center of Ezekiel's story. She concludes that: "Seen through Ezekiel's eyes, the world is inescapably theocentric".<sup>25</sup>

#### The Divine Character as He is Portrayed in Ezekiel

My analysis of the narrative in Ezekiel has shown that the divine character is affected by the creation which he has created. An impassable God is therefore incongruent with the portrayal of the God in the narrative. My analysis of Ezekiel has revealed, furthermore, that the divine character, though affected by the behaviour of the people, is not affected in the way concluded by those scholars who profess the passibility of the divine character in biblical literature. It is not for the sake of the people that God, as portrayed in the narrative, is moved to action. Whatever the motive of action for the divine character may be elsewhere in the Old Testament, it can be said with

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covenant implies the equality of the covenanters, and the devotion exacted from God by the patriarchs was no less thorough than that exacted from them by Him". Gottfried Quell, "[diatheke], The Old Testament Concept berit." TDNT 2 (1964), ed. G. Kittel, pp. 106-127, especially p. 122. Quell concludes that through the covenant relationship Israel and God are both bound to each other.

<sup>25</sup> Swallowing the Scroll, p. 99.

certainty that in the book of Ezekiel the divine character acts only for the sake of his "holy name".

The narrator's perception of God thus reveals a different concept of the effect which creation has on YHWH. The God in the narrative is affected by the behaviour of the people since the rebellious behaviour of the "house of Israel" provokes him to anger. The anomaly is obvious when we see that YHWH's response to his anger leads him to send the people into exile and thus profane and defile his "holy name". While in exile the people also profane YHWH's holy name by their behaviour among the nations where they have been scattered. The drama clearly portrays the divine character as passible. The effect causes the God in the narrative to be concerned, not for the people who have rebelled, however, but for his name's sake.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Robert C Dentan, The Knowledge of God in Ancient Israel, p. 188, suggests the following perspective for understanding the divine character's acts for his name's sake:

when Ezekiel represents [YHWH] as doing great deeds 'for the sake of his name' (Ezek. 20:9, 22, etc.), he does not mean that God acts merely to save his reputation, but in order to demonstrate his power and show what kind of God he is."

This rather refined interpretation is prevented if one accepts the argument I have presented previously, that the God in the narrative acts in order to sustain his reputation. According to the narrative, if the divine character did not do these "great deeds" he would suffer a deflated reputation among his people and the nations.



### A Favourable Portrayal

These observations as witnessed in the narrator's portrayal of the divine character in congruence with the motive for YHWH's actions suggest that the divine character is selfishly concerned with his reputation in neglect of anything or anyone else. The narrator has, however, anomalously portrayed the God in the narrative. He has subtly undermined the divine character's status as a selfish deity by colouring the actions of YHWH as favourable.

From the very first encounter between the divine character and Ezekiel in chs. 1:2-3:15 the narrator shows that it is YHWH, in all his glory, who comes to the exiles. In the narrative Ezekiel does not merely hear the voice of YHWH but sees with his eyes the "likeness of the glory of YHWH" (1:28b) there among the exiles (1:3b). This event portrays the divine character favourably, for through it the exiles can be assured by YHWH's manifestation that they are not "far from YHWH" (11:17b) and are not thus cut off without hope (37:11). Likewise, in chs. 2 and 3, the divine character is shown as attempting to communicate with the "rebellious house" of Israel even though they actively transgress against him (2:3). Even here the divine character is portrayed favourably as one who has not abandoned his people (8:12b; 9:9b).

In the "vision" (8:1-11:25) showing the departure of the "the glory of YHWH" from the temple in Jerusalem, an act which would indicate that YHWH was abandoning his people, concludes

with a portrayal favourable to the God in the narrative. Though the divine character is abandoning his people in residence in Jerusalem, the narrator says in the closing oracle that God has been a sanctuary to the exiles (11:16). The divine character will gather them together and return them to the land of Israel (11:17). The God in the narrative will enable them, furthermore, through a unified heart and new spirit, to be obedient to him (11:19-20). God renews the promise of the covenant that they shall be God's people, and he will be their God. The portrayal of the divine character would clearly have been incriminating, even though the people's behaviour deserved such a response, if the narrative described only his abandonment of the residents of the land and their divinely guided destruction (ch. 9). The significance of the shift from the divine character's abandonment of the residents of the land to his claimed presence among his people in exile is that it ultimately portrays YHWH in a favourable light. Therefore the narrator anomalously portrays the divine character as he tells the story.

The narrator continues to reinforce the favourable portrayal of the God in the narrative in the allegory of the unfaithful wife in ch. 16. Here, as so often in the book, the narrator shows the divine character as initiating the relationship between Israel and himself. YHWH's actions in responding to the castaway child (16:5) are set from the start in opposition to the abhorrence which the child had received. This divine response is the first indication that the God in the narrative is favourably

portrayed as the good character in the allegory. The favourableness of the divine character is substantiated when the relationship is verified by the making of a covenant of YHWH with the mature woman (16:8). The character who receives a negative portrayal in the allegory is the woman who turns away from her husband to adulterous relationships. Although the husband (i.e. YHWH) responds aggressively to the unfaithfulness of his wife (16:37-40), the divine character, nonetheless, is shown in the end to be the good character who will establish a new and "everlasting covenant" (16:60).

The most obvious turn in the portrayal of the divine character in order to colour him as a favourable character is seen in the pericopes of chs. 20 and 36. In ch. 20 the negative portrayal is once again given to "Israel". Indeed, it is Israel who is shown to have continuously rebelled against God (20:8, 13, 21). The crucial point made here is that the divine character is shown to control his anger patiently and withhold his wrath for the sake of his name, "that it should not be profaned" (20:8b-9a, 13b-14a, 21b-22a). Although Israel has been shown to rebel repeatedly against YHWH and even defile themselves (20:7) and profane his sabbaths (20:16, 21, 24), it is obvious in the narrative that their behaviour has not "profaned" the divine character's name. The interpretation, since this is the case, must be that YHWH's acting out his anger and pouring out his wrath would in itself "profane" his name. The divine character's retribution upon the people, therefore in ch. 20, is what will



profane his name. In this light, the fall of Jerusalem and the exile of the surviving inhabitants of the land which has been shown as resulting from the divine character's anger and wrath (chs. 5, 6, 7, 9), is what will now profane his name. The actions of the God in the narrative, in other words, will profane the name of God. The profanation will thus be caused by the divine character himself.

In view of what has been said about the cause of the profanation of the divine character's name, it is surprising that in ch. 36, following the fall of Jerusalem and the exile (33:21) that the profanation is attributed to the "house of Israel" (36:20, 22, 23). It would seem that the narrator totally ignores the obvious evidence that the God in the narrative has acted in response to his anger and poured out his wrath upon the "house of Israel"; an action which in ch. 20 would show that the divine character himself profaned his name. The "house of Israel" becomes the scapegoat for YHWH's actions, however. Although all the instances describing their rebellious behaviour against the God in the narrative in ch. 20 were never accredited with profaning his name, the "house of Israel" now receives the blame for the divine character's acts which resulted in the profanation. The divine character is thus portrayed favourably even when the catastrophe is caused by him. It is this aspect which is an anomaly as seen in the narrator's portrayal of the divine character.

Complementary to the favourable portrayal of the divine character are the "visions" of the restoration of the "people of Israel"<sup>27</sup> in chs. 37, 40-48. The narrator effectively shows that the God in the narrative will restore the people in exile<sup>28</sup> to their land and establish an "everlasting covenant" (37:26) with them. Like the previous promises of hope and restoration,<sup>29</sup> but in more elaborate form, the narrator describes the greatness of this event. The God in the narrative will cause the unification of the divided kingdoms (37:15-23). The divine character will set a Davidic ruler over the people (37:24). The restoration will include the creation of a new temple (40:5-42:20) with new ordinances (43:2-46:24). There will be new boundaries and divisions of the land for the unified people in the restoration (48:1-29). The crucial point to be observed is that the divine character is portrayed as the one who is causing all these wonderful things to happen to the "rebellious" people. The narrator has effectively shown the divine character to be the hero in the narrative in spite of the fact that it is YHWH who has also caused the situation which he now reverses. We are briefly reminded by the narrator in 44:6 that the "house of

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<sup>27</sup> The people who are restored are identified as "the people of Israel" in 37:21 and the "house of Israel" in 40.4 (e.g. 43:7, 10; 44:6; 45:8; "the whole house of Israel" 45:6).

<sup>28</sup> For further analysis see ch. 5 "Hope: Divine and Human" (Ezekiel 37:1-28).

<sup>29</sup> These promises have previously been noted in my research (e.g. 11:16-20; 16:59-63; 20:33-38, 40-44; 36:24-36).

Israel", the character who is to receive the restoration, is "rebellious".

That the narrator has carefully crafted his portrayal of the divine character is evident, and attested to in the construction of the pericopes in my analysis. Even when the cause of the events which are being acted upon are those caused by the God in the narrative, the divine character still receives a favourable portrayal. The narrator simply adjusts the story to show Israel as the scapegoat. It is clear that the "house of Israel," as portrayed in the narrative, is not without blemish or undeserving of retribution. The reason that the divine character reacts to the events to vindicate his "holy name", however, is because he has punished his people. Through the method of altering his focus on the negative behaviour of the people to the positive behaviour of YHWH, the narrator manipulates the story to portray the divine character favourably in every situation.



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APPENDIX 1

Gender Vacillation in Ezekiel 1

- v. 5 v<sup>e</sup>zeh "and this" mas.  
mar'êhen "their appearance" fem.  
lāhēnah "to them" fem.
- v. 6 l<sup>e</sup>'ehāt "to each" mas.  
l<sup>e</sup>'ahāt "to each" fem.  
lāhem "to them" mas.
- v. 7 v<sup>e</sup>raqlêhem "and their feet" mas.  
raqlêhem "their feet" mas.
- v. 8 kanpêhem "their wings" mas.  
rib'êhem "their sides" mas.  
ûp<sup>e</sup>nêhem "and their faces" mas.  
v<sup>e</sup>kanpêhem "and their wings" mas.  
l<sup>e</sup>'arba'tām "to the four of them" mas.
- v. 9 'iššā "each one" fem.  
'<sup>a</sup>hôtāh "the other" fem.  
kanpêhem "their wings" mas.  
yissabû "they turned" mas.  
b<sup>e</sup>lektān "in their going" fem.  
'iš "each one" mas.  
pānā[y]v "his face" 3 mas. sing. suffix  
yēlēkû "they went" mas.
- v. 10 p<sup>e</sup>nêhem "their faces" mas.  
l<sup>e</sup>'arba'tām "to the four of them"mas.  the proximity of  
l<sup>e</sup>'arba'tān "to the four of them"fem.  these three is  
l<sup>e</sup>'arba'tān "to the four of them"fem.  fascinating.
- v. 11 ûp<sup>e</sup>nêhem "and their faces" mas.  
v<sup>e</sup>kanpêhem "and their wings" mas.  
l<sup>e</sup>'iš "to each one" mas.  
'iš "each one" mas.  
g<sup>e</sup>vīyōtêhenāh "their bodies" fem.
- v. 12 v<sup>e</sup>'iš "and each one" mas.  
pānā[y]v "his faces" 3 mas. sing. suffix  
yēlēkû "they went" mas.  
yēlēkû "they went" mas.  
yissabû "they turned" mas.  
b<sup>e</sup>lektān "in their going" fem.
- v. 13 mar'êhem "their appearance" mas.
- v. 14 rāsô' "kept running" gal inf. absolute  
vāšûb "and turning" gal inf. absolute
- v. 15 'ehād "one" mas. in reference to the wheel 'opan  
pānā[y]v "his faces" 3 mas. sing. suffix
- v. 16 ūma'<sup>a</sup>sêhem "and their workmanship" mas. ref. to wheels  
l<sup>e</sup>'arba'tān "to the four of them" fem. ref. to wheels  
ūmar'êhem "and their appearance" mas. ref. to wheels  
ūma'<sup>a</sup>sêhem "and their workmanship" mas. ref. to wheels

- v. 17 rib'êhen "their sides" fem.  
b<sup>e</sup>l<sup>e</sup>ktām "in their going" mas. }  
yēlēkū "they went" mas. } Reverse gender of the  
yissabū "they turned" mas. } same word in the same  
b<sup>e</sup>l<sup>e</sup>ktān "in their going" fem. } verse
- v. 18 v<sup>e</sup>gabêhen "and their rims" fem. ref. to wheels  
lāhem "to them" mas. ref. to wheels  
lāhem "to them" mas. ref. to wheels  
v<sup>e</sup>gabōtām "and their rims" mas. ref. to wheels  
l<sup>e</sup>'arba'tān "to the four of them" fem. ref. to wheels
- v. 19 ūb<sup>e</sup>leket "and in going" qal inf. construct  
yēlkū "they went" mas. ref. to wheels  
yinnās'ū "they lifted up" mas. ref. to wheels
- v. 20 yēlēkū "they went" mas.  
yinnās'ū "they lifted up" mas. ref. to wheels  
l<sup>e</sup>'umātām "along with them" mas.
- v. 21 b<sup>e</sup>l<sup>e</sup>ktām "in their going" mas.  
yēlēkū "they went" mas. ref. to wheels  
ūb<sup>e</sup>'āmdām "and in their standing" mas.  
ya'<sup>a</sup>mōdū "they stood" mas. ref. to wheels  
ūb<sup>e</sup>hinnās'ām "and in their lifting up" mas.  
yinnās'ū "they lifted up" mas. ref. to wheels  
l<sup>e</sup>'umātām "along with them" mas.
- v. 22 rā'ōšêhem "their heads" mas.
- v. 23 kanpêhem "their wings" mas.  
g<sup>e</sup>vīyōtêhem "their bodies" mas.
- v. 24 kanpêhem "their wings" mas. }  
b<sup>e</sup>l<sup>e</sup>ktām "in their going" mas. } Reverse gender of  
b<sup>e</sup>'āmdām "in their standing" mas. } the same word in  
t<sup>e</sup>rapenāh "they drop" fem. (wings?) } the same verse.  
kanpêhen "their wings" fem.
- v. 25 rō'sām "their heads" 3 mas. pl. suffix  
b<sup>e</sup>'āmdām "in their standing" mas.  
t<sup>e</sup>rapenāh "they drop" fem. (wings?)  
kanpêhen "their wings" fem.
- v. 26 rō'sām "their heads" 3 mas. pl. suffix

There are 46 masculine references to the living creatures **h.ayyôṭ** in the first chapter of Ezekiel.

There are 16 feminine references to the living creatures **h.ayyôṭ** in the first chapter of Ezekiel.

There are 13 masculine refernces to the wheels of the living creatures in the first chapter of Ezekiel.

There are 3 feminine references to the wheels of the living creatures in the first chapter of Ezekiel.

There are 3 infinitive (2 absolute, 1 construct) in reference to the living creatures in the first chapter of Ezekiel.

## APPENDIX 2

### Parallels of Chapters 1 and 10

#### Chapter 1

#### Chapter 10

#### The Platform and Throne

22) Over the heads of the living creatures there was the likeness of a platform like the color of shining crystal, spread out above their heads. 26) And above the platform which was over their heads there was the likeness of a throne, in appearance like sapphire.

1) And I looked, and behold, on the platform that was over the heads of the cherubim there appeared above them something like a stone of sapphire, in form resembling a throne.

#### The Sound of the Wings

24) And when they went, I heard the sound of their wings like the sound of many waters, like the thunder of the Almighty...

5) And the sound of the wings of the cherubim was heard as far as the outer court, like the voice of God Almighty when he speaks.

#### The Likeness of Burning Coals and Fire

13) And the likeness of the living creatures appeared like burning coals of fire, like the appearance of torches moving to and fro among the living creatures; and fire was bright, and out of the fire went forth lighting.

2) Fill your hands with burning coals from between the cherubim.  
6) And when he commanded the man clothed in linen, "Take fire from between the wheels, from between the cherubim"

#### The Hand of the Living Creature/Cherub

8) Under their wings on their four sides they had human hands.

7) And a cherub stretched forth his hand from between the cherubim to the fire that was between the cherubim, and lifted it and gave it to the hand of the one clothed in linen.



### The Wheels and Their Appearance

15) And I looked at the living creatures, behold, a wheel upon the earth beside each of the four living creatures. 16) The appearance of the wheels and their construction was like the color of gleaming chrysolite; and the four had the same likeness, and their appearance and their construction was like as it were a wheel within a wheel.

9) And I looked, and behold, four wheels beside the cherubim, one wheel beside each cherub; and the appearance of the wheels was like gleaming chrysolite. 10) And their appearance was the same for the four of them, as if a wheel were within a wheel.

### The Unified Movement of the Wheels

17) When they went, they went in any of their four directions not turning as they went.

11) When they went, they went in any of their four directions not turning as they went, for in whatever direction they faced the others followed without turning as they went.

### The Eyes of the Wheels

18)...and their rims were full of eyes round about.

12)...and the wheels were full of eyes round about...

### The Four Faces of the Living Creatures/Cherubim

10) As for the likeness of their faces, each had the face of a man (in front); the four had the face of a lion on the right side, the four had the face of an ox on the left side, and the four had the face of an eagle (at the back.)

14) And every one had four faces: the first face was the face of a cherub, and the second face was the face of a man, and the third the face of a lion, and the fourth a face of an eagle.

### The Synchronized Movement of the Creatures and Wheels

19) And when the living creatures went, the wheels went beside them; and when the living creatures lifted up from upon the earth, the wheels lifted up. 20) Wherever the spirit would go, they went, and the wheels lifted up along with them; for the spirit of

16) And when the cherubim went, the wheels went beside them; and when the cherubim lifted up their wings to mount up from upon the earth, the wheels did not turn from beside them. 17) When they stood still, these stood still, and when they mounted up, these mounted up

the living creatures was in the wheels. 21) In their going, these went; and in their standing, these stood; and in their lifting up from upon the earth, the wheels lifted up with them; for the spirit of the living creatures was in the wheels.

with them; for the spirit of the living creatures was in them.

#### The Glory of YHWH

26b) and upon the likeness of a throne was a likeness in appearance of a human from above. 27) And upward from what had the appearance of his loins I saw a color like gleaming bronze, like the appearance of fire within it round about; and downward from what had the appearance of his loins I saw what had the appearance of fire, and there was brightness round about him...28b) Such was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of YHWH.

18) And the glory of YHWH went forth from upon the threshold of the house, and stood over the cherubim. 19) And the cherubim lifted up their wings and rose from the earth in my sight as they went forth, with the wheels beside them; and he (they) stood at the door of the east gate of the house of YHWH; and the glory of the God of Israel was over them.