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Ezekiel 5:5-17 and Theodicy: a Theological Investigation of the Character of God

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ABSTRACT

EZEKIEL 5:5-17 AND THEODICY: A THEOLOGICAL
INVESTIGATION OF THE CHARACTER OF GOD

by

Paul Onyango Wahonya

Adviser: Jiří Moskala

ABSTRACT OF GRADUATE STUDENT RESEARCH

Dissertation

Andrews University

Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary

Title: EZEKIEL 5:5-17 AND THEODICY: A THEOLOGICAL INVESTIGATION OF THE CHARACTER OF GOD

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Date completed: August 2011

The question of the character of God has been an issue of contention among many biblical scholars, particularly when considering the severe punitive actions that he unleashes upon humanity from time to time. This contention makes it imperative to reexamine the biblical corpus to ascertain its portrayal of YHWH's character in the light of his harsh and severe judgments.

The exegetical examination of Ezek 5:5-17 in the context of Ezek 1-24 has revealed that YHWH is a God who upholds the terms of the covenant. When his people breach the covenant stipulations, as the Israelites did, he takes appropriate disciplinary measures, some of which may be unprecedented, to register his disapproval of the people's sins. What this implies is that his punishments, although they are painful and

may cause intense suffering, are deserved and justified, because of the Israelites' persistence in the worship of idols and other abominable practices. Furthermore, YHWH, unlike some of the ancient Near Eastern gods, whose punishments are based on flimsy and baseless reasons, metes out judgments based on weighty matters, such as moral and cultic violations.

Despite the severe judgments unleashed on the Israelites, the book of Ezekiel reveals that God is still loving, gracious, and merciful. This is based on the actions he takes, such as calling the Israelites to repentance, offering them a new heart, a new spirit (spiritual transformation), and being present with them even in exile.

After the introduction in chapter 1, chapter 2 of this dissertation explores the challenges to the character of God as reflected in Ezek 5:5-17. Chapters 3, 4, and 5 respectively examine the basis, the function, and the nature of YHWH's retributive judgment on the people of Israel in Ezek 5:5-17 within its context. Chapter 6 investigates theodicy in Ezek 5:5-17 within its context. This chapter elucidates the implications that YHWH's retributive justice has on his character. Chapter 7 looks at the intratextual and intertextual relations Ezek 5:5-17 has with the rest of Ezekiel and other sections of the Old Testament. Chapter 8 offers a comparison of the character of Israel's God with the gods of the ancient Near East. Chapter 9 synthesizes the findings of the entire study.

Andrews University
Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary

EZEKIEL 5:5-17 AND THEODICY: A THEOLOGICAL
INVESTIGATION OF THE CHARACTER OF GOD

A Dissertation
Presented in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Philosophy

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Paul Onyango Wahonya

August 2011

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

<i>ABD</i>	<i>Anchor Bible Dictionary</i> . Edited by D. N. Freedman. 6 vols. New York, 1992
<i>AJICL</i>	<i>The African Journal of International and Comparative Law</i>
<i>AJT</i>	<i>Asia Journal of Theology</i>
<i>ANET</i>	<i>Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament</i> . Edited by J. B. Pritchard. 3d ed. Princeton, 1969
<i>Anima</i>	<i>Anima</i>
<i>AThR</i>	<i>Anglican Theological Review</i>
<i>AUSS</i>	<i>Andrews University Seminary Studies</i>
<i>BAR</i>	<i>Biblical Archaeology Review</i>
<i>BASOR</i>	<i>Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research</i>
<i>BBR</i>	<i>Bulletin for Biblical Research</i>
<i>BDB</i>	Brown, F., S. R. Driver, and C. A. Briggs. <i>A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament</i> . Oxford, 1907
<i>Bib</i>	<i>Biblica</i>
<i>BibInt</i>	<i>Biblical Interpretation</i>
<i>BN</i>	<i>Biblische Notizen</i>
<i>BRev</i>	<i>Bible Review</i>
<i>BSac</i>	<i>Bibliotheca Sacra</i>
<i>BTB</i>	<i>Biblical Theology Bulletin</i>
<i>BurH</i>	<i>Buried History</i>

<i>BV</i>	<i>Biblical Viewpoint</i>
<i>BZAW</i>	Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft
<i>CAD</i>	<i>The Assyrian Dictionary of the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago</i> . Chicago, 1956—
<i>CBQ</i>	<i>Catholic Biblical Quarterly</i>
<i>Com</i>	<i>Commentary</i>
<i>COS</i>	<i>The Context of Scripture</i> . Edited by W. W. Hallo. 3 vols. Leiden, 1997—
<i>CTJ</i>	<i>Calvin Theological Journal</i>
<i>CTSJ</i>	<i>Chafer Theological Seminary Journal</i>
<i>CurBS</i>	<i>Currents in Research: Biblical Studies</i>
<i>DBLSD</i>	<i>Dictionary of Biblical Languages with Semantic Domains: Hebrew (Old Testament)</i>
<i>EDB</i>	<i>Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible</i>
<i>ETL</i>	<i>Ephemerides Theologicae Lovanienses</i>
<i>ExAud</i>	<i>Ex auditu</i>
<i>FemT</i>	<i>Feminist Theology</i>
<i>GKC</i>	<i>Gesenius' Hebrew Grammar</i> . Edited by E. Kautzch. Translated by A. E. Cowley. 2d ed. Oxford, 1910
<i>HALOT</i>	Koehler, L., W. Baumgartner, and J. J. Stamm, <i>The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament</i> . Translated and edited under the supervision of M. E. Richardson. 5 vols. Leiden, 2001.
<i>HBT</i>	<i>Horizons in Biblical Theology</i>
<i>HTR</i>	<i>Harvard Theological Review</i>
<i>HUCA</i>	<i>Hebrew Union College Annual</i>
<i>HvTSt</i>	<i>Hervormde theologiese studies</i>

<i>Int</i>	<i>Interpretation</i>
<i>Iraq</i>	<i>Iraq</i>
<i>JANER</i>	<i>Journal of Ancient Near Eastern Religions</i>
<i>JAOS</i>	<i>Journal of the American Oriental Society</i>
<i>JATS</i>	<i>Journal of the Adventist Theological Society</i>
<i>JBL</i>	<i>Journal of Biblical Literature</i>
<i>JBQ</i>	<i>Jewish Bible Quarterly</i>
<i>JCS</i>	<i>Journal of Cuneiform Studies</i>
<i>JDT</i>	<i>Journal of Dispensational Theology</i>
<i>JETS</i>	<i>Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society</i>
<i>JFSR</i>	<i>Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion</i>
<i>JITC</i>	<i>Journal of the Interdenominational Theological Center</i>
<i>JNES</i>	<i>Journal of Near Eastern Studies</i>
<i>JNSL</i>	<i>Journal of Northwest Semitic Languages</i>
<i>JRA</i>	<i>Journal of Religion in Africa</i>
<i>JSJ</i>	<i>Journal for the Study of Judaism in the Persian, Hellenistic, and Roman Periods</i>
<i>JSOT</i>	<i>Journal for the Study of the Old Testament</i>
<i>JTS</i>	<i>Journal of Theological Studies</i>
<i>KTU</i>	<i>Die keilalphabetischen Texte aus Ugarit</i> . Edited by M. Dietrich, O. Loretz, and J. Sanmartin. AOAT 24/1. Neukirchen-Vluyn, 1976. 2d enlarged ed. of KTU: <i>The Cuneiform Alphabetic Texts from Ugarit, Ras Ibn Hani, and Other Places</i> . Edited by M. Dietrich, O. Loretz, and J. Sanmartin. Munster, 1995 (= CTU)
<i>NIV</i>	New International Version

<i>NIDOTTE</i>	<i>New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis</i> . Edited by W. A. VanGemeren. 5 vols. Grand Rapids, 1997
<i>Numen</i>	<i>Numen: International Review for the History of Religions</i>
<i>Or</i>	<i>Orientalia</i>
<i>OTE</i>	<i>Old Testament Essays</i>
<i>PEQ</i>	<i>Palestinian Exploration Quarterly</i>
<i>PRSt</i>	<i>Perspectives in Religious Studies</i>
<i>RB</i>	<i>Revue biblique</i>
<i>RevExp</i>	<i>Review & Expositor</i>
<i>SJOT</i>	<i>Scandinavian Journal of the Old Testament</i>
<i>SJT</i>	<i>Scottish Journal of Theology</i>
<i>SBLSP</i>	<i>Society of Biblical Literature Seminar Papers</i>
<i>ST</i>	<i>Studia theologica</i>
<i>TBT</i>	<i>The Bible Today</i>
<i>TDOT</i>	<i>Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament</i> . Edited by G. J. Botterweck and H. Ringgren. Translated by J. T. Willis, G. W. Bromiley, and D. E. Green. 15 vols. Grand Rapids, 1974—
<i>ThTo</i>	<i>Theology Today</i>
<i>TLOT</i>	<i>Theological Lexicon of the Old Testament</i> . Edited by E. Jenni, with assistance from C. Westermann. Translated by M. E. Biddle. 3 vols. Peabody, Mass., 1997
<i>Trad</i>	<i>Tradition</i>
<i>Transeu</i>	<i>Transeuphratène</i>
<i>TTE</i>	<i>The Theological Educator</i>
<i>TWOT</i>	<i>Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament</i> . Edited by R. L. Harris, G. L. Archer Jr. 2 vols. Chicago, 1980

<i>TynBul</i>	<i>Tyndale Bulletin</i>
<i>UF</i>	<i>Ugarit-Forschungen</i>
<i>USQR</i>	<i>Union Seminary Quarterly Review</i>
<i>VT</i>	<i>Vetus Testamentum</i>
<i>WW</i>	<i>Word & World</i>
<i>ZAW</i>	<i>Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft</i>
<i>ZPEB</i>	<i>Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible</i> . Edited by M. C. Tenney. 5 vols. Grand Rapids, 2009
<i>ZTK</i>	<i>Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche</i>

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Background to the Problem

The character of God has come under attack from many circles¹ as people seek to reconcile his nature and character with the adversities and realities of life.² The Bible

¹ For discussion on some of the negative characterizations of God, see Dawkins's work, in which he gives a very disparaging description of God when he says, "The God of the Old Testament is arguably the most unpleasant character in all fiction: jealous and proud of it; a petty, unjust, unforgiving, control-freak; a vindictive, bloodthirsty ethnic cleanser; a misogynistic, homophobic, racist, infanticidal, genocidal, filicidal, pestilential, megalomaniacal, sadomasochistic, capriciously malevolent bully." Richard Dawkins, *The God Delusion* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 2006), 31. Other misrepresentations of the character of God can be seen from the images that Penchansky attributes to God in the titles of the six chapters of his book. These include such descriptions as 'YHWH the Monster: The Insecure God,' 'The Irrational God,' 'The Vindictive God,' 'The Dangerous God,' 'The Malevolent God,' and 'The Abusive God.' To Penchansky God is "rough, violent, unpredictable," and thus a figure ready to attack even his most loyal people. David Penchansky, *What a Rough Beast? Images of God in the Hebrew Bible* (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox, 1999), 1-94. Julia O'Brien characterizes God as 'an abusive husband,' 'an authoritarian father,' and 'an angry warrior.' Julia M. O'Brien, *Challenging Prophetic Metaphor: Theology and Ideology in the Prophets* (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox, 2008), 63-124. See also James L. Crenshaw, *A Whirlpool of Torment: Israelite Traditions of God as an Oppressive Presence* (Philadelphia, Pa.: Fortress, 1984). Whybray says God has "a demonic or vicious side to his nature" and it is this "dark" side which makes him punish the "innocent" and those who deserve his love. R. N. Whybray, "Shall Not the Judge of All the Earth Do What Is Just? God's Oppression of the Innocent in the Old Testament," in *Shall Not the Judge of All the Earth Do What Is Right? Studies on the Nature of God in Tribute to James L. Crenshaw* (ed. D. Penchansky and P. L. Redditt; Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 2000), 1-20.

² See for example Bart Ehrman, a renowned New Testament scholar, who eventually became an atheist because he could not reconcile the immense human suffering with a loving compassionate God. He became so disillusioned by what seemed to be the divine incoherence that he reached a point in his life when he said, "I realized that I could no longer reconcile the claims of faith with the facts of life. In particular, I could no longer explain how there can be a good and all-powerful God actively involved with this world, given the state of things. For many people who inhabit this planet, life is a cesspool of misery and suffering. I came to a point where I simply could not believe that there is a good and kindly disposed Ruler who is in charge of it."

portrays him as omniscient (Pss 139:1-4; 147:5), omnipresent (Jer 23:24; Prov 15:3), and omnipotent (Gen 18:14; Deut 10:17; Isa 14:24-27; Jer 32:17, 27; Zech 8:6), with the ability to direct and control the forces of nature (Exod 14:1-31; Josh 10:1-14).³ At the same time he is known to be compassionate and loving (Exod 34:5-7).

Disillusionment can develop when one discovers that when God exercises his prerogatives as judge of all the earth (Gen 18:25), he at times utilizes punitive measures to discipline his disobedient people,⁴ which cause them to suffer. These manifestations of divine retributive justice call into question the justice and the character of God.⁵

Bart D. Ehrman, *God's Problem: How the Bible Fails to Answer Our Most Important Question—Why We Suffer* (New York: HarperOne, 2008), 3. For further discussion see David R. Blumenthal, *Facing the Abusing God: A Theology of Protest* (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster/John Knox, 1993); Harold S. Kushner, *When Bad Things Happen to Good People* (New York: Schocken Books, 1981); Warren McWilliams, *Where Is the God of Justice? Biblical Perspectives on Suffering* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 2005); Daniel J. Simundson, *Faith Under Fire: Biblical Interpretations of Suffering* (Minneapolis, Minn.: Augsburg, 1980); Marvin A. Sweeney, *Reading the Hebrew Bible After the Shoah: Engaging Holocaust Theology* (Minneapolis, Minn.: Fortress Press, 2008); Christopher J. H. Wright, *The God I Don't Understand* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008), 25-55.

³ Terence E. Fretheim, *Creation Untamed: The Bible, God, and Natural Disasters* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2010). For other questions that dog people concerning YHWH, see Iain M. Duguid, *Ezekiel* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1999), 37.

⁴ It is evident that whenever God enacted some form of judgment upon the disobedient, he utilized some means to accomplish the judgment. For example, in the Flood story (Gen 7, 8), God employed water to bring an end to a sinful generation; in Sodom and Gomorrah he used fire and brimstone as a means of judgment on the sinful inhabitants of the city (Gen 19:1-29). God employed ten different plagues as means of punishment on the Egyptian gods (Exod 7-12). When the Israelites complained in the wilderness, YHWH's "anger was kindled; and the fire of the Lord burnt among them, and consumed them that were in the uttermost parts of the camp" (Num 11:1). Nadab and Abihu's disobedience was met with instant divine retribution by fire (Lev 10:2). In response to David's unauthorized census in 2 Sam 24, God offered David three choices of punishments which he would bring upon him and his people: three days of pestilence, three months of famine or military defeat. God used wild animals to bring justice on the youth who jeered Elisha in Bethel (2 Kgs 2:23-25). God employed foreign nations to mete out punishment to those who persisted in disobedience (2 Kgs 17:1-23).

⁵ While the character of God has been misrepresented from the very beginning of time when Satan tempted Adam and Eve to doubt the veracity of God's word and thus to lure them into sin, yet as Moskala clearly observes, judgment is "an integral part of His nature, His divine prerogative, and His very fundamental characteristic." Therefore, "to understand His judgments

Many scholarly works have been written on the concept of divine judgment in the sense of retributive justice. These cover a variety of topics and encompass various books of the Bible.⁶ While a number of these studies focusing on the book of Ezekiel paint a positive picture of God,⁷ others give a negative portrait of him, based on his actions in various sections of the book.⁸

means to know God better and comprehend His values and priorities.” Moskala adds that “God actually invites us to apprehend His judgments in order to be able to deliberately declare that He is the God of love and justice.” Jiří Moskala, “The Message of God’s People in the Old Testament,” *JATS* 19 (2008): 18-39.

⁶ See for example Richard M. Davidson, “The Good News of Yom Kippur,” *JATS* 2 (1991): 4-27; idem, “Assurance in the Judgment,” *Adventist Review*, 7 January 1998, 18-20; Roy Gane, “Judgment as Covenant Review,” *JATS* 8 (1997): 181-94; idem, *Cult and Character: Purification Offerings, Day of Atonement, and Theodicy* (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 2005); idem, *Who Is Afraid of the Judgment? The Good News about Christ’s Work in the Heavenly Sanctuary* (Nampa, Idaho: Pacific Press, 2006), 18; J. Gordon McConville, “The Judgment of God in the Old Testament,” *ExAud* 20 (2004): 25-42; Jiří Moskala, “Toward a Biblical Theology of God’s Judgment: A Celebration of the Cross in Seven Phases of Divine Universal Judgment (An Overview of a Theocentric-Christocentric Approach),” *JATS* 15 (2004): 138-65; R. J. R. Plant, *Good Figs, Bad Figs: Judicial Differentiation in the Book of Jeremiah* (New York: T&T Clark, 2008); Thomas M. Raitt, *A Theology of Exile: Judgment/Deliverance in Jeremiah and Ezekiel* (Philadelphia, Pa.: Fortress, 1977); Gene M. Tucker, “Sin and ‘Judgment’ in the Prophets,” in *Problems in Biblical Theology: Essays in Honor of Rolf Knierim* (ed. H. T.C. Sun et al.; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 373-88.

⁷ See Daniel I. Block, *The Book of Ezekiel Chapters 1-24* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 202; Mark S. Bryan, “The Threat to the Reputation of YHWH: The Portrayal of the Divine Character in the Book of Ezekiel” (Ph.D. diss., University of Sheffield, 1992); Moshe Greenberg, *Ezekiel 1-20* (New York: Double Day, 1983), 113; idem, *Ezekiel 21-37* (New York: Doubleday, 1997); Walther Zimmerli, *Ezekiel 1: A Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Ezekiel, Chapters 1-24* (Philadelphia, Pa.: Fortress, 1979).

⁸ See for example Gerlinde Baumann, *Love and Violence: Marriage as Metaphor for the Relationship between YHWH and Israel in the Prophetic Books* (Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical, 2003); Athalya Brenner, *The Intercourse of Knowledge: On Gendering Desire and “Sexuality” in the Hebrew Bible* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1997), 153-174; idem, “Some Reflections on Violence against Women and the Image of the Hebrew God: Prophetic Books Revisited,” in *On the Cutting Edge—The Study of Women in Biblical Worlds: Essays in Honor of Elisabeth Schussler Fiorenza* (ed. J. Schagerl et al.; New York: Continuum, 2003), 69-81; Peggy L. Day, “Adulterous Jerusalem’s Imagined Demise: Death of a Metaphor in Ezekiel 16,” *VT* 50 (2000): 285-309; idem, “The Bitch Had It Coming to Her: Rhetoric and Interpretation in Ezekiel 16,” *BibInt* 8 (2000): 231-253; Sandra L. Gravett, “That All Women May Be Warned: Reading the Sexual and Ethnic Violence in Ezekiel 16 and 23” (Ph.D. diss., Duke University, 1994); Susanna M. Odendaal, “YHWH as Character in Ezekiel” (Ph.D. diss., Princeton Theological Seminary, 1999) 1-2, 5;

Patrick D. Miller observes: “The notion of Judgment in the prophets needs continual re-examination and interpretation from various aspects.”⁹ The present study responds to this challenge by examining various aspects of God’s judgment in Ezek 5:5-17 and what these punitive measures reveal about the character and justice of God within the context of Ezek 1-24.¹⁰

Ezekiel 5:5-17 is the basic object of analysis in this inquiry because the passage not only outlines the basis for YHWH’s retributive judgment on Israel, but also clearly spells out the means God uses to chastise them. The severity of these punishments calls YHWH’s justice into question. Moreover, it is also in this passage where we have the first appearance of the strong “I” statements of intent, focusing on the divine resolve to execute judgment upon Israel. Commenting on these harsh divine judgment statements, Ward says that “no term except ‘divine rage’ is adequate” to explain YHWH’s posture toward the rebellious Judeans.¹¹ Darr calls YHWH’s action here “a ferocious diatribe.”¹²

Renita J. Weems, *Battered Love: Marriage, Sex, and Violence in the Hebrew Prophets* (Minneapolis, Minn.: Fortress Press, 1995).

⁹ Patrick D. Miller, *Sin and Judgment in the Prophets: A Stylistic and Theological Analysis* (Chico, Calif.: Scholars, 1982), 1.

¹⁰ This research is undertaken within the context of Ezek 1-24 because, apart from being a complete literary unit, “divine rage permeates Ezekiel 1-24.” James M. Ward, *Thus Says the Lord: The Message of the Prophets* (Nashville, Tenn.: Abingdon, 1991), 174. The chapters also attempt to give justification for these harsh divine judgments and thus help us to make sense of theodicy. Paul M. Joyce, *Divine Initiative and Human Response in Ezekiel* (Sheffield: Journal for the Study of the Old Testament, 1989), 34.

¹¹ Ward, *Thus Says the Lord: The Message of the Prophets*, 174.

¹² Kathryn P. Darr, “The Book of Ezekiel: Introduction, Commentary, and Reflections,” in *The New Interpreter’s Bible* (Nashville, Tenn.: Abingdon, 2001), 1152. See also Plant who, while observing that “the dominant impression of YHWH’s judicial action in the prophets is its sweeping, comprehensive character,” concludes that of all the prophets “the most searing critique of Israel’s apostasy, however, occurs in the book of Ezekiel.” Plant, *Good Figs, Bad Figs*, 19, 21.

Statement of the Problem

In view of the negative characterizations of YHWH that some scholars bring to the study of the book of Ezek 1-24,¹³ and in particular the preponderance of harsh judgment language in Ezek 5:5-17,¹⁴ can God employ various punitive measures upon his people and still be viewed positively? What is the justification for using such severe judicial actions? Can God use the ‘rod’ on his children and still remain a caring, compassionate, and loving God?

Statement of Purpose

The purpose of this study is to conduct an exegetical and theological investigation of the basis, function, and nature of divine judgment in Ezek 5:5-17, with a view to establishing the justification and meaning of this punishment of Israel and its bearing on the character of God within the context of Ezek 1-24.

Justification for the Research

Many scholarly works have been produced on the book of Ezekiel, attempting to address questions on the justice and the character of God. While some of these studies

¹³ For some examples of such studies see Day, “The Bitch Had It Coming to Her,” 231-54; Gravett considers YHWH an accomplice in the sexual mistreatment of the woman Jerusalem. Gravett, “That All Women May Be Warned,” 182-88. Odendall also discusses YHWH’s mistreatment of the woman in Ezek 16 and 23 and claims that the book of Ezekiel is silent regarding the concept of love. Odendaal, “YHWH as Character in Ezekiel,” 158-201.

¹⁴ See the outline where I have divided these statements into the following four categories: Statements of direct intent of judgment, statements of impending exile, statements of withdrawal of divine favor, and statements of instruments of judgment. It is also worth noting Feinberg’s observation that “Ezekiel’s denunciations against Judah’s spiritual declension are more severe than those of Jeremiah.” Charles L. Feinberg, *The Prophecy of Ezekiel: The Glory of the Lord* (Chicago, Ill.: Moody, 1969), 13.

focus on the punitive features of the book¹⁵ and others seek to relate sin and its resultant judgments with themes related to the restorative work of God,¹⁶ no work has thoroughly investigated why God takes such extreme measures on his people, the various methods he uses, and the roles these play in informing us of the overall character and justice of God.

In addition to the literature already cited above, several other scholarly works have been valuable for aspects of this research. These include major biblical commentaries on the book of Ezekiel such as Zimmerli's *Ezekiel 1: A Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Ezekiel, Chapters 1-24*.¹⁷ Zimmerli devotes only a few pages to discussion of Ezek 5, but his contribution on the 'recognition formula' in the book of Ezekiel, both in his commentary and in his *I Am YHWH*,¹⁸ has been very useful regarding the present investigation. Greenberg's commentary, *Ezekiel 1-20*, provides many valuable insights on God's judgment on Israel, including an outline of Ezek 5:5-17 in which he briefly highlights the basis and the means of the actions of God against Jerusalem.¹⁹

¹⁵ See for example Michael Fishbane, "Sin and Judgment in the Prophecies of Ezekiel," *Int* 38 (1984): 131-50; E. J. Smit, "The Concepts of Obliteration in Ezekiel 5:1-4," *JNSL* 1 (1971): 46-50; John T. Strong, "Ezekiel's Oracles Against the Nations within the Context of His Message" (Ph.D. diss., Union Theological Seminary, 1993).

¹⁶ For discussion on this see Moshe Greenberg, "The Design and Themes of Ezekiel's Program of Restoration," *Int* 38 (1984): 181-208; Key-Sup Hong, "Judgment and Restoration in the Temple Visions of Ezekiel 8-11 and Ezekiel 40-48 in the Light of Temple Theology" (Ph.D. diss., Fuller Theological Seminary, 2003). See also Renz who argues that the temple vision of Ezek 8-11 is designed to underscore YHWH's judgment on the people of Judah who did not go into exile while at the same time giving hope of future restoration solely to those exiles who were in the Babylonian captivity. Thomas Renz, *The Rhetorical Function of the Book of Ezekiel* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1999).

¹⁷ See Zimmerli, *Ezekiel 1-24*, 147-178; idem, "The Message of the Prophet Ezekiel," *Int* 23 (1969): 131-57.

¹⁸ Zimmerli, *Ezekiel 1-24*, 36-41; idem, *I Am Yahweh* (Atlanta, Ga.: John Knox, 1982).

¹⁹ Greenberg, *Ezekiel 1-20*, 119. See also his discussion on the use of the particles *laken* and *ya'an* on pp. 111-12. The brief section on pp. 127 and 128 which compares Lev 26 and Ezek

Block's book, *The Book of Ezekiel Chapters 1-24*, has useful commentary and theological insights, but it does not deal exhaustively with the subject of this research.²⁰ In the section dealing with Ezek 5 in his book, *Word and Spirit in Ezekiel*, Robson focuses mainly on the concept of disobedience of the exiles.²¹ Other helpful resources include, but are not limited to, the following: Tuell, *Ezekiel*,²² Jenson, *Ezekiel*,²³ Joyce, *Ezekiel: A Commentary*,²⁴ Hummel, *Ezekiel 1-20*,²⁵ Cooper, *Ezekiel*,²⁶ Hals, *Ezekiel*,²⁷ and Eichrodt, *Ezekiel*.²⁸

Some other works that have dealt with the theme of judgment within the context of Ezek 1-24 include the dissertation of McBride, "The Nature of God's Judgment against Israel in Ezek 1-24."²⁹ While some of the means of judgment, like sword, famine,

5:5-17 is also quite invaluable to this inquiry since the curses of Lev 26 appear to form the backdrop for Ezekiel's message of judgment.

²⁰ Block, *Ezekiel 1-24*.

²¹ James Robson, *Word and Spirit in Ezekiel* (New York: T&T Clark, 2006), 173-12.

²² Steven S. Tuell, *Ezekiel* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 2009).

²³ Robert W. Jenson, *Ezekiel* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2009).

²⁴ Paul M. Joyce, *Ezekiel: A Commentary* (New York: T&T Clark, 2007).

²⁵ Hummel sets the stage for this discussion by giving an analysis of the words used to describe rebellious Israel right from the time YHWH is commissioning Ezekiel for his work, for example, "hard of face," "hard-hearted," "house of rebellion" (Ezek 2:4, 5). A detailed discussion of this rebellious phenomenon will be dealt with in detail in chapter 3 where the basis of YHWH's judgment on Israel will be considered. Horace D. Hummel, *Ezekiel 1-20* (St. Louis, Mo.: Concordia, 2005), 77-89.

²⁶ Lamar E. Cooper, *Ezekiel* (Nashville, Tenn.: Broadman & Holman, 1994).

²⁷ Ronald M. Hals, *Ezekiel* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989).

²⁸ Walther Eichrodt, *Ezekiel* (London: SCM Press, 1970).

²⁹ Gregory J. McBride, "The Nature of God's Judgment against Israel in Ezekiel 1-24" (Ph.D. diss., New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, 1995).

pestilence and others, are mentioned, they do not form a major focus of the study. In fact, his focus is mainly on the objects of the judgment: the leaders and the people. McBride's dissertation also does not deal comprehensively with the issues that the present study seeks to elucidate. For example, his study does not in any way make a connection between the nature of the judgments of God in Ezek 1-24 and the justice and character of God, an area that is to be a major focus of my dissertation. Another study is that of Garber entitled, "Trauma, History and Survival in Ezek 1-24."³⁰ As the title indicates, the work does not cover any aspect of the means of judgment and hence leaves a vacuum that this research seeks to fill.

Robertson's dissertation on "Drought, Famine, Plague and Pestilence: Ancient Israel's Understandings of and Responses to Natural Catastrophes"³¹ addresses the natural disasters that God used to bring punishment on the Israelites. His major emphasis is to determine how ancient Israel understood and responded to those disasters. The dissertation covers biblical natural catastrophes in general and provides detailed Near Eastern background for these natural catastrophes. However, the work has very few references to the book of Ezekiel.³²

³⁰ David G. Garber, "Trauma, History and Survival in Ezekiel 1-24" (Ph.D. diss., Emory University, 2005).

³¹ Warren C. Robertson, "Drought, Famine, Plague and Pestilence: Ancient Israel's Understandings of and Responses to Natural Catastrophes" (Ph.D. diss., Drew University, 2007). For other perspectives on divine judgment and natural catastrophes see Terence E. Fretheim, "Divine Judgment and the Warming of the World: An Old Testament Perspective," in *God, Evil, and Suffering: Essays in Honor of Paul R. Sponheim* (ed. T. Fretheim and C. Thompson; *Word and World Supplement 4*; St. Paul, Minn.: Word and World, 2000), 21-32.

³² Robertson, however, makes a very important observation: "To understand natural catastrophes as divine punishment for human transgression . . . was common to people of the ancient Near East in general and biblical Israelites in particular." He points out that "the Hebrew Bible and many other ancient Near Eastern texts are replete with stories that make reference to, if

There are other studies that touch on the means of judgment in Ezekiel. They include that of Swanepoel, which deals with the stoning of the unfaithful wife in the allegory of Ezek 16.³³ Shea sees a connection between famine and the covenant blessings and curses of Lev 26 and Deut 28 when he states, “Related to the idea of famine as a covenant curse is the prophetic pronouncement of famine as a judgment upon a covenant breaking people.”³⁴ In his article, “The Lawsuit Motif in Canonical Perspective,” Richard Davidson briefly outlines the covenant lawsuit motif that he finds in Ezek 5 and 6.³⁵

This brief survey of literature has revealed that a number of scholarly works have touched on some components of this investigation as stated above. However, this research focuses on a comprehensive exegetical and theological understanding of the basis, function, and nature of retributive justice in Ezek 5:5-17 and the implications this has on the character and justice of God within the context of Ezek 1-24.

Methodology

This study employs various methodologies that serve as a guide in the exegetical and theological exploration of the basis and function of God’s judgment in Ezek 5:5-17,

not more actively address, the wide variety of natural catastrophes,” and cites the case of Atrahasis, where the gods attempted to destroy humans through disease and famine. Robertson, “Drought, Famine, Plague and Pestilence,” 1, 18-19.

³³ M. G. Swanepoel, “Ezekiel 16: Abandoned Child, Bride Adorned or Unfaithful Wife?” in *Among the Prophets: Language, Image and Structure in the Prophetic Writings* (ed. P. R. Davies and D. J. A. Clines; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993), 90.

³⁴ W. H. Shea, “Famine,” *IDB* 2:769-73.

³⁵ Richard M. Davidson, “The Covenant Lawsuit Motif in Canonical Perspective” (paper presented at Evangelical Theological Society, Providence, R.I., 20 November 2008). See also idem, “The Chiasmic Literary Structure of the Book of Ezekiel,” in *To Understand the Scriptures: Essays in Honor of William H. Shea* (ed. D. Merling; Berrien Springs, Mich.: Institute of Archaeology, Siegfried H. Horn Archaeological Museum, Andrews University, 1997), 79.

but which also direct the presentation of the findings of the study in a logical, coherent, and systematic way.

For the purpose of this study, the investigation deals with the final form of the Masoretic Text.³⁶ It adopts a synchronic approach of biblical interpretation, which, in the words of Joyce, “deals with texts as holistic units,”³⁷ and seeks to “analyze the text in its

³⁶ Brevard S. Childs has eloquently stated the significance of the biblical text in the canonical context. He writes, “The significance of the biblical literature is that it alone bears witness to the full history of revelation. Within the Old Testament neither the process of the formation nor the history of its canonization is assigned an independent integrity. These dimensions have been either lost or purposely blurred. Rather, canon asserts that the witness to Israel’s experience with God is testified to in effect on the biblical text itself. It is only in the final form of the biblical text in which the normative history has reached an end, that the full effect of this revelatory history can be preserved.” In emphasizing the role of the final form of the text, Childs adds, “The final form of the text performs a crucial hermeneutical function in establishing the peculiar profile of a passage.” Furthermore “to work with the final form is to resist any method which seeks critically to shift the canonical ordering.” Brevard S. Childs, “The Canonical Shape of the Prophetic Literature,” in *Interpreting the Prophets* (ed. J. L. Mays and P. Achtemeier; Philadelphia, Pa.: Fortress, 1987), 42, 43. See also idem, *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture* (Philadelphia, Pa.: Fortress, 1979); idem, *New Testament as Canon: An Introduction* (Philadelphia, Pa.: Fortress, 1985).

Other scholars who add their voices to this canonical argument include Rolf Rendtorff, who emphasizes the significance of the “message of the text in its final form,” because “the Bible, in its final, canonical form, is always our teacher.” R. Rendtorff, “What We Miss by Taking the Bible Apart,” *BRev* 14 (1998): 42-44. For some other recent studies on the canonical approach to biblical interpretation see: Craig G. Bartholomew, *Canon and Biblical Interpretation* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006); idem, *Renewing Biblical Interpretation* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000); Mark G. Brett, *Biblical Criticism in Crisis? The Impact of the Canonical Approach on Old Testament Studies* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991); Elmer Dyck, “Canon as Context for Interpretation,” in *The Act of Bible Reading: A Multi-Disciplinary Approach to Biblical Interpretation* (ed. E. Dyck; Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1996); David P. Kuske, *Biblical Interpretation: The Only Right Way* (Milwaukee, Wisc.: Northwest, 1995); John Sailhamer, *Introduction to Old Testament Theology: A Canonical Approach* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995); James A. Sanders, *The Canon Debate* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 2002); idem, *From Sacred Story to Sacred Text: Canon as Paradigm* (Philadelphia, Pa.: Fortress Press, 1987); K. J. Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning in This Text?* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998).

³⁷ Joyce contrasts this method with the diachronic studies which “attempt to trace the development of text through time.” Joyce further notes that both Christian and Jewish traditional readings of Ezekiel have generally been “characterized by synchronic assumptions.” Paul M. Joyce, “Synchronic and Diachronic Perspectives on Ezekiel,” in *Synchronic Or Diachronic? A Debate on Method in Old Testament Exegesis* (ed. J. C. De Moor; New York: E. J. Brill, 1995), 116. See also James Barr, “The Synchronic, the Diachronic and the Historical: A Triangular Relationship?” in *Synchronic or Diachronic? A Debate on Method in Old Testament Exegesis* (ed. J. C. De Moor; New York: E. J. Brill, 1995), 1-14; Moshe Greenberg, “What Are Valid

present form rather than speculate about possible earlier forms or posit a hypothetical history of the development of the text.”³⁸

The research also employs the inductive method of Bible study, with its basic premises of analytical and synthetic treatment of biblical texts in order to arrive at various conclusions.³⁹ Another approach that has been invaluable in this undertaking is intertextuality, the basic assumption of which is the interconnectedness of biblical texts. It is a concept that brings texts into interplay with other texts, and as Fewell has cogently expressed, “no text exists in a vacuum. All texts are embedded in a larger web of related texts.”⁴⁰ Another method that could be closely linked to the ones outlined here is the

Criteria for Determining Inauthentic Matter in Ezekiel?" in *Ezekiel and His Book: Textual and Literary Criticism and Their Interrelation* (ed. J. Lust; Leuven: Uitgeverij Peeters, 1986), 123-35.

³⁸ Joyce, "Synchronic and Diachronic Perspectives on Ezekiel," 121.

³⁹ Under this Bible study method, Lea outlines three categories: (1) Synthetic Bible study in which information concerning the “general content or message of an entire book of the Bible” is considered. (2) Analytical Bible study which considers the “content, meaning and application of a verse or paragraph of Scripture.” (3) Devotional Bible study which “emphasizes the relevance of Scripture to our behavior and that of others.” Lea further points out, “Viewing the Bible synthetically provides added insight into meaning and a basis for more accurate interpretation. Viewing the Bible analytically allows the student to notice small details which provide a careful, complete, and precise grasp of its teaching.” Thomas D. Lea, "Inductive Bible Study Methods," in *Biblical Hermeneutics: A Comprehensive Introduction to Interpreting Scripture* (ed. B. Corley et al.; Nashville, Tenn.: Broadmann & Holman, 2002), 43, 40.

⁴⁰ Danna N. Fewell, "Introduction: Writing, Reading, and Relating," in *Reading Between Texts: Intertextuality and the Hebrew Bible* (ed. D. Fewell; Louisville, Ky.: Westminster/John Knox, 1992), 17. Adding his voice to this intertextual debate Peter Miscall also avers that “texts are interdependent and use each other,” Peter D. Miscall, “Isaiah: New Heavens, New Earth, New Book,” in *Reading Between Texts: Intertextuality and the Hebrew Bible* (ed. D. Fewell; Louisville, Ky.: Westminster/John Knox, 1992), 45.

In discussing what a text is, Patricia Tull takes a broader perspective of looking at a text—a view which includes not only words—written or spoken—but “all signs (or ‘signifiers’) which call for interpretation.” At the end of her article Tull points out that “by removing artificially imposed boundaries between texts and texts, between texts and readers, by attending to the dialogical nature of all speech, intertextual theory invites new ventures in cultural and literary perception that will certainly introduce shifts in the ways biblical scholarship is carried out for many years to come.” Patricia K. Tull, "Intertextuality and the Hebrew Scriptures," *CurBS* 8 (2000): 60, 83. See also Kirsten Nielsen, "Intertextuality and Hebrew Bible," in *Congress Volume Oslo 1998* (ed. A. Lemaire and M. Sæbø; Boston, Mass.: Brill, 2000), 17-31. In this

multidimensional approach which, in the words of Jonker, considers texts from a “total exegetical-hermeneutical picture.” Jonker avers that “texts, therefore also biblical texts, are too complex to be read and understood from the viewpoint of only one or two exegetical strategies.”⁴¹

The research format is as follows: The first chapter deals with the introductory and background issues, the problem and purpose of the study, justification for the research, methodology, and delimitations. Chapter 2 explores the challenges to the character of God as reflected in Ezek 5:5-17. Chapter 3 is an exegetical investigation of the basis of judgment in Ezek 5:5-17 within the context of chs. 1-24. Chapter 4 examines the function of the judgment of God in Ezek 5:5-17 within the context of Ezek 1-24. Chapter 5 examines the nature of divine judgment in Ezek 5:5-17 within its context. Chapter 6 looks into how these judicial actions contribute to our understanding of the character and justice of God.⁴² Chapter 7 moves beyond Ezek 1-24 and explores

article Nielsen gives some practical examples on how to apply the concept of intertextuality to a given biblical text. See also John Barton, "Intertextuality and the 'Final Form' of the Text," in *Congress Volume Oslo 1998* (ed. A. Lemaire and M. Sæbø; Boston, Mass.: Brill, 2000), 33-37; Michael Fishbane, "Types of Biblical Intertextuality," in *Congress Volume Oslo 1998* (ed. A. Lemaire and M. Sæbø; Boston, Mass.: Brill, 2000), 39-44; G. W. Buchanan, *Introduction to Intertextuality* (Lewiston, N.Y.: Edwin Mellen, 1994); Paul E. Dinter, "The Once and Future Text," in *The Quest for Context and Meaning: Studies in Biblical Intertextuality in Honor of James A. Sanders* (ed. C. A. Evans and S. Talmon; New York: Brill, 1997), 375-92.

⁴¹ Louis Jonker, "Reading Jonah Multidimensionally: A Multidimensional Reading Strategy for Biblical Interpretation," *Scriptura* 64 (1998): 1-15. See also E. M. Conradie et al., *Fishing for Jonah: Various Approaches to Biblical Interpretation* (Bellville: University of the Western Cape Press, 1995); Louis Jonker, *Exclusivity and Variety: Perspective on Multidimensional Exegesis* (Kampen, The Netherlands: Kok Pharos, 1996); idem, "On Plotting the Exegetical-Hermeneutical Landscape," *Scriptura* 59 (1996): 397-411; idem, "'Text' in a Multidimensional Exegetical Approach," *Scriptura* 46 (1993): 100-15; B. C. Lategan, "Hermeneutics," *IDB* 3:149-54.

⁴² For some general works on the theology of Ezekiel see Daniel I. Block, "Ezekiel: Theology of," *NIDOTTE* 4:615-28; Cooper, *Ezekiel*, 40-45; Paul House in a section of his book entitled, "The God Who Is Present to Judge: Ezekiel 4-24," discusses YHWH's resolve to bring

intratextual links in the rest of Ezekiel, and the intertextual connections in the rest of the Old Testament. Chapter 8 investigates the intertextual links Ezek 5:5-17 has with some selected ancient Near Eastern literature. The conclusions drawn from the research are presented in chapter 9.

Delimitations

The focus of this investigation is to explore the justification of YHWH's relentless judgment on Israel in Ezek 5:5-17 within the context of Ezek 1-24 and the impact this has on human perception of his character.⁴³ This text scope has been selected not only because of the preponderance of the language of judgment found in this portion of Scripture, as compared to other parts of the book of Ezekiel, but also because of its heightened and harsh tone of the language of judgment. The basis, function, and nature of judgment in other parts of the book of Ezekiel are not central to this investigation. For example, although Ezek 25-32 has many thematic links with Ezek 1-24, it consists of judgments against the nations, and does not deal with Israel. Ezekiel 33-48, which focuses on oracles of restoration, is also not a major part of this study since the dissertation concentrates on YHWH's judgment rather than restoration.

This research does not concern itself with issues regarding the book's date and historical background, authorship, and history of interpretation,⁴⁴ since these concerns

judgment on the nation of Israel. Paul R. House, *Old Testament Theology* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1998), 327-45; John Goldingay, *The Old Testament Theology: Israel's Gospel* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2003); Joyce, *Ezekiel*, 17-32, 88-169.

⁴³ Some scholars who consider Ezek 1-24 as a literary unit include the following: Block, *Ezekiel 1-24*; Hals, *Ezekiel*; Zimmerli, *Ezekiel 1-24*.

⁴⁴ For some recent research on Ezekiel see Daniel I. Block, "Ezekiel in Scholarship at the Turn of the Millennium," in *Ezekiel's Hierarchical World: Wrestling with a Tiered Reality* (ed. S.

have already been dealt with thoroughly in other scholarly sources.⁴⁵ However, limited use is made of any background material deemed to aid the proper exposition of passages under investigation. This project does not deal with broader philosophical issues and literature relating to the problem of evil,⁴⁶ but is limited to a consideration of issues of theodicy that arise from the book of Ezekiel.

L. Cook and C. L. Patton; Atlanta, Ga.: Society of Biblical Literature, 2004), 227-239; Kathryn P. Darr, "Ezekiel Among the Critics," *CurBS* 2 (1994): 9-24; Risa L. Kohn, "Ezekiel at the Turn of the Century," *CurBR* 2 (2003): 9-32; Henry McKeating, *Ezekiel* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993), 11-21, 30-72.

⁴⁵ See for example G. R. Berry, "The Composition of the Book of Ezekiel," *JBL* 58 (1939): 163-175; Joseph Blenkinsopp, *Ezekiel* (Louisville, Ky.: John Knox, 1990), 1-13; Block, *Ezekiel 1-24*, 1-74; Michael D. Coogan, *The Old Testament: A Historical and Literary Introduction to the Hebrew Scriptures* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 386-399; Cooper, *Ezekiel*, 19-52; Darr, "The Book of Ezekiel," 1075-1107; Michael B. Dick, *Reading the Old Testament: An Inductive Introduction* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 2008), 1-50; Iain M. Duguid, *Ezekiel* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1999), 17-39; Greenberg, *Ezekiel 1-20*, 3-27; Carl G. Howie, *The Date and Composition of Ezekiel* (Journal of Biblical Literature Monograph Series 4; Philadelphia: Society of Biblical Literature, 1960), 27-46, 85-99; Hummel, *Ezekiel 1-20*, 1-27; Tremper Longman and Raymond B. Dillard, *An Introduction to the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006), 354-370; Zimmerli, *Ezekiel 1-24*, 1-77.

⁴⁶ For discussion on theodicy, see John Kutsco's article on "Idolatry and Theodicy: Illegitimate Expressions for God's Presence." John F. Kutsco, *Between Heaven and Earth: Divine Presence and Absence in the Book of Ezekiel* (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 2000), 25-76; James L. Crenshaw, "Theodicy and Prophetic Literature," in *Theodicy in the World of the Bible* (ed. A. Laato and J. C. de Moor; Leiden: Brill, 2003), 236-55; Harry A. Hoffner, "Theodicy in Hittite Texts," in *Theodicy in the World of the Bible* (ed. A. Laato and J. C. de Moor; Leiden: Brill, 2003), 90-107; Jacqueline E. Lapsey, "The Problem of the Moral Self in the Book of Ezekiel" (Ph.D. diss., Emory University, 1999); Antonio Loprieno, "Theodicy in Ancient Egyptian Texts," in *Theodicy in the World of the Bible* (ed. A. Laato and J. C. de Moor; Leiden: Brill, 2003), 27-56; J. C. de Moor, "Theodicy in the Texts of Ugarit," in *Theodicy in the World of the Bible* (ed. A. Laato and J. C. de Moor; Leiden: Brill, 2003), 108-50; K. Toorn, "Theodicy in Akkadian Literature," in *Theodicy in the World of the Bible* (ed. A. Laato and J. C. de Moor; Leiden: Brill, 2003), 57-89; Benjamin Uffenheimer, "Theodicy and Ethics in the Prophecy of Ezekiel," in *Justice and Righteousness: Biblical Themes and Their Influence* (ed. H. G. Reventlow and Y. Hoffman; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1992), 200-27.

CHAPTER 2

CHALLENGES TO THE CHARACTER OF GOD AS

REFLECTED IN EZEKIEL 5:5-17

Introduction

Words and actions have consequences. This concept has an impact on the way YHWH has been characterized by biblical scholars, who view some of his words and actions in the Old Testament to be contrary to his perceived character. They have therefore ascribed to YHWH some of the most negative portrayals imaginable.¹ While negative characterization of YHWH is quite a common phenomenon among some Old Testament scholars,² the negativity with which he is viewed in Ezekiel reaches astounding and astronomical proportions. This is especially true among some of the feminist critics, who view some of the metaphors used in Ezekiel as a personal affront to

¹ See Walter Brueggemann's *Theology of the Old Testament*, in which many negative terms like abusive, ambiguous, devious, irascible, insanely jealous, out of control, unstable, irrational, inattentive, unreliable, etc., are used to portray YHWH. Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament: Testimony, Dispute, Advocacy* (Minneapolis, Minn.: Fortress, 1997). For some critiques of Brueggemann's portrayal of YHWH see Terence E. Fretheim, "Some Reflections on Brueggemann's God," in *God in the Fray: A Tribute to Walter Brueggemann* (ed. T. Linafelt and T. K. Beal; Minneapolis, Minn.: Fortress, 1998), 24-37.

² For some examples of these, see Crenshaw, *A Whirlpool of Torment*; Penchansky, *What a Rough Beast?*; O'Brien, *Challenging Prophetic Metaphor*, 63-124. In his discussion on the "ambiguity and the character of YHWH," Walter Brueggemann poses three significant questions: Does YHWH abuse? Does YHWH contradict? Is YHWH unreliable? Brueggemann answers these questions in the affirmative: He says there is evidence of YHWH's abusiveness, he is in essence a "connundrum of contradictions," and also unreliable. Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 359-72.

women. The so-called “offensive” metaphors that raise the ire of these scholars are found mainly in Ezek 16 and Ezek 23, where “lady Jerusalem,” as in Ezek 5:5-17, is severely punished by YHWH.³

I therefore begin the study by drawing some parallels between Ezek 5:5-17 and Ezek 16 and 23. I have taken this approach because these two chapters are constituent parts of the larger context of Ezek 5:5-17 that have come under intense scrutiny from secondary interpreters who view YHWH’s actions in the two passages as the sum total of his character. With these links established, I then explore the interpretations of both

³ See for example, Baumann, *Love and Violence*; Brenner, *The Intercourse of Knowledge*, 153-74; idem, "Some Reflections on Violence against Women and the Image of the Hebrew God," 69-81; Tristanne J. Conolly, "Metaphor and Abuse in Hosea," *FemT* 18 (1998): 55-66; Day, "Adulterous Jerusalem's Imagined Demise," 285-309; idem, "The Bitch Had It Coming to Her," 231-53; Carol J. Dempsey, "The 'Whore' of Ezekiel 16: The Impact of and Ramifications of Gender-Specific Metaphors in Light of Biblical Law and Divine Judgment," in *Gender and Law in the Hebrew Bible and the Ancient Near East* (ed. V. H. Matthews, B. M. Levinson, and T. Frymer-Kensky; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998), 57-78; Fokkelien van Dijk-Hemmes, "The Metaphorization of Woman in Prophetic Speech: An Analysis of Ezekiel 23," in *A Feminist Companion to the Latter Prophets* (ed. A. Brenner; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995), 244-55; idem, "The Metaphorization of Woman in Prophetic Speech: An Analysis of Ezekiel 23," in *On Gendering Texts: Female and Male Voices in the Hebrew Bible* (ed. A. Brenner and F. van Dijk-Hemmes; Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1993), 167-76; idem, "The Metaphorization of Woman in Prophetic Speech: An Analysis of Ezekiel 23," *VT* 43 (1993): 162-170; J. Cheryl Exum, "The Ethics of Biblical Violence against Women," in *The Bible in Ethics: The Second Sheffield Colloquium* (ed. J. W. Rogerson, M. Davies, and M. Daniel Carroll R.; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1995), 248-71; Erin Runions, "Violence and the Economy of Desire in Ezek 16:1-45," in *Prophets and Daniel: A Feminist Companion to the Bible* (A. Brenner; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 2001), 159-69; T. Drorah Setel, "Prophets and Pornography: Female Sexual Imagery in Hosea," in *Feminist Interpretation of the Bible* (ed. L. M. Russel; Philadelphia, Pa.: Westminster, 1985), 86-95; Mary E. Shields, "Multiple Exposures: Body Rhetoric and Gender Characterization in Ezekiel 16," *JFSR* 14 (1998): 5-18; Renita J. Weems, "Gomer: Victim of Violence or Victim of Metaphor? *Semeia* 47 (1989): 87-104; idem, *Battered Love: Marriage, Sex, and Violence in the Hebrew Prophets* (Minneapolis, Minn.: Fortress, 1995); Corrine L. Patton, "'Should Our Sister Be Treated Like a Whore?' A Response to Feminist Critiques of Ezekiel 23," in *The Book of Ezekiel: Theological and Anthropological Perspectives* (ed. M. S. Odell and J. T. Strong; Atlanta, Ga.: Society of Biblical Literature, 2000), 221-38.

feminist and traditional scholars, whose disparate views have given rise to spirited and vigorous debate on the character of God in Ezekiel.

Ezekiel 5:5-17 and Ezekiel 16, 23

Several general features stand out when Ezek 5:5-17 is compared with Ezek 16 and Ezek 23.⁴ First, in both sets of passages, Jerusalem is personified as female,⁵ although the full development of the metaphorized Jerusalem as female only takes place in Ezek 16 and 23.⁶ Second, some of the accusations labeled against Jerusalem in Ezek 5:5-17 cohere with those in Ezek 16 and Ezek 23. Third, the texts are characterized by harsh and severe judgment scenarios. In fact, the punishments encountered in Ezek 5:5-17 are played out in a more elaborate form in Ezek 16 and Ezek 23.⁷ Lastly, the theodicy question of the justice of God is a natural outgrowth of Ezek 5:5-17 and Ezek 16 and 23.

⁴ On this comparison Galambush's remarks are quite pertinent: "Themes that in chs. 16 and 23 seem intimately tied to the personification of Yahweh as a woman—Jerusalem's pollution of Yahweh's sanctuary, Yahweh's 'satisfaction' at her punishment by the united male community, the gossip over the public exposure of Jerusalem, and her openness to the gaze of 'every passerby'—already in chap 5 form part of the 'story' of Jerusalem. In this context the narrative metaphors of chs. 16 and 23 can be seen, not as exceptional depictions of the city, but as one end of a continuum of personification within Ezekiel." Julie Galambush, *Jerusalem in the Book of Ezekiel: The City as Yahweh's Wife* (Atlanta, Ga.: Scholars, 1992), 131.

⁵ For similar characterizations outside Ezek 1-24, see Ezek 26:6, 8; 30:18.

⁶ For studies on the metaphorization of Jerusalem as YHWH's wife and its implications on the relationship between YHWH and Israel see Elaine J. Adler, "The Background for the Metaphor of Covenant as Marriage in the Hebrew Bible" (Ph.D. diss., University of California, 1990); Galambush, *Jerusalem in the Book of Ezekiel*; Nelly Stienstra, *Yahweh Is the Husband of His People: Analysis of a Biblical Metaphor with Special Reference to Translation* (Kampen, The Netherlands: Pharos, 1993); E. Ben Zvi, "Observations on the Marital Metaphor of YHWH and Israel in Its Ancient Israelite Context: General Considerations and Particular Images in Hosea 1:2," *JSOT* 28 (2004): 363-84.

⁷ Galambush also observes that "Yahweh describes the aftermath of Jerusalem's punishment in the same terms as the aftermath of the woman's punishment in chap 16; Yahweh's 'anger will be spent' and he will 'be satisfied'" (Ezek 5:13 cf. 16:42). Galambush, *Jerusalem in the Book of Ezekiel*, 131.

It is therefore not surprising that, as parts of the larger context of Ezek 5:5-17, these two chapters are particularly targeted by secondary interpreters as reflecting on the character of God.

A brief exploration of the passages reveals that they share several specific elements that warrant consideration. First, in both Ezek 5 and Ezek 16, Jerusalem is identified as the recipient of YHWH's reproofs (Ezek 5:5; 16:2, 3; 23:4). The laser beam of divine justice is aimed directly at this city to expose its spiritual decadence. Its evil has to be uncovered for all to see. Second, YHWH spells out his beneficent actions on behalf of Israel (Ezek 5:5; 16:3-14). This is significant because it is partly because of disregard of these gracious actions that YHWH intends to unleash severe judgments on Israel.

Third, there are common elements regarding the accusations brought against Jerusalem (see table 1). For example, תועבה, "abomination" that is found in Ezek 5:9, 11, occurs nine times in Ezek 16 (vv. 2, 22, 36, 43, 47, 50, 51 [twice], 58) and once in Ezek 23 (v. 36). In Ezek 23 idolatry is represented mainly by the word גליל, "idols" (vv. 7, 30, 37, 39, 49), but which does not appear in Ezek 5:5-17. The same word is found only once in Ezek 16 (v. 36). Another element of idolatry for which Israel is indicted in Ezek 16 and 23 is child sacrifice (Ezek 16:20, 21; 23:39). This phenomenon is not found in Ezek 5:5-17. Similarly, Israel is indicted in both Ezek 5 and 23 for defiling YHWH's sanctuary (Ezek 5:11; 23:38, 39). While in Ezek 5:11 they are said to defile the sanctuary with vile idols (שקוץ) and detestable things (תועבה), in Ezek 23:38, 39 the defiling of the sanctuary is connected with child sacrifice. Israel is also indicted in Ezek 16 and 23

Table 1. Indictments in Ezekiel 5:5-17 and Ezekiel 16, 23

Ezekiel 5:5-17	Ezekiel 16 and 23
v. 5 Jerusalem, the focal point of judgment: This is Jerusalem	Jerusalem, the focal point of judgment: Son of man, make known to Jerusalem her abominations (16:2)
vv. 6, 7 Rebellion against statutes and ordinances	
v. 9 Because of all your abominations, I will do to you what I have never yet done, and the like of which I will never do again	<p>16:2 Make known to Jerusalem her abominations</p> <p>16:22 In all your abominations . . . you did not remember the days of your youth</p> <p>16:36 Because of all your abominable idols</p> <p>16:43 Have you not committed lewdness beyond all your abominations</p> <p>16:47 You not only followed their ways, and acted according to their abominations</p> <p>16:50 They were haughty, and did abominable things before me</p> <p>16:51 You have committed more of your abominations than they [Samaria] and have made your sisters appear righteous by all your abominations which you have committed</p> <p>16:58 You must bear the penalty of your lewdness and your abominations</p> <p>23:36 Son of man, will you judge Oholah and Oholibah? Then declare to them their abominations</p>
	<p>16:36 Because of all the idols of your abominations</p> <p>23:7 By all their idols she hath been defiled</p> <p>23:30 because you played the whore with the nations, and polluted yourself with their idols</p> <p>23:37 With their idols they have committed adultery</p> <p>23:49 And the sins of your idols you bear</p>
v. 11 Because you have defiled my sanctuary with all your vile images and with all your abominations	23:39 For when they had slaughtered their children for their idols on the same day they came into my sanctuary to profane it
	16:15-34; 23:1-8, 10-21, 37 Promiscuity
	16:59 Breaking the covenant
	16:20, 21; 23:39 Child sacrifice and bloodshed

for her unfaithfulness to YHWH by building political alliances with other nations.⁸ This phenomenon is strikingly absent from Ezek 5:5-17.

In Ezek 5:17 YHWH threatens bloodshed upon the people of Israel. The reverse is the case in Ezek 16 and 23, where woman Jerusalem is accused of having blood on her hands (Ezek 23:37, 45). In Ezek 16:38 Jerusalem is to be judged as a woman who commits adultery and sheds blood (וַשְׁפֹּךְ דָּם). It is therefore not surprising that blood is one of the judgments threatened in Ezek 5:17.

Fourth, while the judgments in Ezek 5:5-17 are the result of covenant violation (Lev 26:14-39), the word covenant is not explicitly mentioned. On the contrary, Israel is charged with breaking the covenant in Ezek 16:59. Noticeably absent from Ezek 16 and 23 is the indictment dealing with statutes and ordinances as spelled out in Ezek 5:6, 7.

Fifth, there are clear similarities and differences in the means YHWH employs to punish Israel. Ezekiel 5:5-17 has cannibalism (v. 10), exile (v. 10), plague (vv. 12, 17), famine (vv. 12, 16, 17), sword (vv. 12, 17), wild beasts (v. 17), and bloodshed (v. 17). YHWH uses other means in Ezek 16 and 23. These include the use of lovers—the nations with which Jerusalem formed political alliances—who expose her nakedness, leaving her naked and bare (16:37, 39), strip her naked and take away her children and kill her with the sword (23:9, 10, 22-26), the mob who stone and hack her to pieces and burn her houses (16:40; 23:25, 46-47), and exposure to prostitution (23:42-44).

The public nature of these punishments is also a common feature of these

⁸ Galambush points out that by forming these political alliances, “Jerusalem violates her covenant obligation to Yahweh as king, simultaneously forfeiting his protection and defiling the divine name.” Galambush, *Jerusalem in the Book of Ezekiel*, 100.

passages. In Ezek 5:8 YHWH's punishments are conducted in the sight of the nations. Jerusalem is made a ruin and a reproach among the nations around her and in the sight of all who pass by (Ezek 5:14; cf. 16:6, 8, 15, 25, 57). To the adulterous woman YHWH brings the mob who will inflict punishment on her in the sight of many women (Ezek 16:40). Other features that connect the passages are the words expressing YHWH's emotions of anger (אָפּ), wrath (אַפּ) and jealousy (אַפּ). These are found in Ezek 5:13 and 16:38, 42, and 23:25.

This brief exploration has established that Ezek 5:5-17 has significant features that correspond to those in Ezek 16 and 23. Although there are some differences, Ezek 5:5-17 and Ezek 16 and 23 depict severe punishments that YHWH brings upon Israel. It is these harsh punishments (see table 2) to which feminist biblical scholars have objected and have argued that the God presented in Ezek 16 and 23 is violent and sexually abusive. In contrast to the feminist scholars, Carol Meyers argues that YHWH's judgments on the adulteresses in Ezek 16 and 23 do not come close to the procedural punishments stipulated for similar offenses in some ancient Near Eastern cultures. These involved: "immediate slaughter of the adulteress on the spot, legal proceedings invoking the death penalty, and legal proceedings invoking divorce and/or public shaming." She concludes that Ezekiel's harsh punishments employ the divorce/shame scheme rather than the most serious capital punishment. Hence, "examining the horrific imagery of Ezekiel in its ancient context using anthropological perspectives and legal analysis indicates that the punishment for adultery turns out to be one of relative leniency rather

Table 2. Perceived physical and sexual violence in Ezekiel 16 and 23

Ezekiel 16	Ezekiel 23
<p>I [YHWH] am going to gather all your lovers with whom you found pleasure—those you loved and those you hated (v. 37)</p> <p>I will hand you over to your lovers (v. 39)</p>	<p>I [YHWH] handed her over to her lovers (v. 9) I will stir up your lovers against you ... I will bring them against you from every side (vv. 22, 23)</p>
<p>I will expose your nakedness unto them [lovers] and they [lovers] will see all your nakedness (v. 37)</p> <p>They [lovers] will strip you of your clothes . . . They will leave you naked and bare (v. 39)</p>	<p>They [the lovers] uncovered her nakedness (v. 10) They [lovers] will strip you of your clothes (v. 26)</p>
	<p>They [lovers] killed her with the sword (v. 10) They [lovers] will come against you with weapons, chariots, and wagons (v. 24)</p>
	<p>They [lovers] will cut off your noses and your ears (v. 25) Those left will fall by the sword (v. 25)</p>
<p>They will bring a mob against you who will stone you and they will hack you to pieces with their swords (v. 40)</p>	<p>Bring a mob against them, give them over to terror and plunder (v. 46) The mob will stone them and cut them down with their swords (v. 47) They [mob] will kill their sons and daughters and burn down their houses (v. 47)</p>
<p>They will burn down your houses (v. 41)</p>	

than of exceptional brutality.”⁹

Negative Characterizations of YHWH

Let me review the negative descriptions some scholars have attributed to YHWH in Ezek 16 and 23. It should be noted that this investigation deals only with their portrayal of the character of YHWH in Ezek 16 and 23 within the context of Ezek 1-24. Other areas of their work will be outside the purview of this study. Many negative characterizations of YHWH in Ezek 16 and 23 relate to the use of the marriage metaphor¹⁰ that depicts YHWH’s relationship with Israel. That depiction is, however, couched in language that many feminist scholars consider to portray physical abuse (violence), sexual abuse, and exposing nakedness.¹¹ I now explore the feminist scholars’ arguments in this regard.

⁹ Carol Meyers, "Engendering Ezekiel: Female Figures Reconsidered," in *Birkat Shalom: Studies in the Bible, Ancient Near Eastern Literature, and Postbiblical Judaism Presented to Shalom M. Paul on the Occasion of His Seventieth Birthday* (ed. C. Cohen et al.; Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 2008), 1:281-97. See also, Henry McKeating, "Sanctions against Adultery in Ancient Israelite Society, With Some Reflections on Methodology in the Study of Old Testament Ethics," *JSOT* 11 (1979): 57-72.

¹⁰ Athalya Brenner suggests that the use of this metaphor in the Hebrew Bible is problematic since metaphor by its very nature tends to obscure reality. Brenner, "Some Reflections on Violence against Women and the Image of the Hebrew God," 69-81.

¹¹ Because of the perceived violence in these passages Nancy Bowen argues that the Bible "is not a safe space for women" because of the violence that prevails in some of its passages. She urges readers to expose and resist biblical texts that have the potential of harming women. Bowen’s work is balanced in that she also discusses cases in which women are the perpetrators of violence. I do not, however, agree with Bowen’s suggestion that those who find the biblical canon to be unsafe should discard it and look for alternative inspirational reading. Nancy R. Bowen, "Women, Violence, and the Bible," in *Engaging the Bible in a Gendered World: An Introduction to Feminist Biblical Interpretation in Honor of Katharine Doob Sakenfeld* (ed. L. Day and C. Pressler; Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox, 2006), 186-99.

Robert Carroll calls Ezek 16 and 23 “two offending chapters in Ezekiel.”¹² He contends that YHWH of Ezek 16 and 23 “is a tyrant and a bully—an abusive husband of a kind utterly unacceptable to modern readers. This Yahweh is a monster, guilty of bouts of pornographic violence.”¹³ He finds in Ezek 16 and 23 “pornography of a deeply sadistic nature.”¹⁴ This coheres with Cheryl Exum’s view that Ezek 23 is “the most pornographic example of divine violence.”¹⁵ Carroll adds that “the anchoring of such images of violent action in the activities of YHWH only strengthens the ideology of violence informing the text. For a violent god breeds violent men—or, better still, violent men produce violent images of gods.”¹⁶

It is interesting, however, to see how Carroll takes issue with Fokkelien van Dijk-

¹² Robert P. Carroll, “Whorusalamin: A Tale of Three Cities as Three Sisters,” in *On Reading Prophetic Texts: Gender Specific and Related Studies in Memory of Fokkelien van Dijk-Hemmes* (ed. B. Becking and M. Dijkstra; Leiden: Brill, 1996), 67, 68. See also Renita Weems’s work in which she categorizes Ezek 16 and 23 among the “terrifying texts” of the Bible. Weems, *Battered Love*, 10.

¹³ Carroll, “Whorusalamin,” 77. Nancy Bowen observes that the violent imagery in Ezek 16 and 23 is “classified as pornography in feminist writings because it involves objectification, domination, pain, and degradation.” Bowen, “Women, Violence, and the Bible,” 190.

¹⁴ Carroll, “Whorusalamin,” 78. The views of T. Drorah Setel could possibly explain why feminist critics consider pornography to be part of the “violent actions” of YHWH. Setel considers “pornography as both a description of and a tool for maintaining male domination of female sexuality.” For her, pornography has three major distinguishing features: (1) Female sexuality is depicted as negative in relationship to a positive and neutral male standard; (2) women are degraded and publicly humiliated; (3) female sexuality is portrayed as an object of male possession and control. Setel, “Prophets and Pornography,” 87.

¹⁵ J. Cheryl Exum, *Plotted, Shot and Painted: Cultural Representations of Biblical Women* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1996), 109. Hummel counters such arguments by stating that “were Ezekiel not divinely inspired for the purpose of eliciting repentance and faith, one might call chapters 16 and 23 pornographic.” Hummel, *Ezekiel 1-20*, 462.

¹⁶ Carroll, “Whorusalamin,” 76.

Hemmes's characterization of the woman metaphor in Ezek 23.¹⁷ He does not believe that the metaphor here refers to actual women,¹⁸ but to "cities and communities represented by those cities."¹⁹ Furthermore, Carroll convincingly argues for the all-inclusive nature of metaphors, thus dismantling the feminists' insistence that the woman metaphor in the Bible specifically pertains to women:

If the biblical writers only used negative images of women and positive images of men, then I could see the force of the objections made by feminist readers of the Bible. But that is not the case. The metaphorization processes represent negative *and* positive images both of women and men (as metaphors!) and because such representations are inevitably metaphoric their referential force is symbolic.²⁰

Carroll however agrees with Fokkelien van Dijk-Hemmes that the prophetic texts that use the feminine metaphors are "offensive and unacceptable."²¹ With this position on the proper interpretation of metaphors in the Bible, it is hard to understand how Carroll could

¹⁷ Dijk-Hemmes's depiction of this imagery, which I do not agree with, is that "the metaphorization of woman in Ezekiel 23 performs first and foremost a violent speech act which is even more offensive than the Hosean version: it simultaneously shapes and distorts women's (sexual) experience." Dijk-Hemmes, "The Metaphorization of Woman in Prophetic Speech: An Analysis of Ezekiel 23," 255. See also Moughtin-Mumbi who argues that "sexual and marital metaphorical language not only negatively influences our understanding of Israel/Judah; it also has the potential negatively to influence our understanding of women more generally and is therefore unacceptable." Sharon Moughtin-Mumbi, *Sexual and Marital Metaphors in Hosea, Jeremiah, Isaiah, and Ezekiel* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 5.

¹⁸ Dempsey argues that the metaphorical language used in Ezek 16 is not useful both to its original recipients and the present readers. This kind of language "admits a strong bias against women." Dempsey, "The 'Whore' of Ezekiel 16," 57-78.

¹⁹ Robert Carroll, "Desire under the Terebinths: On Pornographic Representation in the Prophets—A Response," in *A Feminist Companion to the Latter Prophets* (ed. A. Brenner; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic 1995), 275-307.

²⁰ Carroll, "Desire under the Terebinths," 279. Schöpflin argues that the metaphors in Ezek 16 and 23 simply highlight Jerusalem's unfaithfulness and as such give justification for her severe punishment. Karin Schöpflin, "The Composition of Metaphorical Oracles within the Book of Ezekiel," *VT* 55 (2005): 101-20.

²¹ Carroll, "Desire under the Terebinths," 284.

give such negative characterizations of YHWH that we have seen above. This could probably be from his general attitude towards the Hebrew Bible, which at one point he says is mainly “crude propaganda.”²²

In her article, “Rhetoric and Domestic Violence in Ezek 16,”²³ Linda Day sketches what could be termed the “woes” woman Jerusalem goes through at the hands of YHWH. She describes YHWH as an abuser, bent on using the woman Jerusalem for his sexual escapades and then physically and emotionally abuses her. In this article Day finds in YHWH the same abusive traits found in other spousal abusers. These include, but are not limited to, jealousy, dominance and overbearing attitude, name calling, derogatory and demeaning remarks, and negative emotions like anger and rage.²⁴ Violent actions Day attributes to YHWH include withdrawing her food (v. 27), her clothing (vv. 37, 39), her shelter (v. 41); raping her, and gathering others to attack her (vv. 27-41).

To Mary Shields, YHWH’s treatment of the metaphorical woman of Ezek 16 reveals a God who is “abusive, wounding, and cruel.”²⁵ Because of this, she is categorical that a God of mercy, love, and compassion does not exist in Ezek 16. She sees in the passage YHWH’s anger and fury (Ezek 16:15-23) and jealousy (Ezek 16:26). For her

²² Carroll, “Desire under the Terebinths,” 284. See also Robert P. Carroll, “The Hebrew Bible as Literature: A Misprison?” *ST* 47 (1993): 80.

²³ Linda Day, “Rhetoric and Domestic Violence in Ezekiel 16,” *BibInt* 8 (2000): 205-30.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 220. See also Moughtin-Mumbi who suggests that Ezek 16 has “echoes of domestic abuse.” Moughtin-Mumbi, *Sexual and Marital Metaphors*, 179.

²⁵ Shields, “Multiple Exposures,” 5-18. See also *idem*, “Multiple Exposures: Body Rhetoric and Gender in Ezekiel 16,” in *Prophets and Daniel: A Feminist Companion to the Bible* (ed. A. Brenner; London, Sheffield Academic, 2001), 137-53; *idem*, “Self-Response to ‘Multiple Exposures,’” in *Prophets and Daniel: A Feminist Companion to the Bible* (ed. A. Brenner; London: Sheffield Academic, 2001), 154-55.

YHWH is an abuser who exposes the woman Jerusalem to both sexual and physical abuse (vv. 35-43). To her, Ezekiel's God is "an abusive, violent, wife-battering God."²⁶ I respectfully disagree with Shields's argument that those who only emphasize YHWH's beneficent actions of grace, mercy, and compassion, and do not attribute to him the so-called "violent actions" in Ezek 16, "endorse violence against women."²⁷ Expressing similar views on Ezek 23, she argues that Yahweh's role in the punishment of the whore not only gives "biblical, but *divine* justification for domestic violence."²⁸ Such a view is inconsistent with the way mainline scholars interpret the passage. The difference in interpretation could lie in what Kamionkowski characterizes as God-centered versus woman-centered interpretations.²⁹ Shields is, however, correct in emphasizing that Ezek 16 should never be used "to justify male violence and abuse of any group in our society."³⁰

Odendaal, however, recognizes YHWH's violent anger against a supposed partner and argues that the violence depicted in Ezek 16 and 23 is "part of YHWH's violent

²⁶ Shields, "Self-Response to 'Multiple Exposures,'" 154.

²⁷ Shields, "Multiple Exposures: Body Rhetoric and Gender Characterization," 18. Darr expresses her uneasiness with the sexual imagery in Ezek 16 because such imagery "can have perilous, even lethal repercussions." She gives examples of people who have negatively exploited this text to demonize and abuse women. She also criticizes the use of violence as "justifiable punishment for female infidelity." Darr, "The Book of Ezekiel," 1241, 1317.

²⁸ Mary E. Shields, "An Abusive God? Identity and Power, Gender and Violence in Ezekiel 23," in *Postmodern Interpretations of the Bible: A Reader* (ed. A. K. M. Adam; St. Louis, Mo.: Chalice, 2001), 129-51; idem, "Gender and Violence in Ezekiel 23," *SBLSP* 37 (1998): 86-105.

²⁹ S. Tamar Kamionkowski, *Gender Reversal and Cosmic Chaos: A Study on the Book of Ezekiel* (London: Sheffield Academic Press, 2003), 41.

³⁰ Shields, "Multiple Exposures: Body Rhetoric and Gender Characterization," 18.

judgment.”³¹ Runions on the other hand argues that what motivates YHWH to violence is the thwarted sexual advances.³² Entering into the emotional areas of the divine, Odendaal suggests that “what YHWH does know in terms of feeling is anger, red hot anger.”³³ She however concedes that this divine anger is aimed at having “a restored relationship with Israel.”³⁴

Rachel Magdalene also sees God as an active “perpetrator of gender-based violence”³⁵ who is constantly involved in female sexual abuse. Citing Ezek 16:35-39; 23:9-10, 26-29; and several other biblical texts,³⁶ Magdalene argues that in these biblical texts, YHWH “is regularly threatening, in judgment, to rape, or otherwise sexually abuse, the cities of Israel, Judah and their neighbors, all characterized as female.”³⁷ Borrowing Phyllis Trible’s term,³⁸ she says these “texts are the ultimate in biblical texts of terror.”³⁹

³¹ Odendaal, “YHWH as Character in Ezekiel,” 198.

³² Using René Girard’s theory of mimetic desire and conflict Runions argues that this theory “illuminates the elusive operation of violence” in Ezek 16. Hence, “the violence of YHWH toward the woman is a result of the conflict produced by mimesis; it is the violence directed against one encroaching on the deity’s sexual territory.” Runions, “Violence and the Economy of Desire in Ezekiel 16:1-45,” 156-69.

³³ Odendaal, “YHWH as Character in Ezekiel,” 179.

³⁴ Ibid., 202.

³⁵ F. Rachel Magdalene, “Ancient Near Eastern Treaty-Curses and the Ultimate Texts of Terror: A Study of the Language of Divine Sexual Abuse in the Prophetic Corpus,” in *A Feminist Companion to the Latter Prophets* (ed. A. Brenner; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995), 326-52.

³⁶ Isa 3:17-26; 47:1-4; Jer 13:22-26; Hos 2:4-5; Nah 2:7-8; 3:5, 13; Zech 14:2.

³⁷ Magdalene, “Ancient Near Eastern Treaty-Curses,” 327.

³⁸ Phyllis Trible, *Texts of Terror: Literary-Feminist Readings of Biblical Narratives* (Philadelphia, Pa.: Fortress, 1984).

³⁹ Magdalene, “Ancient Near Eastern Treaty-Curses,” 327.

In some of the strongest comments ever penned on the character of God, Magdalene asserts: “Not only is God a passive participant in the sexual assaults on and abuse of women in the narrative portions of the Hebrew Bible by his lack of intervention on behalf of the raped and abused, God is an active perpetrator of such sexual violence against women in the prophetic corpus of the Bible.”⁴⁰

Voicing her rage on the sexual overtones in Ezekiel, Fokkelien van Dijk-Hemmes paraphrases Ezek 23:3 as follows: “[Samaria and Jerusalem] were sexually molested in Egypt, in their youth they were sexually abused.”⁴¹ Mary Shields cites the use of the word אֲהָבָה, “lovers,” in Ezek 16:8, as an argument against any notion of YHWH showing pure love to metaphorical Jerusalem. She rather contends that the text “attributes only desire, that is, sexual feelings, to God.”⁴² In fact Shields feels that the text does not adequately expose YHWH as the architect of sexual violence.

In her chapter on prophetic pornography, Exum accuses YHWH of directing sexual violence against Israel.⁴³ To her, YHWH is not just a sexual abuser; he is also an abusive husband.⁴⁴ The heightened nature of YHWH’s sexual abuse in prophetic

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Dijk-Hemmes, “The Metaphorization of Woman in Prophetic Speech: An Analysis of Ezekiel 23,” 173.

⁴² Shields, “Multiple Exposures: Body Rhetoric and Gender Characterization in Ezekiel 16,” 9. See also idem, “Multiple Exposures: Body Rhetoric and Gender in Ezekiel 16,” 141-43.

⁴³ Patton argues against labeling these texts as pornography. And so he says: “The author does not hold up a pornographic picture here on which the reader is supposed to gaze. Rather, he holds up a mirror, and in the mirror the audience sees its true self.” Corrine L. Patton, “Should Our Sister Be Treated Like a Whore? A Resonse to Feminist Critiques of Ezekiel 23,” in *The Book of Ezekiel: Theological and Anthropological Perspectives* (ed. M. S. Odell and J. T. Strong; Atlanta, Ga.: Society of Biblical Literature, 2000), 221-38.

⁴⁴ Exum, *Plotted, Shot and Painted*, 101-102.

literature is depicted in Ezek 16 and 23. In Ezek 16 the woman is sexually and physically abused (vv. 35-40). Exum further argues that sexual abuse explicit in these prophetic books cannot be dismissed on the grounds that they are simply metaphorical.⁴⁵ This metaphorical nature does not minimize their criminality.⁴⁶ She therefore takes issue with Robert Carroll, who argues that the women in Ezek 23⁴⁷ are simply used as metaphors, and also because of their all-inclusive nature, the excessive sexual violence against women should not be read into them.⁴⁸ She argues that these are real and practical issues that affect the lives of people today.

Odendaal considers YHWH's action in Ezek 16:8 an act of sexual intercourse and wonders if YHWH's care for the woman is not payment for her sexual favors. Odendaal suggests that YHWH could as well be accused of child abuse for entering into a covenant relationship with this young foundling.

Renita Weems notes that even the prophets "were careful to acknowledge that just as God was capable of profound acts of mercy and compassion, there was also a side to God that was mysterious and adversarial."⁴⁹ To Weems this adversarial nature involved a God who is a "jealous husband, abusive and unpredictable."⁵⁰ Commenting on what she calls "romance rhetoric in Ezekiel," Weems observes that there is some ambivalence with

⁴⁵ Ibid., 118-19.

⁴⁶ Exum, "The Ethics of Biblical Violence against Women," 248-49.

⁴⁷ This chapter is "the most pornographic example of divine violence." Ibid., 255.

⁴⁸ Carroll, "Desire under the Terebinths," 275-307.

⁴⁹ Weems, *Battered Love*, 75.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

respect to YHWH's character, hence we have here the picture of a God who can be "insanely violent and jealous,"⁵¹ while at the same time "merciful and loving."⁵² In general, such a God can be said to be "out of control."⁵³ She laments why the prophets did not try to resolve these apparent contradictions in YHWH's character. Renita Weems deserves to be commended in that in spite of the negative portrayals of YHWH, she also gives room for the positive affirmations of YHWH that are found in the text of Ezekiel.

Summary

This brief analysis has shown the road many feminist scholars have taken in portraying YHWH in Ezekiel. Many of them see in these texts the picture of a God who is so full of anger and rage that he resorts to physical abusive tendencies on his victim. He will go to the extent of enlisting agents (the mob) who will ensure that his purposes are fulfilled. But this God not only inflicts physical abuse. He is also a champion of sexual abuse, a God who will seek sexual favors for the gracious actions he performs. These feminists consider YHWH to be excessively controlling of the female figure. This is a God who many of these scholars consider to have no love, grace, or compassion.

Not all feminist critics on the book of Ezekiel give a depressing portrayal of YHWH. Johanna Stiebert, for example, supports some of the views espoused by the feminist critics, especially those relating to the more expressive sexual language

⁵¹ Ibid., 97.

⁵² Ibid., 75.

⁵³ Ibid., 73.

contained in Ezek 16 and 23.⁵⁴ Stiebert, however, does not consider these chapters to depict the experiences of “actual women.”⁵⁵ Stiebert uses two arguments to support this idea. First, the all-inclusive nature of metaphors needs to be taken into account.⁵⁶ The metaphors in Ezek 16 and 23 refer to both men and women.⁵⁷ There is therefore no need to impute any partiality to YHWH in his negative treatment of women. Secondly, the texts are “intentionally hyperbolic,”⁵⁸ meant for a particular rhetorical effect. They are thus not addressing abuses directed at any real women.

While not all feminist scholars characterize YHWH negatively, it is clear that many read these biblical texts with suspicion. We cannot simply dismiss their work. These interpretations present biblical scholars with a unique challenge, for they bring a different slant to the interpretation of Scripture. There is, therefore, a need for mainstream biblical scholars to engage them in dialogue. They need to be informed that these texts are not intended to denigrate, discriminate against, or shame women. They contain no gender bias. They are simply couched in metaphors YHWH uses to illustrate his

⁵⁴ Johanna Stiebert, "The Woman Metaphor of Ezekiel 16 and 23: A Victim of Violence, or a Symbol of Subversion?" *OTE* 15 (2002): 200-208.

⁵⁵ Stiebert, "The Woman Metaphor of Ezekiel 16 and 23," 204. See also Kamionkowski, *Gender Reversal and Cosmic Chaos*, 42.

⁵⁶ See Kamionkowski's study, in which he accuses traditional interpreters of Ezek 16 and 23 of confusing metaphor with reality and the feminist interpreters of being "reactive rather than proactive." Kamionkowski, *Gender Reversal and Cosmic Chaos*, 41.

⁵⁷ While many feminist critics argue that the female metaphors used in Ezek 16 and 23 represent literal women, Odendaal contends that the metaphor does not refer to women as a gendered group. In fact to her the message of Ezekiel is all-inclusive. It is a message of warning to both "men and women, to look out. YHWH is on the loose." Odendaal, "YHWH as Character in Ezekiel," 205.

⁵⁸ Stiebert, "The Woman Metaphor of Ezekiel 16 and 23," 204.

relationship with his people, whether male or female, and the resultant effects of deviating from his covenant.

Positive Characterizations of YHWH

While the feminist and other scholars have disparaged YHWH's character, there are traditional or mainline scholars who have maintained a different view. In this section, I explore the positions held by some of these scholars as pertain to Ezek 16 and 23. The scholars whose views are discussed in this section have been selected because they give a different perspective on the character of YHWH as opposed to the negative views and characterizations by their feminist counterparts that we have seen in the previous section.

One of the first portrayals of YHWH that these scholars present is that YHWH is a God of love. Leading the pack in this section is Walther Eichrodt, who in his 1961 commentary on Ezekiel sees in YHWH's handling of the foundling in Ezek 16:1-8 a case of Israel's election which he says is "a result of the ultimately incomprehensible love of a holy God."⁵⁹ Other scholars have echoed Eichrodt's position in this regard. While acknowledging the offensive nature of the violent language used in the indictment in Ezek 16, Blenkinsopp observes that "the kind of pain and anger from which the language springs is, more often than we care to think, integral to the act of love."⁶⁰

Commenting on the metaphor of Ezek 16 Lamar Cooper observes that "it is a

⁵⁹ Eichrodt observes that YHWH expresses this love as follows: "YHWH appears as one who is himself seized by an inward inclination, and led by it not just to forget all that is lacking in the object of his love but even in overflowing self-giving kindness to prepare it for fellowship with himself, and to bind it to him with the very strongest of links without any attempt to test its worthiness." Eichrodt, *Ezekiel*, 218.

⁶⁰ Blenkinsopp, *Ezekiel*, 75.

parable about grace and ingratitude, of God's love spurned and his riches squandered."⁶¹ He notes that the language YHWH employs as he describes his actions on behalf of the foundling are "reminders of the providential care God gave Israel from the time of Abraham to nationhood and onward."⁶² Ronald Clements says that both Ezek 16 and 23 contain a "message of the enduring power of divine love," which contrasts sharply with Jerusalem's sinfulness.⁶³ Hummel observes that Ezek 16 "is one of Scripture's most powerful expressions of both God's wrath and his love—of Law and Gospel."⁶⁴ It is therefore not surprising to find Swanepoel arguing that the explicit and shocking sexual language YHWH employs in these chapters is designed to convey the message that "in his love for Jerusalem he has been forsaken."⁶⁵

The traditional scholars not only see a God of love in Ezekiel, they also find divine grace and mercy in these passages that have been associated with cruelty and abuse. Eichrodt talks of God's mercy and faithfulness, which is contrasted with human unfaithfulness. He thus considers Israel's punishment as justified because of their unfaithfulness to YHWH's "unheard-of graciousness."⁶⁶ Cooper observes that Israel's

⁶¹ Cooper, *Ezekiel*, 167-68.

⁶² Ibid., 170.

⁶³ Ronald E. Clements, *Ezekiel* (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster/John Knox, 1996), 73-74.

⁶⁴ Hummel, *Ezekiel 1-20*, 460.

⁶⁵ Swanepoel, "Ezekiel 16: Abandoned Child, Bride Adorned," 89.

⁶⁶ Eichrodt, *Ezekiel*, 209.

failure to remember YHWH's gracious dealing with them in the past resulted in their enslavement to debasing and destructive practices.⁶⁷

Zimmerli, in his final comments on Ezek 16, talks of YHWH's "free and gracious kindness toward the lost girl."⁶⁸ Swanepoel has come up with a fivefold structural pattern of Ezek 16:3-63 in which Jerusalem's sin and God's judgment are enveloped by God's mercy.⁶⁹ As a result of this he concludes: "The mercy of YHWH is emphasized here as incomprehensible."⁷⁰ "Here is magnificent mercy, regardless of filth and vileness; and then the love of YHWH in spite of the evil of human beings."⁷¹ "The great mercy of YHWH overshadows every single act that Jerusalem can commit."⁷²

Block posits that Ezek 16 "represents YHWH as a gracious and compassionate God."⁷³ He specifically singles out vv. 6-14 which he says "offer one of the most vivid pictures of the grace of God in the entire Bible."⁷⁴ Block suggests four critical areas with respect to this grace.⁷⁵ First, YHWH is the initiator of this grace. Second, is the limitless nature of YHWH's love. Third, YHWH's love is expressed in covenant relationship.

⁶⁷ Cooper, *Ezekiel*, 173.

⁶⁸ Zimmerli, *Ezekiel 1-24*, 353.

⁶⁹ This structure is as follows: *YHWH's mercy* (vv. 3-14); Jerusalem's sin (vv. 15-34); YHWH's judgment (vv. 35-43); Jerusalem's sin (vv. 44-58); *YHWH's mercy* (vv. 59-63) (emphasis mine). Swanepoel, "Ezekiel 16: Abandoned Child, Bride Adorned," 93.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 94.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 84.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 102.

⁷³ Block, *Ezekiel 1-24*, 49.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 521.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

Fourth, is the transforming power of God's love. YHWH of Ezekiel is a God whose love and grace permeates our lives and effects the requisite changes that enhance our relationship with him.

But this God is also a faithful, covenant-keeping God. In the section on the theology of Ezekiel, Block lays it out plainly that the God whom the reader meets in the book of Ezekiel is "first and foremost the God of Israel, not only passionate about his relationship with his people, but also willing to stake his reputation on their fate or fortune."⁷⁶ This God orchestrates events, like those of Gog and Magog, to demonstrate his "enduring commitment to the safety of his people (28:24-26)."⁷⁷ Block observes that even YHWH's self-interest cannot trump his focus on his people, Israel. But that is not all. Block affirms that he is also the "gracious covenant-making and covenant keeping God of Israel."⁷⁸ Reflecting on the harsh judgments Israel has to endure from this covenant God in Ezek 16, Hummel argues that here YHWH is repaying Israel's "faithlessness, with faithfulness to his ancient covenant."⁷⁹ Eichrodt contends that the punishment meted out to Israel was intended to awaken their sensitivities to the wanton actions that have brought disrepute to YHWH and also to show YHWH's commitment to them as covenant partners.⁸⁰

Robert Jenson sees the covenant in Ezek 16:59-63 as being "decisive, as it is in

⁷⁶ Ibid., 47.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Block, *Ezekiel 1-24*, 48.

⁷⁹ Hummel, *Ezekiel 1-20*, 460.

⁸⁰ Eichrodt, *Ezekiel*, 216.

other parts of the Old Testament.”⁸¹ Commenting on the everlasting aspect of this covenant he says, “The eternity of the covenant resides solely in the Lord’s unshakable faithfulness through history with his people.”⁸² This means that “divorce is henceforth impossible: no matter how Jerusalem strays, the Lord will—and indeed must!—regard her as his wife.”⁸³ This is a God who has bound himself to Israel with bonds that are not easily broken.

If the picture that emerges for the traditional scholars out of Ezek 16 and 23 is one that reveals a God of love, who is full of grace and mercy, a God whose commitment to the covenant is unquestionable, then what do they say about the sexual language and the perceived violence and abuses that appear to characterize these chapters? The first thing that emerges from most of these scholars is the acknowledgement of the offensive nature of the language of Ezek 16 and 23. Hummel, for example, acknowledges the presence of “explicit sexual language” and “scandalous language” in Ezek 16 and 23 to depict YHWH’s relationship to Israel.⁸⁴ Steven Tuell recognizes that the physical and sexual abuses described in Ezek 16 make it “a deeply disturbing, indeed offensive, text” and acknowledges the same for Ezek 23.⁸⁵

While acknowledging the offensive character of the sexual, violent, abusive, and shameful language that pervades Ezek 16 and 23, the traditional scholars argue that this

⁸¹ Jenson, *Ezekiel*, 134.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 135.

⁸³ *Ibid.*

⁸⁴ Hummel, *Ezekiel 1-20*, 461.

⁸⁵ Tuell, *Ezekiel*, 92, 153.

language is intentionally applied in these passages to accomplish a divine purpose. On his part, Eichrodt acknowledges the explicit sexual language of Ezek 23, but warns that the sexual analogies used in the chapter cannot be equated to the sexual activities of the ancient Near Eastern divine mythology.⁸⁶ He says Ezekiel employs such language to depict “the full horror of the people’s disloyalty.”⁸⁷ Allen concurs that the language used is coarse and repulsive, but then suggests that “sexuality . . . is used as a blatant weapon of communication, to convey the emotional distaste of YHWH to this expedient”⁸⁸ and emphasizes, as Stuart,⁸⁹ that “its ‘potential to offend is, of course, the very point.’”⁹⁰

The language is also meant to send some shock waves across the ancient Near Eastern landscape. Commenting on Ezek 23, Block says Ezekiel’s metaphorical portrayal of the women in this passage does not represent his overall attitude toward all women. Rather, Ezekiel is dealing with two special characters, Oholah and Oholibah, and thus “Ezekiel’s aim is to shock his audience, not to titillate them with pornographic images.”⁹¹ Summing up his remarks on Ezek 23, Duguid says:

Ezekiel 23 is incorporated into Scripture not to give its readers some kind of salacious fantasy of sex and violence. . . . Certainly it is intended to shock, as was the case with the other ‘R-rated’ section of Ezekiel’s prophecy (ch. 16). But the shock is designed to jolt the comfortable into a recognition of the reality and inevitability of the

⁸⁶ Eichrodt, *Ezekiel*, 321.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Allen, *Ezekiel 20-48*, 51-52.

⁸⁹ Douglas Stuart, *Ezekiel* (Dallas, Tex.: Word Books, 1989), 220.

⁹⁰ Allen, *Ezekiel 20-48*, 52.

⁹¹ Block, *Ezekiel 1-24*, 734.

judgment to come so that we might see the utter folly of trusting in anything—or anyone—less than the living God.⁹²

Patton on the other hand argues that this shock phenomenon is so intentional that “it is just at the moment when the audience yells, ‘Should our sister be treated like a whore?’ that they realize they are the whore and should be treated as one.”⁹³ Clements is therefore right in suggesting that this coarse and shocking language was an intentional rhetorical device aimed at effectively communicating the divine message.⁹⁴

Echoing the other traditional scholars Hummel notes that Ezek 16 and 23 are not designed to bring any sexual excitement to the readers. Rather, they are meant to convey “shock” and to illustrate how the Israelites’ “behavior departed from YHWH’s will as sharply as the people’s attitude toward him did in other respects.”⁹⁵ Hummel suggests that the feminist scholars’ misplaced interpretation of the two chapters is based on their failure to consider the chapters’ “historical and theological context.”⁹⁶ He therefore concludes that in spite of the violence and sexual language in the texts, their overall goal is to “evoke repentance.”⁹⁷

The traditional scholars also address the charge that the treatment of the female figures in Ezek 16 and 23 by the male divine figure is tantamount to sexual and domestic abuse. A proper understanding of the role of YHWH in this regard is significant for a

⁹² Duguid, *Ezekiel*, 310.

⁹³ Patton, “Should Our Sister Be Treated Like a Whore?” 232.

⁹⁴ Clements, *Ezekiel*, 69, 106.

⁹⁵ Hummel, *Ezekiel 21-48*, 720.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ Hummel, *Ezekiel 1-20*, 463.

correct perspective on his character. Countering such misplaced claims, Duguid notes that Ezekiel is not “giving any justification to husbands abusing their wives. Rather, he is utilizing conventional norms to illustrate a deeper reality, namely, the relationship between the Lord and his people.”⁹⁸ Hummel, for one, acknowledges the critical scholars’ stance of portraying YHWH in Ezek 16 and 23 as “an abusive husband who resorts to violence to control female sexuality for his own ends.”⁹⁹ He however argues that YHWH’s actions in those chapters are “just retribution for unfaithfulness.”¹⁰⁰

Similarly, Tuell argues against the notion that these passages are meant to promote abuses and says that Ezek 16 is not meant “to justify or encourage child abuse, spouse abuse, or rape.”¹⁰¹ He reminds the readers of the metaphorical nature of Ezek 16, hence the need to avoid literal interpretation of the text. It is with this understanding that “Ezekiel seeks, through deliberately shocking and offensive imagery, to confront his audience with truths they do not want to face.”¹⁰²

I do not concur with Tuell in his submission that Ezek 16 cannot be labeled “theology or theodicy.”¹⁰³ Tuell appears to forget that in the metaphorical figure of Ezek

⁹⁸ Duguid, *Ezekiel*, 217.

⁹⁹ Hummel, *Ezekiel 1-20*, 462.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ Tuell, *Ezekiel*, 92.

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ Ibid., 92. Allen sees the fury with which YHWH threatens to punish Israel in Ezek 16:38 and connects it with the anger, wrath, and fury expressed in Ezek 5:13 and 24:13, and concludes that this allusion to earlier passages is proof “that theodicy is the issue at stake in this oracle. Only the final destruction of Jerusalem could wipe clean the slate of accumulated debt owed to its divine patron. Jerusalem owed everything to God, and to treat him as she had was unconscionable. He could only let justice take its terminal course.” Allen, *Ezekiel 1-19*, 243.

16 is the portrayal of YHWH's beneficent actions, Israel's unfaithfulness, and YHWH's response in just retribution. It is interesting that with this position of divorcing theodicy or theology from this passage he later puts the following words in the exiles' mouths: "This is our fault; we did this to ourselves."¹⁰⁴

In an excursus on Ezek 16 which he titles, "The Offense of Ezekiel's Gospel,"¹⁰⁵ Block addresses the challenges posed by critics who view the God of Ezekiel as an enraged husband who inflicts sexual, physical, and emotional abuse on his victim.¹⁰⁶ Block begins by acknowledging that not everyone may be convinced by his line of reasoning. However, he goes ahead and gives seven points to set the record of God's character straight in the so-called "disturbing texts."¹⁰⁷ First, Block points out that the texts are written from the well-intentioned motives of YHWH. The texts are written to serve divine purpose and have no sinister motives at all. Second, the texts do "not reflect a fundamental pro-male and anti-female bias."¹⁰⁸ In YHWH's economy of justice, there is no room for preferential treatment or gender bias.

Third, the literary contexts of the texts must be taken into account if they are to be

¹⁰⁴ Tuell, *Ezekiel*, 93.

¹⁰⁵ Block, *Ezekiel 1-24*, 467-70. See also Darr who suggests that in order to understand texts such as Ezek 16, it is significant for readers to take into account "marriage and adultery in ancient Israel, and (equally important), of the metaphorical nature of Ezekiel's narrative." Furthermore, the reader needs to identify "Ezekiel's presupposition, convictions, and conditions (including social and cultural influences), and second of engaging troubling texts, both by placing them in conversation with other texts (including biblical texts) and by entering into 'arguments' (the civil negotiation of difference) with both medium and message." Darr, *The Book of Ezekiel*, 1241.

¹⁰⁶ See also Block, *Ezekiel 1-24*, 734.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 468.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*

properly interpreted. Hence Block states, “Far from YHWH acting as an oppressive and powerful male who takes advantage of a weak and vulnerable female, Ezek 16 presents YHWH as a gracious savior who lavishes his favors on this helpless infant/young woman.”¹⁰⁹ This would counter Galambush’s argument that “YHWH’s struggle for control emerges over the course of Ezekiel as a struggle between male and female, depicted in chaps 16 and 23 through a form of pornography, a whore’s biography with the woman’s sexual subordination as its goal.”¹¹⁰ It should therefore be noted that YHWH would have nothing to gain from being domineering on “lady Jerusalem.”

Fourth, the text does not support “a double standard of sexual conduct,”¹¹¹ neither does it attribute a higher level of immorality on the part of women. Fifth, prophetic literature contained a lot of “hyperbole and graphic images” which were aimed at Israel. Their rhetorical purpose was “to shock their stony hearts.”¹¹² Block here concurs with Biggs who argues that the metaphor used in Ezek 16 and 23 was intended to “shock and outrage” Ezekiel’s listeners and to awaken them from their spiritual stupor.¹¹³ Sixth, before YHWH could effect Israel’s restoration, the past religious, moral, and spiritual lapses had to be dealt with. Lastly, we must let God be God and allow him to exercise his sovereignty over the universe.

¹⁰⁹ Block, *Ezekiel 1-24*, 469.

¹¹⁰ Galambush, *Jerusalem in the Book of Ezekiel*, 163.

¹¹¹ Block, *Ezekiel 1-24*, 469.

¹¹² Ibid., 469-70; for Ezek 23 see *ibid.*, 734.

¹¹³ Charles R. Biggs, *The Book of Ezekiel* (London: Epworth 1996), xix.

Another area worth considering is the justified nature of YHWH's judgment on Israel. Zimmerli appears to justify YHWH's judgment when he says these judgments are as a result of people's own deliberate sinful choices,¹¹⁴ and thus the fate of those in Ezek 16 and 23 are basically "didactic example-stories of a righteous divine judgment upon sinful, adulterous, and murderous women, who are to serve as a warning example so that other women in the future may not do likewise."¹¹⁵

To feminist scholars, such a conclusion downplays the harsh and severe realities of judgment in the text.¹¹⁶ Like Zimmerli, Block also acknowledges the role YHWH's actions play in revealing his person. In spite of all the relational character portrayals that Block finds in YHWH, yet he also finds justification for YHWH's harsh judgment upon his people: their rejection of his grace.¹¹⁷

Duguid recognizes the absence of decorum in Ezekiel's manner in the language of Ezek 16. He however justifies the use of such language by saying YHWH "will not 'be polite' about Israel's history of sin; instead, he is instructed to expose it in its full ugliness in the most graphic manner possible. Only thus can he get the point across."¹¹⁸ Duguid observes that graphic sexual images in Ezek 23 are intended to underscore the point that Jerusalem's imminent demise "is both the deserved and the inevitable consequence of her

¹¹⁴ Zimmerli, *Ezekiel 1-24*, 489-90.

¹¹⁵ Ibid., 492.

¹¹⁶ Meyers, "Engendering Ezekiel: Female Figures Reconsidered," 288-89. See also, McKeating, "Sanctions against Adultery in Ancient Israelite Society," 57-72.

¹¹⁷ Block, *Ezekiel 1-24*, 521.

¹¹⁸ Duguid, *Ezekiel*, 216.

past actions.”¹¹⁹ Israel has sinned and now she is reaping the consequences of her depravity.

How then should the mainline scholars respond to the feminist critics and their “twisted”¹²⁰ picture of God? Greenberg’s response to such an inquiry is quite candid: “There can be no doubt that such readings are authentic expressions of the pain and outrage experienced by feminists searching for reflections of their constructions of reality and meeting with Oholah and Oholibah. The feminist project, promoting a new female reality, necessarily clashes with Scripture.”¹²¹ Pressing on with his evaluation, Greenberg concludes: “Whether aiming to savage Scripture or to salvage it, feminists are judgmental. They applaud or decry, approve or disapprove. They write to promote a new gender reality.”¹²² Thus Greenberg takes a very strong stand against the feminist scholars, and he decides not to engage them in the rest of his work.¹²³

Joseph Blenkinsopp is more tolerant. He says the antifeminism current in prophetic literature should not be ignored. He therefore feels that “the ambiguity, suspicion, and fear aroused by female allure, and even more by the biological processes connected with birth and menstruation . . . may help to explain but do nothing to render

¹¹⁹ Duguid, *Ezekiel*, 310.

¹²⁰ Moskala, “The Message of God’s People in the Old Testament,” 18.

¹²¹ Greenberg, *Ezekiel 21-37*, 494.

¹²² *Ibid.*

¹²³ *Ibid.* Hummel counters this position and contends that we cannot “easily dismiss these liberal objections as anachronistic and irrelevant. . . . Our culture demands that we not simply ignore them.” Hummel, *Ezekiel 1-20*, 462.

these attitudes less distasteful to the enlightened modern reader.”¹²⁴ He concludes that what the readers ought to do is to focus on the essence of the narrative “which is Israel’s history of infidelity and failure.”¹²⁵

Corrine Patton affirms the authority of Scripture and completely rejects feminist interpretations that are designed to strip the Bible “of its authoritative status.”¹²⁶ Patton accuses feminist critics of neglecting the historical factors that gave rise to the metaphors in Ezek 23. Patton therefore concludes that Ezek 23 “does not substantiate domestic abuse; and scholars, teachers, and preachers must continue to remind uninformed readers that such an interpretation is actually a misreading.”¹²⁷ Patton argues that whereas Ezek 23 may appear to give a negative portrayal of YHWH, yet it gives a picture of “a God for whom no experience, not even rape and mutilation in wartime, is beyond hope for healing and redemption.”¹²⁸

Summary

The picture that emerges from the discussion in this chapter is that of disparate views regarding the character of God in the book of Ezekiel. This study takes the position that the feminist scholars who portray YHWH negatively have not taken into account the basis for YHWH’s severe judgments. When the wanton actions of the Israelites are

¹²⁴ Blenkinsopp, *Ezekiel*, 99.

¹²⁵ Ibid.

¹²⁶ Corrine L. Patton, ““Should Our Sister Be Treated Like a Whore?”” 221-38.

¹²⁷ Ibid., 238.

¹²⁸ Ibid.

considered in the light of their implications for YHWH's character, the harsh retribution coming from YHWH will be seen to be just.

The mainstream scholars, for the most part, depict YHWH quite positively. To them, YHWH is gracious, loving, and merciful. He is a God whose gracious and merciful acts are seen in the way he treats the foundling of Ezek 16. These scholars reveal that even the shocking language used in passages like Ezek 16 and 23 reflect this love. They see in the metaphors of Ezek 16 and 23 a depiction of YHWH's relationship with Israel. YHWH has done so much for her. She has spurned those gracious acts, gone whoring after other deities, and entered into unlawful alliances with other nations. For such ungracious response YHWH unleashes upon them the covenant curses. YHWH's judgments are therefore seen as justified. Daniel Block must be commended for the elaborate explanation he gives on the often misunderstood and misrepresented metaphor of Ezek 16 and 23.¹²⁹

This brief analysis has revealed that Ezek 5:5-17 shares several features with Ezek 16 and 23. If the abominations committed by Israel in Ezek 16 and 23 result in harsh punishments that have caused feminist scholars to portray YHWH negatively, it is then possible that the harsh punishments YHWH threatens to inflict in Ezek 5:5-17 could also fall under the same condemnation and result in a negative portrayal of his character. It is therefore necessary to explore the basis of such severe judgments, so YHWH's punitive actions can be justified and any mischaracterizations of his character dispelled.

¹²⁹ Block, *Ezekiel 1-24*, 467-70.

CHAPTER 3

THE BASIS OF DIVINE JUDGMENT IN EZEKIEL 5:5-17

WITHIN ITS CONTEXT

Introduction

The book of Ezekiel, unlike that of Joel, where there does not seem to be any justified reason for punishment,¹ is quite explicit with reference to the reasons behind YHWH's judgment on Israel. This section seeks to establish the basis of this divine retributive judgment in Ezek 5:5-17 within its larger context of Ezek 1-24.

The Literary Context of Ezekiel 5:5-17

Ezekiel 5:5-17 is set within the literary context of Ezek 1-24, which deals with YHWH's judgment on Israel. The passage follows the call and commission narratives in Ezek 1-3 and the various symbolic actions² in Ezek 4-5:4, which were meant to warn

¹ Harvey Shapiro argues that no explicit reason is given for the devastating plague of locusts in Joel and so draws a conclusion, with which I do not agree, that "these aren't sinners in the hands of an angry God; they are people in the hands of a megalomaniac God." Harvey Shapiro, "Joel," in *Congregation: Contemporary Writers Read the Jewish Bible* (ed. D. Rosenberg; San Diego, Calif.: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1987), 201.

² Moshe Greenberg categorizes Ezekiel's symbolic action in 4:1-3 as the first of his sign acts. Greenberg, *Ezekiel 1-20*, 122. Hummel on the other hand considers the divine directives given to Ezekiel in 3:25-27 to be the first of the action prophecies. Hummel, *Ezekiel 1-20*, 130. Brownlee, who compares Ezekiel to the Suffering Servant of Isaiah, views Ezek 3:24b-26 as the first symbolic action of Ezekiel. William H. Brownlee, *Ezekiel 1-19* (Waco, Tex.: Word Books, 1986), 52. For more discussion on Ezekiel's symbolic actions see Kelvin G. Friebel, *Jeremiah's and Ezekiel's Sign-Acts: Rhetorical Nonverbal Communication* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic,

Judah of the impending divine judgments so that they would rethink their loyalty to YHWH.³ These symbolic or sign acts⁴ represented the siege that would soon befall Jerusalem at the hands of the Babylonians, and the resultant calamities the people of Judah would experience. Yet these symbolic acts were not just about imminent judgment. As Block observes, when they were coupled with the recognition formula, “their aim was to effect an acknowledgement of God.”⁵ It is therefore apparent that these symbolic actions were a well-calculated and properly targeted rhetoric tool aimed at reinforcing YHWH’s imminent and impending judicial actions against Israel.

But apart from the symbolic acts that form part of the setting for Ezek 5:5-17, the passage also has an exilic setting. The people of Judah went through two very harrowing experiences of exile at the hands of the Babylonians.⁶ The prophet Ezekiel was taken into

1999); Joshua J. Adler, "The Symbolic Acts of Ezekiel (Chaps. 3-5)," *JBQ* 19 (1990-91): 120-22; Edwin C. Broome, "Ezekiel's Abnormal Personality," *JBL* 65 (1946): 277-92; W. D. Stacey, *Prophetic Drama in the Old Testament* (London: Epworth, 1990).

³ Jiří Moskala, "Toward the Fulfillment of the Gog and Magog Prophecy of Ezekiel 38-39," *JATS* 18 (2007): 243-73.

⁴ Joseph Blenkinsopp describes them as “prophetic theatre.” Blenkinsopp, *Ezekiel*, 33-39. Hummel dubs them “action prophecies.” Hummel, *Ezekiel* 1-20, 10.

⁵ Block, *Ezekiel* 1-24, 164.

⁶ The first “deportation” occurred in 605 B.C. when some talented young people from the nobility and the royal family were taken to Babylon (Dan 1:3). The second tragic deportation followed in 597 B.C. when the prophet Ezekiel was also taken captive. Ezekiel’s ministry includes warning the people of Judah of an impending exile which would occur in 586/87 B.C. if these divinely inspired messages were not heeded. Steinman observes that those left in Judah after the Babylonian captivity of 605 B.C. “were given another chance to repent and turn to God.” Their refusal to “repent and avail themselves of the mercy of God” led to the catastrophe of 587 B.C. Andrew E. Steinmann, *Daniel* (Saint Louis, Mo.: Concordia, 2008), 85. See also Gerhard F. Hasel, "Establishing a Date for the Book of Daniel," in *Symposium on Daniel: Introductory and Exegetical Studies* (ed. F. B. Holbrook; Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald, 1986), 84-164.

For scholars who discount the historical facts related to the events of 605 B.C., including Nebuchadnezzar’s subjugation of Jehoiakim (2 Chr 36:6-7; Dan 1:2), see Donald E. Gowan, *Daniel* (Nashville, Tenn.: Abingdon, 2001); John J. Collins, *Daniel: A Commentary on the Book of Daniel* (Minneapolis, Minn.: Fortress, 1993). Among scholars who consider the deportation of

captivity during the second Babylonian exile of 597 B.C. It was thus during this exilic period that God commissioned him to “go now to your countrymen in exile and speak to them” (Ezek 3:11 NIV). Earlier in his first vision report he states, “I was among the exiles by the river Chebar” (Ezek 1:1).⁷ Ezekiel is thus one of the exiles and receives the divine commission while in this foreign environment.

A cursory exploration of Ezek 2 and 3 reveals that God is sending Ezekiel to people who are not true to their covenant relationship with God. They are repeatedly described as “a nation of rebels who have rebelled against me” (Ezek 2:3), “obstinate and stubborn” (Ezek 2:4 NIV), “a rebellious house” (Ezek 2:5, 6; 3:9, 26, 27), “that rebellious house” (Ezek 2:8; cf. 12:2-3, 9, 25; 17:12; 24:3), “hardened and obstinate” (Ezek 3:7 NIV). It is not therefore surprising that Ezek 5:5-17 consists of very harsh statements of divine judgment against these recalcitrant Judean citizens.⁸ This is in sharp contrast to the

597 B.C. as the first exile are Ralph W. Klein, *Israel in Exile: A Theological Interpretation* (Philadelphia, Pa.: Fortress, 1979), 1; Johanna Stiebert, *The Exile and the Prophet's Wife: Historic Events and Marginal Perspectives* (Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 2005), 11-14; Jill A. Middlemas, *The Templeless Age: An Introduction to the History, Literature, and Theology of the Exile* (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox, 2007), 3.

⁷ Daniel Block remarks that the phrase, “among the exiles,” “highlights the fact that he was away from his native land, removed from Jerusalem and the temple.” Block, *Ezekiel 1-24*, 83. Cooper notes that the recurring use of the word מִן, “midst” which occurs 116 times in the book of Ezekiel “revealed the unique perspective he had of himself as a prophet in the midst of the captives and the crucial events of the exile.” Cooper, *Ezekiel*, 29. Kohn remarks that Ezekiel was a resident of a Jewish settlement at Tel-Abib and adds that “the traumatic events of the Exile provide the key to Ezekiel’s prophetic message.” Risa L. Kohn, *A New Heart and a New Soul: Ezekiel, the Exile and the Torah* (New York: Sheffield Academic, 2002), 106.

⁸ Zimmerli emphasizes that this rebellious nature had Canaanite roots, was perpetuated during their Egyptian sojourn, continued into their wilderness wanderings and finally led to their captivity. Zimmerli, “The Message of the Prophet Ezekiel,” 131-57. See also idem, *The Fiery Throne: The Prophets and Old Testament Theology* (Minneapolis, Minn.: Fortress, 2003), 84.

portrayal of Ezekiel, who does not exhibit any rebellious tendencies. Because of this stance, Robson is correct in depicting him to be “a prescriptive paradigm of obedience.”⁹

What we find in Ezek 6-24 is no different. Here too Israel is portrayed as a rebellious nation that has neglected her covenant obligations. YHWH therefore makes prophetic judicial pronouncements upon her. In Ezek 6, it is judgment for idolatry on the mountains, while in Ezek 7, YHWH declares the dawn of the end. Idolatry in the temple is condemned in Ezek 8. Ezekiel 9 depicts the merciless punishment upon the idolatrous worshipers. After the departure of the glory of the Lord from the temple in Ezek 11, YHWH resumes his judicial work by using symbolic actions to depict the impending exile (Ezek 12:1-20). The prophets of doom are condemned in Ezek 13, and in Ezek 14:1-11 there is judgment for consulting idols. The rest of Ezek 14 portrays a scenario of judgment so serious that even the most righteous cannot be relied on for deliverance.

YHWH then proceeds to portray Israel as a useless vine in Ezek 15. This is followed by the serious judgment theme of ch. 16, which finds its counterpart in Ezek 23. The parable of Ezek 17 is meant to inform Israel of the grim facts of the judgment, in which even the top leaders of the nation would not be spared. This chapter has its counterpart in Ezek 19. The message of ch. 18 is clear: Judgment is coming and everyone must bear his/her own cross. While Ezek 20 and 22 recount a litany of Israel's sins and YHWH's resolve to bring judgment upon them, Ezek 21 has YHWH wielding his sword of judgment. The larger context of Ezek 5:5-17 ends in ch. 24 where the iron curtain of YHWH's retributive justice finally falls on Judah.

⁹ Robson, *Word and Spirit in Ezekiel*, 211.

As can be seen from this brief survey, the theme of Ezek 5:5-17 can be summed up in three simple, but similar words: judgment, judgment, judgment!

The Genre of Ezekiel 5:5-17

Genre is a form, type, or classification of literature. Ezekiel 5:5-17 is part of the Old Testament literature, which comprises many genres.¹⁰ It is important to determine the genre¹¹ of Ezek 5:5-17 in order to arrive at its proper interpretation. While Block notes that the passage is made up of a patchwork of sayings, he classifies it as a “complex prophetic judgment speech” and further notes that the structure and vocabulary of Ezek 5:5-17 “display heavy influence from proceedings conducted in courts of law.”¹² Richard Davidson characterizes this passage as a covenant lawsuit,¹³ and Hummel simply calls it

¹⁰ E.g., Law (found in parts of Exodus, Leviticus); History/Narrative (parts of Genesis, Exodus, Numbers, Joshua, Judges, Ruth, 1 and 2 Samuel, 1 and 2 Kings, 1 and 2 Chronicles, Ezra, Esther, Jonah); Wisdom (Job, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and some parts of Psalms); Poetry (Psalms, Song of Solomon, Lamentations); Prophecy (Major and Minor Prophets); Apocalyptic (parts of Isaiah, Daniel, Zechariah).

¹¹ Claus Westermann categorizes the genres of prophetic literature into three main groups: accounts, speeches, and prayers. He points out that the speeches that are generally found in the composition of the prophetic literature include: “Judgment-speeches to the prophet’s own nation”; “Judgment-speeches to foreign nations”; “Salvation-speeches to the prophet’s own nation.” Claus Westermann, *Basic Forms of Prophetic Speech* (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox, 1991), 90, 95. For other references on the use of genre in the Old Testament see F. W. Dobbs-Allsopp, “Genre,” *EDB*, 493-494; John Barton, *Reading the Old Testament: Method in Biblical Study* (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox, 1996), 16-18; Ronald L. Giese, “Literary Forms of the Old Testament,” in *Cracking the Old Testament Codes: A Guide to Interpreting the Literary Genres of the Old Testament* (ed. D. B. Sandy and R. L. Giese; Nashville, Tenn.: Broadman & Holman, 1995), 14; Rick Byargeon, “Listening to the Lyrics: Interpreting Old Testament Wisdom Literature and Poetry,” in *Biblical Hermeneutics: A Comprehensive Introduction to Interpreting Scripture* (ed. B. Corley et al.; Nashville, Tenn.: Broadman & Holman, 2002), 280-300.

¹² Block, *Ezekiel 1-24*, 196, 197.

¹³ See Davidson, “The Covenant Lawsuit Motif in Canonical Perspective.” For further discussion on the covenant lawsuit pattern in the Old Testament see Herbert B. Huffmon, “The Covenant Lawsuit in the Prophets,” *JBL* 78 (1959): 285-95.

a “generic judgment oracle.”¹⁴ While obedience to the covenant stipulations meant blessings, disobedience resulted in a multiplicity of disasters (cf. Lev 26; Deut 28). It is therefore clear that Ezek 5:5-17 is a judgment-based prophetic oracle, couched in a lawsuit format, in which YHWH spells out his grievances against Israel and determines the requisite punishments.

The Literary Structure of Ezekiel 5:5-17

Now that the examination of Ezek 5:5-17 has revealed that it is embedded in the immediate literary context of Ezek 1-24 in the book of Ezekiel, the focus in this section shifts to an examination of the literary structure of the passage, with a view to determining its precise concerns. The investigation shows that the passage deals with YHWH’s accusation of Israel for its sins and the announcement of the harsh judgments.

Ezekiel 5:5-17 has several literary structural features that stand out as one examines the text.¹⁵ The passage is preceded by symbolic actions in Ezek 5:1-4,¹⁶ while

¹⁴ Hummel, *Ezekiel 1-20*, 178.

¹⁵ One such structural marker that delineates the section as a separate and complete literary unit is the presence of the Masoretic marker, **פ**, at the end of Ezek 4:4 and also at the end of Ezek 5:17. This sign which denotes an “open space” shows that there is a key transition at this point in the text. Hummel, *Ezekiel 1-20*, 73-74, 169.

¹⁶ In his outline of the book of Ezekiel, Paul Joyce categorizes Ezek 4:1-5:17 as “Prophetic Sign-Actions.” Joyce, *Ezekiel*, 61, 84-90. Zimmerli on the other hand classifies Ezek 3:16a, 22-5:17 as “The Siege of Jerusalem and the Exile of Israel in the Prophet’s Symbolic Actions.” Zimmerli, *Ezekiel 1-24*, 147-78. Jenson classifies Ezek 3:22-5:4 as “Signs of the Siege and Fall of Jerusalem.” Jenson, *Ezekiel*, 54-58. Although Hummel considers Ezek 5:1-17 as one unit, he, however, treats vv. 5-17 as a subunit and designates it the “first Judgment Oracle.” Hummel, *Ezekiel 1-20*, 166-87. Block categorizes the symbolic acts of Ezek 4:1-5:4 as “dramatic performances” involving the siege of Jerusalem, the destruction of Jerusalem, and the deportation of Jerusalem’s population. He observes that these symbolic actions are “designed to visualize a message and in the process to enhance its persuasive force so that the observers’ perceptions of a given situation might be changed and their beliefs and behavior modified.” Block, *Ezekiel 1-24*, 166-70.

Ezek 5:5-17 contains their interpretation.¹⁷ This is an indication that the unit to be analyzed constitutes a complete literary segment.

The presence of the “messenger formula,”¹⁸ כֹּה אָמַר אֲדֹנָי יְהוִה, “Thus says the Lord God” (Ezek 5:5),¹⁹ at the very beginning of the unit is another pointer that this is a new pericope. The repetition of this formula in Ezek 5:7, 8 is indicative of its role as a structural tool. In Ezek 5:11, which may be regarded as the center of this passage, there is the “prophetic utterance formula,”²⁰ נֹאֲמִים אֲדֹנָי יְהוִה, “a declaration of the Lord YHWH.” This phrase marks the prophetic speech as the authentic word of God. Hence it is generally situated either at the end of a unit or a main segment in a unit.²¹ The section ends with the “conclusion formula for divine speech:”²² אֲנִי יְהוִה דִּבַּרְתִּי, “I, the Lord, have spoken” (Ezek 5:17).²³

¹⁷ For discussion on the purpose of these symbolic acts see Zimmerli, *Ezekiel 1-24*, 28-30.

¹⁸ Hals, *Ezekiel*, 361. See also Westermann, *Basic Forms of Prophetic Speech*, 98-198. Other scholars refer to this form of speech as “the citation formula.” See Block, *Ezekiel 1-24*, 196; Hummel, *Ezekiel 1-20*, 169.

¹⁹ Paul Joyce observes that this is “typical of Ezekiel’s theocentric presentation.” Joyce, *Ezekiel*, 88.

²⁰ Hals, *Ezekiel*, 361.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid., 360. Hals points out that this formula is mostly used in Ezekiel to designate the conclusion of a portion of YHWH’s words, a role that it aptly plays here to bring this literary unit to an end. See also Zimmerli, *Ezekiel 1-24*, 26-27.

²³ Block calls this formula and other related constructions “the self-introduction formula” and prefers the translation “I am YHWH, I have spoken,” because this “would highlight YHWH as one whose word is always effective.” Block, *Ezekiel 1-24*, 36-37. Jenson categorizes it as a “statement of irrevocable determination.” Jenson, *Ezekiel*, 72.

This same formula is in Ezek 5:13, where it is prefixed with כִּי, “for” and in vv. 15 and 17.²⁴ The prophetic word formula in Ezek 6:1, וַיְהִי דְבַר־יְהוָה אֵלַי לֵאמֹר, “The word of the Lord came to me saying,” at the end of 5:17, delineates the beginning of the next literary unit and therefore marks Ezek 5:17 as the end of Ezek 5:5-17.²⁵

These forms not only function as structural markers within this passage; they also serve to reinforce the centrality of YHWH as the major player in this judgment passage. YHWH’s key role is reinforced by the sevenfold use of the first-person pronoun אֲנִי, “I”,²⁶ and the use of many perfect first-person verbs like שִׁמַּתִּיהָ, “I have placed her” (Ezek 5:5), עָשִׂיתִי, “I have done” (Ezek 5:8),²⁷ which permeate this whole section also show how the author had a literary strategy to underscore the significance of YHWH’s actions in Ezek 5:5-17.

This strategy is accentuated by the use of the possessive pronoun “my” suffixed to several nouns, for example, מִשְׁפָּטַי, “my judgments” (Ezek 5:6), חֻקֹּתַי, “my statutes” (Ezek 5:6), מִקְדָּשִׁי, and “my sanctuary” (Ezek 5:11).²⁸ One is also struck by the sevenfold use of the noun מִשְׁפָּט, “judgment” (Ezek 5:6 [twice], 7 [twice], 8, 10, 15). This

²⁴ For other occurrences of this construction in Ezekiel see 17:21, 24; 21:22, 37; 22:14; 24:14; 26:14; 30:12; 34:24; 36:36; 37:14.

²⁵ Note that the Masoretic marker פ at the end of Ezek 5:17 also marks off the passage from the next section beginning in Ezek 6:1.

²⁶ See Ezek 5:8, 11 [thrice], 13, 15, 17.

²⁷ It is interesting to note that the verb עָשָׂה, “do,” is used three times in Ezek 5:9, two times as a perfect verb and once in the imperfect mode.

²⁸ While this phrase occurs only once in Ezek 5:5-17, it is found 14 other times in Ezek: 8:6; 9:6; 23:38, 39; 24:21; 25:3; 37:26, 28; 44:7, 8, 9, 11, 15, 16.

intentional repetition is also an indication of the use of the noun as a structural device.

The fourfold use of לָכֵן, “therefore” (Ezek 5:7, 8, 10, 11),²⁹ also appears to have been intended to function as a literary device. The repetition of לָכֵן and the citation formula at the beginning of v. 7 are intended to highlight the impending judgment.³⁰

It is clear from this discussion that the literary structure of Ezek 5:5-17 is artistically woven, playing a key role in emphasizing the judgment and YHWH’s central role in it.

Based on these literary features and the content of the passage, Ezek 5:5-17 can be summarized with the following structural components:

- I. Jerusalem Identified as the Culprit (vv. 5-7)
 - a. Her Special Placement (v. 5)
 - b. Her Rebellious Nature (vv. 6, 7)
- II. The Punishments on Jerusalem (vv. 8-12)
 - a. YHWH’s Determination to Punish (v. 8)
 - b. The Basis of Punishment (v. 9)
 - c. The Punishments
 - i. Cannibalism (v. 10)
 - ii. Scattering to the Winds (v. 10)
 - iii. Plague, Famine and Sword (v. 12)
- III. YHWH’s Anger on Jerusalem (v. 13)
- IV. Jerusalem’s Disadvantaged Position among the Nations (vv. 14-15)
 - a. A Ruin and a Reproach (v. 14)
 - b. An Object of Horror (v. 14)
- V. More Punishments on Jerusalem (vv. 16-17)
 - a. Famine (vv. 16, 17)
 - b. Wild Beasts (v. 17)
 - c. Plague (v. 17)
 - d. Bloodshed (v. 17)
 - e. Sword (v. 17)

²⁹ For further views on the use of לָכֵן, see Greenberg, *Ezekiel 1-20*, 111-12; F. J. Goldbaum, "Two Hebrew Quasi-Adverbs: *lkn* and '*kn*,'" *JNES* 23 (1964): 132-35. W. E. March, "*Lākēn*: Its Functions and Meanings," in *Rhetorical Criticism: Essays in Honor of J. Muilenburg* (ed. J. Jackson and M. Kessler; Pittsburgh, Pa.: Pickwick, 1974), 256-86.

³⁰ Hummel, *Ezekiel 1-20*, 171.

The Literary Function of Ezekiel 5:5-17

Having examined where Ezek 5:5-17 falls in the wider literary context of Ezek 1-24 plus its literary structure and the issues it raises, some remarks and conclusions become apparent. Ezekiel 5:5-17 appears to be well placed in its setting as a constituent part of Ezek 1-24. Most of the material in the section is undoubtedly intended to alert the readers about the negative effect of sinful practices on YHWH's relationship with his people, and how this will ultimately bring judgment upon them. These sinful practices are mentioned in units and sub-units that precede Ezek 5:5-17 and those that follow it within the larger context of Ezek 1-24 and even beyond.³¹

Ezekiel 2:1-3:27 repeatedly portrays the house of Israel as "rebellious."³² Ezekiel 4:1-5:4 covers the symbolic actions that depict the sins of Israel and the intended punishments. The unit is considered to be the interpretation of these symbolic actions that precede it.³³ In Ezek 5:5-17 God highlights the specific sins of Israel and announces his judgments with very strong "I" statements. It is worth noting that the language of punishment used in the unit is strongly linked to the covenant curses of Lev 26 and Deut 28.³⁴ It is significant to note the absence in the pericope of any call for Israel to repent.

³¹ See for example YHWH's prophecy against the unfaithful shepherds of Israel in Ezek 33:1-10.

³² See Ezek 2:3, 5, 6, 7, 8; 3:9, 26, 27.

³³ Zimmerli points out that Ezek 5:5 "first reveals the intention of the symbolic actions." Zimmerli, *Ezekiel 1-24*, 174. Hummel however contends that it is only in Ezek 5:12 where there is "a specific reference to and commentary on the action prophecy" in Ezek 5:1-4. Hummel, *Ezekiel 1-20*, 178.

³⁴ For further discussion on the connection between the covenant curses in the Old Testament and their interrelationship with Ezek 5:5-17 see Allen, *Ezekiel 1-19*, 92-96.

Summary

I have established that Ezek 5:5-17 is a prophetic judgment genre, and that it functions within the immediate context of Ezek 1-24. It is also apparent that this section of Scripture has clear structural markers that delineate its various sections. Ezekiel 5:5-17 interprets the earlier symbolic actions and sets in motion YHWH's judgments upon Israel because of its sins.

Indictment of Israel in Ezekiel 5:5-17

Iain Duguid makes a brief but pertinent observation regarding the relationship between YHWH and Israel:

All of the prophets preached against the sin and idolatry of their own day, but perhaps none was quite as comprehensive or as sweeping in their indictment as Ezekiel. For him, the sin of God's people stretched back throughout their entire history. Jerusalem had acted like a prostitute from the day of its birth (Ezek. 23:3) and was actually worse than Sodom (16:46-48)! Even from earliest times, from the day when God had called Israel out of Egypt and brought them into the desert, they had rebelled against him (ch. 20).³⁵

The significance of this statement begins to unfold as YHWH castigates Israel for various covenant violations in Ezek 5:5-17. Among these violations are the rejection of divine laws and decrees, and abominations carried out in the sanctuary by the Israelites. We shall examine these indictments in two parts: first, rejection of divine laws and decrees, followed by abominations in the sanctuary.

³⁵ Duguid, *Ezekiel*, 36.

Rejection of Divine Laws and Decrees

The law was one of the components of YHWH's covenant relationship with Israel. Obedience to the law signified blessings (Lev 26:1-13; Deut 28:1-14) and disobedience to the law resulted in curses (Lev 26:14-39; Deut 28:15-68). It is this law that the Israelites had contravened, and YHWH is quite categorical with regard to this infraction. Referring to Jerusalem and her privileged position,³⁶ YHWH spells out the accusation: "Yet in her wickedness she has rebelled against my laws and decrees around her. She has rejected my laws and has not followed my decrees" (Ezek 5:6). This is an allusion to Lev 26:3, 15 which envisions such a possibility and the attendant consequences. YHWH does not want to leave any doubt as to what the offense is, so he reiterates the accusation, "You have been more unruly than the nations around you and have not followed my decrees or kept my laws. You have not even conformed to the standards of the nations around you" (Ezek 5:7).

In his commentary on Lev 26:15, where Israel is warned of the consequences of despising YHWH's decrees and abhorring his laws, John Hartley observes that the use of the pronoun "my" with regard to decrees and laws "underscores Israel's intentional turning away from those essential elements that define their relationship with YHWH."³⁷ This departure from YHWH's established norms cannot be treated lightly or casually. YHWH has to act in order to protect his reputation.

³⁶ Allen points out that Jerusalem's privileged position made its rebellion worse. Allen, *Ezekiel 1-19*, 72.

³⁷ John E. Hartley, *Leviticus* (Dallas, Tex.: Word Books, 1992), 464.

An analysis of some of the words used to describe Israel's behavior of rebellion against YHWH's laws and decrees will further show the seriousness of their actions. The verb used here is מָרָה, "be contentious, refractory, rebellious,"³⁸ "to be obstinate."³⁹ It occurs 45 times in the Old Testament and 4 times in Ezekiel (Ezek 5:6; 20:8, 13, 21). The noun מָרִי, "rebellion," with its 23 occurrences in the Old Testament, is found 16 times in Ezekiel.⁴⁰ Several times in Ezekiel Israel is called a "house of rebellion,"⁴¹ a "rebellious nation" (Ezek 2:3). One of the earliest uses of the word מָרָה is in Deut 21:18-20 which describes a son who is said to be stubborn and rebellious (וּמָרָה). Such a son should face capital punishment. This indicates that the sin of rebellion was considered to be very serious in Israelite society and the Israelites knew what they were up against when they took this stance against YHWH and his will.

Another word in Ezek 5:6 that describes the Israelites is רָשָׁעָה, "wickedness, evil." In this they are said to be worse than the surrounding nations. The word רָשָׁעָה comes from the root רָשָׁע, "guilty, wicked, impious."⁴² In Deut 9:4, 5 YHWH tells the Israelites that it is because of the רָשָׁעָה, "wickedness of," the Canaanites that they are going to be driven out of the land. Now it appears that soon the tables are going to be turned against the Israelites and it will not be a surprise that as a result of their רָשָׁעָה,

³⁸ V. P. Hamilton, "מָרָה," n.p., *TWOT* on CD-ROM. Version 3.0g. 2000-2007.

³⁹ R. Knierim, "מָרָה," *TLOT* 2:687-88.

⁴⁰ Ezek 2:5, 6, 7, 8 [twice]; 3:9, 26, 27; 12:2 [twice], 3, 9, 25; 17:12; 24:3; 44:6.

⁴¹ See Ezek 2:5, 6, 8; 3:9, 26, 27; 12:2 [twice], 3, 9, 25; 17:12; 24:3.

⁴² H. Ringgren, "רָשָׁע," *TDOT* 14:1-9. For further discussion see C. van Leeuwen, "רָשָׁע," *TLOT* 3:1261-65.

they too will be driven out of that same land. Ezekiel 18:20 maintains that anyone who perpetrates רָשָׁע must personally bear the consequences. This is the position Israel finds itself in and must now give an account for their רָשָׁע.

YHWH unequivocally spells out the basis of his judgment on Israel in Ezek 5:9. In the first part of the verse YHWH declares: “I will do to you what I have never yet done, and the like of which I will never do again.” It is significant to note that the verb עָשָׂה, “do, make,” is used three times in this verse, two times in the perfect form and once in the imperfect form. The repetition of this verb with YHWH as the subject is indicative of the emphasis YHWH is putting on his inevitable actions on Israel. Additionally, the word עָשָׂה, in its common usage with the meaning “do, make,” often has ethical connotations,⁴³ with the Israelites repeatedly charged to “do” all that YHWH decreed (Exod 23:22; Lev 19:37; Deut 6:18). It is therefore not surprising to see YHWH turn and use this word in relation to the judgment that he would soon bring upon those who have failed to “do” YHWH’s commands.

Abominations in the Sanctuary

The exploration undertaken in this section reveals Israel’s intransigence of rebellion and failure to abide by YHWH’s laws and decrees. I will start this section by exploring the abuses that went on in YHWH’s temple and thus provided the basis on which he announced harsh judgments upon Israel. In Ezek 5:9 YHWH explicitly states,

⁴³ T. E. McComiskey, “עָשָׂה,” n.p., *TWOT* on CD-ROM. Version 3.0g. 2000-2007.

“Because of all your detestable idols” (תועבתיך).⁴⁴ Swearing by his own self,⁴⁵ YHWH proclaims, “Therefore as surely as I live, declares the Sovereign Lord, because you have defiled (טמאת) my sanctuary (מקדש), with all your vile images (שקויציך) and detestable practices (תועבתיך).”

John Calvin observes that "man's nature, so to speak, is a perpetual factory of idols."⁴⁶ Where would this declaration have been more applicable than in the lives of the people of Israel! The two verses cited above give us an indication that idolatry was an issue that YHWH's people had to contend with from time to time. But this was not all. The two verses are also explicit that this attachment to idolatry would eventually lead to YHWH's severe and relentless judgments upon his people.

A closer examination of the following words from Ezek 5:9, 11 highlights the seriousness of Israel's offense against YHWH: טמא, מקדש, שקויץ, and תועבה. A clear understanding of these words will enable us to appreciate YHWH's intense infuriation at the people of Israel and his determination to pronounce severe judgments upon them.

The first word to consider here is טמא, “become unclean, to defile.”⁴⁷ In the *pi'el*

⁴⁴ Allen translates תועבה as “abomination, shocking practice.” Allen, *Ezekiel 1-19*, 74.

⁴⁵ The construction הִיאֲנִי used here occurs more times in Ezekiel than in any other Old Testament book. For the sixteen occurrences in Ezekiel see 5:11; 14:6, 18, 20; 16:48; 17:16, 19; 18:3; 20:3, 31, 33; 33:11, 27; 34:8; 35:6, 11. For its six occurrences in the rest of the Old Testament books see Num 14:21, 28; Isa 49:18; Jer 22:24; 46:18; Zeph 2:9. It is worth noting that the plurality of its occurrences are found in contexts where YHWH is determined to carry out judicial punishments upon the disobedient. For further discussion on this oath formula see Moshe Greenberg, “The Hebrew Oath Particle *hay/hē*,” *JBL* 76 (1957): 34-39.

⁴⁶ Jean Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (Philadelphia, Pa.: Westminster, 1960), 108.

⁴⁷ See Moskala's categorization of טמא into ethical, ceremonial/ritual, and death-life antithesis. Moskala, “The Laws of Clean and Unclean Animals,” 191-94.

this word means “defile, make unclean, desecrate.” In Ezek 5:11 the object of this defilement is YHWH’s מִקְדָּשׁ, ‘sanctuary.’⁴⁸ The denominative verb קִדַּשׁ, from which the noun מִקְדָּשׁ is derived, denotes the realm of that which is holy. The sanctuary was a dwelling place of YHWH (Exod 25:8), and by its very nature it was a holy place. The laws governing its cultic practices were designed to maintain its purity. As McComiskey observes, “The maintenance of the integrity of the ‘holy’ was a function of the Israelite cultus.”⁴⁹ The priests had the obligation of ensuring that the instruments that were used in the sanctuary were holy. The sacrificial animals were to be without any defects to reflect the holy state of the sanctuary (Lev 22:17-25). The priests who performed the cultic activities in the sanctuary had to undergo special ceremonies to ensure that they did not defile the sanctuary in the course of their cultic duties. The sanctuary was therefore in essence a holy place.⁵⁰ It was therefore inconceivable that the Israelites would introduce objects in the sanctuary that by their very nature would defile (טָמֵא) the sanctuary.

Two words in Ezek 5:11 are of special interest, for they reveal the means by which the Israelites defiled the sanctuary. These are שְׂקִיזִים, “detestable things,” and תועֲבוֹת, “abominations,”⁵¹ the two elements that are used in defiling the sanctuary. An examination of the use of שָׁקַץ in the Old Testament reveals that it has different nuances

⁴⁸ Other references to the defilement of the sanctuary in Ezekiel are found in 9:7 and 23:38.

⁴⁹ T. E. McComiskey, “קִדַּשׁ,” n.p., *TWOT* on CD-ROM. Version 3.0g. 2000-2007.

⁵⁰ For discussion on some of the purification rites involved in maintaining the purity of the sanctuary see Roy Gane, *Cult and Character*; Baruch J. Schwartz et al., eds., *Perspectives on Purity and Purification in the Bible* (New York: T&T Clark, 2008); Jay Sklar, *Sin, Impurity, Sacrifice, Atonement: The Priestly Conceptions* (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix, 2005).

⁵¹ This word occurs mostly in the plural form in the book of Ezekiel.

of meaning. In Lev 11, where the word is used several times (vv. 10, 11, 12, 13, 20, 23, 41, 42), it refers to the types of food that the Israelites were forbidden to eat because such unclean foods or animals are *שֶׁקֶץ*, “an abomination.”⁵² This word is used in several passages in Ezekiel, and as Ganzel observes, there are eight instances in which *שֶׁקֶץ* is used with specific reference to idolatry: 5:11; 7:20; 11:18, 21; 20:7, 8, 30; 37: 23.⁵³

The other means that YHWH identifies as defiling the temple is *תועבה*, “abomination.”⁵⁴ This word which is found 117 times in the Old Testament appears 43 times in Ezekiel.⁵⁵ This is more times than in any other Old Testament book.⁵⁶ Because of these many usages of *תועבה*, Winston Pickett posits that Ezekiel appears to have “a partiality towards it.”⁵⁷ A look at a few biblical passages gives us some basic meaning of the word *תועבה*. YHWH warned the Israelites regarding Canaanite images, saying they

⁵² See for example Lev 11:10-13, 20, 23, 41-42; 20:25. Moskala points out that all swarmers in Lev 11 are designated as *שֶׁקֶץ* and so are unfit for human consumption. Moskala, “The Laws of Clean and Unclean Animals,” 232. See also table 2, pp. 180-182 in Moskala’s dissertation, where *שֶׁקֶץ* is shown to be one of the key words for describing the unclean animals.

⁵³ Tova Ganzel, “The Defilement and Desecration of the Temple in Ezekiel,” *Bib* 89 (2008): 369-79. See also the Hebrew article by Jacob Milgrom, “Two Priestly Terms *šeqes* and *tāmē*,” *Tarbiz* 60 (1991): 423-28; idem, “The Nature and Extent of Idolatry in Seventh-eighth Century Judah,” *HUCA* 69 (1998): 1-13; Allen P. Ross, *Holiness to the Lord: A Guide to the Exposition of the Book of Leviticus* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2002).

⁵⁴ Moskala notes that included in the meaning of the word *תועבה* are “idolatry (child sacrifices are included), sexual perversion, and eating unclean food.” Moskala, “The Laws of Clean and Unclean Animals,” 294.

⁵⁵ These usages are found in Ezek 5:9, 11; 6:9, 11; 7:3, 4, 8, 9, 20; 8:6 [twice], 9, 13, 15, 17; 9:4; 11:18, 21; 12:16; 14:6; 16:2, 22, 36, 43, 47, 50, 51 [twice], 58; 18:12, 13, 24; 20:4; 22:2, 11; 23:36; 33:26, 29; 36:31; 43:8; 44:6, 7, 13.

⁵⁶ For comparison see its occurrence in the other latter prophetic books: Isa 1:13; 41:24; 44:19; Jer 2:7; 6:15; 7:10; 8:12; 16:18; 32:35; 44:4, 22; Mal 2:11.

⁵⁷ Winston H. Pickett, “The Meaning and Function of *T’b/To’eva* in the Hebrew Bible” (Ph.D. diss., Hebrew Union College, 1985), 233-234. Paul Joyce says it is “Ezekiel’s favoured word.” Joyce, *Ezekiel*, 98.

were abhorrent (תועבת) to him (Deut 7:25). YHWH further warned against bringing such images into one's house because of their abhorrent nature, and whoever flouted that warning was bound to perish like these abhorrent images (Deut 7:26). In Deut 13:12-15, YHWH explicitly associates תועבה with the worship of other gods, and issues stern warning that anyone found worshipping such gods will face capital punishment. Deuteronomy 17:2-5 elaborates on this and includes the worship of the sun, moon, or any of the host of heaven among the things YHWH considers abominable. YHWH commands that a curse is pronounced upon anyone who makes an idol or casts an image or anything abhorrent (תועבת) to the Lord (Deut 27:15). From this brief analysis, it is apparent that תועבה involves something that is impure, alien, and an intrusion into YHWH's sacred space, which must be kept away.

If שְׂקוּצִים, “detestable things,” and תועבות, “abominations,” are so loathsome to YHWH that their use in the sanctuary called for the judgment of God, what is it about these practices that make them so repulsive? Roy Gane makes a very instructive observation when he writes, “Ethical sins arising from weaknesses such as greed or lust violated YHWH's covenant law. But idolatrous worship rejected YHWH in a more direct sense by deliberately putting something in place of him.”⁵⁸ Gane further notes that “idolatry was like cancer. Because it was never wholly eradicated, it survived occasional surgery and always returned with a vengeance.”⁵⁹ It is because of this that YHWH has to act like a physician who performs a major surgical operation to remove all the cancer

⁵⁸ Roy Gane, "The End of the Israelite Monarchy," *JATS* 10 (1999): 333-56.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 342.

cells of idolatry from the already diseased nation. Failure to do this will result in the atrophy of the entire nation and the eventual loss of precious people.

Summary

YHWH's resolve to judge Israel is not without cause. Israel has sinned and violated the terms of the covenant. They have not followed the divine decrees that were the basis of their relationship with YHWH. Worse still, they have failed to make a distinction between the holy and the common.⁶⁰ They have encroached on the sacred area of YHWH's residence and profaned it. YHWH cannot let this happen without consequences. He must carry out the threatened judgments to show his abhorrence of acts of disobedience. He also does this to show the veracity of his word. It is through this word that warnings concerning consequences for disobedience have been given. Those who disregard his stipulations must know that there is a day of reckoning in which each person must reap what he or she has sown; a time when YHWH has to unleash retributive justice upon the disobedient.⁶¹

Rejection of Divine Laws and Decrees in Ezekiel 1-24

Israel's rebelliousness towards YHWH's laws and decrees is not limited to Ezek 5:5-17. The tendency pervades the rest of Ezek 1-24 and contributes immensely to the

⁶⁰ The punishment that came on Nadab and Abihu in Lev 10 when they failed to recognize the "distinction between the holy and the common, the clean and the unclean" (Lev 10:10) should have been a lesson to the people of Israel. Moskala notes the semantic links between holy and common, clean and unclean and observes that uncleanness "is a threat to, or is in opposition to holiness (Lev 10:10), and hence must be kept separate from that sphere." Moskala, "The Laws of Clean and Unclean Animals," 195-196, 192.

⁶¹ Darr, "The Book of Ezekiel," 1155.

basis of YHWH's judgment on Israel. While this research project does not deal exhaustively with these evidences, it does, however, highlight them to show that Israel's disobedience in this important area of their relationship with YHWH caused him to bring upon them his furious judgments. This study focuses mainly on the following areas of the rejection of divine laws and decrees: bloodshed and violence; disrespect to parents; social injustices; desecration of the Sabbath, and sexual immorality.⁶²

Bloodshed and Violence

One of the reasons why YHWH's judgment is directed on the Israelites is because of the crimes they commit against their fellow human beings. One of these crimes consisted of bloodshed and violence.⁶³ The prophet Ezekiel uses the word "blood" and "bloodshed" more times than any other prophet to describe some of the crimes of the people of Judah.⁶⁴ This usage informs us of his rhetorical purpose of illustrating the sinfulness of Judah and therefore justifies YHWH's ensuing judgment upon its people.

Apart from crimes of bloodshed, YHWH also accuses the people of Judah of other crimes

⁶² Other sins condemned in Ezekiel are false words and lying visions of the false prophets who led God's people astray (Ezek 13:2-23; 14:9, 10); magic charms of the women who enticed God's people (Ezek 13:18, 20); child sacrifice (Ezek 16:21; 23:39);

⁶³ Hummel characterizes these as "social crimes." Hummel, *Ezekiel 1-20*, 220. See also Greenberg, *Ezekiel 1-20*, 162. Block argues that the crimes of bloodshed dealt with in Ezekiel are not limited to crimes against humanity, but that they also encompass cultic sins whenever the sacrificial animals were not properly slaughtered (Lev 17:1-4). Block, *Ezekiel 1-24*, 704.

⁶⁴ See for example Ezek 7:23; 9:9; 16:38; 18:10; 22:2, 3, 6, 9, 12, 27; 23:37, 45; 24:6, 9; 33:25; 35:6; 36:18. For its comparative occurrences in the latter prophets see Isa 1:15; 4:4; 9:4; 26:21; 33:15; 59:3, 7; Jer 2:34; 7:6; 19:4; 22:3, 17; 26:15; Joel 4:21; Mic 3:10; 7:2; Nah 3:1; Hab 2:8, 12, 17.

of violence⁶⁵ that will also in turn bring about his judgment upon the people of Israel. A close examination of these words and some phrases associated with the crimes being committed in Jerusalem will help us to appreciate why YHWH directs his judgments on the people of Judah.

One such phrase found in Ezek 7:23 and nowhere else in the Hebrew Bible is מִשְׁפָּט דָּמִים, consisting of the Hebrew words מִשְׁפָּט, a masculine singular noun generally translated “judgment, justice,” and דָּמִים, a masculine plural noun derived from the word דָּם, “blood.” As we look at the crimes of bloodshed it is important to briefly explore the value YHWH attached to human life. It is because of this that laws pertaining to capital punishment for inadvertent murder were instituted (Num 35:1-33).⁶⁶ The first recorded crime of bloodshed in the Hebrew Bible is when Cain killed his brother, Abel. YHWH was fast in condemning this act and cursing Cain for it (Gen 4:10, 11). It is because of the sanctity of human life and to safeguard the unnecessary loss of life that YHWH instituted cities of refuge so that anyone who had unintentionally killed someone could find a place of refuge while the details of the case were being considered (Num 35:9-28; Deut 19:1-13; Josh 20:1-19). It is because of the value YHWH attaches to human life that he issued a harsh judgment on king Ahab for the cruel and senseless murder of Naboth at the instigation of his wife, Jezebel (1 Kgs 21:1-29).

⁶⁵ See Ezek 7:11, 23; 8:17; 12:19; 45:9; for its comparative occurrences in the latter prophets see Isa 59:6; Jer 6:7; 20:8; 22:3; 51:46; Amos 3:10; 6:3; Mic 6:12; Hab 1:2, 3, 8, 9; 2:8, 17; Zeph 1:9; Mal 2:16.

⁶⁶ For further discussion, see Roy Gane, *Leviticus/Numbers* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004), 792-806.

The picture that emerges in Israel at the time of Ezekiel is that of unwarranted murders and disregard for human life perpetrated by YHWH's own people. Such acts, done in complete disregard for YHWH's commands regarding the sanctity of life, must be punished. YHWH is not going to be apathetic when his own people face threats of crimes of bloodshed from their fellow citizens.

YHWH's judgment on Israel is therefore warranted because the land is full of bloodshed (Ezek 9:9). Jerusalem is described as the "bloody city" (Ezek 22:2).⁶⁷ Oholah and Oholibah face harsh judgment because, among other sins they have committed, "blood is on their hands" (Ezek 23:37). They will therefore be judged with the judgment of women who shed blood since they are adulteresses and blood is on their hands (Ezek 23:45). As YHWH comes to the end of the judgment section on the people of Judah (Ezek 1-24), he pronounces the death knell on Judah by pronouncing the **אֵי**, "woe,"⁶⁸ judgment upon her: "Woe to the city of bloodshed . . . for the blood she shed is in her midst. . . . Woe to the city of bloodshed" (Ezek 24:6, 7, 9 NIV).⁶⁹

The other word used in connection with the crimes of blood in Ezekiel is the verb **שָׁפַךְ**, "pour, pour out, shed, spill." This word, which occurs 117 times in the Old Testament and 33 times in Ezekiel, is mostly used in reference to the shedding of

⁶⁷ There are scholars who argue that Ezekiel borrowed this phrase from Nahum, who had earlier characterized Nineveh as "the bloody city" (Nah 3:1). See for example Block, *Ezekiel 1-24*, 703-704.

⁶⁸ For other pronouncements of **אֵי** see Ezek 16:23 [twice]. See also the use of the variant **הָיָה** in Ezek 13:3, 18; 34:2.

⁶⁹ For the use of "woe" as a cry generally connected with funeral laments see R. J. Clifford, "The Use of **הָיָה** in the Prophets," *CBQ* 28 (1966): 458-64; Erhard Gerstenberger, "The Woe-Oracles of the Prophets," *JBL* 81 (1962): 249-63; Waldemar Janzen, *Mourning Cry and Woe Oracle* (New York: De Gruyter, 1972).

human blood,⁷⁰ hence the phrase שָׁפַךְ דָּם, “shed blood,” that is found 8 times in Ezekiel (Ezek 16:38; 18:10; 22:3, 6, 9, 12, 27; 23:45).

In Ezek 22:3 Jerusalem is said to be עִיר שֹׁפְכַת דָּם, “a city shedding blood.” This shedding of blood is not just confined to ordinary people, for in Ezek 22:6 the princes of Israel are accused of using their power to שָׁפַךְ דָּם, “shed blood.”⁷¹ These same princes are said to be “like wolves tearing the prey, to shed blood, to destroy people, and to get dishonest gain” (Ezek 22:27).⁷² Then in 22:9 YHWH talks of the presence of men of רִכְלִיל, “slander,”⁷³ in Jerusalem who disparage others in order to shed blood, and some even go so far as taking bribes in order to shed blood (Ezek 22:12). It is interesting to note that part of the crimes of bloodshed in Jerusalem involved child sacrifice (cf. Ezek 16:22; 23:37-39). YHWH complains that the people of Judah go to his sanctuary after

⁷⁰ H. Austel, “שָׁפַךְ,” n.p., *TWOT* on CD-ROM. Version 3.0g. 2000-2007.

⁷¹ Duguid characterizes these as crimes of “bloodshed and judicial robbery.” Iain M. Duguid, *Ezekiel and the Leaders of Israel* (New York: E. J. Brill, 1994), 38.

⁷² Ezek 22:25 does not have the word ‘blood’ or ‘bloodshed,’ yet the leaders are characterized as being “like roaring lions which tear their prey. A word of interest here is טָרַף, “tear, rend, pluck.” Swanson says this word connotes “a ripping apart of soft tissue with sharp teeth, with a focus on a violent, abhorrent death.” J. Swanson, “טָרַף,” n.p., *DBL* on CD-ROM. Version 3.0g. 2000-2007. While the root of this word may refer to the action of animals, yet as Alexander avers, it is also “predominantly used to illustrate the predatory nature of people who continually conquer and destroy others.” R. H. Alexander, “טָרַף,” n.p., *TWOT* on CD-ROM. Version 3.0g. 2000-2007.

⁷³ William White’s argument that any translation of this word as “talebearer” and “gossip” does not correctly portray the meaning of the Hebrew word רִכְלִיל is not true since the words *slander*, *talebearer*, and *gossip* all have a malicious intent. W. White, “רִכְלִיל,” n.p., *TWOT* on CD-ROM. Version 3.0g. 2000-2007.

slaughtering their children to their idols and thus pollute it (Ezek 23:39).⁷⁴ Harland is therefore right in his remarks that “the most vulnerable in society were cruelly killed.”⁷⁵

Because of these crimes of bloodshed, YHWH declares his unrelenting resolve to bring judgments upon them (Ezek 16:38), and as a consequence of these crimes, he will punish the people of Judah by scattering them among the nations and dispersing them through the lands (Ezek 22:15). He does this is because the crime of bloodshed is not just a crime against human beings. It is above all a crime against YHWH, in whose image human beings are created (Gen 1:27) and who has commanded that life not be indiscriminately ended (Exod 20:13). Such a serious crime unquestionably justifies YHWH’s judgment against Israel.

Another feature in this catalogue of social crimes that provokes YHWH’s fury is the presence of **חַמַּד**, “violence,” in the land. The word **חַמַּד** is used in Genesis to describe the enormity of sin that characterized the days of Noah (Gen 6:11, 13). Jacob uses it to describe Simeon and Levi for their bloody murders following the rape of Dinah by Shechem (Gen 35:25; 49:5). The word has the connotation of extreme wickedness, brutality, cruelty, and hostility.⁷⁶ Swart and Van Dam observe that both verb and noun forms of **חַמַּד** convey “the cold-blooded and unscrupulous infringement of the personal

⁷⁴ See also Ezek 20: 26, 31. For prohibitions on child sacrifice in the Old Testament see Lev 18:21 and Deut 12:31; 18:10. For discussion see chapters 4 and 5 that deal with idolatry and impurity in Ka Leung Wong, *The Idea of Retribution in the Book of Ezekiel* (Leiden: Brill, 2001).

⁷⁵ P. J. Harland, “A Land Full of Violence: The Value of Human Life in the Book of the Prophet Ezekiel,” in *New Heaven and New Earth: Prophecy and the Millenium: Essays in Honor of Anthony Gelston* (ed. P. J. Harland and C. T. R. Hayward; Leiden: Brill, 1999), 116. For other references to child sacrifice in Ezekiel see Ezek 16:20-21; 20:26.

⁷⁶ I. Swart and C. Van Dam, “**חַמַּד**,” *NIDOTTE* 2:177-80.

rights of others, motivated by greed and hate and often making use of physical violence and brutality.”⁷⁷ Because of this Stoebe concludes that if the crime of violence fills the land, “then the consequence for its inhabitants is punishment and destruction.”⁷⁸ This is what awaited the Israelites of Ezekiel’s time in the form of exile and other disasters.⁷⁹

Disrespect to Parents

In Ezek 22:6-12 YHWH accuses the princes of a litany of sins against their people. Among these sins is disrespect to parents: “In you they have treated father and mother with contempt” (Ezek 22:7).⁸⁰ The word קָלַל used here for the action of the princes has the basic meaning of “be slight, trifling, of little account.”⁸¹ Further nuances of its meaning denote “disdain, despise, be in a state of contempt for an object, showing little regard or value to the object.”⁸² Sarai uses קָלַל to describe the disdain with which Hagar treats her after she discovers she is pregnant (Gen 16:4, 5). The gravity of this offense is seen when one considers the covenantal stipulations in which YHWH had mandated respect for parents (Exod 20:12; Deut 5:16). YHWH further underscored the

⁷⁷ I. Swart and C. Van Dam, 178. Swanson describes מַחֲרֵף as “a strong, fierce, destructive force resulting in acts that maim, destroy, kill, often implying a lawlessness, terror, and lack of moral restraint.” J. Swanson, “מַחֲרֵף,” n.p., *DBL* on CD-ROM. Version 3.0g. 2000-2007. Some biblical examples of this include Gen 49:5; Isa 59:3-7; Joel 4:19; Obad 10. It is therefore not surprising to see David pray that God deliver him from those who are violent and who plan evil things in their minds (Ps 140:1, 2, 5).

⁷⁸ H. Stoebe, “מַחֲרֵף,” *TLOT* 1:437-39.

⁷⁹ Harland, “A Land Full of Violence,” 115; Block, *Ezekiel 1-24*, 913.

⁸⁰ Block observes that the contempt the princes of Jerusalem showed towards father and mother was in itself a challenge to “the very foundation of Israelite society.” *Ibid.*, 708.

⁸¹ L. J. Coppes, “קָלַל,” n.p., *TWOT* on CD-ROM. Version 3.0g. 2000-2007.

⁸² *Ibid.*

significance of this law when he declared that the penalty for its disobedience would be death (see Exod 21:15, 17; Lev 20:9). YHWH is enraged with the princes because of the way they are relating to parents, and this becomes a justified cause for judgment.⁸³

Other Social Injustices

Among the causes of YHWH's judgments upon the Israelites are the social injustices perpetrated on some of the vulnerable members of the Israelite society. This group of defenseless persons consists of the גֵּר, "stranger," the יָתוֹם, "orphan," the אֵלְמָנָה, "widow," the אַבְיָוֹן and the עָנִי "poor, needy."⁸⁴ Ezekiel is very candid in describing the social injustices that are directed at them. He mentions the oppression, (עֲשָׂק) of the alien; oppression and mistreatment (נִזְלָה) of the orphan⁸⁵ and the widow; the oppression, mistreatment, and denial of justice to the poor and the needy. Furthermore those bent on perpetrating these outrageous injustices accept bribes (שֹׁחַד) to shed blood; they take

⁸³ Hummel observes that YHWH's condemnation of those abusing parents is not necessarily limited to the princes denounced in Ezek 22:6 but is likely to include "unidentified persons, probably to virtually anyone in a position to behave that way." Hummel, *Ezekiel 21-48*, 682. See also Greenberg, *Ezekiel 21-37*, 454.

⁸⁴ Gowan sums up their precarious situation quite succinctly: "The worst problem, that which these groups have in common, is powerlessness and its consequences: lack of status, lack of respect, making one an easy mark for the powerful and unscrupulous, so that those who are not poor are likely to become poor and those who are poor are going to get poorer. . . . It was not that all widows or resident aliens were poor. What these four groups had in common was their precarious social status. They were weak, for various reasons, and thus the plight of which the Old Testament most often speaks is not hunger or lack of shelter; it is their inability to maintain their rights, so that it is possible for others to oppress them. Donald E. Gowan, "Wealth and Poverty in the Old Testament: The Case of the Widow, the Orphan, and the Sojourner," *Int* 41 (1987): 341-53.

⁸⁵ Hamilton notes that "in almost every case a *yatom* is one who has lost his/her father." V. P. Hamilton, "יָתוֹם," *NIDOTTE* 2:570-71. Note Renkema's argument that the יָתוֹם, while being "the very picture of weakness and vulnerability," does not necessarily refer to the fatherless, but to one who has been bereaved of both father and mother. J. Renkema, "Does Hebrew *Ytwm* Really Mean 'Fatherless'?" *VT* 45 (1995): 119-21.

interest (וְשֹׁד) and usury (תַּרְבִּית), and make unjust gain (בְּצֹעַ)⁸⁶ from their neighbors by extortion (Ezek 22:12). In Ezek 22:29 they are accused of committing robbery (גְּזֹל).

Because of all this YHWH declares “I will surely strike my hands together at the unjust gain you have made” (Ezek 22:13). While this gesture may have various connotations,⁸⁷ as used here in Ezekiel it denotes anger. I therefore concur with Hummel, who points out that it is YHWH’s “gesture of exasperation indicating that his patience is exhausted.”⁸⁸

The first of these vulnerable groups is the גֵּר, which in its 92 occurrences in the Old Testament always has the meaning of “a sojourner or alien.”⁸⁹ Moskala in his 1998 dissertation distinguishes between two types of גֵּר: the גֵּר in the “initial stage of sojourning,” who is not fully integrated into the life of the Israelite community and the גֵּר in the “advanced stage of sojourning” who fully identifies with the Israelites.⁹⁰ According to Stigers, the גֵּר, “alien, sojourner, stranger,” refers “to someone who did not enjoy the rights usually possessed by the resident” and was therefore “dependent on the hospitality

⁸⁶ For discussion on this term see P. J. Harland, “בְּצֹעַ: Bribe, Extortion or Profit?” *VT* 50 (2000): 310-22.

⁸⁷ Cooper suggests that it is a “sign of extreme displeasure.” Cooper, *Ezekiel*, 221.

⁸⁸ Hummel, *Ezekiel 21-48*, 687.

⁸⁹ A. H. Konkel, “גֵּר,” *NIDOTTE* 1:836-39. Spina prefers the word ‘immigrant’ as the most reasonable translation of גֵּר. F. A. Spina, “Israelites as *gērîm*, ‘Sojourners,’ in Social and Historical Context,” in *The Word of the Lord Shall Go Forth: Essays in Honor of David Noel Freedman* (ed. C. L. Meyers and M. O’Connor; Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1983), 321-35. For discussion on the גֵּר, see Gowan, “Wealth and Poverty in the Old Testament,” 343-47.

⁹⁰ Moskala, “The Laws of Clean and Unclean Animals,” 272-74. Milgrom observes that there were laws that bound both Israelite and the גֵּר. For example, both Israelite and non-Israelite who inadvertently violated a “prohibitive commandment,” were required to bring a purification offering. Both were also subject to the כֹּרֶת penalty in the event of a presumptuous violation (Num 15:22-26). Jacob Milgrom, *Leviticus 1-16: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (New York: Doubleday, 1991), 1055.

that played an important role in the ancient near east.”⁹¹ Swanson says the גֵּר belonged to a group that was “of a different geographical or cultural group, often with fewer rights than the reference group.”⁹² These are descriptions of a vulnerable group that could easily be taken advantage of by the powerful and influential members of the society.⁹³

Biblical law and prophets are very clear regarding the treatment of the resident alien. Just like the orphan, the widow and the poor, he was not to be oppressed (Exod 22:21; Lev 19:33; Jer 7:6; 22:3; Zech 7:10). The Israelites were instructed to love the stranger as themselves (Lev 19:33, 34). Contrary to these instructions, these vulnerable members of society were constantly subjected to many social and economic injustices.⁹⁴

Another class of the underprivileged for which Ezekiel expresses concern is the אִלְמָנָה, “widow.” Hoffner describes a widow as “a woman who has been divested of her male protector (husband, sons, often also brothers).”⁹⁵ If this is true it means that widows

⁹¹ H. G. Stigers, “גֵּר,” n.p., *TWOT* on CD-ROM. Version 3.0g. 2000-2007. See also D. Kellermann, “גֵּר,” *TDOT* 2:439-49; Naomi P. Franklin, “The Stranger Within their Gates: How the Israelite Portrayed the Non-Israelite in Biblical Literature” (Ph.D. diss., Duke University, 1990), 1-26.

⁹² J. Swanson, “גֵּר,” n.p., *DBL* on CD-ROM. Version 3.0g. 2000-2007. For discussion see S. Krauss, “The Word ‘Ger’ in the Bible and Its Implications,” *JBQ* 34 (2006): 264-70.

⁹³ Swart notes that during the time of the Old Testament prophets those who were bent on oppressing others were “the rich and the ruling class in society (Jer 22:1-3; Ezek 22:6-7; 45:8; 46:18; Zeph 3:1,3) and the victims are aliens, widows, or orphans (Exod 22:21[20]; Lev 19:33; Jer 22:3).” I. Swart, “יָגֵר,” *NIDOTTE* 2:471-72. Hartley observes that “a corrupt society extorts the sojourner, wrongs the orphan and the widow, and expresses contempt for father and mother (Ezek 22:7; cf. Isa 10:2). J. E. Hartley, “יָגֵר,” n.p., *TWOT* on CD-ROM. Version 3.0g. 2000-2007.

⁹⁴ R. B. Allen, “עֲשֵׂק,” n.p., *TWOT* on CD-ROM. Version 3.0g. 2000-2007.

⁹⁵ H. A. Hoffner, “אִלְמָנָה,” *TDOT* 1:287-91. For other studies that reinforce this idea from the ancient Near Eastern perspective see Paula S. Hiebert, “Whence Shall Help Come to Me? The Biblical Widow,” in *Gender and Difference in Ancient Israel* (ed. P. L. Day; Minneapolis, Minn.: Fortress, 1989), 125-141. Rook argues that a woman becomes an אִלְמָנָה, “not when her husband dies, but when she has no male guardian from the kin group to look out

were subject to socio-economic and familial aspects that must have made life quite challenging.⁹⁶ Because of their vulnerability, YHWH made special provisions for the care and protection of the widows. These provisions involved various laws and regulations that were intended to safeguard their welfare and ensure that justice was done to them.⁹⁷

A number of terms used to describe the actions of the people of Jerusalem on these vulnerable members of society reveal the atrocious character of the Jerusalemites. One such word is *רָשַׁע*, “oppression, tyranny, extortion” (Ezek 18:18; 22:7, 12, 29). This word is derived from the verbal root *רָשַׁע*, “oppress, get deceitfully, defraud, do violence.” YHWH warns against such practices (Deut 24:24). Samuel claims complete innocence from defrauding anybody (1 Sam 12:3, 4). It is then evident that *רָשַׁע* referred to acts involving taking advantage of others or subjecting others to other forms of injustices.⁹⁸ Another word expressing such atrocities in Ezekiel is *רָשַׁע*, “suppress, oppress,

for her interests.” John Rook, “Making Widows: The Patriarchal Guardian at Work,” *BTB* 27 (1997): 10-15.

⁹⁶ Pnina Galpaz-Feller, “The Widow in the Bible and in Ancient Egypt,” *ZAW* 120 (2008): 231-53. In discussing the terms *גֵּר*, *יְתוֹם*, and *אַלְמָנָה*, Sneed avers that these categories of the stranger, the widow, and the orphan “represent the worst of the worst, the most wretched poor.” He then adds that “these terms constituted the poor par excellence! Not only were they poor, but poor without kin to buttress them.” Mark Sneed, “Israelite Concern for the Alien, Orphan, and Widow: Altruism or Ideology?” *ZAW* 111 (1999): 498-507. Swanson declares that the widow belonged to “a class of persons, low in status, meager in resources, and so pitiable that society was to take special effort to help them.” J. Swanson, “*אַלְמָנָה*,” n.p., *DBL* on CD-ROM. Version 3.0g. 2000-2007. Scott adds that “widows were often elderly, often without much income, and easy prey for the unscrupulous.” J. B. Scott, “*אַלְמָנָה*,” n.p., *TWOT* on CD-ROM. Version 3.0g. 2000-2007.

⁹⁷ Protection from creditors (Deut 24:17); protection during a civil suit (Deut 10:18; 27:19; Isa 1:17, 23; 10:2; Jer 7:6; 22:3; Zech 7:10; Mal 3:5); given tithes every third year (Deut 14:28f.; 26:12f.); food left in the fields for them to glean (Lev 19:9; Deut 24:19-21; Ruth 2).

⁹⁸ Thomas D. Hanks, *God So Loved the Third World: The Biblical Vocabulary of Oppression* (New York: Maryknoll, 1983), 5. Hummel notes that the use of the cognate noun, *רָשַׁע*, preceded with the verb *רָשַׁע* could possibly signal “ongoing behavior, not merely a solitary offence.” Hummel, *Ezekiel 25-48*, 682.

maltreat” (Ezek 18:7, 12, 16; 22:7, 29; 45:8; 46:18). YHWH is categorical that no such oppression of the vulnerable should be practiced (Exod 22:21; Lev 19:33).⁹⁹

Also associated with the mistreatment of the defenseless is the word לָקַח, “seize, tear off, pull off, take away by force, rob.”¹⁰⁰ The action of this verb is seen in the act of Abimelech’s servants who are said to have seized (לָקַח) wells of water from Abraham (Gen 21:25). When Laban catches up with Jacob and inquires why he left secretly with his entire entourage, Jacob says “I was afraid lest thou take violently (לָקַח) away thy daughters from me” (Gen 31:31, YLT). The verb portrays forceful and violent actions that do not take into account the pain and suffering to the affected party.¹⁰¹ This how some of the vulnerable members of the Israelite society were treated.

But these leaders are also guilty of עָצָב, “unjust gain, covetousness.”¹⁰² The action of Samuel’s sons who did not follow his ways, turned aside after gain and took bribes and perverted justice (1 Sam 8:3) best explains the meaning of עָצָב. The word connotes the unjustified pursuit of wealth while taking economic advantage of others.¹⁰³ Oswalt observes that leaders are especially the culprits when it comes to this dishonest

⁹⁹ Hanks, *The Biblical Vocabulary of Oppression*, 8.

¹⁰⁰ See Ezek 18:7, 12, 16, 18; 22:29.

¹⁰¹ For discussion see E. B. Sick, “לָקַח,” n.p., *TWOT* on CD-ROM. Version 3.0g. 2000-2007; W. R. Domeris, “לָקַח,” *NIDOTTE* 1:844-45; J. Schupphaus, “לָקַח,” *TDOT* 2:456-58.

¹⁰² John N. Oswalt, “עָצָב,” n.p., *TWOT* on CD-ROM. Version 3.0g. 2000-2007.

¹⁰³ James Swanson, “עָצָב,” See also Kellermann who discusses the negative nature of עָצָב and points out that the princes in Ezek 22:27 “are condemned because they get gain by bloodshed and murder.” D. Kellermann, “עָצָב,” *TDOT* 2:205-208. Commenting on the abuses in Ezekiel, McCann observes that עָצָב is generally associated with wicked acts such as “bloodshed, oppression, and violence.” J. C. McCann, “עָצָב,” *NIDOTTE* 1:694-95.

gain and further that “it was the desire of the leaders for personal gain which led Israel into disaster.”¹⁰⁴

Another accusation leveled against the Israelites is that they take bribes (שֹׁחַד)¹⁰⁵ to shed blood; they take usury (נִשְׁבָּ) ¹⁰⁶ and increase (תַּרְבִּית)¹⁰⁷ and they make profit (צָצַע) from their neighbors by extortion (עֲשָׂה). Worst of all, they have forgotten YHWH (Ezek 22:12).¹⁰⁸ Hummel calls this “climactic and comprehensive charge” “the theological pièce de résistance of the entire section.”¹⁰⁹ Cooper notes that forgetting God is “the summation of all that is wrong.”¹¹⁰ Block’s comment points to the gravity of this charge when he says forgetting YHWH is tantamount to “abandoning the covenant.”¹¹¹ Preuss tersely states that forgetting YHWH “involves turning away from him, abandoning him, no longer concerning oneself with his will, no longer heeding that will,

¹⁰⁴ Oswalt, “צָצַע,” n.p., *TWOT* on CD-ROM. Version 3.0g. 2000-2007.

¹⁰⁵ YHWH condemns and prohibits this kind of practice with the following unequivocal words: “Cursed is the one who takes a bribe to slay an innocent person” (Deut 27:25).

¹⁰⁶ נִשְׁבָּ is the word for interest or usury. Fisher notes that textual evidence from Lev 25:35-54 and Deut 23:19-20 indicates that exacting “interest was allowed, but unreasonable interest (usury) was not.” Milton C. Fisher, “נִשְׁבָּ,” n.p., *TWOT* on CD-ROM. Libronix Digital Library System, 2002-2007. For further discussion on נִשְׁבָּ see S. Stein, “The Laws on Interest in the Old Testament,” *JTS* 4 (1953): 161-70.

¹⁰⁷ Hummel observes that the context in which the two nouns שֹׁחַד וְתַרְבִּית are found is indicative of “illicit and/or fraudulent profit-taking.” Hummel, *Ezekiel 21-48*, 668.

¹⁰⁸ The charge is repeated in Ezek 23:35. For the occurrence of this concept in the rest of the Old Testament see Deut 4:9, 23; 6:12; 8:11, 14; 9:7; 25:19; 32:18; Judg 3:7; 1 Sam 1:11; 12:9; 2 Kgs 17:38; Jer 2:32; 13:25; 18:15; 20:11; 23:27, 40; Hos 2:15 [13]; 4:6; 8:14; 13:6; Pss 50:22; 78:7, 11; 106:13, 21. Similar charges can also be found in Jer 2:32; 3:21; 13:25; 18:15; Hos 2:15; 4:6; 8:14; 13:6.

¹⁰⁹ Hummel, *Ezekiel 21-48*, 685.

¹¹⁰ Cooper, *Ezekiel*, 220.

¹¹¹ Block, *Ezekiel 1-24*, 711.

and no longer considering his earlier salvific activity to be of import or even relevant.”¹¹²

It is therefore not surprising that Israel had to face YHWH’s unmitigated judgment.

Desecration of the Sabbath

Ezekiel 20 presents an interesting slant to the concept of the Sabbath in Ezekiel.

The Elders of Israel come to Ezekiel “to inquire of the Lord” (Ezek 20:1). After enunciating a catalogue of sins¹¹³ that the Israelites have been guilty of committing (Ezek 20:4-31), YHWH categorically declares, “I will not let you inquire of me” (Ezek 20:31 NIV).¹¹⁴ One of the complaints that YHWH lodges against the Israelites in this catalogue of sins is this: וְאֵת-שַׁבְּתֹתַי הִלְלוּ מְאֹד, “they utterly desecrated my Sabbaths” (Ezek 20:13). The same accusation is repeated in Ezek 20:16, 21 and 24.¹¹⁵ The seriousness of the accusation against the Israelites is further seen when one looks at Ezek 20:13 in its

¹¹² H. D. Preuss, “שָׁכַח,” *TDOT* 14:671-77.

¹¹³ Risa Kohn characterizes Ezek 20 as “Israel’s résumé of rebellion.” Kohn, *A New Heart and a New Soul*, 49.

¹¹⁴ Note Isaac Block’s interesting discussion concerning the reason for the elders’ visit to Ezekiel to שָׁרַר, “inquire,” of YHWH. Two of these reasons are of special interest, especially because of the subject of this study. Block cites J. A. Bewer, “Beitrage zur Exegese des Buches Ezechiel,” *ZAW* 63 (1951): 195-97, who notes that the elders came “to seek permission to establish an indigenous sacrificial cult in Babylon.” The other reference Block cites is that of Fohrer (*Ezechiel*, 108) who proposes that these elders wanted to build an image of YHWH made of “wood and stone.” See Block, *Ezekiel 1-24*, 618-19.

¹¹⁵ It is interesting to note Eichrodt’s unjustified contention that the repeated references to the Sabbath in these verses in Ezek 20 is nothing but a distraction or a “sidetrack of Priestly devotion” aimed at deflecting the focus from the substantive issues addressed in the chapter and thus should be deleted. This is in stark contradiction to his earlier recognition of the significance the priests attached to the Sabbath as “a sign of the subsistence of the divine covenant of grace,” and thus any contempt for the Sabbath was considered “as a symptom of the complete alienation of Israel from its sacred destiny.” Eichrodt, *Ezekiel*, 264, 268, 270. Contrary to Eichrodt’s unwarranted argument, Blenkinsopp points out that this stress on the Sabbath “reflects the increasing importance of this observance during the late monarchy and the exilic period as a distinguishing mark of the true devotee of YHWH.” Blenkinsopp, *Ezekiel*, 89. Other references to the desecration of the Sabbath outside of Ezekiel include Exod 16:27 and Num 15:32.

totality. Speaking of this wilderness generation, YHWH accuses them of rebelling against him, not following his laws and judgments, and utterly desecrating his Sabbaths. Because of this YHWH declares, “Then I thought I would pour out my wrath upon them in the wilderness, to make an end of them” (Ezek 20:13).

The charge of the desecration of the Sabbath stands in a stream of charges of rebellion (Ezek 20:8, 13, 21) and disobedience to YHWH’s commands. The desecration of the Sabbath is, therefore, cast within the context of serious infractions against YHWH. It is therefore not surprising to see YHWH issue a strong indictment on those who have chosen to go against his established norms.

Speaking on the theme of the Sabbath, Ezekiel records YHWH saying, “You have despised my holy things and desecrated my Sabbaths” (Ezek 22:8 NIV). In Ezek 22:26 YHWH accuses Israel of not upholding the law regarding the Sabbath as he points out that “they shut their eyes to the keeping of my Sabbaths.”¹¹⁶ Addressing this untoward action toward the temple and the Sabbath, YHWH condemns the Israelites in Ezek 23:38: “Moreover this they have done to me: they have defiled my sanctuary on the same day and profaned my Sabbaths.” Note the way YHWH relates Sabbaths to himself by calling

¹¹⁶ Hummel observes that the hiding of the face here possibly implies “both the priests’ own disregard for the Sabbath rest as well as the failure to reprove those who did likewise.” Hummel, *Ezekiel 21-48*, 692. So Block, *Ezekiel 1-24*, 726.

it *שְׁבֻתוֹתַי*, “My Sabbaths.”¹¹⁷ This emphasizes the special place the Sabbath held in YHWH’s overall scheme of things and why its violation had to meet divine reproof.¹¹⁸

A closer look at the word used in this accusation regarding the Sabbath will enable us to see why this act is so offensive and obnoxious to YHWH that it will call for divine judgment upon those responsible for the act.¹¹⁹ The word at the center of this cultic and moral abuse is *הָלַל*, “defile, profane, treat with contempt,” which in its verbal form occurs 134 times in the Hebrew Bible.¹²⁰ Block observes that with reference to the Sabbaths the *pi’el* perfect verb *הָלַל* signifies the exact opposite of *שָׁמַר*, “to keep.”¹²¹ Hence, instead of keeping the Sabbath so that it would achieve the covenantal purpose YHWH had intended it to accomplish in their lives, they desecrated and profaned it.

As Maass points out, the use of *הָלַל* in the book of Ezekiel generally involves the “desecration of God or of his name (11x), of the Sabbath (7x), and of the temple (7x).”

¹¹⁷ See the following for the ten occurrences of this phrase in Ezekiel: Ezek 20:12, 13, 16, 20, 21, 24; 22:8, 26; 23:38; 44:24. Note that this phrase is always used in the plural in Ezekiel.

¹¹⁸ It should be noted that there were also laws governing other Sabbath institutions, such as the sabbatical years (Lev 25:1-7), and any violation of these laws met with divine disapproval. For example, neglect of the laws relating to the sabbatical years resulted in exile (Lev 26:33-35). Similarly, the Day of Atonement was regarded as a Sabbath, with strict instructions for its observance (Lev 23:26-32). Roy Gane makes this observation: “Any Israelites who are eligible for *כִּפּוּר* on the Day of Atonement but who fail to practice self-denial and/or keep Sabbath at this time, are condemned to extirpation and/or destruction (23:26-32).” Furthermore, the special characterization given to the Day of Atonement, the weekly Sabbath, and the sabbatical year “requires complete rest.” Gane, *Cult and Character*, 306, 315.

¹¹⁹ For YHWH’s judgments on those who defiled the Sabbath in Ezekiel see Ezek 20:12-15, in which YHWH states that the failure of this wilderness generation to observe the Sabbath properly prevented them from entering the promised land. Then in Ezek 20:20-23 the prophet Ezekiel refers to YHWH’s oath made while the Israelites were still in the desert when he swore to punish them by exile.

¹²⁰ O’Kennedy, *NIDOTTE* 2:146.

¹²¹ Block, *Ezekiel 1-24*, 709.

And in this regard it is interesting that Maass remarks: “The guilty parties are always the Israelites.”¹²² O’Kennedy on the other hand observes that the concept of *חָלַל* in the Old Testament often has moral implications: “to offend, to insult (especially when the object is the name of YHWH, his sanctuary, his holy things, or the Sabbath and festivals).”¹²³ This desecration of the holy entities, Maass says, “is requited through the destruction of the temple and the sanctuaries.”¹²⁴ In this light it is therefore not surprising that the temple in Jerusalem was completely destroyed when the Babylonians invaded Jerusalem in 586 B.C., as had been prophesied.

Sexual Immorality

Another ill of which YHWH accused Israel was the practice of deviant sexual practices. These accusations address sexual sins involving incest, adultery, and other inappropriate sexual relations.¹²⁵ These aberrant sexual practices are in complete contravention of what YHWH had intended for human sexuality in the beginning when

¹²² F. Maass, “*חָלַל*,” *TLOT* 1:427-30.

¹²³ O’Kennedy, *NIDOTTE* 2:146. In a dramatic shift of the usage of *חָלַל* in the book of Ezekiel, it is not the people who do the desecrating. In Ezek 7 YHWH announces the dawn of the end upon his sinful people and without mincing his words says he is going to turn his face against the Israelites and leave the strangers to “pollute” the sanctuary (Ezek 7:21, 22). Then, in an unprecedented move involving YHWH’s judgment, he declares, *הִנְנִי מְחַלֵּל אֶת-מִקְדָּשִׁי* “behold I am polluting my sanctuary” (Ezek 24:21).

¹²⁴ Maass, *TLOT* 1:429. See Jer 17:19-27 where YHWH made it clear to the Israelites that if they did not heed his command to hallow the Sabbath day by not carrying any luggage when entering the gates of Jerusalem on the Sabbath day, then he would kindle an unquenchable fire in its gates, a fire which would eventually devour the palaces of Jerusalem.

¹²⁵ Daniel Block calls them a range of “sexual taboos.” Block, *Ezekiel 1-24*, 710.

God had given a clear blueprint on sexuality to safeguard its sanctity.¹²⁶ Yet these immoral practices in Ezekiel's time are indicative of how low human morality had fallen. YHWH's judgment would inevitably fall on those involved in these heinous sins.

Abnormal sexual behaviors are introduced by the clause *וַיַּעַשׂוּ בְּתוֹכָךְ זִמָּה*, "they have done wickedness in your midst (Ezek 22:9)." The word *זִמָּה*, with its 32 occurrences in the Old Testament and 14 times in Ezekiel (Ezek 16:27, 43, 58; 22:9, 11; 23:21, 27, 29, 35, 44, 48x2, 49; 24:13), normally means "wickedness, lewdness."¹²⁷ It is derived from the root *זמ* and as used here often highlights "behavior that is lewd, shameless in relation to sexual behavior."¹²⁸ It is apparent that the word involves some practice which, in the eyes of YHWH, is repugnant, disgusting, loathsome, and abhorrent and therefore one that would invite judgment on those involved in it.

¹²⁶ See Davidson's work, in which he discusses the elevated and noble nature of sexuality as given to humanity from the beginning. Richard M. Davidson, *Flame of Yahweh: Sexuality in the Old Testament* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 2007), 15-54.

¹²⁷ S. Steingrimsson, "זמ," *TDOT* 4:87-90.

¹²⁸ J. Swanson, "זמ," n.p., *DBL* on CD-ROM. Version 3.0g. 2000-2007. Hartley observes that this word is generally used to describe precise acts that are quite disgraceful and abhorrent to God, and furthermore it is used to declare some sexual affairs that are "potently defiling." J. E. Hartley, "זמ," *NIDOTTE* 1:1112-14. Hummel says this word "is one of the strongest and most comprehensive biblical terms for unchastity and forbidden sexual unions." Hummel, *Ezekiel 21-48*, 684. See also Lipka who affirms that this term involves sexual acts like adultery, incest, and sexual relations with a woman during her impurity, sexual acts that are prohibited by YHWH. Hilary B. Lipka, *Sexual Transgression in the Hebrew Bible* (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix, 2006), 249. Greenberg asserts that the expression *וַיַּעַשׂוּ בְּתוֹכָךְ זִמָּה* is generally used to refer to "all forbidden sexual unions." Greenberg, *Ezekiel 21-37*, 455. For example, in Lev 18:17 YHWH declares: "You shall not uncover the nakedness of a woman and her daughter, and you shall not take her son's daughter or her daughter's daughter to uncover her nakedness; they are your flesh; it is depravity (*זמ*). Similarly in Lev 20:14 he announces: "If a man takes a wife and her mother also, it is depravity; they shall be burned to death, both he and they, that there may be no depravity (*זמ*) among you." Job avers that anything that would lead him to defile his neighbor's wife is a *זמ* and deserves to be punished (Job 31:9-12).

Let us briefly examine the sexual misconducts mentioned in Ezek 22:10, 11 to determine why these deviations would lead YHWH to execute harsh judgments on the culprits. The first accusations leveled against Jerusalem are those pertaining to incest.¹²⁹ There are in her those who are bent on uncovering the nakedness of the father, expressed by the Hebrew expression, *עֲרוֹת־אָב גִּלָּה*.¹³⁰ This expression is based on Lev 18:7, 8 and 20:11 where YHWH warns against anyone who uncovered the nakedness of their father or mother and so was involved in incestuous relations. Swanson delineates the meaning of the word *עֲרוֹה* as “genitals,” “pudenda,” “nakedness,” “indecentness,” and the phrase *עֲרוֹה גִּלָּה*, as “sexual relations, formally expose the nakedness, i.e., to have physical, sexual intercourse.”¹³¹ For example, YHWH warns, “You shall not uncover the nakedness of your father, which is the nakedness of your mother; she is your mother, you shall not uncover her nakedness. You shall not uncover the nakedness of your father’s wife; it is the nakedness of your father” (Lev 18:7, 8).¹³² It is within this context that the idea of uncovering the nakedness of someone is generally understood as “a euphemism for sexual intercourse.”¹³³

¹²⁹ For discussion on incestuous sexual liaisons in the Old Testament see Davidson, *Flame of Yahweh*, 425-446. It is interesting to note Davidson’s comment on p. 446 that incestuous sexual practices were common in Israel before the Babylonian exile, yet the biblical record does not attest any occurrence after the Babylonian exile. Deborah L. Ellens, *Women in the Sex Texts of Leviticus and Deuteronomy: A Comparative Conceptual Analysis* (New York: T&T Clark, 2008), 80-84.

¹³⁰ Note that the phrase *עֲרוֹת גִּלָּה* is also used in Ezek 16:36-37; 22:10; 23:10, 18, 29 in contexts which deal with sexual immorality and sexual aggression.

¹³¹ J. Swanson, “*עֲרוֹה*,” n.p., *DBL* on CD-ROM. Version 3.0g. 2000-2007.

¹³² See also vv. 18:6, 9, 10, 11, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19.

¹³³ Davidson, *Flame of Yahweh*, 434. On p. 446 Davidson specifically uses this phrase in connection with the sexual sins in Ezek 22:10, 11. Carmichael argues that the expression “to

Another case of incest is that where “another lewdly defiles¹³⁴ his daughter-in-law” (Ezek 22:11). This sexual practice was also prohibited in the Old Testament (Lev 18:15; 20:12). Yet in Jerusalem this appears to be common. Then there is the brother-sister relationship: “another in you defiles his sister, his father’s daughter” (Ezek 22:11). The seriousness of this sin is shown by the use of the word *עָנָה*, which connotes the forceful imposition of the male on an unwilling female partner. Ezekiel once again invokes the purity laws of Lev 18, which are unambiguous regarding this unlawful sexual act as a basis to warn against the practice.¹³⁵

The next indictment is on those who have sexual intercourse with women during their menstrual periods. Of these Ezekiel says, *טִמְאַת הַנִּזְדָּה עֲנוּ-בָהּ*, “they violate the uncleanness of the menstruant in you” (Ezek 22:10).¹³⁶ The word *נִדָּה* that is used here is traditionally defined and translated in various ways, namely “filthiness,” “impurity,”

uncover nakedness” has its background from the cases of Noah and Ham (Gen 9:18-27) and Lot and his daughters (Gen 19:30-38). Calum M. Carmichael, *Law, Legend, and Incest in the Bible: Leviticus 18-20* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1997), 17; idem, *Sex and Religion in the Bible* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2010), 135-57.

Davidson contends that the case of Ham and Noah “was an incident of filial disrespect (a ‘gloating stare’), not sexual relations.” Davidson, *Flame of Yahweh*, 430. Davidson also counters Bassett’s contention that Ham actually had sexual intercourse with Noah’s wife, a union which produced Canaan, the only one of Ham’s children who was cursed by Noah. Frederick W. Bassett, “Noah’s Nakedness and the Curse of Canaan: A Case of Incest?” *VT* 21 (1971): 234-35. See also John S. Bergsma and Scott W. Hahn, “Noah’s Nakedness and the Curse of Canaan (Genesis 9:20-27),” *JBL* 124 (2005): 25-40.

¹³⁴ For discussion on the concept of *טִמְאָה* see G. André, “*טִמְאָה*,” *TDOT* 5:330-342; R. E. Averbach, “*טִמְאָה*,” *NIDOTTE* 2:365-76.

¹³⁵ See Lev 18:9, 11; 20:17. For discussion on this, see Ellens, *Women in the Sex Texts of Leviticus and Deuteronomy*, 287-89; Madeline G. McClenney-Sadler, *Recovering the Daughter’s Nakedness: A Formal Analysis of Israelite Kinship Terminology and the Internal Logic of Leviticus 18* (New York: T&T Clark, 2007), 76-110.

¹³⁶ Note the statement in Ezek 18:6 in which YHWH states that the righteous person does not approach a woman during her impurity.

“uncleanness,” “menstruous woman,” “menstrual period,” “abhorrent thing.”¹³⁷ In Lev 18:19 YHWH warns the Israelites: “You shall not approach a woman to uncover her nakedness while she is in her menstrual uncleanness” (בְּיָדָהּ טָמְאָתָהּ). The word יָדָה is employed in Ezek 36:17 to describe the wanton actions of the Israelites that have defiled the land: “Mortal, when the house of Israel lived on their own soil, they defiled it with their ways and their deeds; their conduct in my sight was like the uncleanness of a woman in her menstrual period” (כְּטָמְאָת הַיָּדָה). Based on these nuances of meaning, Gane is right in calling menstruation a “fairly severe impurity.”¹³⁸

Engaging a woman sexually during her menstrual period was proscribed in the Old Testament (Lev 15:19-27; 18:19; 20:18). The consequence for flouting this prohibition ranged from remaining ritually unclean for seven days to capital punishment (Lev 15:24; 20:18). Amanda McGuire points out that this capital punishment was warranted because “a man has uncovered the menstruant’s ‘fountain’ and she has exposed her ‘fountain of blood.’ This is categorized as a sexual sin on par with adultery and incest.”¹³⁹ She further adds that severe punishment is done because menstrual blood is considered to be a symbol of mortality and the loss of sacred life. For this reason it

¹³⁷ T. E. McComiskey, “יָדָה,” n.p., *TWOT* on CD-ROM. Version 3.0g. 2000-2007; J. Swanson, “יָדָה,” n.p., *DBL* on CD-ROM. Version 3.0g. 2000-2007. For discussion on the etymology of this word see Moshe Greenberg, “The Etymology of Nidah '(Menstrual) Impurity',” in *Solving Riddles and Untying Knots: Biblical, Epigraphic, and Semitic Studies in Honor of Jonas C. Greenfield* (ed. Z. Zevit et al.; Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1995), 69-77. See also an interesting discussion on menstruation in Rahel R. Wasserfall, ed., *Women and Water: Menstruation in Jewish Life and Law* (Hanover: University Press of New England, 1999).

¹³⁸ Gane, *Leviticus, Numbers*, 259.

¹³⁹ J. Amanda McGuire, “Menstruation and Impurity” (paper presented at Seminary Scholarship Symposium, Berrien Springs, MI, 8 February 2008), 19.

needs to stay hidden and shielded from the eyes of men. But this symbol of mortality is also honored, as the blood of a slain animal is. For this reason, men must abstain from it as they do from the blood of animals. Therefore, menstrual blood is paradoxically forbidden on both accounts.¹⁴⁰

Davidson points out that the prohibition in the prophets is placed “in the midst of a list of ethical/moral, not ritual, laws” and that it has to do with “the woman’s physical and psychological well-being.”¹⁴¹ Gane observes that the prohibition protected “the woman from unwanted advances by her husband during her period of weakness.”¹⁴² Yet like many other prohibitions that were flouted, this too was violated and therefore invoked the wrath of YHWH.¹⁴³

The word הִצַּטְּ, “to oppress, treat poorly, humble, debase, to force and to rape,”¹⁴⁴

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., 20.

¹⁴¹ Davidson, *Flame of Yahweh*, 333.

¹⁴² Gane, *Leviticus, Numbers*, 325, cited from Milgrom, *Leviticus 17-22*, 1755.

¹⁴³ For further discussion on menstrual sex, see Carmichael, *Law, Legend, and Incest*, 49-50, 168-169; Johnson M. Kimuhu, *Leviticus: The Priestly Laws and Prohibitions from the Perspective of Ancient Near East and Africa* (ed. H. Gossai; New York: Peter Lang, 2008), 94-95; Deborah Klee, “Menstruation in the Hebrew Bible” (Ph.D. diss., Boston University, 1998); Kathleen O’Grady, “The Semantics of Taboo: Menstrual Prohibitions in the Hebrew Bible,” in *Wholly Woman, Holy Blood, A Feminist Critique of Purity and Impurity* (ed. Troyer et al.; *Studies in Antiquity and Christianity*; Harrisburg, Pa.: Trinity Press International, 2003), 1-28; Jennifer Schultz, “Doctors, Philosophers, and Christian Fathers on Menstrual Blood,” in *Wholly Woman, Holy Blood: A Feminist Critique of Purity and Impurity* (ed. K. Troyer et al.; Harrisburg, Pa.: Trinity Press International, 2003), 97-116; Karel van der Toorn, *From Her Cradle to Her Grave: The Role of Religion in the Life of the Israelite and Babylonian Woman* (Sheffield: Journal for the Study of the Old Testament, 1994), 55; Kristin De Troyer, “Blood: A Threat to Holiness or toward (Another) Holiness?” in *Wholly Woman, Holy Blood: A Feminist Critique of Purity and Impurity* (ed. K. Troyer et al.; Harrisburg, Pa.: Trinity Press International, 2003), 45-64.

¹⁴⁴ R. Martin-Achard, “הִצַּטְּ,” *TLOT* 2:931-37. See also the following texts for the close association of הִצַּטְּ and rape: Gen 34:2; Deut 21:14; 22:24, 29; Judg 19:24; 20:4; 2 Sam 13:12, 14, 32; Lam 5:11.

used in this accusation underscores the seriousness of the sin. Lipka notes that any treatment of a woman which involves **עָנָה** lowers her status and the status of her family in the community.¹⁴⁵ Various nuances of the meaning of the word **עָנָה** suggest that the men who are accused of having sexual intercourse with the women during their menstruation do it against the women's consent.¹⁴⁶ Block points out that "by replacing the euphemism *qārab*, 'to approach,' with *innâ*, 'to violate, humiliate,' Ezekiel emphasizes the abusiveness of the men's actions."¹⁴⁷ While the focus of the discussion here is on the abusive nature of the men involved in sexual acts with the menstruant, it should be noted that even if there was a willing female partner in this sexual act, it would still be morally wrong because of the divine prohibition against it. Because of this and other related sins condemned in Ezek 22, YHWH promises to deal with them and scatter them among the nations (Ezek 22:14-16).

There are also adulterous relationships going on in Jerusalem whereby "a man commits an abomination with his neighbor's wife" (Ezek 22:11). The word **תועבה**, "abominations," is used here as a description of the sin that the man is accused of

¹⁴⁵ Lipka, *Sexual Transgression in the Hebrew Bible*, 253. Gordon and Washington observe that there is a close association between the word rape and **עָנָה**. Pamela Gordon and Harold C. Washington, "Rape as a Military Metaphor in the Hebrew Bible," in *A Feminist Companion to the Latter Prophets* (ed. A. Brenner; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995), 308-25.

¹⁴⁶ Klee therefore says the statement **עָנָה עִנְיָהּ** in Ezek 22:10 "connotes the use of force against the menstruant." Deborah Klee, "Menstruation in the Hebrew Bible," 106 n. 22. In this respect, Greenberg's observation on the use of **עָנָה** in Ezek 22:10 is on target when he says, "The sexual use of *nh* 'humiliate, oppress' occurs in Deut 21:14; 22:24, 29; here and in v. 11 it signifies unwillingness of the woman to acquiesce in the illegal union." Greenberg, *Ezekiel 21-37*, 455. Hummel, like Greenberg, concludes that this implies "the woman's unwillingness to acquiesce." Hummel, *Ezekiel 21-48*, 684.

¹⁴⁷ Block, *Ezekiel 1-24*, 710.

committing with the neighbor's wife,¹⁴⁸ indicating the abhorrent nature of this sexual practice.¹⁴⁹ YHWH had issued prohibitions regarding this practice both in the Decalogue (Exod 20:14, 17) and in the Holiness Code (Lev 20:10). The same commandment is reiterated in Deut 5:18, 21. YHWH commands capital punishment for those involved in adultery (Deut 22:22).¹⁵⁰ Although this practice was completely prohibited in the Old Testament, yet there is abundant evidence that it was a common practice,¹⁵¹ one that was sure to bring God's judgment upon Israel (cf. 2 Sam 11-12).

Other sexual sins which are symbolic of the Israelites' idolatrous tendencies are found in Ezek 16, where they are indicated by the words זָנָה, "commit fornication,"¹⁵²

¹⁴⁸ Hummel points out that this is the only place in the Old Testament where the idiom "commit abomination with" is used and argues that it is Ezekiel's reworking of Lev 18:20 and 20:10 to portray adultery. Hummel, *Ezekiel 21-48*, 668. Zimmerli also connects the idiom with Lev 18:20 and 20:10 and depicts it as "the abomination of intercourse with a neighbor's wife," which is a clear indication of adultery. Zimmerli, *Ezekiel 1-24*, 458.

¹⁴⁹ The same word is found in Lev 18 where YHWH outlines a catalogue of sexual prohibitions and says that these illicit and perverted sexual behaviors defiled the land and caused him to drive out the inhabitants of the land because they were abominable practices. Then, in Lev 20:10, YHWH categorically states, "If a man commits adultery with a married woman—committing adultery with his (Israelite) neighbor's wife—the adulterer and the adulteress must be put to death." Note that in Num 5:11-31 the penalty for an adulterous woman apprehended through a special ritual is not death but sterility. For a detailed and interesting discussion on this see Milgrom, *Leviticus 17-22*, 1747-48.

¹⁵⁰ Goodfriend includes the following in the discussion of the penalties for adultery: (1) The Death Penalty; (2) Divorce; (3) Public Stripping Adulteress; Mutilation. Elaine A. Goodfriend, "Adultery," *ABD* 1:82-86.

¹⁵¹ McKeating, "Sanctions against Adultery in Ancient Israelite Society," 57-72.

¹⁵² See Ezek 16:15, 16, 17, 26, 28, 30, 31, 33, 34, 35, 41; 23:3 [twice], 5, 19, 30, 43, 44. Block points out that Ezekiel's use of the verb זָנָה, as opposed to הִזְנָה, in Ezek 16 was an intentional rhetorical device to underscore Israel's unfaithfulness to YHWH: (1) the use of the participle זֹנֶה to describe a professional whore suggests that habitual, iterative activity is implied in the verb זָנָה; (2) the motive of personal gain (cf. 16:33-34) places the offense in the realm of prostitution, rather than adultery; (3) the involvement of multiple partners (cf. 16:17, 25-29) is more appropriate to זָנָה; (4) in contrast to הִזְנָה, which refers to illicit sex by both genders, the verb זָנָה is used exclusively of females. Block, *Ezekiel 1-24*, 465.

תִּזְנוּת, “unfaithfulness,”¹⁵³ and זָמָה, “wickedness.”¹⁵⁴ In Lev 20:14 זָמָה is used to describe a case in which a man has sexual relations with a woman and her mother. To indicate the seriousness of the sin involved, this זָמָה is punishable by death. Then there is the other word עָגַב, “have inordinate affection, lust.”¹⁵⁵ Other words depicting this promiscuous tendency are נָאֵף, “commit adultery” (Ezek 16:32, 37; 23:37 [twice], 45 [twice]).¹⁵⁶ Then there are nouns derived from the verb נָאֵף such as נְאוּפִים, “adulteries” (Ezek 23:43), and נְאוּפוֹת, “adulteresses” (Ezek 16:38; 23:45). Once again we hereby encounter behaviors that were forbidden in the Old Testament and yet the practices, like at other times in the Old Testament,¹⁵⁷ were common among the people of Ezekiel’s time. Such sexual abuses could not be allowed to go on without meeting the wrath of YHWH.

Summary

This examination has revealed that the Israelites’ violation of divine laws and decrees encompassed quite an array of areas, involving murder, sexual sins, social

¹⁵³ See Ezek 16:15, 20, 22, 25, 26, 29, 33, 34, 36; 23:7, 8x2, 11, 14, 17, 18, 19, 29, 35, 43.

¹⁵⁴ See Ezek 16:27, 43, 58; 23:21, 27, 29, 35, 44, 48x2, 49.

¹⁵⁵ See Ezek 23:5, 7, 9, 12, 16, 20.

¹⁵⁶ For discussion, see Ellens, *Women in the Sex Texts of Leviticus and Deuteronomy*, 289.

¹⁵⁷ See for example the case of Amnon and Tamar (2 Sam 13). For discussion on this see Diane Jacobson, “Remembering Tamar,” *WW* 24 (2004): 353-357. There are scholars who do not regard Amnon’s transgression as incest, but rather a failure of a brother to protect the sexuality of a sister. For proponents of this view, see Hilary B. Lipka, “Such a Thing Is Not Done in Israel: The Construction of Sexual Transgression in the Hebrew Bible” (Ph.D. dissertation, Brandeis University, 2004), 275-280; Kenneth A. Stone, *Sex, Honor, and Power in the Deuteronomistic History* (Sheffield, Eng.: Journal for the Study of the Old Testament, 1996). Whereas Davidson appears to leave some room for debate on this argument, I would counter the position that tends to minimize the offensive nature of incest, on the basis of the prohibition given in the Holiness Code against any sexual contact with a sister. Davidson, *Flame of Yahweh*, 443-45.

injustices, and dishonoring the Sabbath. These breaches contravened divine laws and decrees. These sins had a more serious import than would have been imagined. They made the people unable to have wholesome communion and relationship with YHWH and because of this fractured relationship YHWH had to bring about his absolute judgment upon the offenders.

Abominations in the Sanctuary in Ezekiel 1-24

An exploration of Ezek 5:9 and 11 above has demonstrated that the Israelites introduced practices into the sanctuary that were completely at variance with YHWH's conceptions of holiness, and he thus accused Israel of defiling the sanctuary. This section examines further evidence of such despicable and heinous practices within Ezek 1-24, with a view to ascertaining how these abominations ultimately led to YHWH's judgment on Israel and his departure from the sanctuary. I start by examining the abhorrent practices that went on in the sanctuary in Ezek 8. In this passage YHWH brings Ezekiel to the temple¹⁵⁸ in Jerusalem and shows him four abominations in the sanctuary. These abominations are despicable, detestable, and so obnoxious that they will not only lead to YHWH's dreadful and severe judgment on the Israelites, but will in the long run cause YHWH to depart from the sanctuary in Jerusalem (Ezek 8:6).¹⁵⁹

¹⁵⁸ Hummel highlights the use of three different words for the sanctuary which he argues "represent increasing degrees of sanctity as one moves from the entire compound inward toward the heart of the temple." The three words are: מִקְדָּשׁ, "sanctuary, holy place" (Ezek 8:6), בֵּית־יְהוָה, "the house of YHWH" (Ezek 8:14, 16), and הַיְכָל יְהוָה, "the temple of YHWH" (Ezek 8:16 [twice]). Hummel, *Ezekiel 1-20*, 251.

¹⁵⁹ Kutsco, *Between Heaven and Earth*, 77-93. For discussion on the variant views regarding the subject of the phrase לְרַחֵקָה מֵעַל מִקְדָּשִׁי, "to become far from over my sanctuary" (Ezek 8:6) see Susan Ackerman, *Under Every Green Tree: Popular Religion in Sixth-Century*

The abominable practices that are of grave concern here are: the image of jealousy (Ezek 8:3, 5), abominations inside the wall of the sanctuary (Ezek 7-12), women weeping for Tammuz (Ezek 8:14), and worship of the sun (Ezek 8:16). The fourfold use of the refrain תועבות גדלות, “great abominations,” in Ezek 8:6 [x2], 13, 15 underscores the seriousness of these loathsome religious practices. Tuell suggests that the use of תועבות גדלות “shows that the images of unfaithfulness in this chapter are intended to build to a climax.”¹⁶⁰ This phrase is used as a rhetorical tool to depict the gradation of the idolatrous practices from the least to the most abominable,¹⁶¹ starting with the image of jealousy and reaching the climax in the worship of the sun.¹⁶² Block observes that by adopting this strategy, YHWH is “developing his case against Israel,”¹⁶³ and thus justifying his judgments against her.

The Image of Jealousy

The first of the detestable things that Ezekiel is shown is סמל הקנאה המקנה, “the image of jealousy that provokes jealousy” (Ezek 8:3).¹⁶⁴ Ezekiel 8:5 has a more

Judah (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1992), 41; Greenberg, *Ezekiel 1-20*, 168-169; Hummel, *Ezekiel 1-20*, 232, 235, 251; Joyce, *Ezekiel*, 98-99; Ka Leung Wong, “A Note on Ezekiel 8:6,” *VT* 51 (2001): 396-400; Zimmerli, *Ezekiel 1*, 238. Frank M. Cross, “A Papyrus Recording a Divine Legal Decision and the Root *rhq* in Biblical and Near Eastern Legal Usage,” in *Texts, Temples, and Traditions: A Tribute to Menahem Haran* (ed. M. V. Fox et al.; Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1996), 319; Duguid, *Ezekiel*, 128.

¹⁶⁰ Tuell, *Ezekiel*, 46. Allen says this is a literary device intended to alert the reader of the “intensification in the scale of religious aberrations.” Allen, *Ezekiel 1-19*, 143.

¹⁶¹ Hummel, *Ezekiel 1-20*, 250-51.

¹⁶² Tuell, *Ezekiel*, 48.

¹⁶³ Block, *Ezekiel 1-24*, 283.

¹⁶⁴ Greenberg translates this as “the statue (semel) of outrage that outrages.” Greenberg, *Ezekiel 1-20*, 168.

abbreviated form סִמָּל הַקִּנְאָה, “the image of **jealousy**.”¹⁶⁵ An examination of the words סִמָּל, “idol, image,” and קִנְאָה, “ardor, zeal, anger, jealousy” (Ezek 8:3), will help us to understand the nature of this image of jealousy.

The word סִמָּל occurs only five times in the entire Old Testament and two times in Ezekiel.¹⁶⁶ It refers mainly to an idol, image, or statue. In Deut 4:16 the word occurs in the phrase פֶּסֶל תְּמוּנַת כָּל-סִמָּל, “an idol, the likeness of any image.” Moses warns the Israelites against the temptation to make any image or idol to represent God or to worship the sun, moon, and the stars (Deut 4:15-19). Moses concludes this warning by reminding the Israelites about their covenant relationship with God as a basis on which to avoid these idolatrous practices (Deut 4:20).¹⁶⁷ סִמָּל is also used with respect to the wicked King Manasseh who, in direct contradiction to YHWH’s admonition against idolatry of any kind, put אֶת-פֶּסֶל הַסִּמָּל אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה, “the idol, the image which he had made,” in the temple of God (2 Chr 33:7).¹⁶⁸ This same word later occurs in 2 Chr 33:15 in the context

¹⁶⁵ H. C. Lutzky, "On the 'Image of Jealousy' (Ezek 8:3, 5)," VT 46 (1996): 121-124. In this article Lutzky advances an argument for the transposition of the word קִנְאָה, with the resultant translation of “create” or “procreate” rather than the normal translation “be jealous.” He therefore proceeds to translate the phrase in vv. 3 and 8 as the “image of Creatress,” a translation that does not make much sense taking into account the context of the passage.

¹⁶⁶ See Deut 4:16; 2 Chr 33:7, 15; Ezek 8:3, 5.

¹⁶⁷ Patterson mentions three fundamental reasons for the prohibition of idolatry in Israel: (1) It was “prohibited and condemned as apostasy and deviation from God’s basic standard.” (2) It brought people “into contact with evil spiritual forces,” and was thus “both spiritually damaging and dangerous.” (3) It was “a violation of God’s person, work, and covenant with them (Deut 4:15–20).” R. D. Patterson, "סִמָּל," n.p., TWOT on CD-ROM. Version 3.0g. 2000-2007.

¹⁶⁸ 2 Kings 21:7 is more specific about this image of Manasseh, calling it “the Asherah.” Blenkinsopp contends that the cult of Asherah was set side by side that of YHWH in the Jerusalem temple because of the belief that she was YHWH’s consort. Blenkinsopp, *Ezekiel*, 54. Block however discounts this argument by pointing out that Manasseh’s Asherah was destroyed during King Josiah’s religious reform. See Block, *Ezekiel 1-24*, 281. For further discussion on the cult of Asherah, see John Day, *Yahweh and the Gods and Goddesses of Canaan* (Sheffield:

in which the ‘restored’ Manasseh is said to have removed אִתּוֹ הַסֵּמָל, “the image” from the temple of the Lord.

Ezekiel says that this statue is an image הַמְקַנֵּה הַקִּנְיָה, “that provokes jealousy” (Ezek 8:3).¹⁶⁹ The denominative verb קִנְיָה, “be jealous, envious, zealous,” appears two times in this phrase: first as a singular feminine noun with a definite article הַקִּנְיָה, and second as a *hip ‘il* participle masculine singular verb הַמְקַנֵּה.¹⁷⁰ While the predominant import of קִנְיָה pertains to jealousy, especially with regard to the relationship between husbands and wives, yet the Old Testament is quite unequivocal in its portrayal of YHWH as a “jealous God” (Exod 20:5; Josh 24:19). Reuter, who notes that almost half of its usages pertain to the jealousy of God where he demands that he alone be worshiped, calls this requirement “the central characteristic of OT belief.”¹⁷¹ Ackerman observes that most usage of the word קִנְיָה pertains to “YHWH’s jealous anger, his impassioned wrath turned against Israel for her violations of the covenantal relationship

Sheffield Academic Press, 2000), 42-67; Judith M. Hadley, *The Cult of Asherah in Ancient Israel and Judah: Evidence for a Hebrew Goddess* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000); Patrick D. Miller, *The Religion of Ancient Israel* (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster/John Knox, 2000), 29-40; Mark S. Smith, *The Early History of God: YHWH and the Other Deities in Ancient Israel* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 108-47. Margaret S. Odell, “What Was the Image of Jealousy in Ezek 8?” in *The Priests in the Prophets: The Portrayal of Priests, Prophets and Other Religious Specialists in the Latter Prophets* (ed. L. L. Grabbe and A. O. Bellis; New York: T&T Clark, 2004), 136-37.

¹⁶⁹ For other occurrences of the word קִנְיָה in relation to “divine jealousy” see Ezek 5:13, 16:38, 42; 23:25; 36:5; 39:19; Exod 20:4-6; Deut 4:23-24; 5:8-10; 32:21; 1 Kgs 14:22-23; Ps 78:58.

¹⁷⁰ Odell rejects the rendering of this verb as “jealousy” and instead translates this *hip ‘il* participle as “create.” She argues that the verb expresses “the human display of zeal” and, as such, the image that Ezekiel is shown is “an expression of zeal that invokes divine blessings.” Odell, “What Was the Image of Jealousy in Ezekiel 8?” 137. This interpretation does not conform with the general tenor of the passage, in which the actions of the worshippers are under divine scrutiny and will incur unprecedented judgment.

¹⁷¹ E. Reuter, “קִנְיָה,” *TDOT* 13:47-58.

between YHWH and people.”¹⁷² Swanson defines קִנְיָא as “a state of ill will ranging even to anger, based on a perceived advantage, or a desire for exclusivity in relationship.”¹⁷³

What YHWH sees situated in the temple threatens his perceived wholesome and lawful relationship with his people. It is therefore not surprising that the presence of the סֶמֶל in the temple would infuriate YHWH and arouse his jealousy. As an aggrieved spouse, YHWH has to act with great resolve. Commenting on this resolve, Block aptly says, “The intensity of his wrath at threats to this relationship is directly proportional to the depth of his love. It arises out of the profundity of his covenant love. Because he feels so deeply he must respond vigorously. His relationship with his people has been violated, and he must defend it.”¹⁷⁴ Hence the ensuing inexorable judgment!

Abominations inside the Wall of the Sanctuary

The next set of abominations that Ezekiel sees in vision¹⁷⁵ are described in very

¹⁷² Ackerman, *Under Every Green Tree*, 59.

¹⁷³ J. Swanson, “קִנְיָא,” n.p., *DBL* on CD-ROM. Version 3.0g. 2000-2007. See also Ackerman, *Under Every Green Tree*, 58 n. 78.

¹⁷⁴ Block, *Ezekiel 1-24*, 14. Eichrodt says the “wrathful jealousy of YHWH” would not tolerate such an image. Eichrodt, *Ezekiel*, 122.

¹⁷⁵ Halperin interprets Ezek 8:7-12 as an “image for sexual intercourse” and calls this visionary experience “Ezekiel’s hallucinatory ‘abominations.’” For his bizarre arguments on the passage see David J. Halperin, *Seeking Ezekiel*, 81-140. I agree with Joyce who couteracts and dismisses Halperin’s interpretation on the grounds that the analysis has no textual relevance and no theological perspective. Paul M. Joyce, “Reading the Bible in the Public Domain,” in *Dare We Speak of God in Public? The Edward Cadbury Lectures, 1993-94* (ed. F. Young; New York: Mowbray, 1995), 67-79.

elaborate terms in Ezek 8:7-13.¹⁷⁶ Ezekiel is led to the entrance of the temple where he sees a hole in the wall. His divine guide then asks him to dig a hole into the wall and enter the area to see the “wicked and detestable things” that are being done inside. On entering this area Ezekiel sees “portrayed all over the walls all kinds of crawling things¹⁷⁷ and detestable animals¹⁷⁸ and all the idols of the house of Israel” (Ezek 8:10).

Let us examine certain words or practices that are significant for the proper interpretation of Ezek 8:10 because they illustrate the basis on which YHWH’s ire is directed on the people of Judah. One of these is *שִׁקָץ*, “detestable thing,” a loathing, an

¹⁷⁶ Ackerman connects this passage to Amos 6:4-7 and Jer 16:5-9 and argues that the passage is a *marzeah* which was generally characterized by eating and drinking, and its members were wealthy aristocrats. Susan Ackerman, “A Marzeah in Ezekiel 8:7-13?” *HTR* 82 (1989): 267-81; idem, *Under Every Green Tree*, 71-79. McLaughlin counteracts this argument on the grounds that Ezek 8:7-12, unlike a *marzeah*, is fraught with a lot of secrecy, and the drinking, which Ackerman says forms a major part of the *marzeah*, is non-existent in this passage. J. L. McLaughlin, *The Marzeah in the Prophetic Literature: References and Allusions in Light of the Extra-Biblical Evidence* (Leiden: Brill, 2001), 196-213. Mein, like McLaughlin, counters Ackerman’s argument and says that this *marzeah* claim “distracts attention from the main crime” of the elders, which is the worship of idols. Andrew Mein, *Ezekiel and the Ethics of Exile* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 126.

¹⁷⁷ In the creation story *רֶמֶשׂ*, “creeping things,” and *בְּהֵמָה*, “beasts,” were part of God’s original creation (Gen 1:24-26). YHWH however warned the Israelites against the making of any *תְּבַלִּית*, “image, form or likeness,” of any beast or any creeping thing (Deut 4:16-18). Note the abhorrent nature of these creeping things in the dietary regulations of Lev 11:29, 41-43. Cf. Moskala’s discussion on why Lev 11 avoids the use of *רֶמֶשׂ* and instead uses *שִׁרְץ* for the creeping creatures. Underscoring the abhorrent nature of these creeping things Moskala makes a pertinent remark that “in Lev 11 all swarmer without a single exception are unclean and this category of living creatures is called *שִׁקָץ* ‘abomination,’ ‘detestable,’ ‘abomination.’” Moskala, “The Laws of Clean and Unclean Animals,” 208-209, 232.

¹⁷⁸ Walther Eichrodt suggests that the animals specified in this abominable practice have Egyptian prototypes since it is mainly in Egypt where gods with animal-like shapes are common and gods can take the form of crocodiles, snakes, dung-beetles, oxen, sheep, and cats. Eichrodt, *Ezekiel*, 124. See also William Albright who describes these practices as borrowed from Egyptian spiritualistic worship, and which he characterizes as having “strong magical elements.” William F. Albright, *Archaeology and the Religion of Israel* (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox, 2006), 166-67. For other scholars who advocate Egyptian provenance, see J. B. Job, “Ezekiel: Theology of,” *NIDOTTE* 4:628-34.

abomination. In the book of Leviticus *שְׁקָץ* is associated with unclean foods which YHWH calls abominable (Lev 11:10, 11, 12, 13, 20, 23, 41, 42, 43). The textual evidence that links *שְׁקָץ* with *טָמֵא*, “unclean” (Ezek 5:11; 20:7, 30; 37:23), *תועבה*, “detestable thing, abomination, repulsion” (Ezek 5:11; 7:20; 11:18, 21), and *גְּלִילִים*, “idols” (Ezek 8:10; 20:7, 8, 30, 31; 37:23), also reinforces the detestable nature of *שְׁקָץ*. This has led Freedman and Welch to conclude that its root is part of the “lexical field of ‘uncleanness.’”¹⁷⁹ Zimmerli is therefore correct in remarking that a situation where creatures known to be abominations, not even used for food, were objects of pious worship in the temple was particularly offensive.¹⁸⁰ Since YHWH cannot and will not tolerate such impurity and pollution, Israel must come under his rod of judgment.

The other word which connotes idols is *גְּלִיל* (Ezek 8:10). This word is found 48 times in the Old Testament and occurs 39 times in Ezekiel.¹⁸¹ It is used mainly in contexts involving YHWH’s announcements of judgment and the basis for such judicial actions. As Hadley points out, *גְּלִילִים* is a term that is used derogatorily for images and idols and embodies condemnation of what is perceived as the utmost transgression.¹⁸²

¹⁷⁹ See D. N. Freedman, A. J. Welch, “שְׁקָץ,” *TDOT* 15:465–69.

¹⁸⁰ Zimmerli, *Ezekiel 1*, 241.

¹⁸¹ See Ezek 6:4, 5, 6, 9, 13 [twice]; 8:10; 14:3,4 [twice], 5, 6, 7; 16:36; 18:6, 12, 15; 20:7, 8, 16, 18, 24, 31, 39 [twice]; 22:3, 4; 23:7, 30, 37, 39, 49; 30:13; 33:25; 36:18, 25; 37:23; 44:10, 12.

¹⁸² J. M. Hadley, “גְּלִילִים,” *NIDOTTE* 1:864–65. Hummel observes that *גְּלִילִים* is one of Ezekiel’s “most contemptuous terms for an idol.” Hummel, *Ezekiel 1–20*, 192, 193.

Preuss avers that the word “denotes what is totally foreign to YHWH, concretely defines Judah’s preceding apostasy from YHWH, and thus provides the reason for judgment.”¹⁸³

Standing before¹⁸⁴ these abominable things are seventy Israelite elders, each having a burning censer in his hand and is stationed “at the shrine of his own idol” in the darkness.¹⁸⁵ Block proposes that while the basic reference here is to literal darkness, yet it may also echo the spiritual darkness among the Israelites, as is evident from these idolatrous practices.¹⁸⁶

Women Weeping for Tammuz

~~Ezekiel also mentions the worship~~ of Tammuz as one of the objectionable practices that brought about YHWH’s judgment upon Judah (Ezek 8:13-14).¹⁸⁷ At the door of the north gate of the temple Ezekiel is shown one of the “greater abominations” (Ezek 8:13).¹⁸⁸ ~~Depicted here are women sitting and weeping for Tammuz (Ezek 8:14);~~

¹⁸³ Preuss, *TDOT* 3:3, 4. It is worth noting, as Preuss points out, that in certain contexts the word גליליִם is accompanied by the following suffixes: “your,” “their,” to emphasize that “idols neither have nor can have anything to do with YHWH or faith in YHWH” as in Ezek 6:4-6, 13; 14:3-7; 20:16, 18, 31, 39; 22:4; 23:37, 39, 49; 33:25; 36:18, 25; 37:23; 44:10.

¹⁸⁴ Hummel notes that the phrase עָמַד לְפָנָי, “stand before,” usually denotes worship. See also n. 40 for the scriptural passages cited in support of this idea. Hummel, *Ezekiel 1-20*, 253.

¹⁸⁵ The identity of the elders is still a matter of debate. Some propose that they are members of the leadership team in Israel while others attribute other roles to them. For discussion on this see Blenkinsopp, *Ezekiel*, 55; Ackerman, *Under Every Green Tree*, 71; Eichrodt, *Ezekiel*, 124, 125; Hummel, *Ezekiel 1-20*, 253; Duguid, *Ezekiel and the Leaders of Israel*, 68-72, 113-116.

¹⁸⁶ Block, *Ezekiel 1-24*, 289 n. 37.

¹⁸⁷ For discussion of what this could have entailed, see Meyers, “Engendering Ezekiel: Female Figures Reconsidered,” 289-290.

¹⁸⁸ Greenberg avers that wailing for Tammuz was a women’s rite widely practiced throughout the ancient Near East for many centuries. Greenberg, *Ezekiel 1-20*, 171. Hummel asserts that these women were weeping for Tammuz because they syncretically equated Tammuz with YHWH. Hummel, *Ezekiel 1-20*, 258. Block contends, “the Tammuz” was not really a god

one of the fertility gods of Mesopotamia who was associated with the demise and rebirth of vegetation and was assumed to be dead at the end of the spring harvest season.¹⁸⁹ The death of Tammuz was then followed by cultic lamentation.¹⁹⁰

While the circumstances surrounding the introduction of this Mesopotamian mythological practice to Judah and Jerusalem are a matter of much scholarly debate,¹⁹¹ one thing is clear: The worship of Tammuz not only robbed YHWH of his place as the God who controls nature, but as Feinberg points out, the worship of Tammuz in ancient times involved “the basest immoralities.”¹⁹² This act was a clear indication of how much

per se but rather “a special genre of lament.” Hence the women could not have been using this lament genre to mourn the departure of YHWH. Block, *Ezekiel 1-24*, 294, 295. This argument is, however, not textually tenable, as YHWH’s departure from the temple occurs later in Ezek 11. See also Nili Fox who suggests that since the worship of Tammuz occurred within the temple “his devotees viewed the cult as a component of Yahwism.” Nili Fox, “Concepts of God in Israel and the Question of monotheism,” in *Text, Artifact, and Image: Revealing Ancient Israelite Religion* (ed. G. M. Beckman and T. J. Lewis; Providence, R.I.: Brown University, 2006), 399.

¹⁸⁹ Susan Ackerman, “‘And the Women Knead Dough’: The Worship of the Queen of Heaven in Sixth-Century Judah,” in *Gender and Difference in Ancient Israel* (ed. P. L. Day; Minneapolis, Minn.: Fortress, 1989), 116. For further discussions on this see Thorkild Jacobsen, *Toward the Image of Tammuz and Other Essays on Mesopotamian History and Culture* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1970), 100.

¹⁹⁰ For examples of these laments see Jacobsen, *Toward the Image of Tammuz*, 77-78; Thorkild Jacobsen, *Treasures of Darkness: A History of Mesopotamian Religion* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1976), 47-55; “Descent of Ishtar to the Nether World,” translated by E. A. Speiser (*ANET*, 109).

¹⁹¹ Ackerman credits the women in late seventh-century and early sixth-century Judah and Jerusalem with the introduction of the cult of Tammuz in the Jerusalem temple. Ackerman, “‘And the Women Knead Dough,’” 117-18. Eichrodt observes that this Babylonian god was introduced into Judean territory as early as the time of Isaiah (17:11; 1:29f.; 10:4) and flourished when Judah fell under Babylonian domination. Eichrodt, *Ezekiel*, 125-126. McKay contends that the Tammuz cult was introduced to Jerusalem by the Babylonians. John W. McKay, *Religion in Judah Under the Assyrians, 732-609 B.C.* (London: SCM Press, 1973), 68-69. For further discussion see Baruch Margalit, “The Myth of Tammuz in Biblical Narrative,” in *Birkat Shalom: Studies in the Bible, Ancient Near Eastern Literature, and Postbiblical Judaism Presented to Shalom M. Paul on the Occasion of His Seventieth Birthday* (ed. C. Cohen et al.; Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 2008), 1:531-48.

¹⁹² Feinberg, *The Prophecy of Ezekiel*, 51.

the people of Israel had forgotten and rejected YHWH and sought to rely on other gods who, unlike YHWH, were susceptible to death.

In spite of the nature of the Tammuz and irrespective of how the practice of weeping for this goddess was introduced into Israel, one thing is clear: These women weeping for Tammuz within the confines of the sacred temple of Jerusalem were an affront to YHWH.¹⁹³ This left him with no option but to prepare his munitions of judgment to counteract this baseless and irreverent religious practice.¹⁹⁴

Sun Worship

The worst abominable thing is the worship of the sun. At the entrance to the temple between the portico¹⁹⁵ and the altar, Ezekiel is shown about twenty-five men¹⁹⁶ whose backs are turned toward the temple and their faces turned toward the east (Ezek 8:16). In an eastern orientation, these men are seen prostrating themselves and worshipping the sun.¹⁹⁷ This was in direct disregard of the explicit statements proscribing

¹⁹³ This contrasts sharply with the humility portrayed by Hannah at the temple at Shiloh (1 Sam 2:1-10).

¹⁹⁴ Allen observes that for the Babylonian exiles the worship of Tammuz was more heinous and shocking because it represented the worship of a Babylonian god on Judean soil. Allen, *Ezekiel 1-19*, 144.

¹⁹⁵ It is evident from Joel 2:17 that the setting “between the porch and the temple” was where the priests entreated with YHWH on their fasting occasions and as Greenberg points out, “it appears to have had a special sanctity within the inner court.” Greenberg, *Ezekiel 1-20*, 171.

¹⁹⁶ Taylor suggests that these 25 men were most likely priests because of their location in the temple. James G. Taylor, *YHWH and the Sun: Biblical and Archaeological Evidence for Sun Worship in Ancient Israel* (Sheffield: Journal for the Study of the Old Testament, 1993), 156 n. 4. Zimmerli concurs that the 25 are priests. However, he proposes that Ezekiel declines to call them such because they had betrayed their priestly calling. Zimmerli, *Ezekiel 1-24*, 243.

¹⁹⁷ There are scholars who equate YHWH with the sun and thus argue that these people were not worshipping the sun per se, but rather worshipped YHWH as the sun. For such

sun worship in the Old Testament: “And when you look up to the heavens and see the sun, the moon, and the stars, all the host of heaven, do not be led astray and bow down to them and serve them, things that the LORD your God has allotted to all the peoples everywhere under heaven” (Deut 4:19). The penalty for worshipping any astral body was capital punishment:

If there is found among you, in one of your towns that the LORD your God is giving you, a man or woman who does what is evil in the sight of the LORD your God, and transgresses his covenant by going to serve other gods and worshiping them—whether the sun or the moon or any of the host of heaven, which I have forbidden—and if it is reported to you or you hear of it, and you make a thorough inquiry, and the charge is proved true that such an abhorrent thing has occurred in Israel, then you shall bring out to your gates that man or that woman who has committed this crime and you shall stone the man or woman to death. (Deut 17:2-5)

Yet despite these clear and unequivocal warnings, the worship of the sun appears to have been part of apostate Israelite cultic practice.¹⁹⁸ It is therefore not surprising to find this cult embedded within the temple, with participants paying homage to the sun.¹⁹⁹

arguments see Taylor, *Yahweh and the Sun*, 147-158. His view is disputed by Middlemas, who contends such a position has no place in the context of Ezek 8. I concur with Middlemas because if the worship these people were engaged in was not abominable, it would not have raised the ire of YHWH. Jill A. Middlemas, *The Troubles of Templeless Judah* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 116, n. 136. See also Steve A. Wiggins, “Yahweh: The God of the Sun?” *JSOT* 71 (1996): 89-106.

¹⁹⁸ Taylor asserts that the practice was quite prevalent in Judah. Taylor, *YHWH and the Sun*, 24-98. Klopper maintains that “there is adequate textual and visual evidence to confirm that the practice was well known and widespread throughout Israel’s history.” He says it was “an established, time-honored Israelite religious practice” and further affirms that “astral worship was deeply ingrained in Israel’s folk religion.” Frances Klopper, “Iconographical Evidence for a Theory on Astral Worship in Seventh- and Sixth-Century Judah,” in *South African Perspectives on the Pentateuch Between Synchrony and Diachrony* (ed. L. le Roux and E. Otto; New York: T&T Clark, 2007), 168, 170.

¹⁹⁹ Davidson observes that sun worship was the “climactic issue, the sign of rebellion,” that sealed the fate of Judah. He draws a fitting parallel between this ill-advised worship and the imprudent worship featured in the book of Revelation. Richard M. Davidson, “In Confirmation of the Sanctuary Message,” *JATS* 2 (1991): 98. Marianne Thompson observes that in Revelation, “the question of our worship is a fundamental and ultimate question.” Marianne M. Thompson, “Worship in the Book of Revelation,” *ExAud* 8 (1992): 47.

Feinberg calls this “the crowning insult to the Lord of heaven and earth.”²⁰⁰ Greenberg terms this egregious disrespect for YHWH “the climactic abomination.”²⁰¹ Eichrodt says this was “an expression of their utter contempt for the holy God of Israel.”²⁰² YHWH’s reaction is therefore not surprising as he sees all these abominations. These worshipers must face the inevitable wrath of YHWH.

Scholars are divided as to how the practice of sun worship was introduced in Israel. There are those who advocate Assyrian origin,²⁰³ while others advance Egyptian²⁰⁴ or Canaanite provenance.²⁰⁵ Keel and Uehlinger suggest that this practice began during the time of King Hezekiah, when Judah was faced with threats from the Assyrians and they turned to Egypt and subsequently embraced ideas emerging from Egyptian solar practices.²⁰⁶ But whatever its background may be, a number of scholars are agreed that

²⁰⁰ Feinberg, *The Prophecy of Ezekiel*, 52.

²⁰¹ Greenberg, *Ezekiel 1-20*, 171.

²⁰² Eichrodt, *Ezekiel*, 127.

²⁰³ See for example G. A. Cooke, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Ezekiel* (ed. Driver et al.; vol. 22; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1951), 99; Hermann Spieckermann, *Juda unter Assur in der Sargonidenzeit* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1982), cited in Day, *Yahweh and the Gods and Goddesses of Canaan*, 151.

²⁰⁴ Keith W. Carley, *The Book of the Prophet Ezekiel* (Cambridge, Mass.: Cambridge University Press, 1974), 56. Ackerman strongly argues against this as is evident in her work. Ackerman, *Under Every Green Tree*, 93, 94.

²⁰⁵ Based on biblical and archaeological evidence, Day argues in support of the Canaanite origin of sun worship in Israel. Among the evidence that he adduces in support of his position are Canaanite deities and place names. Day, *YHWH and the Gods and Goddesses of Canaan*, 151-155. See also McKay, *Religion in Judah Under the Assyrians*, 32-36, 48-53.

²⁰⁶ Othmar Keel and Christoph Uehlinger, *Gods, Goddesses and Images of God in Ancient Israel* (trans. T. H. Trapp; Minneapolis, Minn.: Fortress, 1998), 272. See also Keel, *Goddesses and Trees, New Moon and Yahweh: Ancient Near Eastern Art and the Hebrew Bible* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1998), 102-104.

worship of the sun, which was quite prevalent among Israel's neighbors²⁰⁷ in the ancient Near East, must have reached its climax in Judah particularly during the seventh and sixth centuries B.C.²⁰⁸

King Manasseh of Judah²⁰⁹ is known to have been involved with these astral elements, and the cult of the sun thrived particularly during his kingship.²¹⁰ He “bowed down to all the starry hosts and worshiped them” (2 Kgs 21:3 NIV) and “in both courts of the temple of the Lord, he built altars to all the starry hosts” (2 Kgs 21:5 NIV). The religious reforms undertaken by King Josiah²¹¹ may have stemmed the tide of these practices for a while. But people seem to have adopted them again after Josiah's death. It is therefore not surprising that sun worship is one of the abominations that provokes YHWH's ire, and with unflinching resolve, he declares that he will now react in fury. His eye will not spare and he will not show any pity (Ezek 8:17).

²⁰⁷ Tsumura says that the cult of the sun was not just a seventh-century innovation, rather “it was traditionally well established in Canaan.” D. T. Tsumura, “שָׁמַשׁ,” *NIDOTTE* 4:185-90.

²⁰⁸ Hummel, *Ezekiel 1-20*, 259. See also Keel and Uehlinger, *Gods, Goddesses and Images of God in Ancient Israel*, 179-81; E. Lipinski, “שָׁמַשׁ,” *TDOT* 15:308-11. Smith argues that it was during the Israelite monarchy that solar language developed in Israel. He traces this development to other features within the Israelite religious system that could have given rise to this phenomenon, like the association of YHWH with the sun in Ps 84:12, the eastern orientation of the temple in Jerusalem and the biblical descriptions of YHWH with the verbal root אָרַץ, “arise, rise, shine,” as in Deut 33:2 and Isa 60. Mark S. Smith, “The Near Eastern Background of Solar Language for Yahweh,” *JBL* 109 (1990): 29-39.

²⁰⁹ Cogan calls Manasseh “the idolator par excellence” and adds that Manasseh's wife, like Ahab's wife Jezebel, “may have been one factor in the insinuation of foreign elements.” Morton Cogan, *Imperialism and Religion: Assyria, Judah, and Israel in the Eighth and Seventh Centuries B.C.E.* (Missoula, Mont.: Society of Biblical Literature and Scholars Press, 1974), 89-90, 91.

²¹⁰ Tsumura, *NIDOTTE* 4:187.

²¹¹ For a survey of King Josiah's religious reforms with respect to astral phenomenon, see 2 Kgs 23:4, 5, 12. For discussion on the reforms see McKay, *Religion in Judah under the Assyrians*, 28-44.

He is infuriated the more with the Judean's contemptible gesture of putting the branch to the nose (Ezek 8:17). Block and Hummel characterize it as an "insulting physical gesture" directed at YHWH.²¹² These Judeans appear to have reached a point in which their conscience has been seared such that they have no sense of what impact their actions have on God. Or if they have any conscience at all, they do not care about the impact of those deeds.²¹³

Summary

In the light of these abominations YHWH declares that he would deal with the Israelites in anger, he will not look upon them with pity or spare them, and further that he would not even listen to them (Ezek 8:18). Summing up Israel's moral depravity, McKenna says, "Ezekiel's history of Israel is one of unmitigated failure, rebellion, desecration of the Sabbath, child sacrifice, criminal abuse of the poor, and mockery of God."²¹⁴ With such abundant evidence concerning these aberrant and deviant practices, it is not surprising that YHWH cannot help but render a guilty verdict upon his beloved people and threaten to release upon them the covenant curses (Lev 26:15-39).

²¹² Block, *Ezekiel 1-24*, 299; Hummel, *Ezekiel 1-20*, 261.

²¹³ I do not concur with Wendland who argues that the the actions presented here "are not properly worship of foreign gods, but rather distortions of true Yahwistic practices. Accordingly, the condemnation in Ezekiel's second vision account is not against worship rituals *per se*, but against bad theology." Christina L. Wendland, "'I Will Give You a Heart of Flesh': The Heart, Relationship, and Faithfulness in the Book of Ezekiel" (Ph.D. diss., Luther Seminary, 2007), 113.

²¹⁴ Megan McKenna, *Prophets: Words of Fire* (New York: Orbis Books, 2001), 163.

CHAPTER 4

THE FUNCTION OF DIVINE JUDGMENT IN EZEKIEL 5:5-17

WITHIN ITS CONTEXT

Introduction and General Overview

The prophetic corpus of the Hebrew Bible has many references to judgment directed against Israel (e.g., Isa 1:1-9; Jer 4:5-18; Hos 5:1-15; Amos 2:4-16; 3:1-15; 4:1-13). The discussion in chapter 3 of this work has revealed that YHWH does not pounce on Israel and mete out harsh punishments arbitrarily. Israel has been unfaithful to the covenant provisions. She has rebelled against divine laws and engaged in cultic and moral misconduct. YHWH's response to these religious malpractices has been swift and decisive. He has to take the requisite steps to discipline Israel. The present chapter examines the role YHWH's judgments are designed to play in the overall scheme of his plan for Israel.

As we investigate the function of divine retributive judgment in Ezek 5:5-17 and its larger context of chs. 1-24, one of the key questions we need to explore is how a just, caring, and covenant God can use such harsh measures to discipline his people. Is Carol Dempsey right that in Ezek 5:5-17 "God speaks of death and not life, destruction and not mitigation, wrath without compassion, and anger without reconciliation"? This jealous, self-interested God even manipulates the forces of creation, namely, rain and the animals

and insects, to get even with faithless, sinful Jerusalem.”¹ The picture presented by Dempsey’s evaluation leads to the conclusion that YHWH is a vindictive God whose actions are totally unjustified. It is therefore pertinent that further investigation of YHWH’s judgments on Israel in the book of Ezekiel be conducted in an attempt to understand their purpose and function in the overall scheme of YHWH’s parameters of retributive justice.

The question posed by the post-exilic community in Mal 2:17, “Where is the God of Justice?”² appears to be quite relevant here as we examine the purposes of these divine punitive actions on the Israelites.³ The people YHWH threatens to punish in the passages under review are his own covenant people. They have persisted in their disobedience, and YHWH is now planning to bring unprecedented punishments upon them. Is YHWH justified in using these extraordinary means of punishment on his people? Is this act of punishment compatible with his nature? What does he plan to accomplish in all this? Such questions need to be addressed to see if YHWH’s actions are within the parameters of his justice and righteousness.

Because of the harshness of God that is exhibited in the book of Ezekiel and other biblical texts, several scholars have questioned the character of YHWH. Some have gone as far as attributing negative characterizations to YHWH because of his punitive actions

¹ Carol J. Dempsey, *The Prophets: A Liberation-Critical Reading* (Minneapolis, Minn.: Fortress, 2000), 97.

² For some works that have been written with this perspective see James L. Crenshaw, "Popular Questioning of the Justice of God in Ancient Israel," *ZAW* 82 (1970): 380-95; McWilliams, *Where Is the God of Justice? Biblical Perspectives on Suffering*.

³ Allen argues that the function of the message of Ezek 5 is theodicy since it seeks to justify God’s judgment on Israel. Allen, *Ezekiel 1-19*, 77.

that appear to be inconsistent with his character.⁴ Some see in this YHWH a violent being,⁵ while others find in him a God who is full of rage and great wrath.⁶ Others who see the indiscriminate nature of these punitive measures accuse YHWH of having a “dark side” through which he unnecessarily and excessively attacks even his own innocent people.⁷ After describing the harsh judgment scenario in Ezek 8-10, which ends with YHWH’s withdrawal from the Jerusalem temple, Zimmerli poses the question, “Is not God in all this unjust, and has he not become a demon of destruction?”⁸ It is worth noting that Zimmerli later acknowledges YHWH’s freedom and right to act as he chooses and so finds justification for Israel’s punishment as an errant covenant partner.⁹

⁴ See for example Lüdemann who discusses the concept of the *ban* and the violence instigated on the Canaanites by YHWH. Gerd Lüdemann, *The Unholy in Holy Scripture: The Dark Side of the Bible* (trans. J. Bowden; Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox, 1997), 33-75.

⁵ Examples of such views are found among scholars like Fretheim who argues that YHWH’s association with violence in the Old Testament poses a big theological problem, yet he rightly acknowledges that this violence is prompted by people’s sinful actions and further that this divine violence has as its goal judgment and salvation. Terence E. Fretheim, “God and Violence in the Old Testament,” *WW* 24 (2004): 18-28; idem, “‘I Was Only a Little Angry’: Divine Violence in the Prophets,” *Int* 58 (2004): 365-75; idem, “The Character of God in Jeremiah,” in *Character and Scripture: Moral Formation, Community, and Biblical Interpretation* (ed. W. P. Brown; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 211-30.

⁶ Poetker discusses various aspects of YHWH’s wrath in several Old Testament books. In these discussions, no reference is made of Ezekiel as a prophet who wrote about the wrath and punishment of God on the Israelites. Katrina Poetker, “The Wrath of YHWH,” *Direction* 16 (1987): 55-61. See also Terence E. Fretheim, “Theological Reflections on the Wrath of God in the Old Testament,” *HBT* 24 (2002): 14-17. In his discussion of “The Meaning and Mystery of Wrath,” Heschel notes that YHWH is “long-suffering, compassionate, loving, and faithful, but He is also demanding, insistent, terrible, and dangerous.” Abraham J. Heschel, *The Prophets* (New York: Harper & Row, 1962), 279-98; see also Gary A. Herion, “Wrath of God,” *ABD* 6:989-96; S. Erlandsson, “The Wrath of YHWH,” *TynBul* 23 (1972): 111-16.

⁷ Whybray strongly castigates those biblical scholars who try to deconstruct passages that show YHWH’s cruelty and insensitiveness. Whybray, “Shall Not the Judge of All the Earth Do What Is Just?: God’s Oppression of the Innocent in the Old Testament,” 1-19.

⁸ Zimmerli, “The Message of the Prophet Ezekiel,” 143.

⁹ Zimmerli, *Ezekiel 1-24*, 52-60.

In the light of these critical observations regarding some of YHWH's actions in the Old Testament, is there any positive thing that would come from Ezek 5:5-17 and other passages in the book that deal with YHWH's judgment on Israel? What purpose do these seemingly harsh divine actions serve?

Some scholars have suggested that these judicial actions, far from giving YHWH a negative reputation, demonstrate the justice and righteousness of YHWH. John Barton, for example, argues quite cogently regarding the significance of theodicy in the Old Testament and goes so far as to suggest that theodicy could be one of the central themes of the Old Testament. He suggests, however, that the value of theodicy in the Old Testament should not be so much to justify the punitive actions of YHWH, but rather to describe these actions and let them be seen for what they are. This position on theodicy appears to be much more refined when compared with his earlier position, in which he characterized the suggestion of having theodicy as the principal thesis of the Old Testament as a "little exaggeration."¹⁰ Daniel Block argues that these harsh judgments are intended to enable Israel to recognize YHWH's "presence, character, and claims on their lives."¹¹ As different scholarly views are evaluated, one thing is clear, however. Israel has sinned. She is in breach of covenant obligations and her punishment is deserved.

¹⁰ John Barton, "Prophecy and Theodicy," in *Thus Says the Lord: Essays on the Former and Latter Prophets in Honor of Robert R. Wilson* (ed. J. J. Ahn and S. L. Cook; New York: T&T Clark, 2009), 73-86; idem, "Historiography and Theodicy in the Old Testament," in *Reflection and Refraction: Studies in Biblical Historiography in Honor of A. Graeme Auld* (ed. R. Rezetko, T. H. Lim, and W. B. Aucker; Leiden: Brill, 2007), 27-33. See also James L. Crenshaw, "Theodicy and Prophetic Literature," 236-55.

¹¹ Block, *Ezekiel 1-24*, 211.

Lawsuit and Justice

The Prophetic Lawsuit

As we consider the function of YHWH's judgment in Ezek 5:5-17 we will begin by recognizing that this passage is part of the prophetic judgment speech¹² generally known as prophetic¹³ or covenant lawsuit.¹⁴ This involves a thorough investigation of all the available evidence before a final "verdict and sentence are pronounced upon God's professed covenant people and executive judgment is meted out."¹⁵ But apart from this juridical component, the covenant lawsuit also plays another key role. YHWH uses it to warn his people of the impending judgments because he does not want anyone to perish (Jer 18:7-11; Ezek 3:1-16-27; 33:1-17; Jonah 3:4).¹⁶

¹² For discussion on this categorization see Block, *Ezekiel 1-24*, 197; Hummel, *Ezekiel 1-20*, 179-80. It is interesting to note Carol Christ's argument that women should use this biblical genre to express their disapproval of God's actions. Through it, she says, "women can appeal to God against God" and these complaints can finally lead to the indictment of God. Carol P. Christ, "Expressing Anger at God: An Essay in Story Theology," *Anima* 5 (1978): 3-10.

¹³ I agree with Davidson who argues that because of the connection such passages have with the covenant, they should be characterized as "covenant lawsuit" rather than "prophetic lawsuit." Davidson, "The Covenant Lawsuit Motif in Canonical Perspective," 21.

¹⁴ For scholars who classify Ezek 5:5-17 in this category see Westermann, *Basic Forms of Prophetic Speech*, 208. Richard Davidson identifies the following structural elements in the lawsuit: (1) Preamble (Ezek 5:5a), (2) Historical prologue (Ezek 5:5b), (3) Indictments (Ezek 5:6-8), (4) Verdict and Sentencing (Ezek 5:8-9; 5:10-17), (5) Witnesses (which he takes from Ezek 6:1-14). Davidson, "The Covenant Lawsuit Motif in Canonical Perspective," 22, 23. I will present an argument in this study that Ezek 5:5-17 does not need any input from ch. 6 to be a complete prophetic or covenant lawsuit. I take the position that the nations and countries surrounding Israel (Ezek 5:5) are the witnesses to these judicial proceedings, since judgment is executed in their sight (Ezek 5:8; see also v. 15).

¹⁵ Richard M. Davidson, "Cosmic Metanarrative for the Coming Millennium," *JATS* 11 (2000): 102-19; idem, "In Confirmation of the Sanctuary Message," 96-97.

¹⁶ Davidson observes that the lawsuits against Israel and Judah, given just before their judgment, indicate that Yahweh designed the messages to serve as a warning to the recalcitrant citizens of these nations. He further suggests that similar messages to the foreign nations also served as an "implicit warning and call to repentance." Davidson, "The Covenant Lawsuit Motif in Canonical Perspective," 27-28.

Julien Harvey suggests the following elements comprise the prophetic lawsuit:¹⁷

1. Appeal to heaven and earth, and to everyone, to listen
2. Declaration of YHWH's right to act as he has done
3. Accusation against the people, who have been disloyal to the covenant
4. Rhetorical cross-examination, which does not expect any reply
5. Accusatory address, usually historically founded, which summarizes

YHWH's gracious acts and the people's ingratitude

6. Declaration of the powerlessness of the foreign gods, and of the impossibility of re-establishing the right relationship to YHWH by means of rites

7. Declaration of Israel's guilt
8. Type A: threats of destruction = declaration of war

Type B: a positive specification of what is needed to rebuild the relationship = ultimatum.

Huffmon has the following form of the prophetic lawsuit:¹⁸

1. A description of the scene of judgment
2. The speech by the judge
 - a. Address to the defendant
 - i. Reproach (based on the accusation)

¹⁷ Julien Harvey, *Le Plaidoyer Prophetique contre Israel après la Rupture de l'alliance: Etude d'une Formule Littéraire de l'Ancient Testament* (Bruges-Paris: Desclee de Brouwer, 1967), translated and quoted in Kirsten Nielsen, *Yahweh as Prosecutor and Judge: An Investigation of the Prophetic Lawsuit (Rib-Pattern)* (Sheffield: Journal for the Study of the Old Testament, 1978), 15.

¹⁸ Huffmon, "The Covenant Lawsuit in the Prophets," 286.

- ii. Statement (usually in the third person) that the accused has
no defense

3. Pronouncement of guilt

4. Sentence (in second or third person).

This genre that is found in several passages in the Old Testament¹⁹ has been the subject of much scholarly debate, especially as to its *Sitz im Leben*. Some link its provenance to the secular court at the city gates,²⁰ others trace its source to the cultic sphere,²¹ while still others advance the idea that it must have been birthed from the international law.²² Others like Michael DeRoche²³ and Dwight R. Daniels²⁴ have ruled it out as a genre. Limburg,

¹⁹ For some of these passages see Deut 32:1-43; Isa 1:2-3, 18-20; 3:13-15; Jer 2:4-13; Hos 4:1-3; Mic 6:1-8; Ps 50:1-23.

²⁰ George Ramsey articulates the functions of the court at the city gate and also notes that there were cases where a king at the court at the city gate played the dual role both as prosecutor and judge. George W. Ramsey, "Speech-Forms in Hebrew Law and Prophetic Oracles," *JBL* 96 (1977): 45-58. See also Hans J. Boecker, *Law and Administration of Justice in the Old Testament and Ancient Near East* (trans. Jeremy Moiser; Minneapolis, Minn.: Augsburg, 1980), 27-52.

²¹ See Ernst Wñrthwein, "Der Ursprung der prophetischen Gerichtsrede," *ZTK* 49 (1952): 1-16.

²² Julien Harvey, *Le plaidoyer prophetique contre Israel après la rupture de l'alliance: Etude d'une formule littéraire de l'Ancient Testament* (Bruges-Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1967).

²³ DeRoche contends that the Old Testament prophetic בִּיָּד should not be characterized as a lawsuit because these cases involved only two individuals with no third party to arbitrate their disputes and concludes that "the terms 'prophetic lawsuit' and 'covenant lawsuit' should be abandoned." Michael DeRoche, "Yahweh's Rib Against Israel: A Reassessment of the So-Called 'Prophetic Lawsuit' in the Pre-Exilic Prophets," *JBL* 102 (1983): 563-74. Davidson dismisses De Roche's arguments as untenable and concludes that the "the term 'lawsuit' is entirely appropriate for these passages." Davidson, "The Covenant Lawsuit Motif in Canonical Perspective," 13.

²⁴ Dwight Daniels dismisses any such notion as a prophetic lawsuit on the grounds that the texts that have been used as examples of this genre (Isa 1:2-3, 18-20; Jer 2:4-13; Mic 6:1-8; and Hos 4:1-3) are bereft of any structural and thematic elements of a בִּיָּד and concludes that the term 'prophetic lawsuit' should be discarded altogether. Dwight R. Daniels, "Is There a 'Prophetic Lawsuit' Genre?" *ZAW* 99 (1987): 339-60. After a careful analysis of Daniels's arguments Davidson characterizes his approach as a "radical redaction-critical surgery on these passages." Davidson, "The Covenant Lawsuit Motif in Canonical Perspective," 13.

on the other hand, connects the prophetic lawsuit with all three situations just mentioned: the court at the city gate, the cultic realm, and the international sphere as well.²⁵

One of the key features of the prophetic lawsuit is the characteristic word רִיב.²⁶ Based on this, one could easily rule out Ezek 5:5-17 from this prophetic genre because the word רִיב does not occur anywhere in the entire passage. Another distinctive feature that is commonly found in most prophetic lawsuits is the direct appeal to some form of witnesses, whether animate or inanimate, to be privy to the divine legal proceedings (e.g., Isa 1:2; Mic 6:1-2). Ezekiel 5:5-17 does not have such an explicit appeal to witnesses.²⁷ However, a closer examination of the passage reveals that it bears other major hallmarks of a prophetic lawsuit. This is demonstrated by YHWH's statement indicating his intent to execute מִשְׁפָּטִים, "judgments," upon Israel in the sight of the nations (Ezek 5:8).²⁸ I will argue that these nations, before whom YHWH's judgment is conducted, are the witnesses in this covenant lawsuit.²⁹

²⁵ J. Limburg, "The Root רִיב and the Prophetic Lawsuit Speeches," *JBL* 88 (1969): 291-304.

²⁶ Limburg seems to suggest that the word *rib* is the characteristic word of the prophetic lawsuits. See J. Limburg, "The Root רִיב and the Prophetic Lawsuit Speeches," 291-304. It is clear, however, from some biblical examples cited by other scholars that there are prophetic lawsuits in some passages that do not have the word רִיב.

²⁷ See Davidson's article in which he suggests that the mountains in Ezek 6 are the witnesses in the prophetic lawsuit in Ezek 5 and 6. I respectfully object to this position because the text states that these mountains are themselves objects of YHWH's judgment, a fact that Davidson himself acknowledges. Davidson, "The Covenant Lawsuit Motif in Canonical Perspective," 1-41.

²⁸ See Davidson's suggestion that passages with synonyms of רִיב, such as מִשְׁפָּט, "judgment," "to judge," "to examine," could very easily contain some form of a prophetic lawsuit. Davidson, "The Covenant Lawsuit Motif in Canonical Perspective," 23.

²⁹ It should be noted that the absence of witnesses alone does not disqualify a passage from consideration as a prophetic or covenant lawsuit (e.g., Isa 3:13-15; Hos 4:1-3).

The Prophetic Lawsuit in Ezekiel 5:5-17

Following are the cardinal elements of Ezek 5:5-17 that qualify it to be classified as a covenant lawsuit:³⁰

1. Ezekiel 5:5 Identification of the culprit: “This is Jerusalem.”
2. Ezekiel 5:5 Beneficent actions toward the culprit: “I have placed her in the midst of the nations.”³¹
3. Ezekiel 5:6 Indictment: “She has rebelled against my statutes and my ordinances.”
4. Ezekiel 5:7 Messenger formula: “Therefore thus says the Lord God.”
5. Ezekiel 5:7 Indictment: Jerusalem has multiplied its sinful practices.
6. Ezekiel 5:8 Messenger formula: “Therefore thus says the Lord God.”
7. Ezekiel 5:8-10 Announcement of judgment.
8. Ezekiel 5:11 Messenger Formula: “Therefore, as I live,’ says the Lord God.”
9. Ezekiel 5:11 Indictment: They have defiled the sanctuary.
10. Ezekiel 5:12 Verdict and Sentence.
11. Ezekiel 5:16-17 Verdict and Sentence.

This covenant lawsuit follows the basic pattern of the Hittite suzerainty treaties, which as

³⁰ See how this relates to the Hittite Suzerain covenant treaties and other biblical covenant lawsuits as presented below.

³¹ This statement reveals YHWH’s gracious dealings with Israel. Even as Jerusalem is indicted for her sins, God wants everyone to know that he is a God who specializes in acts of grace. There are special and unique things that he has done for his covenant people. Hummel therefore rightly observes that the significance of this placement goes far beyond geographical considerations. Rather “Jerusalem is the theological center of God’s activity, the locus of his salvation, both in the OT era and in its fulfillment in Christ, who died and rose there.” Hummel, *Ezekiel 1-20*, 180.

Mendenhall observes, had the following basic structure:³²

1. The preamble (which identifies the initiator of the covenant)
2. The historical prologue (expressing the beneficent actions of the suzerain king to the vassal king)
3. The stipulations (detailing the obligations of the vassal to the suzerain king)
4. Provisions for deposit in the temple and periodic reading (to ensure continuing respect for the suzerain and to familiarize all citizens with the obligations)
5. The list of gods as witnesses (of both the suzerain nation and the vassal states)
6. The curses and blessings formula (for anyone who breaches the terms of the covenant).

As can be seen, this covenant structure has some parallels with Ezek 5:5-17. For example, Yahweh identifies himself in several sections of Ezek 5:5-17 as the subject concerned about covenant violations (Ezek 5:5, 8, 11, 17). Then there is the historical prologue, in which YHWH expresses his benevolent actions towards Jerusalem: He has placed her in the midst of the nations with countries all around her (Ezek 5:5). He therefore has rightful claims for her obedience because of this beneficent action. I will argue in this study that these same nations are the witnesses that are privy to the divine judicial proceedings against Israel.

While it is acknowledged that the covenant lawsuit in Ezek 5:5-17 follows the basic pattern of the Hittite suzerainty covenant, there are some significant variations that are worth noting: Instead of the stipulations, as is the case in the suzerainty treaties, one

³² George E. Mendenhall, *Law and Covenant in Israel and the Ancient Near East* (Pittsburgh: The Biblical Colloquium, 1955), 31-34.

finds the indictments, and instead of blessings, one finds the curses. This is an indication that Israel has veered from the covenant obligations and YHWH is initiating his case against them. This covenant lawsuit format, therefore, helps us to understand the function of judgment in Ezek 5:5-17 and subsequently in the rest of Ezek 1-24. I concur with Davidson in his observation that “the covenant lawsuit is a statement of theodicy.”³³ Using this genre, YHWH presents his case in such a coherent, logical, and systematic manner that leaves no doubt that he is just in what he does.

An examination of the proceedings in Ezek 5:5-17 reveals several salient points that underscore the role that judgment plays in YHWH’s court of justice. These include a demonstration of YHWH’s justice and righteousness, his faithfulness to the covenant, sanctity of the sanctuary and proper worship, and an acknowledgment of YHWH.

YHWH’s Justice and Righteousness in Ezekiel 5:5-17

Kathryn P. Darr, in one of the comments on the presuppositions and beliefs that influenced Ezekiel’s work, makes the following terse but significant observation: “Ezekiel refuses to abandon his defense of divine justice.”³⁴ This section explores how this statement is supported by YHWH’s actions in Ezek 5:5-17.

Impartial Nature of the Proceedings

Several judicial proceedings in the passage portray YHWH as a just and righteous judge. This is demonstrated by the impartial nature with which he conducts the

³³ Davidson, “The Covenant Lawsuit Motif in Canonical Perspective,” 26.

³⁴ Darr, “The Book of Ezekiel,” 1155; idem, “Ezekiel’s Justifications of God: Teaching Troubling Texts,” *JSOT* 55 (1992): 97-117.

proceedings. YHWH starts by identifying the culprit: “This is Jerusalem” (Ezek 5:5).³⁵

When YHWH isolates Jerusalem for condemnation, he is not only dealing with Jerusalem as a city, but the city as a representative of the entire nation and people of Israel.³⁶ Allen observes that Jerusalem, apart from being a city, also “connotes the members of the administration and other notable citizens who played a leading, representative role in the ongoing life of Judah.”³⁷ The identification of Jerusalem at the beginning of this judgment message was therefore meant to send out a strong signal regarding the all-inclusive nature of YHWH’s judgments.

Like any major modern metropolitan center, the significance and uniqueness of Jerusalem cannot be underestimated.³⁸ First, she enjoyed YHWH’s patronage. It came into being by YHWH’s special design. The use of a *qal* perfect first-person singular verb with a third-person singular suffix, $\text{ָנִי־נָתַתִּיָּהָּ}$, “I have placed her” (Ezek 5:5), demonstrates YHWH’s personal involvement. This is the “historical prologue of the covenant lawsuit in which YHWH spells out his beneficent actions towards Jerusalem. Jerusalem’s existence was not orchestrated by any human devising. It had the imprint and insignia of the divine upon it. Every high calling demands special responsibilities. Her actions should have been in consonant with her unique position as a privileged covenant partner.

³⁵ Jenson notes that this identification of Jerusalem as the object of judgment is in itself “a message of judgment.” Jenson, *Ezekiel*, 59.

³⁶ Hummel, *Ezekiel 1-20*, 169.

³⁷ Allen, *Ezekiel 1-19*, 72.

³⁸ Eichrodt argues that Jerusalem’s centrality was due to the unique set of laws that YHWH had given to the Israelites and had designed should emanate from there to the rest of the world. Eichrodt, *Ezekiel*, 88.

Second, Jerusalem's placement in this location was a radical act on the part of YHWH to showcase Jerusalem. She was set "in the middle of the nations with countries all around her" (Ezek 5:5). Because of its vantage position, the surrounding nations are inclined to have dealings with Jerusalem, be it in the economic, social, political, or religious spheres.³⁹ They cannot ignore this neighbor who is so conspicuous. Table 3 shows YHWH's actions vis-à-vis the actions of the Israelites. The picture that emerges is that of a God whose actions are justified. Commenting on Jerusalem's privileged position Hummel observes that it had become "the theological center of God's activity."⁴⁰ This is in line with YHWH's original plan for Israel (Gen 22:17, 18). This means that Jerusalem's distinctiveness called for greater accountability. She was under obligation to play her missionary role by being a model and beacon of obedience and then teaching others to do the same (Gen 12:2, 3). It is in this that Jerusalem and Israel failed to live up to the divine expectations.

If there was a city or place that should not have felt the brunt of YHWH's anger and fury it was Jerusalem. She was spared when Samaria, the capital city of the northern kingdom, fell to the Assyrians in 722 B.C. (2 Kgs 17:6, 18). Yet to this privileged city

³⁹ For discussion on the significance of Jerusalem's 'centrality' with its commercial, political, and religious ramifications see Cooper, *Ezekiel*, 101-102; Margreet Steiner notes that Jerusalem, apart from being the chief city of Judah, was a rich and flourishing city, a relatively large city and a focal point for all economic, political, and social power. Margreet L. Steiner, "The Notion of Jerusalem as a Holy City," in *Reflection and Refraction: Studies in Biblical Historiography in Honor of A. Graeme Auld* (ed. R. Rezetko, T. H. Lim, and W. B. Aucker; Leiden: Brill, 2007), 447-58. Lester Grabbe suggests that Jerusalem's expansion took place in the seventh century B.C., and that this was partly "due to immigration from the Northern Kingdom after the conquest of Samaria." Lester L. Grabbe, "The Kingdom of Judah from Sennacherib's Invasion to the Fall of Jerusalem: If We Had Only the Bible," in *Good Kings and Bad Kings* (ed. L. L. Grabbe; London: T&T Clark, 2005), 82-83.

⁴⁰ Hummel, *Ezekiel 1-20*, 169.

Table 3. YHWH's justice and righteousness in Ezekiel 5:5-17

YHWH's Beneficent Actions	Israel's Sinful Actions	YHWH's Punitive Actions
5:5 I have placed her in the midst of the nations	<p>5:6 She has rebelled against my ordinances and my statutes . . . rejecting my ordinances and not following my statutes.</p> <p>5:7 You are more turbulent than the nations that are all around you.</p> <p>5:7 You . . . have not followed my statutes or kept my ordinances.</p> <p>5:7 You have acted according to the ordinances of the nations that are all around you.</p> <p>5:9 Because of all your abominations . . .</p>	<p>5:8 I will execute judgments among you in the sight of the nations.</p> <p>5:10 Parents shall eat their children in your midst, and children shall eat their parents.</p> <p>5:10 Any of you who survive I will scatter to every wind.</p>
	<p>5:11 Because you have defiled my sanctuary with all your detestable things and with all your abominations . . .</p>	<p>5:11 My eye will not spare, and I will have no pity.</p> <p>5:12 One third of you shall die of pestilence or be consumed by famine among you; one third shall fall by the sword around you; and one third I will scatter to every wind.</p> <p>5:14, 15 I will make you a desolation and an object of mocking among the nations around you. . . . You shall be a mockery and a taunt, a warning and a horror, to the nations around you.</p> <p>5:16, 17 When I loose against you my deadly arrows of famine . . . I will bring more and more famine upon you.</p> <p>5:17 I will send famine and wild animals against you, and they will rob you of your children; pestilence and bloodshed shall pass through you; and I will bring the sword upon you.</p>

and people, YHWH now addresses in language that fully expresses his anger and hostility, הִנְנִי עָלֶיךָ גִּם־אֲנִי, “Behold I am indeed against you” (Ezek 5:8).⁴¹ The hostility that should naturally have been aimed at Israel’s enemies is now directed at YHWH’s own people.⁴² Israel no longer enjoys the original divine designed privileged position. She has been an unfaithful, disobedient, and unreliable covenant partner. Her position has been reversed and she has become YHWH’s enemy. YHWH is not going to overlook her rebellious actions simply because of her initial advantaged position. YHWH’s “relentless” and unmitigated judgments are going to fall upon her.⁴³

Further evidence of this lost status is seen in v. 14 where YHWH says he would make Jerusalem, לְחֶרֶבָה וּלְחֶרֶבָה, “into a ruin and a reproach” among the nations which surround her. Verse 15 expands on this with the announcement that Jerusalem would be a חֶרֶפָה, “disgrace,” a גְּדִיפָה, “taunt,” and מוֹטָר, “an object lesson,” and a מִשְׁמָה, “horror” to the surrounding nations. Block pertinently observes:

The physical effects of Yahweh’s wrath will be difficult enough, but the social and psychological impact of Yahweh’s *furiosus chastisements* (tḥkēḥlṭ h□m>) will be even more painful. Instead of the people receiving Yahweh’s covenant blessings and Israel being exalted among the nations (see Deut. 28:1-14, esp. vv. 1, 13), Jerusalem, the capital city of the people consecrated to Yahweh, will lie in ruins. She who had been elevated for praise, for fame, and for honor (Deut 26:19) will become the butt of the most vicious derision.⁴⁴

YHWH’s justice and righteousness is hereby revealed by being no respecter of persons.

⁴¹ Block characterizes this expression “a thunderclap.” Block, *Ezekiel 1-24*, 201.

⁴² Hummel, *Ezekiel 1-20*, 182. For other uses of the same formula in Ezekiel see Ezek 13:8, 20; 21:8 [21:3]; 26:3; 28:22; 29:3, 10; 30:22; 34:10; 35:3; 36:9; 38:3; 39:1.

⁴³ Duguid, *Ezekiel*, 98.

⁴⁴ Block, *Ezekiel 1-24*, 212.

He will not spare even his own people if they persist in sinful ways. It was by YHWH's action that Jerusalem came to be. Yet as a result of its disobedience YHWH turned against her and threatened covenant curses upon her. This is the same fate that will befall all who turn their backs on YHWH and neglect to follow the dictates of his will.⁴⁵

Divine Involvement in the Proceedings

The other aspect that shows YHWH's justice and righteousness is his personal involvement in the judicial proceedings. He does not relegate the judicial proceedings to some other being. Judgment belongs to him. He is the initiator who thoroughly executes judgment to the end. He is indeed the judge. He determines whom to judge, what accusations to bring against the accused, and ascertains what punishment fits the crime. He personally executes judgment not only to emphasize the seriousness of their disobedience, but to clearly present his case so that when the verdict is finally announced it will be obvious that the punishment fits the crime.

The Openness of the Proceedings

YHWH's justice in judgment against Israel is further demonstrated by the openness with which the court proceedings are carried out. As a way of enhancing the justice and righteousness of YHWH, these judicial actions are conducted, as it were, in a public square.⁴⁶ His judgments are an open book into which others can gaze and see how just and fair he deals with the disobedient. For others to watch and witness these judicial

⁴⁵ For discussion on this reversal of status see Hummel, *Ezekiel 1-20*, 186.

⁴⁶ Galambush, *Jerusalem in the Book of Ezekiel*, 90.

proceedings, they must be strategically situated in relation to the accused. Jerusalem's proximity to other nations is quite evident. First, YHWH has set her *בְּתוֹךְ הַגּוֹיִם*, "in the middle of the nations" (Ezek 5:5). Second, and by implication, nations/countries surround her (Ezek 5:5). The repeated use of the adverb *סָבִיב*, "all around, on all sides, surrounding," highlights Israel's geographical location vis-à-vis other nations (Ezek 5:5, 6, 7, 14, 15). By divine design, Israel is purposefully and strategically situated in relation to other nations. Whatever happens to Israel will therefore be known by these nations.

Having established the strategic position of Israel with respect to the other nations, let us now return to Ezek 5:8, where YHWH declares that the legal proceedings will take place *לְעֵינֵי הַגּוֹיִם*, "in the sight of the nations" (Ezek 5:8).⁴⁷ This concept is repeated as YHWH vows to make Israel into a ruin and a reproach among the nations that are around her. He says this will not be done secretly. It will be open to the public and will be *לְעֵינֵי כָל־עוֹבֵר*, "in the sight of all the ones passing by" (v. 14). Since Jerusalem had been placed in the center of the nations and they had seen how YHWH had blessed her, it is therefore necessary that her punishment be done in the public square so that other nations can know that any disobedience to YHWH's will is not to be taken lightly.⁴⁸ But this is also intended to demonstrate his justice and righteousness (Jer 12:1).

Since these nations surround Israel and YHWH's judgments are conducted before their eyes it would be logical to conclude, like Reventlow, that they are witnesses to these

⁴⁷ For other occurrences of this expression see Ezek 20:9, 14, 22, 41; 22:16; 28:25; 38:23; 39:27. See also Lev 26:45 where YHWH uses this same construction to remind the Israelites of their redemption from Egypt that was done "in the eyes of the nations."

⁴⁸ Block, *Ezekiel 1-24*, 212; Hummel, *Ezekiel 1-20*, 180.

proceedings.⁴⁹ Reventlow, however, considers these witnesses to be active participants in the legal proceedings and would be able to make their own conclusions based on the substance of the case.⁵⁰ Joyce on the other hand argues that the texts in which YHWH's judgments are to be conducted before the nations give no "indication of any positive interest in their response for its own sake."⁵¹ He therefore concludes that any mention of the nations as witnesses under these circumstances is "essentially rhetorical."⁵² However, with the strong textual emphasis that Israel is surrounded by the nations and that judgments are done before their eyes, I agree with Reventlow that these nations are in essence active witnesses in YHWH's framework and parameter of justice against Israel.

It is from such a vantage point as eyewitnesses that the sons of Ammon could shout "Aha!" at the desecration of the sanctuary, the devastation of the land of Israel, and at the house of Judah when they went into exile (Ezek 25:3). It is as witnesses that they could clap their hands and stamp their feet and greatly rejoice at the calamities that had befallen Israel (Ezek 25:6).⁵³ Hummel observes that "Ammon's glee was virtually

⁴⁹ H. Graf Reventlow, "Die Volker als Jahwes Zeugen bei Ezechiel" ZAW 71 (1959): 35, 36.

⁵⁰ As summarized in Joyce, *Divine Initiative*, 96.

⁵¹ Ibid., 97. Joyce appears to contradict himself when in conclusion of his discussion on the expression, "in the sight of the nations," he cites the recognition formula in Ezek 38:23, in which YHWH elicits a response of his knowledge as he reveals himself in the eyes of many nations.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ For discussion on the political upheavals between Israel and the Ammonites with whom they had a common ancestry (Gen 19:36-38) see Hummel, *Ezekiel 21-48*, 787-89. See also Zeph 2:8-9 where Ammon is condemned for reviling over the Israelites and gloating over their territory.

explicit applause that YHWH's own salvific purposes seemed to have been thwarted.”⁵⁴

It is as an onlooker to Judah's devastation as a result of YHWH's judgment that Moab would be able to say, “Look, the house of Judah is just like other nations” (Ezek 25:8).⁵⁵

YHWH does not want to be accused of any miscarriage of justice, and as such, he makes other nations privy to his judicial proceedings against Israel. These nations know Israel, and some of them are directly related to Israel. Some of them have even enticed Israel to their pagan ways of life which are opposed to YHWH's demands. When they witness YHWH's dealings with Israel, it will be clear to them that YHWH is justified in punishing Israel. This would also serve as a warning to those who would be tempted to rebel against him.

YHWH's Justice and Righteousness in Ezekiel 1-24

The analysis in the last section showed that one of the functions of judgment in Ezek 5:5-17 is to demonstrate the justice and righteousness of YHWH. We now turn our attention to explore Ezek 1-24 for evidence of functions of judgment that demonstrate YHWH's justice and righteousness. This investigation is designed to show that judgment in Ezek 5:5-17 is part of the larger judicial framework within Ezek 1-24.⁵⁶ William Shea, for example, characterizes the judicial procedures in Ezek 1-10 as the “investigative

⁵⁴ Hummel, *Ezekiel 21-48*, 788-89.

⁵⁵ See Gen 19:36-38 for the common ancestry of Ammon and Moab. For the rivalry and political conflicts that prevailed between Israel and Moab see 2 Kgs 3:1-27. It is interesting that the Bible records Israel's victory over Moab. However in the Moabite stone King Mesha of Moab prides himself on having defeated Israel and taken its cities. “The Moabite Stone,” translated by W. F. Albright (*ANET*, 320-21).

⁵⁶ This reinforces the argument that Ezek 5:5-17 is part of YHWH's judgment scheme.

Judgment of Judah,” in which YHWH sets residence in the temple to specifically judge Israel.⁵⁷ Davidson has also demonstrated that Ezek 1-11 is a complete literary unit, demonstrating YHWH’s movement to the temple “for judgment and away from the temple as His work of judgment is complete.”⁵⁸ Otherwise, chs. 12-23 comprise oracles of judgment, and ch. 24 concludes the periscope with the news of the besieged city (v. 2).

The justice and righteousness of YHWH in his judgments against the people of Israel can be demonstrated from almost every chapter of Ezek 1-24. Israel has been unfaithful to YHWH and must now be subjected to a rigorous process of judicial scrutiny by the God whose ways they have abandoned. They must stand before the divine bar of justice and receive the just and deserved recompense for their actions. A number of passages that are thought to contribute directly to this inquiry have been selected to demonstrate the place and function of judgment within Ezek 1-24.

Ezekiel 6

One of the explicit explanations of the function of judgment as a demonstration of YHWH’s justice and righteousness is in Ezek 6. Table 4 provides a summary of the correspondence between crime, punishment, and function of judgment in Ezek 6. In this chapter, YHWH directs his assault on the cultic places: high places, altars, incense stands (Ezek 6:3, 4, 6). The idolaters are not spared either (Ezek 6:4, 5, 7). They must answer

⁵⁷ William H. Shea, "The Investigative Judgment of Judah: Ezekiel 1-10," in *The Sanctuary and the Atonement: Biblical, Historical, and Theological Studies* (ed. A. V. Wallenkampf and W. R. Leshner; Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald, 1981), 283-91.

⁵⁸ Richard M. Davidson, "The Chiastic Literary Structure of the Book of Ezekiel," 77. He also suggests that chs. 1-10 comprise YHWH’s judicial work of investigation focusing on his chosen people. Davidson, "In Confirmation of the Sanctuary Message," 97.

Table 4. Crime, punishment, and function of judgment in Ezekiel 6

Accusation	Punishment	Function
<p>6:9 Israelites had adulterous hearts which turned away from YHWH and eyes which played the harlot after their idols.</p> <p>6:11 Because of all the evil abominations of the house of Israel.</p>	<p>6:3 I am going to bring a sword on you.</p> <p>I will destroy your high places.</p> <p>6:4 Your altars will become desolate and your incense altars will be smashed.</p> <p>6:4, 5 I will make your slain fall in front of your idols.</p> <p>6:5 I will lay the dead bodies of the sons of Israel in front of their idols.</p> <p>I will scatter your bones around your altars.</p> <p>6:6 Cities will become waste.</p> <p>The high places will become desolate, your altars will become waste and desolate.</p> <p>Your idols will be broken and brought to an end.</p> <p>Your incense altars will be cut down, and your works will be blotted out.</p> <p>6:11, 12 they will fall by the sword, famine and plague.</p> <p>6:14 I will stretch out my hand against them and make the land more desolate and waste.</p>	<p>6:7 You will know that I am the Lord.</p> <p>6:9 Those of you who escape shall <i>remember me among the nations</i> where they are carried captive, <i>they will loathe themselves</i> in their own sight for the evils which they have committed, for all their abominations.</p> <p><i>I have been hurt by their adulterous hearts which have turned away from me and their eyes which played the harlot after their idols.</i></p> <p>6:10 <i>Then they will know that I am the Lord; I have not said in vain that I would bring disaster on them.</i></p> <p>6:13 <i>You will know that I am the Lord, when their slain are among their idols around their altars, on every high hill, on all the tops of the mountains, and under every green tree and every leafy oak.</i></p>

for their actions. So that people may not think that he is acting capriciously, YHWH takes it upon himself to justify his actions. He therefore says, “Not for nothing (לֹא אֶל־הַנֵּם) have I spoken to do to them this evil” (Ezek 6:10, YLT). The use of הַנֵּם here indicates that YHWH does not act without cause. The cultic sins practiced by the Israelites have incensed him (Ezek 6:9) and, because of that, he must act decisively.

The actions YHWH takes in this passage are targeted. They are aimed at achieving three major goals. The first thing is to lead to recognition of YHWH (vv. 7, 10, 13). This assault on the idols and their worshipers should be an object lesson for the Israelites to recognize the superiority of YHWH over the idols. He is still the supreme and sovereign God of Israel who demands their unreserved allegiance.

Second, YHWH hopes that this judgment will elicit within the exiles what I could call “reflective theodicy.” YHWH has not completely given up on Israel. It is his hope that while they are in captivity they will be able to reflect on the initial relationship they had with him, hence the construction, וְזָכְרוּ פְּלִיטֵיכֶם אוֹתִי, “the ones who escape will remember me” (v. 9). They need to reflect on the past. It is as they recall their past covenantal relationship that they will have a proper perspective for the future.⁵⁹

Third, this recollection of the past must put into account the “emotional” toll their actions have had on YHWH. YHWH says they need to remember “how I was crushed by their wanton heart that turned away from me, and their wanton eyes that turned after their idols” (v. 9).⁶⁰ The verb שָׁבַר, “break,” in the *nip'al* form as used here has the connotation

⁵⁹ Cooper, *Ezekiel*, 109.

⁶⁰ For other references where YHWH is depicted as grieving see Ps 78:40; Isa 63:10; Mic 6:3.

of being grieved, broken, crushed. Contrary to Lapsey's argument that this divine disposition is not in consonant with Ezekiel's view and therefore should be rendered "I have broken their whoring heart,"⁶¹ YHWH openly exposes his emotional turmoil. He allows himself to be vulnerable and resorts to anthropomorphic language to portray the hurt he is experiencing by being dumped by his estranged partner.⁶²

YHWH here expresses his innermost feelings and the pain caused by Israel's unfaithfulness. He is heartbroken at the estranged relationship and hopes that Israel will *קִיט*, "loath, abhor," themselves⁶³ for the evils they have done and be willing to accept his offer of a reestablishment of the relationship with him. Blenkinsopp suggests this could be accomplished through a process that begins with remembering, then a loathing of oneself and culminating in the knowledge of God.⁶⁴ Rainer Albertz observes that such a change in disposition appears to have taken root during the Babylonian captivity as the exiles developed liturgies of lament in which they recognized YHWH's hand in their suffering, acknowledged their guilt, and pleaded for forgiveness and restoration.⁶⁵

⁶¹ Jacqueline E. Lapsey, "Shame and Self-Knowledge: The Positive Role of Shame in Ezekiel's View of the Moral Self," in *The Book of Ezekiel: Theological and Anthropological Perspectives* (ed. M. S. Odell and J. T. Strong; Atlanta, Ga.: Society of Biblical Literature, 2000), 154. For other translations that follow the suggested emendation in BHS *וְשָׂבוּ*, see Samson H. Levey, *The Targum of Ezekiel: Translated, with Critical Introduction, Apparatus and Notes* (Collegeville, Minn.: The Liturgical Press, 1990), 30.

⁶² Hummel observes that "God was (anthropopathically) 'heartbroken' at their prostitution." Hummel, *Ezekiel 1-20*, 203.

⁶³ See Ezek 20:43 and 36:31 where the same verb is used. However in both of these cases the Israelites are to remember their evil ways, while in Ezek 6:9 they are to remember YHWH.

⁶⁴ Blenkinsopp, *Ezekiel*, 42.

⁶⁵ Rainer Albertz, "Religion in Israel During and After the Exile," in *The Biblical World* (ed. J. Barton; New York: Routledge, 2002), 2:102-103.

Ezekiel 7

YHWH's justice in punishing Israel is again seen in the case he presents in Ezek 7 with strong indictment language. Table 5 demonstrates this judicial process by presenting the crime, punishment, and function of judgment in Ezek 7. As can be seen in the table, there are sufficient grounds for building a case against Israel. And so YHWH declares, **כִּי יִרְכָּכֶיךָ עָלֶיךָ**, "I will judge you according to your ways" (Ezek 7:3, 8); **וְנָתַתִּי עָלֶיךָ אֶת כָּל־** אֲתָן, "I will punish you for your ways"⁶⁶ (Ezek 7:4, 9);

Table 5. Crime, punishment, and function of judgment in Ezekiel 7

Accusation	Punishment	Function of Punishment
7:3, 8 mention of abominations in these verses	7:3, 8 I will judge you according to your ways and bring all your abominations upon you	7:4 Then you will know that I am the Lord
7:11 Violence has grown into a rod of wickedness	7:4, 9 I will bring your ways upon you	7:9 Then you will know that I am the Lord, the one who smites
7:23 the land is full of bloody crimes and the city is full of violence	7:4, 9 My eye will have no pity . . . nor will I spare you	7:27 And they will know that I am the Lord
	7:14 The sword <i>is</i> without, And the pestilence and the famine within, He who is in a field will die by the sword, and he who is in a city, Famine and pestilence devour him	
	7:27 according to their conduct I will deal with them	

⁶⁶ Block translates this as "I will hold you accountable for your conduct." *Ezekiel 1-24*, 247. For discussion on the formulation "I will judge you according to your ways," see Wong, *The Idea of Retribution in the Book of Ezekiel*, 239-42.

תִּעֲבֹתֶיךָ, “I will punish you according to your abominations” (Ezek 7:3, 8). There is emphasis here on the behavior of the Israelites. These behaviors must be connected to the violence (vv. 3, 8), idolatry (v. 11), and bloody crimes (v. 23). The use of the first-person pronoun “I” underscores YHWH’s personal involvement in the punishment. Notice the use of נָתַן, “give, set, put,” in vv. 3, 4, 8, 9 plus the preposition לְ and the singular suffix ךְּ. The verb נָתַן that should be used to dispense something valuable is here employed to convey YHWH’s hostility towards Israel. What YHWH presents to the Israelites is retribution and not any ordinary or pleasant gift.

Ezekiel 9

Another demonstration of YHWH’s justice and righteousness in the punishment of the wicked is in Ezek 9.⁶⁷ Two things stand out in this text: first, the distinction YHWH makes between the idolaters and those who have maintained their loyalty by shunning idolatry.⁶⁸ Because of his justice, he is not going to indiscriminately mete out punishment. The guilty must not be relegated to the same fate as the wicked. A distinction must be made between those who have been sympathetic to idolatrous practices and those who “sigh and groan” because of the religious excesses and abuses that have been going on in Jerusalem (Ezek 9:4).⁶⁹ It is worth noting that the two verbs

⁶⁷ Block, *Ezekiel 1-24*, 310.

⁶⁸ There is an allusion here in the story of the Exodus when the Israelites were instructed to sprinkle blood on the two doorposts and the lintel of their houses so they could be spared destruction from the avenging angel (Exod 12:1-28).

⁶⁹ This should not in any way negate Ezek 21:8 where the sword is depicted as working indiscriminately, since in that text, YHWH is using a “shock and awe” method to awaken the Israelites from their spiritual stupor/lethargy.

used here נַחֵם, “groan, moan, sigh,” and כִּתֹּב, “groan, sigh,” to describe the action of the faithful are in the *nip'al* participle form. This is an indication of these people’s constant and ongoing concern for the irreligious practices of their time. They must be spared the ax of judgment because of their fidelity to YHWH. YHWH therefore instructs the messenger clothed in linen to put a distinguishing כֶּתֶב, “mark, stamp, sign,” on these people so they are not touched by the executioners. This כֶּתֶב can therefore be designated the judicial differentiating mark of YHWH.

Second, YHWH gives the basis for this harsh punishment: “The guilt of the house of Israel and Judah is exceedingly great; the land is full of bloodshed and the city full of perversity” (Ezek 9:9). Lest someone feel that his action is arbitrary and inconsistent with his character, he gives justification for this seemingly brutal and senseless act. He does not want anybody, including his own prophet, to be left in the dark regarding his punitive actions. People must be shown the consequences of the wrong choices they make. Hopefully this can help them make informed decisions to avoid the divine punitive actions. By taking these two measures, making a distinction between the idolaters and the faithful, and by clearly stating his case for the indictment, we can see that YHWH is acting in ways that demonstrate that he is a God of justice.

Ezekiel 14

Another passage that reveals YHWH’s justice is Ezek 14:12-23. The passage has a backdrop of covenant curses and echoes the punishments threatened in Ezek 5:5-17. Six features of the passage are worth considering to ascertain how YHWH’s justice fits within its framework. First is the hypothetical declaration that the land is involved in

some kind of sin. The construction expressing this sin is לְמַעַל-מַעַל, “to trespass a trespass,” a cognitive accusative form (v. 13) emphasizing the nature of their sin.⁷⁰

Second, Jerusalem is identified as the actual culprit (v. 21). Third, there is an announcement of the calamities that will overrun this city: sword, famine, wild animals, and pestilence, to decimate both humans and animals (v. 21). Fourth, the devastation of this city will not be total, since a יֵתֶר, “remnant,” will be left. This remnant will go into exile (v. 22). Fifth, and most surprising, is the nature of the remnant. They are not different from the people who fell to the sword, famine, wild animals, and pestilence. Their ways (דִּרְכָם) and their deeds (עֲלִילוֹתָם)⁷¹ testify against them. The same words דִּרְךְ and עֲלִילָה are paired in Ezek 20:43. Their usage in Ezek 20:44, however, gives further insight into the nature of the “ways” and “deeds” of the Israelites. They are described as כְּדִרְכֵיכֶם הָרָעִים וְכַעֲלִילוֹתֵיכֶם הַנִּשְׁחָתוֹת, “your wicked ways and your corrupted deeds.” It is not without cause that Block characterizes them as an “unspiritual remnant.”⁷² Sixth, because of their wicked ways and corrupted deeds, YHWH will be vindicated:

When you see their ways and their deeds, you will be consoled for the evil that I have brought upon Jerusalem, for all that I have brought upon it. They shall console you, when you see their ways and their deeds; and you shall know that it was not without cause that I did all that I have done in it, says the Lord God. (Ezek 14:22, 23)

Again YHWH uses the expression we met in Ezek 6:10, לֹא הָיָה, “not for nothing,” to justify his destructive actions on Jerusalem. There was a good reason for

⁷⁰ For similar usages in Ezekiel see 15:8; 17:20; 18:24; 20:27; 39:26.

⁷¹ For other passages featuring the pair דִּרְךְ, “conduct,” and עֲלִילָה, “deed, action, wantonness,” see Ezek 20:43, 44; 24:14; 36:17, 19.

⁷² Block, *Ezekiel 1-24*, 451.

such an unprecedented action. The testimony from the lives of the last group of exiles will make the reason behind this action self-explanatory. Rather than being humbled by the events that transpired in the homeland and being grateful to YHWH for sparing their lives, they will display their true sinful habits. They will act in such a manner that everyone who sees them will wonder why they were spared.⁷³ This would show God's mercy, his undeserved grace.

One thing is clear, however. They were intentionally spared. How could the people who have already been in exile excuse YHWH for the destruction of the Jerusalem Temple? How could they excuse him for the devastation that overtook Jerusalem, their beloved city? YHWH needs to explain the reasons behind the many lives that have been lost during the Babylonian invasion. He needs to explain why he allowed their political leaders, their divinely instituted kingship, to be overpowered and decimated by a heathen nation. In anticipation of these and other unspoken questions and inquiries, YHWH spared this undeserving, reckless remnant to be what I could call a "theodicy specimen in the theatre of divine justice." These exiles are specimens in the lab of theodicy to prove to their fellow exiles, the justice and righteousness of YHWH. As the exiles watch the behavior of these remnants they will be able to conclude that YHWH is just in all his undertakings. YHWH can thus rest his case because he has truly demonstrated his justice in the judgments over Jerusalem and Judah. And as Block has succinctly observed, "When all the evidence is in, his people will recognize that he does

⁷³ Duguid, *Ezekiel*, 195.

not operate arbitrarily or without cause. His actions are always according to his immutable principle of justice and righteousness.”⁷⁴

Ezekiel 16

Echoes of YHWH’s justice are also evident in the way he metes out punishment in Ezek 16.⁷⁵ Table 6 shows some of the harsh judgments unfaithful Israel has to endure at the hands of YHWH through other nations, whom he uses as his instruments. Ezekiel 16 begins by demonstrating YHWH’s benevolence (Ezek 16:1-14) to Judah. This is in contrast to Judah’s ungratefulness as she dabbles with idolatry, child sacrifice, prostitution, and liaisons with other countries (Ezek 16:15-43).⁷⁶ Her sinfulness exceeds that of her sister, Samaria (Ezek 16:44-58). The level of Judah’s abominable actions invites YHWH’s harsh judgments (Ezek 16:35-43), punishments that have led many in the scholarly circles to accuse him of insensitivity and physical and sexual abuse.⁷⁷

Justification for YHWH’s judgment on Judah is found in two verses in this passage. First, in v. 43: “Because you have not remembered the days of your youth, but have enraged me with all these things; therefore, I have returned your deeds upon your head, says the Lord God. Have you not committed lewdness beyond all your

⁷⁴ Block, *Ezekiel 1-24*, 453.

⁷⁵ Block recognizes Ezek 16 as comprising the covenant lawsuit that is also found in Ezek 20, 22, and 23. Block, *Ezekiel 1-24*, 461.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 521.

⁷⁷ See for example, Carroll, “Whorusalamin,” 77; Day, “Rhetoric and Domestic Violence in Ezekiel 16”; Shields, “Multiple Exposures: Body Rhetoric and Gender Characterization in Ezekiel 16”; Magdalene, “Ancient Near Eastern Treaty-Curses and the Ultimate Texts of Terror.”

Table 6. YHWH and the proxies in the punishment of the זָנוֹת in Ezekiel 16

Accusation	Punishment by YHWH	Punishment by YHWH's Proxies
<p>16:15 You trusted in your beauty, and played the whore (זָנוֹת)</p> <p>16:15 You lavished your whorings (תְּזִנוּתֶיךָ) on any passer-by</p> <p>16:16 You took some of your garments . . . and on them played the whore (זָנוֹת)</p> <p>16:17 You also took your beautiful jewels of my gold and my silver that I had given you . . . and with them played the whore (זָנוֹת)</p> <p>16:25 At the head of every street you built your lofty place . . . offering yourself to every passer-by, and multiplying your whoring (תְּזִנוּתֶיךָ)</p> <p>16:26 You played the whore (זָנוֹת) with the Egyptians, your lustful neighbors, multiplying your whoring, to provoke me to anger</p> <p>16:28 You played (זָנוֹת) the whore with the Assyrians, because you were insatiable; you played the whore (זָנוֹת) with them, and still you were not satisfied</p> <p>16:29 You multiplied your whoring (תְּזִנוּתֶיךָ) with Chaldea</p> <p>16:36 Because your lust was poured out and your nakedness uncovered in your whoring with your lovers, and because of all your abominable idols, and because of the blood of your children that you gave to them</p>	<p>16:37 I will gather all your lovers with whom you took pleasure . . . I will gather them against you from all around. I will uncover your nakedness to them, so that they may see all your nakedness</p> <p>16:38 I will judge you as women who commit adultery and shed blood are judged, and bring blood upon you in wrath and jealousy</p> <p>16:39 I will deliver you into their hands</p> <p>16:43 <i>I have returned your deeds upon your head</i></p> <p>16:41 I will stop you from playing the whore</p> <p>16:58 You must bear the penalty of your lewdness and your abominations</p> <p>16:59 <i>I will deal with you as you have done, you who have despised the oath, breaking the covenant</i></p>	<p>16:37 (the lovers) they will see all your nakedness</p> <p>16:39 They shall throw down your platform and break down your lofty places</p> <p>16:39 They shall strip you of your clothes and take your beautiful objects and leave you naked and bare</p> <p>16:40 They shall bring up a mob against you, and they shall stone you and cut you to pieces with their swords</p> <p>16:41 They shall burn your houses and execute judgments on you in the sight of many women</p>

abominations?” Second, v. 59 also provides the theodicy answer to the troubling questions regarding YHWH’s actions in this passage: “I will deal with you as you have done, you who have despised (בְּזִיתָ) the oath, breaking (לָקַפְרָה) the covenant.” These are two serious accusations against Israel. Commenting on Israel’s covenant unfaithfulness and why Ezekiel chose to portray it as prostitution, Block observes:

Ezekiel’s radical development of the theme was driven by theodicy. The total destruction of ‘the last remnant of Israel’ that he has been incessantly preaching could be justified only as a response to some enormous evil. The purpose of this oracle is to describe that sin in the most graphic terms, so that when the judgment falls, all who witness it will recognize the justice of God.⁷⁸

YHWH stands exonerated and justified as the sinful actions of Israel are exposed. She has ignored YHWH’s acts of mercy and broken YHWH’s covenant with impunity. Now she has to suffer the consequences of that choice.

The verb בְּזִיתָ used to describe their response to the oath implies showing contempt for something and regarding it as insignificant. What they are despising is the אֱלֹהִים, “oath.” אֱלֹהִים is a binding agreement one enters into knowing that failure to fulfill its requirements results in divine penalty. These penalties involve curses of various kinds.⁷⁹ The verb פָּרַר, “break, nullify,” is commonly used of covenant violations.⁸⁰ YHWH had made a covenant with Israel in her youth (v. 60). Now the terms of this covenant have been ruptured because of Israel’s dereliction of her obligations to the covenant partner. These two actions depict Israel as a nation that has severed her ties with YHWH and has

⁷⁸ Block, *Ezekiel 1-24*, 466.

⁷⁹ C. A. Keller, אֱלֹהִים, *TLOT* 1:115.

⁸⁰ M. Weinfeld, בָּרִית, *NIDOTTE* 2:253-79.

invited covenant curses upon her. YHWH's judgments are not haphazardly dished out. They come about as a result of choices Israel has made against the will of YHWH.

Israel has abandoned YHWH's ways and has chosen to align herself with other nations and is now set to reap the consequences of her actions. As we consider what YHWH has done and the response from unfaithful Judah, YHWH stands justified in his judgment.⁸¹ He cannot be blamed for punishing without cause. It is the moment of truth for the people of Judah. YHWH is treating them as they deserve by returning their deeds upon their heads (v. 43).

Ezekiel 18

One of the passages that show the tension between the merciful nature of God and the way he exercises his justice is Ezek 18. Here there are strong indications of popular questionings of the justice and righteousness of YHWH, a challenge which he readily takes up and sets the record straight by offering counter-arguments. A number of scholars who have studied this passage have approached it from the perspective of individual responsibility,⁸² but there are many others today who have abandoned this position.⁸³ I find that the passage also addresses the theodicy question of the justice of God.⁸⁴

⁸¹ Block, *Ezekiel 1-24*, 503.

⁸² Eichrodt, *Ezekiel*, 234-249; Joyce, "Ezekiel and Individual Responsibility," 317-21.

⁸³ Zimmerli, *Ezekiel 1*, 391-416; Greenberg, *Ezekiel 1-20*, 325-47; Block, *Ezekiel 1-24*, 553-90; Joyce, "Ezekiel and Individual Responsibility," 317-21; idem, *Divine Initiative*, 35-60; Mein, *Ezekiel and the Ethics of Exile*, 177-213; Gordon H. Matties, *Ezekiel 18 and the Rhetoric of Moral Discourse* (SBLDS 126; Atlanta, Ga.: Scholars, 1990); Kathryn P. Darr, "Proverb Performance and Transgenerational Retribution in Ezekiel 18," in *Ezekiel's Hierarchical World* (Atlanta, Ga.: Society of Biblical Literature, 2004), 199-223.

⁸⁴ Cooper, *Ezekiel*, 186-87; Block, *Ezekiel 1-24*, 590.

Therefore, I suggest that one of the purposes of YHWH's judicial actions against Israel in Ezek 18 is to demonstrate that he is a God of justice and righteousness. This is done by examining the divine responses to the challenges presented by some of the popular sayings⁸⁵ in Ezek 18:2, 25, 29.⁸⁶ The gist of these sayings is to cast doubt on the justice and righteousness of YHWH. He must therefore take the platform to argue his case and prove that the Israelites' portrayal of his ways and person is but a caricature.

The first challenge to YHWH's justice in Ezek 18:2 is in the form of a well crafted, thought out and choreographed common proverb⁸⁷ pertaining to the 'land of Israel':⁸⁸ "Parents eat sour grapes and the children's teeth are set on edge."⁸⁹ The

⁸⁵ For discussion on popular sayings and other citations in Ezekiel see Douglas R. Clark, "The Citations in the Book of Ezekiel: An Investigation into Method, Audience, and Message" (Ph.D. diss., Vanderbilt University, 1984); Erika Moore, "A Rhetorical Analysis of the Use of Popular Sayings in the Book of Ezekiel" (Ph.D. diss., Westminster Theological Seminary, 2003).

⁸⁶ For a similar saying or proverb see Ezek 33:17 and 20.

⁸⁷ Darr proposes that Ezek 18:2 exhibits sufficient distinctive elements associated with popular sayings to validate its categorization as a proverb. Darr, "Proverb Performance and Transgenerational Retribution in Ezekiel 18," 203. It is interesting to note that Herbert does not find anything in "every day experience" to justify the saying in Ezek 18:2. He therefore concludes that what we have in Ezek 18:2 is "not a popular proverb, but a word which suggests condemnation of the religion of which the prophet is the exponent." Arthur S. Herbert, "The 'Parable' (*Māšāl*) in the Old Testament," *SJT* 7 (1954): 180-96.

⁸⁸ For discussion on this phrase see Sergio S. Scatolini, "עַל-אַדְמַת יִשְׂרָאֵל—*al-'admat yišra'el*—in Ezek 12:22, 18:2 and 33:24," *ETL* 79 (2003): 403-22; Johan Lust, "The Sour Grapes: Ezekiel 18," in *Scripture in Transition: Essays on Septuagint, Hebrew Bible, and Dead Sea Scrolls in Honour of Raija Sollamo* (ed. A. Voitila and J. Jokiranta; Boston, Mass.: Brill, 2008), 227-31.

⁸⁹ See similar analogies in Jer 31:29 and Lam 5:7. For discussion of this saying in Jeremiah see Rodney R. Hutton, "Are the Parents Still Eating Sour Grapes? Jeremiah's Use of the *Masal* in Contrast to Ezekiel," *CBQ* 71 (2009): 275-85. See also Adrian Graffy, *A Prophet Confronts His People: The Disputation Speech in the Prophets* (Analecta Biblica 104; Rome: Biblical Institute, 1984), 58-64.

argument conveyed by this proverb has to do with theodicy concerning the question uppermost in the minds of the exiles:⁹⁰ Why should they suffer the covenant curses for the covenant violations of their ancestors?⁹¹ Hals observes that this proverb reflected the disillusionment of the Israelites, who, because of their experience, were bent on giving up on God.⁹² Zimmerli contends that the proverb was fundamentally a “mocking at the divine ‘righteousness’ which lays the guilt of the fathers upon the children.”⁹³ Eichrodt argues that this proverb was such an affront to YHWH that, in essence, it challenged his

⁹⁰ In his article “The Sour Grapes: Ezekiel 18,” Lust vehemently discounts the argument that the proverb in Ezek 18:2 was spoken by the exiles. He suggests that those who could have spoken such a proverb are the Israelites who were still in Judah who must have seen the exilic situation as a just punishment. Lust, “The Sour Grapes: Ezekiel 18,” 223-37.

⁹¹ It is interesting to note here the prevalent practice of *Trokosi* among some communities in Ghana. Under the principle of generational curses, the custom involves subjecting young girls to a perpetual life of slavery to the shrine priests as propitiation for the sins their ancestors committed against the gods. The Pentecostal Church in Ghana with their belief in ‘deliverance and healing’ has spearheaded the response to this dehumanizing and enslaving practice. They have the conviction that God has the power to terminate the consequences of curses and evil that have held sway on people for generations. For discussion see J. Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu, “Of ‘Sour Grapes’ and ‘Children’s Teeth’: Inherited Guilt, Human Rights and Processes of Restoration in Ghanaian Pentecostalism,” *Exchange* 33 (2004): 334-53. In his *African Charismatics*, Asamoah-Gyadu notes that the extent to which those in charge of deliverance and healing ministries are willing to go “in order to deal with misfortune and calamity . . . betrays a struggle to come to terms with theodicy.” J. Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu, *African Charismatics: Current Developments within Independent Indigenous Pentecostalism in Ghana* (Boston, Mass.: Brill, 2005), 189. See also Emmanuel K. Quashigah, “Religious Freedom and Vestal Virgins: The ‘Trokosi’ Practice in Ghana,” *The African Journal of International and Comparative Law* 10 (1998): 193-215; Dorothy B. Akoto, “Women and Health and the ‘Trokosi’ Practice in Ghana: An Issue of Women’s and Children’s Rights in 2 Kings 4:1-7,” in *African Women, Religion, and Health: Essays in Honor of Mercy Amba Ewudziwa Oduyoye* (ed. Isabel A. Phiri and S. Nadar; Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 2006), 96-110. Birgit Meyer discusses various forms of deliverance, including deliverance from the sins of the ancestors. Birgit Meyer, “‘Make a Complete Break with the Past’: Memory and Post-Colonial Modernity in Ghanaian Pentecostal Discourse,” *JRA* 28 (1998): 316-49.

⁹² Hals, *Ezekiel*, 126.

⁹³ Zimmerli, *Ezekiel 1-24*, 378.

righteous retributive justice.⁹⁴ Paul Joyce, like Zimmerli and Eichrodt, argues that the proverb was aimed at questioning the fairness of YHWH's justice.⁹⁵

Block does not consider Ezek 18:2 as having any correlation to theodicy and rejects any theodicean connection this text may have on several grounds:⁹⁶ (1) because of the secular nature of the proverb and its deterministic nature, (2) that the proverb is not about blaming the past generation for the ills that befall the present generation, but rather it is aimed at asserting that "personality traits are passed on from one generation to another," (3) the veiled nature of the proverb, and (4) the seeming contradiction between v. 2 and v. 9. I agree with Hutton, who rebuts Block's arguments by contending that "regardless of whether the saying is itself a 'secular' rather than a 'theological' statement, it certainly was used to construct an argument that seeks a solution to the theodicy created by the crisis of exile."⁹⁷

By an oath, YHWH abolishes this proverb by declaring that it will no longer be circulated, since everyone must bear responsibility for their own sins: "Only the person who sins shall die" (Ezek 18:3). Then, as an astute defendant, YHWH proceeds to carefully and convincingly build his case, using three illustrations involving a righteous

⁹⁴ Eichrodt, *Ezekiel*, 234.

⁹⁵ Joyce, *Divine Initiative*, 45.

⁹⁶ Block, *Ezekiel 1-24*, 560-561.

⁹⁷ Rodney R. Hutton, "Are the Parents Still Eating Sour Grapes?" 278 n. 7. I also concur with Hummel who argues that the traditional interpretation that connects this passage to theodicy cannot be wholly dismissed. Hummel, *Ezekiel 1-20*, 536. See also Darr, "Proverb Performance and Transgenerational Retribution in Ezekiel 18," 211-12.

person, his wicked son, and the righteous grandson (Ezek 18:5-18).⁹⁸ The description of the righteous person reveals five cardinal qualities that set him apart from the others.

First, he has cultic and ritual rectitude: “He does not eat upon the mountains or lift up his eyes to the idols of the house of Israel” and observes YHWH’s statutes and ordinances (vv. 6, 8). The second quality is the moral rectitude:⁹⁹ “He does not defile his neighbor’s wife or approach a woman during her menstrual period” (v. 6). The third quality inherent in this person is social rectitude: “He gives his bread to the hungry and covers the naked with a garment” (v. 7). Fourth, he also manifests social/ethical rectitude: He “does not oppress anyone, but restores to the debtor his pledge, commits no robbery” and “does not take advance or accrued interest” (vv. 7, 8). Lastly, he displays judicial rectitude: “Executes true justice between contending parties” (v. 8). According to YHWH’s standards of justice, such a person will live. He shall not die. The grandson who follows similar principles of decency will also live (vv. 14-17). On the other hand, the son whose actions are contrary to the aforementioned qualities will die (vv. 10-13), for only “the person who sins shall die” (vv. 4, 21).

Judgments carried out by YHWH are selective and targeted. He does not arbitrarily, unjustly, and randomly impose transgenerational punishment upon the people. But those who persist in flouting the moral, social, and religious laws are apt to answer for their actions. Repercussions for such unfaithfulness may be cumulative, transversing one generation after another (Exod 20:5). Roy Gane therefore correctly notes that

⁹⁸ Moore argues that the three hypothetical illustrations “function as a synecdoche for entire generations.” Moore, “A Rhetorical Analysis,” 154.

⁹⁹ Tuell, *Ezekiel*, 109.

“Although it is true that people are punished for their own sins and they can escape punishment by turning from their sins, it is also true that those who continue the rebellion of their ancestors suffer the accumulating consequences of disobedience.”¹⁰⁰ YHWH’s justice and righteousness demand that this be so.

YHWH is next confronted by the challenge of unpredictability and unfairness: אֵלֵינוּ יְהוָה אֵלֵינוּ, “the way of the Lord is not fair” (Ezek 18:25, 29).¹⁰¹ The Hebrew verb used to depict this purported divine injustice is יָחַד, a *nip'al* imperfect verb from the root יָחַד, “just, be right.” This word is used in the Proverbs to affirm that it is YHWH alone who has the capacity to determine the correctness or incorrectness of people’s actions (Prov 16:2; 21:2; 24:12). Swanson observes that the meaning of this word implies “pertaining to meeting a standard, implying moral purity and holiness.”¹⁰² Mommer says that the intransitive *nip'al* could be translated as “be equitable, be right.”¹⁰³ The Israelites are in essence ascribing to YHWH the very opposite of what the word יָחַד stands for and saying his ways are not equitable or right. Questioning these intrinsic divine qualities is tantamount to nothing other than rejecting the justice and righteousness of YHWH.¹⁰⁴

YHWH must correct this false impression. This he does by reversing the accusation and applying the word יָחַד to his accusers. It is actually their ways that are not

¹⁰⁰ Gane, "The End of the Israelite Monarchy," 350.

¹⁰¹ See Ezek 33:17 and 20 where the same charge is leveled against YHWH and how he counters it by saying that his judgments are based on their conduct. Darr observes that Ezekiel intentionally defends “the justice of God’s actions.” Darr, “The Book of Ezekiel,” 1185.

¹⁰² James A. Swanson, “יָחַד,” n.p. *DBLSD* on CD-ROM. Version 3.0 1997, 2001.

¹⁰³ Mommer, “יָחַד,” *TDOT*, 15:663.

¹⁰⁴ Joyce, *Divine Initiative*, 52.

right, that are unfair and unjust (vv. 25, 29). Again YHWH has to present the case in a way that shows that he does not fit the caricature and characterization of the Israelites. He therefore sets out to clarify the issues of judgment so that people may understand that his judgments upon sinners are not arbitrary and to underline the point that his primary desire is to have everyone saved (Ezek 18:26-28, 30-32). This point is highlighted by the invitation to repentance (vv. 27, 32),¹⁰⁵ and the subsequent spiritual renewal by receiving a new heart and a new spirit (vv. 31). This shows not only the character of YHWH, but the positive aspect of the covenant lawsuit, whereby those who have been indicted are given a second chance if they are willing to repent (Mic 7:9).¹⁰⁶

To those who have accused him of being unfair and “(mis) administration of justice”¹⁰⁷ YHWH now stuns them by his declaration that he has no pleasure in the death of anybody (Ezek 18:32). Because of YHWH’s disinterest in the death of anyone, Hummel is therefore right in saying that “he is not only just and fair, but merciful and gracious.”¹⁰⁸ YHWH’s justice and righteousness is therefore settled.

Ezekiel 20

YHWH’s justice and righteousness is further demonstrated in his dealings with the Israelite elders in Ezek 20. The chapter begins by making it clear that the addressees are under condemnation as they come in contact with YHWH. Their lives have not been

¹⁰⁵ Note the frequency with which the word is used: Ezek 18:21, 23, 27, 28, 30, 32 [twice].

¹⁰⁶ Davidson, “The Covenant Lawsuit Motif in Canonical Perspective,” 25.

¹⁰⁷ Block, *Ezekiel 1-24*, 557.

¹⁰⁸ Hummel, *Ezekiel 1-20*, 545.

consistent with the ways of YHWH, hence Ezekiel is directed to confront them (v. 4).

The twofold use of the verb **טָפַט**, “judge,” in the following divine command, **אֲתָם הֵתִשְׁפֹּט**, “will you judge them, will you judge,” indicates the seriousness and the urgency with which YHWH wants to see this judgment executed. Yet as the narrative proceeds, YHWH takes time to lay out the facts of the case. He must provide the basis for his judicial actions. Table 7 shows the contrast between YHWH’s actions and the actions of the Israelites.

The case presented here involves YHWH’s actions while the Israelites were in Egypt. These actions have two basic components: covenant and divine restraint. The covenant component involves divine initiative. YHWH chose Israel (v. 5). Israel came into being by divine election. This was a special privilege that should have inspired her to remain faithful to her God. This covenant aspect also has a restatement of YHWH’s commitment to Israel. This he does first by making himself known to them (v. 5), an act which implies his desire for them to understand his character. This is followed by the covenant formula, “I am the Lord your God” (vv. 5, 7). YHWH wants the Israelites to know that he is fully committed to them.

YHWH knows the centrality of land to the thought process of the Israelites and so reminds them of the commitment he had to give them the promised land (v. 6). In the light of all these beneficent actions, YHWH makes a call for them to renounce idolatry (v. 7). YHWH knows that there is no way the aforementioned covenant components can survive if idolatry is left to thrive. Idolatry is repugnant to YHWH, and Israel, to experience the full measure of YHWH’s blessings, must be willing to relinquish any ties it has with other gods.

Table 7. YHWH's actions vis-à-vis Israel's actions in Egypt (Ezek 20:4-13)

YHWH's Beneficent Actions	Israel's Sinful Actions	YHWH's Punitive Actions
20:5 I chose Israel 20:5 I swore to them, saying, I am the Lord your God 20:6 I swore to them that I would bring them out of the land of Egypt into a land that I had searched out for them, a land flowing with milk and honey, the most glorious of all lands. 20:7 I said to them, Cast away the detestable things your eyes feast on, every one of you, and do not defile yourselves with the idols of Egypt 20:9 But I acted for the sake of my name, that it should not be profaned in the sight of the nations among whom they lived	20:8 But they rebelled against me and would not listen to me; not one of them cast away the detestable things their eyes feasted on, nor did they forsake the idols of Egypt	20:4 Will you judge them, mortal, will you judge them? 20:5 Let them know the abominations of their ancestors (here punishment fits the crime. YHWH returns to them what they had chosen, as if they had not experienced his mercy) 20:8 I thought I would pour out my wrath upon them and spend my anger against them in the midst of the land of Egypt

Equally significant is divine restraint. YHWH's beneficence has not been reciprocated. Israel has been rebellious and has refused to renounce idolatry (v. 8). YHWH says he thought of releasing his wrath on them, were it not for the sake of his name (v. 9). In other words, Israel is guilty. She has persisted in her waywardness and so deserves to be punished. Yet YHWH restrains himself, for the sake of his reputation, and does not destroy Israel.¹⁰⁹ The evidence presented reveals that YHWH has been so gracious to Israel, while Israel has not reciprocated YHWH's magnanimity.

The next round of evidence begins when Israel goes into the wilderness. Table 8 shows the interplay of YHWH's actions vis-à-vis the actions of the Israelites in the wilderness. Here again YHWH has to demonstrate what he has done and Israel's

¹⁰⁹ Block, *Ezekiel 1-24*, 629. See also Tuell, *Ezekiel*, 128.

Table 8. Yahweh's actions vis-à-vis Israel's actions in the wilderness (Ezekiel 20:10-26)

Yahweh's Beneficent Actions	Israel's Sinful Actions	Yahweh's Punitive Actions
<p>20:10 So I led them out of the land of Egypt and brought them into the wilderness</p> <p>20:11 I gave them my statutes and showed them my ordinances, by whose observance everyone shall live</p> <p>20:12 I gave them my Sabbaths, as a sign between me and them, so that they might know that I the Lord sanctify them</p> <p>20:14 But I acted for the sake of my name, so that it should not be profaned in the sight of the nations</p> <p>20:17 Nevertheless my eye spared them, and I did not destroy them or make an end of them in the wilderness</p> <p>20:18 I said to their children in the wilderness, do not follow the statutes of your parents, nor observe their ordinances, nor defile yourselves with their idols</p> <p>20:19, 20 I the Lord am your God; follow my statutes, and be careful to observe my ordinances,²⁰ and hallow my Sabbaths that they may be a sign between me and you, so that you may know that I the Lord am your God</p> <p>20:22 But I withheld my hand, and acted for the sake of my name, so that it should not be profaned in the sight of the nations</p>	<p>20:13 But the house of Israel rebelled against me in the wilderness; they did not observe my statutes but rejected my ordinances, by whose observance everyone shall live; and my Sabbaths they greatly profaned</p> <p>20:16 They rejected my ordinances and did not observe my statutes, and profaned my Sabbaths; for their heart went after their idols</p> <p>20:21 But the children rebelled against me; they did not follow my statutes, and were not careful to observe my ordinances, by whose observance everyone shall live; they profaned my Sabbaths</p>	<p>20:13 I <i>thought</i> I would pour out my wrath upon them in the wilderness, to make an end of them</p> <p>20:15 I swore to them in the wilderness that I would not bring them into the land that I had given them, a land flowing with milk and honey, the most glorious of all lands</p> <p>20:21 Then I <i>thought</i> I would pour out my wrath upon them and spend my anger against them in the wilderness</p> <p>20:23, 24 Moreover I swore to them in the wilderness that I would scatter them among the nations and disperse them through the countries, because they had not executed my ordinances, but had rejected my statutes and profaned my Sabbaths, and their eyes were set on their ancestors' idols</p> <p>20:25 Moreover I gave them statutes that were not good and ordinances by which they could not live</p> <p>20:26 I defiled them through their very gifts, in their offering up all their firstborn, in order that I might horrify them</p>

response to his actions. YHWH shows how he has upheld his covenant commitment once again, by the laws he has given them (vv. 11, 12), refraining himself from punishing them (vv. 14, 17) and even reaffirming the covenant formula (vv. 19, 20). Unfortunately Israel's response even while in the wilderness is no better than when they were in Egypt. There is still a life of rebellion in which they do not obey the laws; they profane the Sabbath and practice idolatry (vv. 13, 16, 21).

This defiant attitude cannot be tolerated for long. YHWH's patience is running out, because of the Israelites' misrepresentation of his character. Other nations must be shown that YHWH does not tolerate rebellion. As can be seen he begins to dish out various judgments, including loss of land and exile (vv. 15, 23, 24). The question of the inheritance of the promised land appears to have been in jeopardy because of the Israelites' rebellious nature. In Ezek 20:15, YHWH vows not to bring them into the land of promise (Ezek 20:6). This promise would not be realized because of their rebellion (Ezek 20:15, 16), yet in Ezek 20:28 YHWH did bring them into the land he had sworn to give to them. The fulfillment of this promise again demonstrates YHWH's justice and mercy as he gives the land to people who did not deserve the gift because of their rebellious and recalcitrant tendencies. YHWH is not yet done presenting his case. He enters into the third and final phase of these proceedings. Table 9 reveals the components of this phase involving the Israelites' unfaithfulness while in Canaan.

As I conclude this section, I should mention that one of the functions of YHWH's judgment with respect to his justice and righteousness deals with the concept of social justice in the book of Ezekiel. In other words, how does God's justice and righteousness

Table 9. YHWH's actions vis-à-vis Israel's actions in Canaan (Ezek 20:27-32)

YHWH's Beneficent Actions	Israel's Sinful Actions	YHWH's Punitive Actions
20:30 Will you defile yourselves after the manner of your ancestors and go astray after their detestable things?	20:28 When I had brought them into the land that I swore to give them, then wherever they saw any high hill or any leafy tree, there they offered their sacrifices and presented the provocation of their offering; there they sent up their pleasing odors, and there they poured out their drink offerings 20:31 When you offer your gifts and make your children pass through the fire, you defile yourselves with all your idols to this day	20:31 As I live, says the Lord God, I will not be consulted by you 20:32 What is in your mind shall never happen—the thought, “Let us be like the nations, like the tribes of the countries, and worship wood and stone”

impact those who are under some unjust systems and powers? In his paper entitled, “Theodicy in a Social Dimension,” Walther Brueggemann argues that “social evil is a crucial, if not a central matter for theodicy in the Old Testament.”¹¹⁰ He further adds that for the Israelite, the concept of theodicy is quite serious because it has to address the inhumane social systems.¹¹¹ Brueggemann therefore sees theodicy as a critical facet in addressing the issues of inequalities in the society in which the privileged take advantage of others while others go through untold harm and suffering (cf. Ps 73). If one of the functions of judgment is to demonstrate YHWH's justice and righteousness, then it is natural that it also addresses the issues of injustice that cause suffering to some of his people (Ezek 18:7, 8, 16, 17; cf. 18:12, 13).

¹¹⁰ Walter Brueggemann, "Theodicy in a Social Dimension," *JSOT* 33 (1985): 3-25; idem, reprint, "Theodicy in a Social Dimension," in *A Social Reading of the Old Testament: Prophetic Approaches to Israel's Communal Life* (ed. P. D. Miller; Minneapolis, Minn.: Fortress, 1994): 174-96.

¹¹¹ Brueggemann, "Theodicy in a Social Dimension," 5.

Covenant

YHWH's Faithfulness to the Covenant in Ezekiel 5:5-17

When YHWH established Israel as a people, he made a covenant with them. This covenant was intended to bind the Israelites to him and him to the Israelites (Gen 17:7; Exod 6:7; 19:5, 6; Deut 29:12). Part of the covenant provisions were the laws that YHWH gave to them (Exod 20; Lev 26:3, 14, 15; Deut 5). The Israelites were under obligation to obey these laws. Their desire and eagerness to do so were seen when Moses presented to them the divine obligations at Mt. Sinai. With passion and unanimity of spirit they solemnly promised to be loyal to their suzerain Lord and be obedient to his legal requirements (Exod 19:1-8). This same fervor was again witnessed during the confirmation of the covenant (Exod 24:3-7).¹¹²

It did not take long before they reneged on this promise. The worship of the Golden Calf at Mt. Sinai (Exod 32:1-35) is a stark reminder of their vulnerability and inability to live by their vows. The book of Judges with its oft-repeated refrain, Israel “did what was evil in the sight of the Lord” (Judg 2:11; 3:7, 12; 4:1; 6:1; 10:6; 13:1), also reveals their systemic life of failure. Things were not different under the monarchy. For it is during this time that the king and the people alike lived contrary to YHWH's legal demands. It is not surprising, therefore, to find that by the time of Ezekiel, things had deteriorated to such a level that the Israelites blatantly disregarded the very laws they had earnestly promised to uphold, and their cultic practices were an affront to the God they purported to worship.

¹¹² Walter Brueggemann contends that by this unanimous assent, “Israel signs a blank check of obedience.” Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 183.

It is therefore not surprising that as soon as the culprit has been identified (Ezek 5:5), YHWH begins by accusing Jerusalem of her failure to follow the laws and decrees. Jerusalem has rebelled against YHWH's laws and decrees (Ezek 5:6). The same thought is reiterated in the second part of v. 6: "She has rejected the laws and has not followed the decrees." In v. 7 YHWH reiterates the same accusation. So the fourfold use of מִשְׁפָּט in vv. 6 and 7 and the threefold use of חֻקֵּי in vv. 6, 7 in itself demonstrates the significance YHWH places on his laws and decrees. YHWH has not forgotten the covenant obligations which he had placed on the Israelites. His laws still have validity. They must be obeyed. Failure to observe them means the Israelites must be held accountable for their disobedience to the covenant, and as a result, must reap the consequences of their actions. YHWH made this very clear in Lev 26:14-43 where he stipulated the curses that would ensue from covenant unfaithfulness (cf. Deut 28:15-68).

Therefore through the judgment scene in Ezek 5:5-17, YHWH says that he is still holding on to his part of the covenant. He has not abdicated his role as a faithful and committed covenant partner. Partners in this relationship must not expect to be let off the hook if they do not remain faithful to him. The time will come when they will be answerable for their actions.

The use of the word קִנְיָא, "jealousy, envy, zeal" (Ezek 5:13), further illustrates YHWH's attachment or faithfulness to the covenant. In the midst of the announcement of furious judgments YHWH informs Israel that when these judgments come to pass they will know that אֲנִי בְּקִנְיָאִי נִבֵּאתִי, "I have spoken in my jealousy" (Ezek 5:13). He wants to maintain exclusive and unrivaled relationship with his people and therefore warns Israel against making covenants with other nations or worshiping their gods (Exod 34:13-15).

This depiction reveals one of the quintessential aspects of YHWH. He alone is to be worshipped. There must be no room for any other forms of allegiance.¹¹³

By defiling the sanctuary with all kinds of abominations and detestable practices (Ezek 5:11; 8:1-17), Israel had either forgotten or taken for granted this consequential, covenantal requirement. Such deviation from the norm infringed upon the divine human relationship. It was a breach of the covenant.¹¹⁴ Like a spouse intent on protecting the boundaries of the sacred relationship with the partner, YHWH cannot remain passive while this relationship is threatened from various quarters. He therefore has to act in the overall long-term interest of his covenant partner, even if it means taking dreadful punitive measures.

But **הַנִּאָּזָר** also has the nuance of zeal or passion, in which there is a deep longing for attachment and commitment to someone. A penitential prayer in Isa 63:15 poignantly underscores this as it relates to YHWH's **הַנִּאָּזָר**, “zeal:”

Where are your zeal (**הַנִּאָּזָר**) and your might?
The yearning of your heart and your compassion?

The context is that of people who feel that YHWH is so transcendent that they do not seem to feel his immanence.¹¹⁵ He appears to have left them to face the struggles of life

¹¹³ This is reminiscent of the husband who is jealous for his unfaithful wife in Num 5.

¹¹⁴ H. G. L. Peels, “**הַנִּאָּזָר**,” *NIDOTTE* 3:937-40. See also G. Sauer, “**הַנִּאָּזָר**,” *TLOT* 3:1145-47; E. Reuter, “**הַנִּאָּזָר, הַנִּאָּזָר, הַנִּאָּזָר, הַנִּאָּזָר**,” *TDOT* 13:47-58.

¹¹⁵ John N. Oswalt, *Isaiah* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003), 670; Joseph Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah 56-66: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (New York: Doubleday, 2003), 262.

alone.¹¹⁶ Yet in this petition the prophet reveals his true understanding of God's nature. The prayer is addressing that which is intrinsic with YHWH: his zeal, his passion, his yearning heart, that heart that longs for attachment and commitment. Here הַיָּזְזִי is equated with the deeper longings of the heart. This therefore reveals another side of YHWH: the God full of passion and desire to be in relationship. With this understanding one can also translate Ezek 5:13 as: "I have spoken in my zeal." Israel may have sinned and breached the terms of the covenant bond, but YHWH is in essence saying he is still passionate about his relationship with Israel and is still committed to them.

YHWH's Faithfulness to the Covenant in Ezekiel 1-24

In Ezek 16, YHWH's faithfulness to the covenant with Israel is vividly illustrated. For here we encounter the description of Jerusalem's initial despicable condition (Ezek 16:1-5), what YHWH did to change her disgraceful situation, including entering into a covenantal relation with her (Ezek 16:6-14), Jerusalem's sinfulness, unfaithfulness, and disloyalty to the magnanimity of the covenant God (Ezek 16:15-34); YHWH's resolve to punish this ungrateful bride (Ezek 16:35-59); and finally YHWH's promise of unmerited grace involving covenantal connections and atonement (Ezek 16:60-63). This is reminiscent of the words in Lev 26:44 in which YHWH states that in spite of the Israelites' disobedience "when they are in the land of their enemies, I will not reject them or abhor them so as to destroy them completely, breaking my covenant with them."

As a devoted covenant partner YHWH clearly articulated the expected outcomes

¹¹⁶ John N. Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah Chapters 40-66* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 611-12.

should they obey or disobey the covenant. Negatively, YHWH's faithfulness to the covenant is demonstrated as he subjects the Israelites to exile, sword, plagues, famine, cannibalism, and wild animals for covenant violations. YHWH's covenant stipulations are very clear: punishment for covenant disloyalty and blessings for covenant loyalty.

It is this faithfulness that is once again depicted in Ezek 16:59, when YHWH states emphatically that he is going to deal with Israel accordingly¹¹⁷ because she had despised (בְּזִיתָ) his oath and broken (לָקַרְתָּ) the covenant.¹¹⁸ Two words used in this verse shed some light on the nature of the Israelites' action. The first word is בָּזָה, "be contemptible, think lightly of, despise." The first use of this word in the Hebrew Bible (Gen 25) has a lot to say concerning its meaning. Esau comes from his hunting expedition, tired, exhausted, and hungry. His brother Jacob has made some food that he badly craves. Jacob is willing to share some of the food with Esau, but on condition that he sells him his birthright (Gen 25:31). Esau's response is fast and astonishing: "I am about to die; of what use is a birthright to me?" (Gen 25:32). Esau ends up selling his birthright and the biblical record makes a succinct, but penetrating statement regarding this action: "Thus Esau despised (וַיִּבֶזְזֵה) the birthright" (Gen 25:34). He did not attach any significance to it. It was just an ordinary, inconsequential thing that he did not have to

¹¹⁷ Woudstra characterizes YHWH's action in this verse as a "covenant of retaliation." Marten H. Woudstra, "The Everlasting Covenant in Ezekiel 16:59-63," *CTJ* 6 (1971): 28-29. For discussion on the concept of וַעֲשֵׂיתָ אֵלַי כַּאֲשֶׁר עָשִׂיתָ, "I will do to you as you have done," see Wong, *The Idea of Retribution in the Book of Ezekiel*, 243-44; Bock observes that YHWH's judgments are based on "the principle of reciprocity." Block, *Ezekiel 1-24*, 515.

¹¹⁸ The same accusation is expressed in Ezek 17:16, 18, 19 where Judah's King Zedekiah is said to have broken the covenant he made with King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon and in the same token broken the covenant with God. For texts on despising YHWH's word, see Num 15:31; 2 Sam 12:9; for despising YHWH, see 2 Sam 12:10. In 1 Sam 2:30 YHWH declares that "those who despise me shall be treated with contempt."

cling to.¹¹⁹ This is what the Israelites did to YHWH's covenant. They disregarded and thought lightly of it. The attraction of giving allegiance to other gods was so strong to them that they no longer valued the covenant benefits that their relationship with YHWH entailed.¹²⁰

The other word is פָּרַר, “break, invalidate, nullify, frustrate.”¹²¹ Its many occurrences with בְּרִית make it “the most common term used for the violation of the covenant.”¹²² Israel had acted contemptuously toward YHWH. When YHWH entered into covenantal relationship with the Israelites, his intention was that this be an ever-growing and expanding relationship. However, with the Israelites' rebellion this covenantal relationship was negatively impacted and appears to have been put in jeopardy. While it is true that their rebellion had put a dent in the relationship, yet it did not diminish the prospects of its renewal and eventual restoration.

When considering the catalogue of sins that brought YHWH's ire upon the Israelites,¹²³ one would be inclined to think that there would be no room for any idea of

¹¹⁹ Reuben Ahroni, "Why Did Esau Spurn the Birthright? A Study in Biblical Interpretation," *Judaism* 29 (1980): 323-31.

¹²⁰ Grisanti observes that as used in the Old Testament בָּזָה denotes “undervaluing someone or something,” and adds that while בָּזָה “denotes an inner attitude, it clearly impacts relationships.” Michael A. Grisanti, “בָּזָה,” *NIDOTTE* 1:628-30. Grg on the other hand notes that “every offence against the will of YHWH implies a *bazah*.” M. Görg, “בָּזָה,” *TDOT* 2:60-65.

¹²¹ Tyler F. Williams, “פָּרַר,” *NIDOTTE* 3:695-98. See also L. Ruppert, “פָּרַר,” *TDOT* 12:114-21.

¹²² Williams, *NIDOTTE* 3:696. For some of these occurrences in the Hebrew Bible see Gen 17:14; Lev 26:15, 44; Deut 31:16, 20; Judg 2:1; 1 Kgs 15:19; Isa 24:5; 33:8; Jer 11:10; 14:21; 31:32; 33:20; Ezek 16:59; 17:15, 16, 18, 19; 44:7; Zech 11:10.

¹²³ Note that Israel's actions are said to be worse than those of Samaria and Sodom (Ezek 16:44-52).

restoration and renewal in YHWH's dealing with the Israelites in Ezek 1-24.¹²⁴ Yet because of YHWH's magnanimous nature and character, he surprisingly and emphatically announces the establishment of בְּרִית עוֹלָם, "an everlasting covenant" with Israel.¹²⁵ Note here the emphasis YHWH puts on this covenant relationship by the use of the following construction וְזָכַרְתִּי אֲנִי אֶת־בְּרִיתִי אִתְּךָ בְּיָמֵי נְעוּרֶיךָ, "I will personally remember my covenant (which I made) with you in the days of your youth" (Ezek 16:60).¹²⁶ He then adds וְהָקְמֹתִי לְךָ בְּרִית עוֹלָם, "I will establish for you an everlasting covenant" (16:60).¹²⁷ Instead of the verb כָּרַת that is generally used for covenant making, Ezekiel uses הִקְיָם, "establish, institute," the *hip 'il* form of the word קָוָם, "stand, rise." YHWH personally enacts this covenantal relationship.¹²⁸ But more than that it appears the word כָּרַת is not used here because it is reserved for extirpation.¹²⁹

¹²⁴ It is not surprising to find Eichrodt questioning the Ezekielian authorship of Ezek 16:59-63 on the basis of the new covenant that it promises. He is however right in his observation that the author of the section "tends more towards that priestly line of thought which regards the institution of the covenant as a symbol of the inalienable divine faithfulness." Eichrodt, *Ezekiel*, 216-17. For discussion on the authorship of this passage and the divergent views presented, see Woudstra, "The Everlasting Covenant," 23-25.

¹²⁵ The expression בְּרִית עוֹלָם, "everlasting covenant," is found in Ezekiel only one other time, namely in Ezek 37:26. Other examples of its usage are found in the following contexts: the covenant God made with all living things after the flood (Gen 9:16); God's covenant with Abraham (Gen 17:1-22); the covenant regarding the Sabbath (Exod 31:16); bread set before the Lord (Lev 24:8); the Davidic covenant (2 Sam 23:5).

¹²⁶ This is reminiscent of Jer 2:2 in which YHWH remembers Israel's devotion to him during their incipient relationship. Woudstra correctly remarks that the concept of remembering in the Hebrew Bible is "tantamount to making the covenant operative again." Woudstra, "The Everlasting Covenant," 29.

¹²⁷ Dempsey observes that "God is faithful and willing to restore covenant despite the fact that humankind may, at times, violate or break it." Dempsey, "The 'Whore' of Ezekiel 16," 57-78.

¹²⁸ So Hummel, *Ezekiel 1-20*, 492.

¹²⁹ כָּרַת is used mostly in Ezekiel to signify extirpation. Of the 19 occurrences, it is only in Ezek 16:4; 17:13; 34:25 and 37:26 that it has a non-extirpation connotation.

Yet even after this reassurance, YHWH takes an additional step as a guarantee to the Israelites that their past deeds that had led to YHWH's judgments will not stand in the way of this newly structured relationship. Using the word כָּפַר, "make an atonement, make reconciliation, purge," he affirms that he will make atonement for them for all that they have done. In the Hebrew Bible the priests were assigned the role of representing YHWH in making atonement for the people (Lev 16, 23). Here YHWH takes the work into his own hands to underscore his faithfulness to his people's eternal good.

YHWH's determination is further seen in Ezek 20. Using covenant language and referring to the election of Israel he says in v. 5 that "with uplifted hand I said to them, 'I am the Lord your God.'" What follows is a catalogue of Israel's life of disobedience during various stages of their pilgrimage. Then in Ezek 20:37 YHWH announces "I will cause you to pass under the rod and I will bring you into the bond of the covenant." While the word שֵׁבֶט, "rod, staff," among other functions, can be used as an "instrument for education, punishment, and discipline,"¹³⁰ it can also serve as a shepherd's staff, which among other things could be used not only to guide the flock, but to separate some animals from the flock.¹³¹

Another significant word, מִסֵּרָה, "bond," is a hapax legomenon. While there is debate as to the derivation of this word,¹³² most commentators regard it as related to אָסַר, "bind, imprison, fetter."¹³³ It appears that YHWH has observed the Israelites' behavior

¹³⁰ H. J. Zobel, "שֵׁבֶט," *TDOT* 14:302-11.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, 14:304.

¹³² See for example Hummel, *Ezekiel 1-20*, 579.

¹³³ A. H. Konkel, אָסַר, *NIDOTTE* 1:472-73.

and now through the judgments that he will bring upon them he takes the firm action of binding them to the covenant that all along they have tried to elude.¹³⁴ YHWH has finally realized that left to themselves they are likely going to revert to their old ways of life and so he uses language that has the connotation of holding them tightly into this covenantal relationship. Therefore, I do not think that this bond of the covenant would involve punishment as Hummel posits.¹³⁵

YHWH's commitment to the Israelites is so deep that even their rebellion and unfaithfulness cannot eradicate it. He is therefore saying, in essence, you have been unfaithful and have not fulfilled your part of the bargain, yet as a faithful covenant partner I will remain true to my part. I will punish you when that is the right course of action to take for the restoration of the relationship. But I will take the appropriate steps to not only bring you back to myself, but to ensure the continuity of the covenantal relationship with you.

Worship

The Sanctity of the Sanctuary and Proper Worship

One of the areas in which the deterioration of the Israelites' spiritual life was manifested and which brought God's judgment was their lack of respect for the sacred (Ezek 5:11; 8:1-18; cf. Lev 10:1, 2; 2 Sam 2:12-17, 22-25; Mal 2:11). The appeals of the

¹³⁴ See Block, *Ezekiel 1-24*, 652. For further discussion on this verse see Moshe Greenberg, "MSRT HBRYT, 'The Obligation of the Covenant,' in Ezekiel 20:37," in *The Word of the Lord Shall Go Forth: Essays in Honor of David Noel Freedman in Celebration of His Sixtieth Birthday* (ed. C. L. Meyers and M. O'Connor; Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1983), 37-46.

¹³⁵ Hummel, *Ezekiel 1-20*, 607.

prophets to call them from the worship of idols and false gods fell on deaf ears.¹³⁶ God needed to take some radical, remedial, and decisive action in order to halt the abuses that tainted worship in Judah.

At the core of any worship experience are the following three basic ingredients: obedience to and proper articulation of the word of God, recognition of the supremacy of the object of worship, and reverence for the place of worship. This is what I will call the “irreducible minimum of worship.” A reading of Ezek 5 and other passages in Ezek 1-24 shows that worship in Israel had been tainted and the worship essentials completely disregarded. My discussion of each of these ingredients seeks to establish the function of judgment as it pertains to worship in Ezek 5:5-17 and the larger context of Ezek 1-24.

The Word of God in Ezekiel 5:5-17

Let us begin by the issue of obedience to and proper handling of God’s word. The word of God is central to any worship experience. It is in the word that God’s will for humanity is revealed (Deut 6:1-3; Josh 1:7, 8; Pss 19:7; 119:9-11, 105). It is in the word that human folly is unmasked as God brings conviction of sin and corrective measures suggested (e.g., 2 Sam 11:1-12:15). Yet Israel is not only disobedient to God’s word; they have rejected it (Ezek 5:6, 7). This word that was rejected had instructions pertaining to the elaborate worship service through which Israel could approach God daily and maintain the relationship with their maker, a relationship that would have prevented them from falling into sin (Num 28:1-8). It was this word that could have constantly reminded

¹³⁶ 1 Kgs 14:7-16; 1 Kgs 18; 2 Chr 36:15-16; Isa 44:6-20; 57:3-13; Jer 2:4-13; 3:11-25; 7:25, 26; 10:8-10; 13:25-27; 25:6, 7; 44:17-19; Ezek 8:1-18; Hos 5:1-11; 9:1-17; Mic 5:13-15.

them of their unique origin and their distinctive relationship to YHWH (Deut 7:6; 26:16-19; Exod 19:5, 6; 1 Kgs 8:53; Isa 43:4; Jer 7:23; 13:11; Amos 3:2). If only they had given heed to this word, they could have learned of YHWH's readiness to restore even those who have deviated from his ways. Through Hosea his magnanimity is revealed:

Come, let us return to the Lord; for it is he who has torn, and he will heal us; he has struck down, and he will bind us up. After two days he will revive us; on the third day he will raise us up, that we may live before him. (Hos 6:1-2)

Through Ezekiel this word is even more categorical regarding YHWH's desire to see them change their ways:

But if the wicked turn away from all their sins that they have committed and keep all my statutes and do what is lawful and right, they shall surely live; they shall not die. None of the transgressions that they have committed shall be remembered against them; for the righteousness that they have done they shall live. Have I any pleasure in the death of the wicked . . . and not rather that they should turn from their ways and live? (Ezek 18:21-23)

The rejected word was the basis on which their covenant relationship could be maintained. This word contained warnings against idolatry and spelled out the doom that awaited the nation if they persisted in their rebellious ways of life (Deut 8:19, 20; 13:1-18), it had instructions pertaining to the sanctity of the sanctuary (Lev 1-6; 23), and it contained invitations to repentance (Ezek 14:6; 18:30-32). Rejecting these statutes and ordinances was tantamount to rejecting YHWH himself (Jer 1:16; 2:4, 13). The words of Hosea reveal Israel's actions: "I have written for him the great things of my law, but they were considered a strange thing. . . . Israel has forgotten his maker" (Hos 8:12, 14). Isaiah on his part laments: "They have rejected the instruction of the Lord of hosts, and have despised the word of the Holy One of Israel" (Isa 5:24; cf. 30:12).

How could YHWH relate to these people in a worshipful atmosphere when one of the central pillars of holistic worship was abused? YHWH needed to take corrective action to stop this negation of a major way of communicating his will to humanity. YHWH's severe judgments in Ezek 5:8-17 are, therefore, a justified reaction to an offended deity, whose authority has been challenged. He must take corrective, though painful, action to indicate that his word still stands. It has not been abrogated and he expects the people to follow its dictates.

The Word of God in Ezekiel 1-24

In the covenant provisions spoken to the Israelites, YHWH had promised blessings for obedience and curses for disobedience (Lev 26:14-39; Deut 28:15-68). The threat and subsequent fulfillment of the covenant curses in Ezekiel are proof that YHWH's word never fails. What he promises he fulfills, whether these promises relate to salvation or to retribution. We have seen in Ezek 5:5-17 that YHWH does not take lightly any attempt to disregard his precepts. Obedience to his word is essential for developing an ongoing relationship with him. When his word is not adhered to, he resorts to punishments to register his displeasure and disapproval by announcing severe judgments upon the disobedient.

The concept of obduracy manifested against God's word in Ezek 5:6, 7 finds echoes in Ezek 1-24. These correspondences are indicated by YHWH's criticism, such as מְרִדּוֹ-בִי, "they rebelled against me" (Ezek 2:3, 20:8, 13, 21), בָּחַקוּתִי לֹא-הָלְכוּ, "they did not follow my statutes" (Ezek 11:12; 20:13, 16, 21), מִשְׁפָּטִי מָאָסוּ, "they rejected my

ordinances” (Ezek 20:13, 16), וְהִקְוִיתִי מֵאַסֹּי, “they rejected my statutes” (Ezek 20:24), מִשְׁפָּטַי לֹא-עָשׂוּ, “they have not done my ordinances” (Ezek 20:24).

The seriousness of the actions of the Israelites is seen in the backdrop of Ezek 20:19. Here YHWH reminds them of the injunctions he had given in the wilderness regarding his laws. These commands are intended to remind them of the sacrosanct nature of YHWH’s laws. Using three *qal* active imperatives, YHWH had declared: וָעֲשׂוּ, “do them” (Ezek 20:19). YHWH gave clear instructions regarding his expectations.¹³⁷ He therefore stands exonerated and vindicated. He cannot be blamed for the consequences that follow such obdurate behavior.

But YHWH’s fury is not only directed against those who disobey his word and do not live by its standards, he is also concerned with the people who misrepresent and misapply his word. He expects his word to be communicated candidly and appropriately. Each one of his messengers is under obligation to speak on his behalf and not craft their own message. The messenger must be true to the message. Failure to uphold this standard will be met by YHWH’s unabashed retribution (Ezek 13:1-23).

The Popular Sayings

What we find in Ezek 12:21-28 is in stark contrast to what YHWH expects of his word. The context of this passage is significant for its correct interpretation. The chapter begins with YHWH’s instructions to Ezekiel to perform a symbolic act. The symbolism

¹³⁷ Block, *Ezekiel 1-24*, 635.

in the passage concerns the coming threatened exile¹³⁸ as a punishment for the Israelites' disobedience. At the end of the first symbolic action, Ezekiel is commanded to tell his hearers the plain truth: "They will go into exile as captives" (Ezek 12:11). The gruesome fact about this exile is that even the leaders of Israel will not be spared.¹³⁹

On the heels of the symbolic actions, YHWH confronts Ezekiel regarding some sayings circulating among the Israelites. Two particular misconceptions are of concern to YHWH. First, is the fallacy that "the days go by and every vision comes to nothing" (Ezek 12:22).¹⁴⁰ While the word *חֲזִיּוֹן*, "visions," mentioned in v. 22 has the connotation of the visual, it can also refer to any divine communication. Isaiah, Amos, and Micah are described as having seen (*חָזָה*) "the word of the Lord" (Isa 2:1; Amos 1:1; Mic 1:1). It may be true that the prophecies had not been fulfilled as expected (Deut 18:20-22), but to characterize them as non-existent or failed (*לֹא-בָרָא*) is tantamount to rejecting the validity of the word of the Lord and minimizing its effectiveness and reliability.

Second, is the misconception that the vision Ezekiel has seen is for "many years from now, and he prophesies about the distant future" (Ezek 12:27). By relegating these prophecies to the future meant they did not have to pay any close attention to them. The prophecies were inconsequential and extraneous because they did not relate to their time.

¹³⁸ Note the prevalence of the word *גָּלוּת*, "exile," in the passage: Ezek 12:3, 4 [twice], 7, 11. Note also the use of *שְׁבוּיָהוּ*, "captivity," in v. 11. Then there are metaphors of exile: "scatter to the winds" (Ezek 12:14), "disperse them among the nations and scatter them through the countries" (Ezek 12:15).

¹³⁹ Note the chilling details concerning the fate of King Zedekiah whose death in Babylon is predicted (Ezek 12:12-14).

¹⁴⁰ Hummel observes that the intention of these skeptics was "to cast doubt about the validity of all prophecy." Hummel, *Ezekiel 1-20*, 348.

If the predicted and threatened judgments were to be fulfilled, then it will be in the time of their posterity. This again was a direct assault on both the message and the messenger.

YHWH must correct these misconceptions regarding the realization of his word so people can know that his word is authoritative and what he predicts will certainly come true. These people must also recognize that the timing for the fulfillment of these judgment prophecies is determined only by YHWH. In addressing the first erroneous belief YHWH states categorically:

I will put an end to this proverb, and they shall use it no more as a proverb in Israel. But say to them, the days are near, and the fulfillment of every vision. For there shall no longer be any false vision or flattering divination within the house of Israel. But I the Lord will speak the word that I speak, and it will be fulfilled. It will no longer be delayed; but in your days, O rebellious house, I will speak the word and fulfill it, says the Lord God. (Ezek 12:23-25)

This popular skepticism concerning the delay in the fulfillment of YHWH's word must also be promptly addressed. YHWH challenges this misconception by stating: "None of my words will be delayed any longer, but the word that I speak will be fulfilled, says the Lord God" (Ezek 12:28). The onus is now with the people. They have to decide what to believe—the popular sayings or the divine word. YHWH makes it clear that the prophecies are going to be fulfilled without any delay, and this will happen in their time. One of the things these people must have forgotten is that God is not dictated by human schedules. As the sovereign God, he has his timetable and timing for every event in the universe. To the human mind the period between prediction and fulfillment may seem unending, but YHWH is a God who knows no haste or delay.

False Prophets

Another challenge to YHWH's word comes from the false prophets.¹⁴¹ Charges and accusations leveled against them reveal their shortcomings in relationship to the word of God. First, they prophesy out of their own imagination (Ezek 13:2). Second, they follow their own spirit and while they have received no revelation (Ezek 13:3). Third, they prophesy false visions and lying divinations (Ezek 13:6). Fourth, the Lord has not sent them (Ezek 13:6, 7). Fifth, they lead people astray by preaching peace when there is no peace (Ezek 13:10, 16).

Note the designation given to these religious functionaries: נְבִיאֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל, “prophets of Israel” (Ezek 13:2). This title shows that they should have been conversant with the authentic word of God. Any deviation from the norm is therefore inexcusable. Before we make any definitive conclusion, let us consider the other description of these same religious professionals: הַנְּבִיאִים הַנְּבָלִים, “foolish prophets” (Ezek 13:3). The word נָבָל, “foolish,” used here has the nuance of one who is not just deficient in understanding, but someone who is deliberately and intentionally disobedient to the word of God.¹⁴² With this meaning, we can conclude that these prophets knew the authentic word of God but deliberately decided to neglect it and conduct their work according to their own

¹⁴¹ Crenshaw attributes the rise of false prophecy in ancient Israel to the following factors: Desire for success and popularity with the people, desire to please the royal authorities, a trend toward popular theology, and power of tradition, such as the inviolability of the temple and the rise of the concept of individualism. James L. Crenshaw, *Prophetic Conflict: Its Effect Upon Israelite Religion* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1971), 65-77.

¹⁴² James A. Swanson, “נָבָל,” n.p. *DBLSD* on CD-ROM. Version 3.0. 1997, 2001. See also Chou-Wee Pan, “נָבָל,” *NIDOTTE* 3:11-13.

dictates and impulses. By making false assertions and distorting YHWH's word they led people astray and to a false sense of security.¹⁴³

These prophets therefore need to recognize that YHWH's word or message is not manufactured in the factory of the human mind. It must have the imprint of the divine. This is the stamp that Ezekiel's message bears. He is constantly a recipient of the word of God as attested by the oft-used clause וַיְהִי דְבַר־יְהוָה אֵלַי, "and it was the word of the Lord unto me."¹⁴⁴ Contrary to the false prophets, who follow their own spirit, the Spirit of God plays an active role in the word Ezekiel receives (Ezek 8:3; 11:24). Therefore, the prophets who want to speak out of their own hearts, neglecting the credible word of God, will have to meet the judgment of YHWH to show the value he attaches to his word.

His outright disapproval of their false and misplaced prophetic pronouncements and the judgment addressed against them is proof that YHWH does not want any type of misrepresentation of his word. He wants his undiluted word to be presented in its authentic, unadulterated form, so as to warn the people of the impending judgment and hopefully produce the transformative effect necessary for them to avoid the threatened divine disasters.

Israel is on the brink of a national catastrophe of unimaginable proportions. The impending disaster is going to rob the people of the things they hold dear. They are in

¹⁴³ Summarizing the problem inherent in the work of these false prophets Duguid remarks, "However confident they were of the validity of their words, they preached the wrong message at the wrong time because YHWH had not sent them." Duguid, *Ezekiel and the Leaders of Israel*, 95.

¹⁴⁴ Ezek 3:16; 6:1; 7:1; 11:14; 12:1, 8, 17, 21, 26; 13:1; 14:2, 12; 15:1; 16:1; 17:1, 11; 18:1; 20:2; 21:1, 6, 13, 23; 22:1, 17, 23; 23:1; 24:1, 15, 20; 25:1; 26:1; 27:1; 28:1, 11, 20; 29:1, 17; 30:1, 20; 31:1; 32:1, 17; 33:1, 23; 34:1; 35:1; 36:16; 37:4, 15; 37:15; 38:1.

danger of losing their ancestral land. Their political leadership is going to be decimated. The Jerusalem Temple, which is at the heart of their cultic experiences, is on the verge of a devastating blow. The people need a message that is authentic, credible, and one that addresses the critical issues of the day. They cannot afford to hear messages originating from the human imagination, which announce peace when there is no peace (Ezek 13:10). This devastation will lead to untold suffering and YHWH stands to be accused of injustice. He cannot therefore tolerate the false prophets who do not declare the proper message of warning.

YHWH's aversion to the work of the false prophets is indicated by the nature of the announced punishments. The hostile orientation formula **הִנְנִי אֵלֵיכֶם**, "behold I am against you" (Ezek 13:8), indicates YHWH's readiness for combat. He does not mince his words. They are now his enemies. The use of the clause **וְהָיָה יָדִי אֶל־הַנְּבִיאִים**, "my hand will be against the prophets," also indicates YHWH's hostile orientation and personal confrontation with these irresponsible religious functionaries (Ezek 13:9).

Then follows the declaration that these prophets will no longer be members of the house of Israel and will not "enter the land of Israel" (Ezek 13:9). Rooy observes YHWH's declaration that they would not enter the land of Israel "demonstrated the futility of their words"¹⁴⁵ since they would not be part of those who would return to Judah after the exile because they would be destroyed during the fall of Jerusalem (Ezek 13:10-

¹⁴⁵ H. F. van Rooy, "Disappointed Expectations and False Hopes: The Message of Ezekiel 13:1-16 in a Time of Change," *HTS* 58 (2002): 1499-1511.

16). With the fall of Jerusalem (Ezek 33:21), it is YHWH's word that would be proved true, and not the deceptive words of the counterfeit prophets.¹⁴⁶

YHWH then turns against the female false prophets, "the daughters of your people" (Ezek 13:17). Three major areas of condemnation stand out with respect to their work and the word of God. First, these prophets, like their male counterparts, prophecy from their heart (Ezek 13:18). Second, they peddle lies (Ezek 13:19, 22). Third, they have encouraged the wicked in their wicked ways so they do not turn from their wickedness (Ezek 13:22). The picture presented here is that of self-imposed prophets with no divine mandate and who do not have the overall welfare of the people. While the word of God should be used to warn people to turn from their wickedness so as to escape the coming catastrophes,¹⁴⁷ these prophets use their own words to anchor people in their wickedness. Again, the picture we have here is that of prophets who want to manipulate the words of YHWH to fit their own selfish schemes.¹⁴⁸

Nancy Bowen's argument that Ezekiel condemned these false prophets, and particularly the female prophets, because of his opposition to the "diversity of religious

¹⁴⁶ Daniel Block gives a very instructive list of five key features that generally characterize such false prophets: (1) they normally profess to have divine signature on their messages, (2) their messages are devoid of the hard, sometimes unpalatable truths that people should be told, (3) they are motivated by their own selfish interests, (4) their prophecies have no durative effect, they do not outlive them, (5) God's judgment upon the false prophets is certain. Block, *Ezekiel 1-24*, 409-10. See also Cooper's list of ten negative characteristics exhibited by the false prophets. Cooper, *Ezekiel*, 157-158.

¹⁴⁷ A. Laato observes that there is an educative aspect of theodicy in which people are able to turn from their wickedness and reestablish covenantal relations with YHWH. Antti Laato, "Theodicy in the Deuteronomistic History," in *Theodicy in the World of the Bible* (ed. A. Laato and J. C. de Moor; Leiden: Brill, 2003), 198.

¹⁴⁸ For further discussion on their work see Meyers, "Engendering Ezekiel: Female Figures Reconsidered," 290-92.

belief and practice” and thus “to eliminate the diversity of Judahite religious practices,”¹⁴⁹ is a far-fetched argument that has no textual basis. These prophets were peddling lies regarding YHWH’s word and thus leading people astray. It is because of this that they stand condemned. YHWH’s condemnation of their practices is therefore a demonstration of the high degree to which his word should be held.¹⁵⁰

We have seen that for worship to be meaningful, people must be willing to live by the principles of the word of God. This can happen only when the word that people hear is the authentic, credible, and unadulterated word of God. Otherwise people are in danger of sliding into the precipice of destruction without warning. YHWH stands justified when the proper warning has been given and people are left to make informed decisions. Also, they would come to believe YHWH when the true prophecies of retribution were fulfilled.¹⁵¹

The Supremacy of the Object of Worship

One of the things that the Israelites appear to have forgotten is that YHWH is incomparable. He is a unique deity, unlike the deities of the surrounding nations. His supremacy and unrivaled nature over other gods had been demonstrated throughout biblical history (Exod 7-12; 1 Kgs 18:16-42; Isa 44:8; 45:5, 18, 22; 46:9; Joel 2:27; Dan

¹⁴⁹ Nancy R. Bowen, "The Daughters of Your People: Female Prophets in Ezekiel 13:17-23," *JBL* 118 (1999): 417-33.

¹⁵⁰ Using the argument of poetic justice, Ka Leung Wong observes that their punishment fits the crime. Wong, *The Idea of Retribution in the Book of Ezekiel*, 219-22.

¹⁵¹ Gane, "The End of the Israelite Monarchy," 353.

3:29). The Israelites, however, did not recognize YHWH's uniqueness and thus sidelined him in favor of the deities of the surrounding nations.

The Israelites' failure to recognize YHWH's supremacy and uniqueness is tied to their attitude towards YHWH's statutes and ordinances. YHWH had outlawed the practice of idolatry (Exod 20:4, 5; 34:14; Deut 5:6-10; 10:20; Jer 25:6). Some of the instructions given to the Israelites as they occupied the land of Canaan were couched in a matrix of statutes and ordinances that they were to observe throughout their lives:

These are the statutes and ordinances that you must diligently observe in the land that the Lord, the God of your ancestors, has given you to occupy all the days that you live on the earth. You must demolish completely all the places where the nations whom you are about to dispossess served their gods, on the mountain heights, on the hills, and under every leafy tree. Break down their altars, smash their pillars, burn their sacred poles with fire, and hew down the idols of their gods, and thus blot out their name from their places. You shall not worship the Lord your God in such ways. (Deut 12:1-4)

Israel's worship of YHWH was to be different from the way other nations worshiped their deities. But because they rebelled against the statutes and ordinances, they entangled themselves with the worship of the gods that displaced YHWH from their lives. As a result of this, they are condemned for dabbling with "detestable idols," "vile images and detestable practices" (Ezek 5:9, 11).

We can reiterate that failure to keep the word of God predisposes one to all kinds of misguided practices. It opens the gateway to seductions, temptations, and allurements that have the potential of derailing one's commitment to a given cause. Rebellion and disobedience to God's word also have the potential of destroying relationships. It is not surprising to find YHWH railing against the cultic and worship practices that are devoid

of commitment and devotion (Isa 1:2-15; 66:3-4; Jer 7:9-29; Amos 5:21-27).¹⁵² YHWH says, in essence, go ahead and conduct your cultic observances. But do not factor me in the equation because your conduct is abominable to me. These worship practices do not benefit the worshiper because of the absence of the relational ingredient with YHWH.

There is no way Israel could have expected a wholesome relationship with the deity whose existence they not only took for granted, but who now occupied a subordinate place in their lives. YHWH could not condone this divided, unbridled allegiance. He had to take appropriate actions that would bring these disrespectful practices to an end and thus restore his honor and protect his matchless supremacy and superiority.

Reverence for the Place and Institutions of Worship

We have seen that meaningful, relational worship cannot take place when the word of God is not allowed to have its impact in the lives of the worshipers. It becomes inconsequential when the object of worship is not acknowledged and given the deserved honor and respect. The third pillar in the irreducible minimum of worship focuses on the places and other related aspects of worship.

Place and Institutions of Worship in Ezekiel 5:5-17

As we examine Ezek 5, one of the issues affecting the relationship between YHWH and Israel is the irreverence for YHWH's sanctuary. Israel is accused of defiling YHWH's sanctuary with detestable things and all kinds of abominations (Ezek 5:11).

¹⁵² Jacob Chinitz, "Were the Prophets Opposed to Sacrifice?" *JBQ* 36 (2008): 73-80.

This accusation reveals the low spiritual level that the people of Israel had succumbed to during the sixth century B.C. The biblical record, however, shows that the Israelites of Ezekiel's time were simply following in the footprints of their predecessors. Over and over again concern over the defilement and desecration of sacred space reverberates in the Pentateuch. Echoes of this are seen when YHWH was giving the laws regarding ceremonial uncleanness of bodily discharges: "Thus you shall keep the people of Israel separate from their uncleanness, so that they do not die in their uncleanness by defiling my tabernacle that is in their midst" (Lev 15:31). With respect to the sacrifice of children, YHWH warns:

Any of the people of Israel, or of the aliens who reside in Israel, who give any of their offspring to Molech shall be put to death; the people of the land shall stone them to death. I myself will set my face against them, and will cut them off from the people, because they have given of their offspring to Molech, defiling my sanctuary and profaning my holy name. (Lev 20:2, 3)

Those who came into contact with dead bodies and did not follow prescribed cleansing rituals were considered to "defile the tabernacle of the Lord" (Num 19:13). Echoes of the same are articulated when someone dies in the tent: "Any who are unclean but do not purify themselves, those persons shall be cut off from the assembly, for they have defiled the sanctuary of the Lord" (Num 19:20). This is also evident in the concern voiced by the psalmist: "O God, the nations have come into your inheritance; they have defiled your holy temple; they have laid Jerusalem in ruins" (Ps 79:1). YHWH's anger against the people of Judah for not honoring the sanctuary is apparent: "For the people of Judah have done evil in my sight, says the Lord; they have set their abominations in the house that is called by my name, defiling it" (Jer 7:30). Everyone is culpable, including both political and religious leaders:

This city has aroused my anger and wrath, from the day it was built until this day, so that I will remove it from my sight because of all the evil of the people of Israel and the people of Judah that they did to provoke me to anger—they, their kings and their officials, their priests and their prophets, the citizens of Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem. They have turned their backs to me, not their faces; though I have taught them persistently, they would not listen and accept correction. They set up their abominations in the house that bears my name, and defiled it. (Jer 32:31-34)

No proper and acceptable worship encounter can occur in an atmosphere of disrespect and irreverence. The demarcation between the holy and the common must be respected. Deliberately crossing that line, and tampering with the holy spells disaster (Lev 10:1, 2).¹⁵³

As a covenant God, YHWH has always sought ways to maximize his contact and relationship with his people. It is therefore no wonder that as the Israelites traversed the wilderness, YHWH appeared to Moses, and one of the instructions he gave him was that the Israelites build him a sanctuary so he could dwell among them (Exod 25:8). Block remarks that the sanctuary “provided a graciously designed and revealed means for Israel to relate personally with their God, and the rituals performed therein provided a way to maintain their covenant relationship with YHWH.”¹⁵⁴ The sanctuary was therefore not just a holy place inhabited by YHWH; it was a relational enhancement center (Exod 29:42-46).¹⁵⁵ Here people came confessing their sins, offering their sacrifices and leaving with the knowledge that their relationship with God had been restored (Exod 29:10-14;

¹⁵³ For discussion on the importance of distinguishing between the sacred and the common and pure and impure, see Milgrom, *Leviticus 1-16*, 615-617.

¹⁵⁴ Daniel I. Block, "The Joy of Worship: The Mosaic Invitation to the Presence of God (Deut. 12:1-14)," *BSac* 162 (2005): 131-49.

¹⁵⁵ Pierce argues that it was this relational aspect with regard to worship that differentiated the Israelite system of worship from that of their neighbors. Timothy M. Pierce, *Enthroned on Our Praise: An Old Testament Theology of Worship* (Nashville, Tenn.: B & H Publishing, 2008), 166-67.

17:11; Lev 1:3-9).¹⁵⁶ Here the priests, as people's representatives, enacted cultic practices that re-established the people's relationship with YHWH (Lev 16:1-34).¹⁵⁷ Yet it is here that the Israelites introduced false and idolatrous forms of worship that infuriated YHWH.

While establishing the covenant with Israel, YHWH had given very specific guidelines regarding the way the Israelites were to relate to this sanctuary in order to ensure that its sanctity was maintained. He said, "You shall . . . reverence my sanctuary" (Lev 26:2). However in Ezek 5:11, Israel is accused of defiling the sanctuary with detestable things and abominations.¹⁵⁸ YHWH's stern reaction to this infiltration of his sanctuary with these strange objects and practices is seen from his repeated renunciation of pity (Ezek 5:11). This act results in YHWH's harsh judgment involving the withdrawal of his favor from them, followed by death threats from plague, famine, sword, and exile (Ezek 5:11- 17). These practices were offensive to God and thus affected the relationship between him and the people.¹⁵⁹ Instead of being their covenant God, ready to protect them from catastrophes and attacks from enemy forces, he is now going to leave them at

¹⁵⁶ Consider here the practice of laying hands on the head of the sacrifice presented and the concept of atonement (Lev 1:4; 3:2, 8, 13; 4:4, 15, 24, 29, 33).

¹⁵⁷ See Barton's article in which he argues that the prophets not only condemned improper cultic practices but that they were also "actively involved in the Israelite cult." John Barton, "The Prophets and the Cult," in *Temple and Worship in Biblical Israel* (ed. J. Day; New York: T&T Clark, 2005), 111-22.

¹⁵⁸ For discussion on the defilement of the sanctuary in Ezekiel, see Tova Ganzel, "The Defilement and Desecration of the Temple in Ezekiel," 369-79. See also Jacob Milgrom, "The Nature and Extent of Idolatry in Seventh-Eighth Century Judah," 1-13.

¹⁵⁹ Moskala rightly notes the offensive nature of false and perverse forms of worship and states that YHWH condemns such practices because they damage "the very foundation of life's principles and laws of relationship." Jiří Moskala, "Worship in the Book of Daniel" (Berrien Springs, Mich.: Andrews University, 2010), 2, 11.

the mercy of these forces that will culminate their aggression by destroying the temple in Jerusalem, the temple that has become the center of various forms of perverted worship.

This judgment reveals YHWH's aversion for any misuse of his place of worship. Israel has turned its back on YHWH and instead introduced into the sanctuary gods of their own making. YHWH's resolve to punish them for this infraction is indicative of the significance he attaches to the sanctuary and his aversion to improper forms of worship.

Such a structure, which has been exposed to defiling components, cannot be left to give people a false sense of security. It must be demolished as a testament to the people of YHWH's abhorrence of cultic impurity, and those involved in the cultic malpractices must also bear the consequences of their actions (2 Kgs 25:1-21; Jer 39:1-10; 52:3-19; 2 Chr 36:15-21). I completely agree with Bromiley who, in assessing the abuses that characterized the period of the monarchy, concludes that the situation required, among other things, YHWH's "sharp judgment of the destruction of kingdom, city, and Temple to bring the remnant to a realization of their loss and a clear understanding of the issues."¹⁶⁰

Place and Institutions of Worship in Ezekiel 1-24

As we saw in Ezek 5:11, the Israelites had introduced vile images and abominable practices in the sanctuary, and as a result, YHWH accused them of defiling his sanctuary and announced harsh judgments. In announcing the impending judgment upon the

¹⁶⁰ G. W. Bromiley, "Worship," *ZPEB* 5:1135.

mountains, the hills, the ravines, and the valleys of Israel¹⁶¹ in Ezek 6, YHWH declares his intention to demolish the pillars of false worship that the Israelites have introduced into their cultic practices in order to show his total abhorrence and disgust with false devotion. These pagan practices which have deluded the Israelites into a false sense of security must not be allowed to continue unabated. They must be demolished once and for all (Ezek 6:3-7).¹⁶²

YHWH encapsulates the entire process by saying וְנִמְחוּ מַעֲשֵׂיכֶם, “and your works will be wiped away” (Ezek 6:6). The verb used to underscore YHWH’s action on these abhorrent worship practices is מָחָה, “to wipe out, wipe away,” a verb that can have both positive¹⁶³ and negative connotations. This is the same word that is used to describe the complete destruction that took place after the flood (Gen 7:4, 23) and when YHWH promised to completely eradicate the memory of Amalek from under heaven (Exod 17:14).¹⁶⁴

This kind of worship brings disappointment and sorrow to YHWH. Note YHWH’s emotional turmoil when he says, וְנִשְׁבַּרְתִּי אֶת־לִבִּי הַזֶּה, “I was broken with their whoring heart” (Ezek 6:9). To imagine that Israel could forget the God who had betrothed them to himself and set their hearts and eyes to idolatry certainly broke his

¹⁶¹ Note the attempts made by King Hezekiah and Josiah of Judah to purge Israel of idolatrous worship. These were later reintroduced by their successors (2 Kgs 18:1-5; 23:1-20).

¹⁶² For discussion on the details of YHWH’s destruction of their works see Block, *Ezekiel 1-24*, 224-27.

¹⁶³ See for example Isa 25:8; 44:22; Ps 51:3, 11 [Eng 51:1, 9].

¹⁶⁴ For detailed discussion on the use of מָחָה see L. Alonso-Sch kel, “מָחָה,” *TDOT* 8:227-31; Cornelis V. Dam, “מָחָה,” *NIDOTTE* 2:913-14.

heart.¹⁶⁵ What breaks YHWH's heart is their worship of idols. The twofold use of the *qal* participle form of the verb זָנָה, "commit fornication, be a harlot, play the harlot," in this verse emphasizes that this spiritual prostitution was a common practice.

YHWH's repugnance for improper worship is further highlighted in the judgment scene in Ezek 8-11.¹⁶⁶ Here Ezekiel sees a vision¹⁶⁷ of despicable abominations in the sanctuary: the statue of jealousy (Ezek 8:5-6), idols of various kinds on the walls of the sanctuary (Ezek 8:7-13), women wailing for Tammuz (Ezek 8:14-15),¹⁶⁸ and men prostrating themselves and worshiping the sun (Ezek 8:16-18).¹⁶⁹ Tova Ganzel suggests that by citing these four forms of idolatry, Ezekiel is magnifying the sins of the Israelites

¹⁶⁵ See Block, *Ezekiel 1-24*, 231; Hummel, *Ezekiel 1-20*, 194-195; 202-203. See also P. A. Kruger, "Israel, the Harlot (Hos. 2:4-9)," *JNSL* 11 (1983): 107-16.

¹⁶⁶ Andrew Mein characterizes Ezek 8:7-12 as a "clandestine cultic activity." Mein, *Ezekiel and the Ethics of Exile*, 124.

¹⁶⁷ Based on the text of Ezekiel and the fulfillment of the judgments that were predicted, I do not agree with Duguid's contention that the events depicted in the vision of Ezek 8-11 are but "a stylized presentation of reality" and as such have no historical relevance to the events described as taking place in the temple during the time of Ezekiel. Duguid, *Ezekiel and the Leaders of Israel*, 68.

¹⁶⁸ Dijkstra suggests that these women were of the priesthood class responsible for the Cult of Asherah. Meindert Dijkstra, "Goddess, Gods, Men and Women in Ezekiel 8," in *On Reading Prophetic Texts: Gender Specific and Related Studies in Memory of Fokkelien Van Dijk-Hemmes* (ed. B. Becking and M. Dijkstra; Leiden: Brill, 1996), 98. For further discussion on the Cult of Asherah see Judith M. Hadley, *The Cult of Asherah in Ancient Israel and Judah: Evidence for a Hebrew Goddess* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

¹⁶⁹ Zimmerli has an interesting analysis of the use of the number 4 in the book of Ezekiel and other Old Testament texts. He points out that 4 is "a number that expresses the totality of an event or sphere." He therefore concludes that with respect to the four abominations "Ezekiel is shown the whole fullness of sin in Jerusalem." Zimmerli, *Ezekiel 1-24*, 120, 235. Taylor asserts that the practice was quite prevalent in Judah. Taylor, *Yahweh and the Sun*, 24-98. Klopper maintains that "there is adequate textual and visual evidence to confirm that the practice was well known and widespread throughout Israel's history." He says it was "an established, time-honored Israelite religious practice" and further affirms that "astral worship was deeply ingrained in Israel's folk religion." Frances Klopper, "Iconographical Evidence for a Theory on Astral Worship in Seventh-and Sixth-Century Judah," 168, 170.

and thus provides proper justification for YHWH's judgments.¹⁷⁰ Three designations for the sanctuary are used in the chapter: מִקְדָּשׁ, "sanctuary, shrine, temple" (Ezek 8:6); בֵּית־יְהוָה, "the house of YHWH" (Ezek 8:14, 16); and הֵיכַל יְהוָה, "the temple of YHWH" (Ezek 8:16 [twice]). Hummel argues that the use of these three expressions denotes "increasing degrees of sanctity as one moves from the entire compound inward toward the heart of the temple."¹⁷¹ If this is true, this makes the actions of the idolatrous worshipers even more heinous:¹⁷² These worshipers have no respect for the sacred and any punishment that will come to them as a result of this is proper and well deserved.

YHWH's disgust with the worshippers is demonstrated in the judgment action he orders to be undertaken. The executioners are instructed to start their destructive work at the sanctuary (Ezek 9:6) since it is at the center of idolatrous worship (Ezek 8:3-18). They are further instructed to defile (מָלֵא) the temple, filling the courts of the temple with the slain (Ezek 9:7).¹⁷³ YHWH does not want to have anything to do with this place, hence he orders that it be defiled with corpses. This echoes Ezek 24:21 where YHWH

¹⁷⁰ Tova Ganzel, "Transformation of Pentateuchal Descriptions of Idolatry," in *Transforming Visions: Transformations of Text, Tradition, and Theology in Ezekiel* (ed. W. A. Tooman and M. A. Lyons; Eugene, Oreg.: Pickwick Publications, 2010), 43.

¹⁷¹ Hummel, *Ezekiel 1-20*, 251.

¹⁷² Note Richard Davidson's article in which he shows that there is an interrelationship between the ongoing cosmic battle and the sanctuary motif in both the Old and New Testaments. He demonstrates how the sanctuary has always been a focus of attack by the forces of evil. Davidson, "Cosmic Metanarrative," 102-19.

¹⁷³ Commenting on this unprecedented move Tova Ganzel suggests two reasons why YHWH may have commanded this action. First, because YHWH was no longer residing there since the sanctuary had already been defiled by the Israelites. Second, this was to signal the coming destruction of the temple. Ganzel, "The Defilement and Desecration of the Temple in Ezekiel," 373.

announces his intentional and unprecedented role of desecrating (מִקְדָּשׁ) his sanctuary.¹⁷⁴

These worshipers have neglected the worship of the covenant God and instead adopted pagan ways of worship. To use the sanctuary as the platform for such idolatrous practices is profanity of the highest order. YHWH cannot stand idle and innocently and passively watch these sacrilegious acts. The worshipers have spurned him and he too must pour out his wrath upon them.

His abhorrence of the temple is also noted as he begins distancing himself by calling it simply as הַבַּיִת, “the house” (Ezek 9:6, 7), instead of מִקְדָּשִׁי, “my sanctuary” (Ezek 9:6).¹⁷⁵ His final withdrawal from the sanctuary is signaled by the departure of his glory from the temple (Ezek 10), and with this action he sends a clear message to the Israelites that he cannot withstand adulterated worship. The Israelites have made their choice to worship other gods, and YHWH is not going to sanction or be a party to it.

Proper worship must have a high regard for God’s word, acknowledge the superiority and uniqueness of YHWH, and have respect for his sanctuary and other related worship structures. Adhering to this “irreducible minimum of worship” will enhance the divine human relationship. This is where Israel’s score card was found wanting and she had to face the inevitability of divine judgment.

¹⁷⁴ For the connection of this act and the death of Ezekiel’s wife see Stephen L. Cook, “The Speechless Suppression of Grief in Ezekiel 24:15-27: The Death of Ezekiel’s Wife and the Prophet’s Abnormal Response,” in *Thus Says the Lord: Essays on the Former and Latter Prophets in Honor of Robert R. Wilson* (ed. J. J. Ahn and S. L. Cook; New York: T&T Clark, 2009), 222-33.

¹⁷⁵ Block, *Ezekiel 1-24*, 326.

Knowledge and Recognition of YHWH

A Call to Renewed Knowledge of YHWH

Another major theme that is associated with judgment in Ezek 5:5-17 is that YHWH undertook these judicial actions to enable people to know him.¹⁷⁶ The word used to underscore this concept is יָדָע, “know, understand, perceive.” The first time this word is found in the Old Testament it is in the context of a cosmic struggle between God and Satan. Adam and Eve are pawns in this cosmic conflict in which Satan challenges not only their allegiance to God, but the very nature and character of YHWH. This is seen in the question the serpent poses which casts doubt on the veracity of the word of YHWH (Gen 3:1-5). Adam and Eve’s success or failure in countering this deception would depend on their knowledge of YHWH. The serpent has just but one aim—to misrepresent God. The word Adam and Eve choose to believe will determine their knowledge or ignorance of YHWH. When you know and trust someone, you will take their words seriously. Adam and Eve’s ultimate decision proved otherwise, because they chose to listen to and trust Satan rather than God (Gen 3:6). And so we can see that יָדָע is birthed in the context in which the nature, character, and the person of YHWH has been challenged (Gen 3:7, 22). Under such circumstances the question that naturally arises is whether this God can be known enough to be trusted.

As we move on to Gen 4 we are introduced to a יָדָע (vv. 1, 17, 25) that is couched in the context of an intimate relationship between couples. This application of יָדָע sets the

¹⁷⁶ Gowan points out that in the recognition formula, with its many occurrences in the book of Ezekiel, “it is the revelation of God, that is, knowledge of the true character of the one called Yahweh, that is the central concern. Donald E. Gowan, *Theology of the Prophetic Books: The Death and Resurrection of Israel* (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox, 1998), 129.

stage for its usage to spearhead the divine/human relationship. This is why I do not support Wheelhouse's argument that the use of יָדָע in Gen 4:1, 17 connotes an abusive encounter in which Adam begins to control and dominate Eve.¹⁷⁷ Such reasoning does not take into account the full consideration of the meaning of יָדָע. Speaking within the context of the covenant¹⁷⁸ and with reference to the special place Israel occupied within YHWH's salvation history, YHWH uses the same endearing word and says, "You only have I known (יָדָעְתִּי) of all the families of the earth" (Amos 3:2).

The frequency with which the expressions "that they may know that I am YHWH," or "that you will know that I am YHWH," and other variations occur in the book of Ezekiel is remarkable. The expression as first used in Ezek 5:13 is, יִדְעוּ כִּי־אֲנִי, יהוה דִּבַּרְתִּי, "they will know that I am YHWH I have spoken."¹⁷⁹ This expression, which is generally referred to as the recognition formula,¹⁸⁰ appears in several variations in the

¹⁷⁷ Troy A. Wheelhouse, "What Is *Yada* Doing Here? Another Text of Terror in the Creation Story," *JITC* 32 (2005): 123-31.

¹⁷⁸ Herbert B. Huffmon, "The Treaty Background of Hebrew *Yada*'," *BASOR* 181 (1966): 31-37; idem, "A Further Note of the Treaty Background of Hebrew *Yada*'," *BASOR* 184 (1966): 36-38.

¹⁷⁹ For discussion on the background and use of the self-introduction formula and the recognition formula in the book of Ezekiel see Zimmerli, *I Am Yahweh*. See also VanGemenen, *Interpreting the Prophetic Word*, 329-31; John Goldingay, "That You May Know That YHWH Is God: A Study in the Relationship between Theology and Historical Truth in the Old Testament," *TynBul* 23 (1972): 58-93.

¹⁸⁰ Zimmerli calls it "the formula of self-introduction." Zimmerli, *Ezekiel 1-24*, 37. Block observes that the phrase is used here as a "purpose statement" intended to transform this judgment oracle "from a mere announcement of an event into an announcement of Yahweh's historical self-manifestation." Block, *Ezekiel 1-24*, 211. On this account Hummel notes: "Whatever false notions the Israelites may have developed about God, his drastic acts of judgment, no less than his signal acts of deliverance, were in fulfillment of predictions uttered long ago and were intended to remind the people of the covenant he had made with them." Hummel, *Ezekiel 1-20*, 185. Fredenburg observes that "Israel had worshiped foreign gods for so long that they could no longer distinguish which god(s) had granted them blessings. Only by enacting the full range of the curses inscribed in their covenant could Yahweh bring their focus

Old Testament.¹⁸¹ In the book of Ezekiel alone it occurs eighty-six times.¹⁸² These occurrences are in contexts of judgment¹⁸³ as well as those of restoration and salvation.¹⁸⁴

Some critical scholars question YHWH's justification for using such language when, in essence, his stance toward the Israelites has been full of harsh and severe judgment realities. Habel for example accuses YHWH of an obsession with some form of selfish pride and argues that because of this haughty attitude, the recognition formula should be called "a divine ego formula."¹⁸⁵ Habel does not seem to consider all the implications this statement has as used by YHWH. Our discussion of this formula, however, reveals that even with YHWH's seeming harshness, he has the noble purpose of

back to him and their relationship." Brandon L. Fredenburg, *Ezekiel* (Joplin, Mo.: College Press, 2002), 71.

¹⁸¹ Outside the book of Ezekiel see יהוה פִּי־אֲנִי יֵדְעֶתֶם, "you shall know that I am the Lord" (Exod 6:7; 10:2; 16:12; 1 Kgs 20:28; Joel 4:17). יֵדְעֶתֶם פִּי־אֲנִי יהוה, "you shall know that I am the Lord" (1 Kgs 20:13; Isa 60:16). יֵדְעוּ פִּי־אֲנִי יהוה, "they shall know that I am the Lord" (Exod 29:46); אֲנִי יהוה . . . פִּי יֵדְעוּ, "they shall know . . . that I am the Lord" (Exod 7:5; 14:4, 18, "the Egyptians," Isa 49:26, "all flesh").

¹⁸² See יהוה פִּי־אֲנִי יֵדְעֶתֶם, "you shall know that I am the Lord" (Ezek 6:7, 13; 7:4, 9; 11:10, 12; 12:20; 13:14; 14:8; 15:7; 17:21; 20:38, 42, 44; 22:22; 25:5; 35:9; 36:11; 37:6, 13, 14). יֵדְעֶתֶם פִּי־אֲנִי יהוה, "you will know that I am the Lord" (Ezek 13:21, 23). יֵדְעֶתֶם פִּי־אֲנִי יהוה, "you shall know that I am the Lord" (Ezek 16:62; 22:16; 25:7; 35:4, 12). יֵדְעוּ פִּי־אֲנִי אֲדֹנָי, "they shall know that I am the Lord God" (13:9; 23:49; 24:24). יֵדְעוּ פִּי־אֲנִי יהוה, "they shall know that I am the Lord" (Ezek 5:13; 6:10, 14; 7:27; 12:15, 16; 24:27; 25:11, 17; 26:6; 28:22, 23, 26; 29:9, 21; 30:8, 19, 25, 26; 32:15; 33:29; 34:27, 30; 35:15; 36:38; 38:23; 39:6, 28). פִּי־אֲנִי יהוה יֵדְעוּ, "they shall know that I am the Lord God" (Ezek 28:24; 29:16). פִּי־אֲנִי יהוה יֵדְעוּ, "they shall know . . . that I am the Lord" (Ezek 17:24, "all the trees of the field," 21:10, "all flesh," 29:6, "all the inhabitants of Egypt," 36:23, "the nations," 36:36, "the nations that are left around you," 37:28, "the nations," 39:7, "the nations," 39:22, "the house of Israel").

¹⁸³ The format "they will know that I YHWH, I have spoken" (Ezek 5:13). For its occurrence in the context of judgment against Judah see Ezek 6:7, 10, 13; 7:4, 27; 11:10, 12; 12:15, 20; 13:14, 21, 23; 14:8; 15:7; 22:16; for its use in the judgment against the nations see Ezek 25:5, 7, 11, 17; 26:6; 28:22-23; 30:8, 19, 25-26; 32:15.

¹⁸⁴ Ezek 20:42, 44; 36:11; 37:6, 13, 14; 16:62; 34:30.

¹⁸⁵ See Norman Habel, "The Silence of the Lands: The Ecojustice Implications of Ezekiel's Judgment Oracles," in *Ezekiel's Hierarchical World: Wrestling with a Tiered Reality* (ed. S. L. Cook and C. L. Patton; Atlanta, Ga.: Society of Biblical Literature, 2004), 136.

reclaiming his people by inviting them to understand his nature and his person. Such an understanding will enable them to come to terms with the suffering brought by YHWH's punishments but will also challenge them to make radical changes in their lives.

Recognition Formula and the Disobedient

A review of the recognition formula in Ezekiel shows that it is connected to the issues that have caused the rift between YHWH and Israel: the laws and ordinances, cultic violations, and the accompanying judgments. YHWH ties these concerns to the recognition formula to show that his judgments are not an outgrowth of some personal malice or vendetta, but are executed out of a desire to lead Israel to a true understanding of the nature and person of YHWH. It may not be wrong to suggest that it is the absence of this awareness that has led to the covenant violations.

In its first usage in Ezekiel, the statement of recognition highlights the identity of the speaker behind all the aforementioned violations and covenant curses: "They will know that I am YHWH I have spoken" (Ezek 5:13). YHWH as the aggrieved party speaks out and identifies himself. Although Ezekiel is his representative to these people, yet they must recognize that behind the words of this prophet is YHWH himself.

The way this identification and the overall recognition formula are articulated shows YHWH's overall concern for his covenant and the covenant community (Ezek 16:62). They have been described as rebellious, obstinate, and stubborn (Ezek 2:3-7), and they have rebelled against and rejected the law (Ezek 5:6, 7). YHWH identifies himself within the robe of the recognition formula to pinpoint himself as the author of these laws: "You shall know that I am the Lord, whose statutes you have not followed, and whose

ordinances you have not kept” (Ezek 11:12). He uses the extended form of the recognition formula here to inform the Israelites that he is the author of these statutes and ordinances. And because of this he stands justified to bring penalties upon them for disobedience. Confronting the rebellious attitude that is at the root of this disobedience YHWH announces, “I will purge out the rebels among you, and those who transgress against me. . . . Then you shall know that I am the Lord” (Ezek 20:38). The recognition formula in these cases indicates that Israel is faced with the stark reality. She has gone against YHWH’s will, but he still hopes that there are those who can recognize him and reconnect with him.

The Recognition Formula and Cultic Leaders

Another use of the recognition formula pertains to the religious leaders. The people who should be giving guidance in spiritual matters are caught in the web of falsehood and deception. Ezekiel 13 reverberates with accusations against these religious personnel. YHWH announces, “My hand will be against the prophets who see false visions and utter lying divinations; they shall not be in the council of my people, nor be enrolled in the register of the house of Israel, nor shall they enter the land of Israel; and you shall know that I am the Lord God” (Ezek 13:9). Their excommunication reveals the harsh reality of misappropriating the word of YHWH. Because of this the cultic leaders are denied the three basic Israelite privileges,¹⁸⁶ and as such, have no hope of salvation. They are essentially consigned to oblivion.¹⁸⁷ The use of the recognition formula with

¹⁸⁶ Block, *Ezekiel 1-24*, 404.

¹⁸⁷ Tuell, *Ezekiel*, 73; Hummel, *Ezekiel 1-20*, 369-70; Cooper, *Ezekiel*, 155-56.

this threefold punishment is intended to alert the prophets that their fate has been determined by YHWH himself.

YHWH's verdict gets even tougher as he takes precautionary measures to curtail the profession of the prophets. First, he puts a halt to their work: "Therefore you shall no longer see false visions or practice divination; I will save my people from your hand. Then you will know that I am the LORD" (Ezek 13:23). Any prophetic work that does not fulfill the mission of leading people to a better acquaintance with YHWH has lost its legitimacy and has to be halted.

Second, they will have no access to the people: "I will tear off your veils, and save my people from your hands; they shall no longer be prey in your hands; and you shall know that I am the Lord" (Ezek 13:21). The use of the recognition formula in these settings underscores three things. At the outset is the identity of YHWH. YHWH comes through as one concerned about the illicit and abhorrent practices of these false prophets. He knows the damage the work of the false prophets is apt to do in the lives of the unsuspecting people they prey upon. Next, it shows the significance YHWH attaches to his word. It is through the proper and correct appropriation of the word that future destinies of individuals depend (Deut 30:15, 16; 32:46, 47). Any misrepresentation of this word puts human life in eternal jeopardy.¹⁸⁸

Lastly, YHWH's concern for humanity is evident. He plans to wrest the people from the hold of the false prophets. He is their God, and they are his people. This covenant relationship forces him to step in and deliver them from these unscrupulous

¹⁸⁸ Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 197.

religious practitioners. The use of the verb וְהַצַּלְתִּי, “I will save” (Ezek 13:21, 23), highlights YHWH’s determination. This situation needed nothing short of the direct intervention of YHWH.

Recognition Formula and Punishments for Idolatry

In a number of cases the recognition formula is directly linked to the idolatrous practices of the Israelites. This can be seen in 7:4, 9 where YHWH declares: “I will judge you according to your ways, while your abominations (תוֹעֲבוֹתֶיךָ) are among you. Then you shall know that I am the Lord.” YHWH points out the cause of the punishment, but ends with the recognition formula. The use of the word מִכָּה, “strike,” which is attached to this recognition formula, is significant here. It is intended to identify YHWH as an active participant in their punishment.¹⁸⁹ These idolaters, though under divine condemnation (cf. Josh 7:1-26; Judg 1:1-7), come to acknowledge YHWH through his direct punitive actions.¹⁹⁰ Even through tough discipline, YHWH still intends that people get to acknowledge him and get a better grasp of his nature and person.

In another rejoinder to the detestable religious innovations of the Israelites, he declares, “They shall repay you for your lewdness, and you shall bear the penalty for your sinful idolatry (תַּטְאִי גִלּוּלֶיךָ); and you shall know that I am the Lord God” (Ezek 23:49). In an all-inclusive statement regarding idolatry he warns those who persist in these abominable practices: “I the Lord will answer them myself. I will set my face

¹⁸⁹ Zimmerli, *I Am Yahweh*, 33.

¹⁹⁰ Block, *Ezekiel 1-24*, 254.

against them; I will make them a sign and a byword and cut them off from the midst of my people; and you shall know that I am the Lord” (14:7, 8).

These alien cultic practices are abhorrent to YHWH. Those experimenting with them must be ready to face the judge of the universe and give account for their actions. Here again, the recognition formula identifies YHWH as the offended deity who will dispense justice to the offenders to show the distasteful nature of such practices and his utter contempt for them. The harsh punishment meted out to Israel (Ezek 23:46-49) ends on two important notes. One is that their punishment serve as a warning to others (v. 38) and two is that they will know YHWH (v. 49). Again, however hard and severe the punitive measures may be, YHWH’s objective is always pedagogical. He desires to be known by his people.

What precedes the recognition formula in Ezek 20:26 is rather puzzling. YHWH says that he defiled the Israelites through their own gifts, the sacrifice of their own children, in order to devastate them (לְמַעַן יִשְׁמְדוּם) ¹⁹¹ so that “they might know that I am YHWH.” YHWH allowed this because their senseless minds were darkened (cf. Rom 1:18-32). This apostasy resulted in their own punishment—losing their children. A number of scholars find it unusual that YHWH could do this. ¹⁹² YHWH takes such extraordinary measures in order to awaken the Israelites to their spiritual lethargy and for

¹⁹¹ HALOT renders the verb יִשְׁמְדוּם, used here as (1) “to cause to be deserted, cause to be desolated” (Ezek 30:12, 14); (2) “to cause people to be dumbfounded, disconcerted, awestruck” (Ezek 3:15; 20:26; 32:10).

¹⁹² Zimmerli, for example, suggests the statement of recognition in this context did not initially belong here and its presence is the work of a redactor. Zimmerli, *I Am Yahweh*, 36. See also Tuell, *Ezekiel*, 137; John W. Wevers, *Ezekiel* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), 156.

them to get to know and understand him. Unprecedented sinful actions call for unprecedented judicial measures. I therefore concur with Tuell who says that “God’s defilement and devastation of Israel make the utter unworthiness of Ezekiel’s community undeniable; they are abandoned to doom and cannot save themselves. The community’s fate rests entirely in God’s hands, and is solely dependent upon God’s identity and character.”¹⁹³

Recognition Formula and Covenant Curses

We also note that some of the statements of the recognition formula are closely linked to the covenant curses. These include curses pertaining to the devastation of land, “I will stretch out my hand against them, and make the land desolate and waste, throughout all their settlements, from the wilderness to Riblah. Then they shall know that I am the Lord” (Ezek 6:14; cf. 12:20). Others relate to the exile, “They shall know that I am the Lord, when I disperse them among the nations and scatter them through the countries” (12:15, 16; cf. 17:21; 22: 16). Still others have to do with the sword, “that all flesh may know that I, the Lord, have drawn My sword out of its sheath; it shall not return anymore” (Ezek 21:10 [Eng 21:5]; cf. 11:10; 17:21).

These judgments show a part of YHWH that people may have overlooked. The threats he issues should the covenant be broken are not just empty threats. They are divine judgments that will eventually come upon the disobedient. Their fulfillment will redirect people’s attention to the covenant Maker, and remind them of his faithfulness and commitment to the covenant.

¹⁹³ Tuell, *Ezekiel*, 132.

Recognition Formula and the Covenant

The ugliness of Israel's sin has been unmasked in Ezek 16. She is guilty of flagrant covenant violations because she has despised YHWH's oath and broken the covenant. YHWH has not flinched to punish her accordingly. Yet at the end of this arduous experience YHWH turns and promises to make an everlasting covenant with her (Ezek 16:59-63), and the resultant effect of this covenant pact will be the knowledge of YHWH (v. 62). Maybe now Israel will be faithful and live within the covenant bounds.

The association of the recognition formula with the covenant is also seen in the parable of Ezek 17. King Zedekiah's failure to honor the terms of the treaty with Babylon comes under strong condemnation (vv. 13-15). But later in the text, YHWH accuses him of despising his oath and breaking his covenant (v. 19). Zedekiah forgot that any commitment one makes is binding and cannot be broken haphazardly (cf. Josh 9; 2 Sam 21).¹⁹⁴ The pericope ends with a modified form of the recognition formula: "Then you will know that I, YHWH, I have spoken" (v. 21) after YHWH spells out the punishment for Zedekiah and his troops (vv. 20, 21).¹⁹⁵ The recognition formula in this context places a divine stamp on the narrative and affirms that its fulfillment is guaranteed.¹⁹⁶

¹⁹⁴ Block, *Ezekiel 1-24*, 553.

¹⁹⁵ For some perspectives on Zedekiah as the last king of Judah, see Shimon Bakon, "Zedekiah: Last King of Judah," *JBQ* 36 (2008): 93-101; Juha Pakkala, "Zedekiah's Fate and the Dynastic Succession," *JBL* 125 (2006): 443-452. See also Mark Roncace, *Jeremiah, Zedekiah, and the Fall of Jerusalem* (New York: T&T Clark, 2005); Mary C. Callaway, "Telling the Truth and Telling Stories: An Analysis of Jeremiah 37-38," *USQR* 44 (1991): 253-265.

¹⁹⁶ Hummel, *Ezekiel 1-20*, 515.

Recognition Formula and the Fall of Jerusalem

The recognition formula is at times directly connected with the events of the fall of Jerusalem. This can be seen in the parable of the useless vine (Ezek 15): “I will set my face against them. They will go out from one fire, but another fire shall devour them. Then you shall know that I am the Lord, when I set my face against them” (Ezek 15:7; cf. 22:22). This extended recognition formula makes it clear that YHWH is responsible for the deserved punishment that comes upon Jerusalem because of its many misdeeds.¹⁹⁷

The punishment YHWH has been threatening reaches a climax in the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple in 587/86 B.C. As painful and heartbreaking as this event may be, it will be a stark reminder to the people of Israel of the nature of the God they have rebuffed. He is a God who fulfills his word and brings punishment on the disobedient (Ezek 24:24). They will learn the hard lesson that YHWH will not spare even this treasured temple when its use has been compromised.¹⁹⁸ The exiles have to come to terms with this reality and get to understand the true nature of YHWH.¹⁹⁹

The Recognition Formula and Justification of the Judgments

There are times when YHWH uses the recognition formula as a vindication tool: “They shall know that I am the Lord; I did not threaten in vain to bring this disaster upon them (Ezek 6:10). The same can be seen in Ezek 14:23 when YHWH justifies the catastrophe of 587/86 B.C. because of the deeds of the inhabitants of Judah. Hence their

¹⁹⁷ Block, *Ezekiel 1-24*, 458; Hummel, *Ezekiel 1-20*, 416.

¹⁹⁸ Block, *Ezekiel 1-24*, 797.

¹⁹⁹ Greenberg aptly refers to this moment as a time when “the people would eventually realize the redemptive significance of Jerusalem’s fall.” Greenberg, *Ezekiel 21-37*, 516.

punishments are deserved and justified. They are retributions returned upon them מִדָּרְכָם, “according to their way,” and וּבְמִשְׁפָּטֵיהֶם, “according to their judgments” (Ezek 7:27).²⁰⁰ Similar constructions occur in Ezek 7:4, 8 and 9, כִּדְרָכֶיךָ עָלֶיךָ אֶתֵּן; כִּי דְרָכֶיךָ עָלֶיךָ אֶתֵּן, “according to your ways I will give upon you” (cf. Ezek 7:8); YHWH repays them for their actions,²⁰¹ putting into motion the *lex talionis* principle.²⁰²

The fact that these constructions appear within the context of judgment shows that YHWH is not just obsessed with wrath and punishment for its own sake. These punitive actions are designed to reconnect the people who have experienced YHWH’s punitive

²⁰⁰ Raitt observes that YHWH’s words give a clear indication of theodicy. Raitt, *A Theology of Exile*, 91.

²⁰¹ Block, *Ezekiel 1-24*, 250.

²⁰² The Bible has many examples of *lex talionis*. For example, in the case of fighting men who cause bodily injury to a pregnant woman, the biblical injunction is clear: “If any harm follows, then you shall give life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, burn for burn, wound for wound, stripe for stripe” (Exod 21:23-25). Leviticus has this to say on the principle of *lex talionis*: “Anyone who maims another shall suffer the same injury in return: fracture for fracture, eye for eye, tooth for tooth; the injury inflicted is the injury to be suffered” (Lev 24:19, 20). In order to discourage false testimony from witnesses, a clear mandate is given in Deut 19:18-21: “The judges shall make a thorough inquiry. If the witness is a false witness, having testified falsely against another, then you shall do to the false witness just as the false witness had meant to do to the other. So you shall purge the evil from your midst. The rest shall hear and be afraid, and a crime such as this shall never again be committed among you. Show no pity: life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot.” Through Isaiah he says: “Woe to the guilty! How unfortunate they are, for what their hands have done shall be done to them” (Isa 3:11). And again through Jeremiah he announces: “I the LORD test the mind and search the heart, to give to all according to their ways, according to the fruit of their doings” (Jer 17:10). Sounding a warning concerning the day of the Lord, YHWH declares: “For the day of the LORD is near against all the nations. As you have done, it shall be done to you; your deeds shall return on your own head” (Obad 15). In the New Testament, Jesus reverses this principle by discouraging any form of retaliatory act (Matt 5:38-42). The principle of *lex talionis* is applied when God calls his eschatological people to sever ties with Babylon: “Come out of her, my people, so that you do not take part in her sins, and so that you do not share in her plagues; for her sins are heaped high as heaven, and God has remembered her iniquities. Render to her as she herself has rendered, and repay her double for her deeds; mix a double draught for her in the cup she mixed. As she glorified herself and lived luxuriously, so give her a like measure of torment and grief” (Rev 18:4-7).

measures with him. It may be that the people's failure to know and understand YHWH may have led them to rebellion and disobedience. YHWH therefore affirms that after the people experience these harsh judgments, they would need to gain a better understanding of his nature and character.²⁰³ Cases of the recognition formula that echo restoration and salvation attest to this.

Recognition Formula and Restoration

As a reminder that there is still hope for Israel in spite of the past failures, YHWH connects the recognition formula with the concept of restoration. He therefore tells them, "You shall know that I am the Lord, when I bring you into the land of Israel, the country I swore to give to your ancestors" (Ezek 20: 38, 42; cf. 34:30; 36:11; 37:6, 13, 14). Truly, this gracious divine reaction is something that Israel could not have expected, taking into account their sinful actions. They did not deserve this divine magnanimity. This action has the potential of revealing the true nature of YHWH. He is a God who meets human moral and spiritual deficiencies with just retribution. But he is also a God who, because of his gracious character, relents and grants humanity another chance. He is a God in whom justice and mercy coexist. Because he could promise such unmerited action of restoring Israel to its land should give the Israelites a better understanding of his character.

²⁰³ It is therefore not surprising to see Eichrodt claim that one of the purposes of YHWH's actions is "to confer a new knowledge of himself." Eichrodt, *Ezekiel*, 15. Cooper observes that these actions were undertaken "that all may 'know' him and his motives, his true character." Cooper, *Ezekiel*, 104.

Summary

This investigation has revealed that God is not the cruel tyrant that some people have made him to be. Rather he is a God who, though wronged by those who do not follow the dictates of his word, will meticulously follow the judicial process so that in the end he is found to be just in all that he does. His judgments therefore demonstrate his justice and righteousness in these judicial procedures. His justice is further demonstrated by the sufficient evidence he provides before the guilty are convicted. That is why he says he does not act in vain. He is prompted to act because of evident breaches of the covenant. The Israelites do not want to follow his laws and they are engaged in idolatry. There are rampant cultic and liturgical abuses. The judgments that he brings upon them may result in pain and suffering, but they are deserved and justified.

Though Israel has proven to be an unfaithful covenant partner, YHWH remains committed to the covenant. The concern he has on the statutes and ordinances are evidence of his dedication to the covenant. His passion and jealousy towards the Israelites when they stray after other gods show his commitment to them as a covenant partner. Even bringing the covenant curses upon them shows his dedication to the covenant. The use of the covenant formula in Ezek 1-24 shows he has not given up on the Israelites. YHWH's devotion to the covenant reaches its climax when he assures Israel that he will establish an everlasting covenant with them (Ezek 16:60).

YHWH's judgments are also enacted to show his concern for the sanctity of the sanctuary and proper worship. The Israelites misused the sanctuary by introducing idols into its precincts. They worshiped gods that were no gods. Moreover, the word of God, which is one of the central pillars of worship, was relegated to the background and

completely neglected and rejected. Some of their leaders were accomplices in these religious abuses, teaching their own words. All these cultic abuses infuriated YHWH. He had to take remedial actions to correct the malpractices so that worship could regain its original purpose and ideal. This inquiry therefore suggests that YHWH's judgments were not meant just to condemn abuses that characterized worship in ancient Israel, they were also designed to raise an awareness of what proper worship entails.

This inquiry therefore suggests that for proper worship to take place, it must have a high regard for God's word, it must acknowledge the superiority and uniqueness of YHWH as the object of worship and it must have respect for his sanctuary and other related worship structures. Adhering to this "irreducible minimum of worship" has the potential of enhancing the divine human relationship.

Finally, the judgments in Ezek 1-24 are meant to lead to a renewed knowledge of God. It is therefore not surprising to find the recognition formula attached virtually to every aspect of these judicial actions. The judgments are meant to make people know and understand him better. YHWH is a covenant God. He is a God of relationships. As people come to know him through these judgments and discover that he has their eternal destiny in mind, they will acknowledge his unfailing love and respond accordingly.

CHAPTER 5

NATURE OF DIVINE JUDGMENT IN EZEKIEL 5:5-17

WITHIN ITS CONTEXT

Introduction

The discussion in chapter 3 has revealed that Israel had persisted in its breach of the covenant. This blatant defiance must now be met with divine retribution. This chapter examines Ezek 5:5-17 and its wider context of Ezek 1-24 to determine the means YHWH threatens to employ in this divine retributive endeavor against Israel. The nature of these judgments takes on a personal element, with YHWH as the chief commanding officer, unleashing various arsenals on Israel. As the discussion progresses, references are made to Lev 26 and Deut 28 to determine the covenant backdrop of the basis of YHWH's harsh judgment on Israel.¹

The "I" Judgment Statements in Ezekiel 5:5-17

Ezekiel 5:5-17 has many "I" judgment statements that focus mainly on YHWH's

¹ See M. Lyons who argues that when Ezekiel uses covenant punishments from the Holiness Code to depict the "actual or imminent" conditions in Judah, he "interprets the fall of Jerusalem as punishment for covenant violation and implicates his contemporaries as covenant violators." Michael A. Lyons, "Transformation of Law: Ezekiel's Use of the Holiness Code," in *Transforming Visions: Transformations of Text, Tradition, and Theology in Ezekiel* (ed. W. A. Tooman and M. A. Lyons; Eugene, Ore.: Pickwick, 2010), 19. John Burton's observation that the book of Leviticus "attempts to make sense of misfortune in terms of the just dealings of God" cannot be accepted because of its presupposition of the exilic or post-exilic authorship of Leviticus. Barton, "Prophecy and Theodicy," 80.

threatened punishments upon Israel. For the purpose of this study these judgment statements have been classified into three kinds, namely (1) statements of direct intent of judgment, (2) statements of withdrawal of divine favor, and (3) statements of instruments of judgment.

Statements of Direct Intent of Divine Judgment

These statements of direct intent of divine judgment are found in various sections of Ezek 5:5-17. The first of these is the adversarial declaration, הִנְנִי עָלֶיךָ גַּם-אֲנִי, “Behold I am against you, even I myself” (Ezek 5:8),² which corresponds to וְנִתַּתִּי פָנַי בְּכֶם, “I will set my face against you,”³ in Lev 26:17. Both constructions use adversative prepositions עַל and בְּ respectively to emphasize YHWH’s antagonistic stance toward Israel. It is in this regard that Hals characterizes it as the “challenge to a duel formula,”⁴ and observes that it “is used particularly in words of YHWH constituting announcements in prophecies of punishment” and further notes that “in most cases the context is dominated by the imagery of battle.”⁵

The formula occurs 22 times in the Old Testament and 14 times in Ezekiel.⁶ Of

² Moshe Greenberg translates the phrase, הִנְנִי עָלֶיךָ, “I am coming at you.” Greenberg, *Ezekiel 1-20*, 113. Allen calls it the “formula of encounter” and גַּם-אֲנִי “the reactive phrase.” Allen, *Ezekiel 1-19*, 74.

³ For other passages that employ the phrase “turn against” see Lev 17:10; 20:3, 5, 6; 26:17; Jer 44:11; Ezek 14:8; 15:7.

⁴ Hals, *Ezekiel*, 352, 359. See also Block, *Ezekiel 1-24*, 201.

⁵ Hals, *Ezekiel*, 359.

⁶ See Ezek 5:8; 13:8, 20; 21:8; 26:3; 28:22; 29:3, 10; 30:22; 34:10; 35:3; 36:9; 38:3; 39:1. It is also worth noting that the same formula is used only two other times in the prophetic books: two times in Nahum (2:14 and 3:5); and six times in Jeremiah (21:13; 23:30, 31, 32; 50:31; 51:25).

these 14 occurrences it is used nine times in the first two sections of Ezekiel that chronicle judgment on Israel (Ezek 1-24) and judgment on other nations (Ezek 25-33). Except for its usage in Ezek 36:9, where it is found in the context of the restoration of Israel, and therefore translated “behold I am for you,” as used in Ezekiel it generally depicts YHWH’s threatening posture.⁷ With the use of this formula, a complete reversal of YHWH’s relationship to Israel has occurred. The God who is supposed to be for them is now against them and at this point addresses them in the same way he addresses other nations (Ezek 26:3; 28:22; 29:3, 10; 35:3; 38:3; 39:1). Because of their disobedience he assumes the posture of their adversary and is ready to wipe them out.⁸

The use of the formula, *הִנְנִי עֲלֵיךְ*, is further augmented by the phrase *גַּם-אֲנִי*, “even I, myself” (Ezek 5:11 [twice]).⁹ The phrase has parallels in Lev 26:24, 28. The phrase underscores not only the seriousness of YHWH’s judgment threats on Israel, but also expresses divine rage, anger, and fury at his people’s intransigence. The people must know the exact identity of the one they have sinned against; hence the use of *גַּם-אֲנִי*.

As if there is a crescendo in the way YHWH presents his case against Israel, the next judgment statement is thus forcefully presented, *וְעָשִׂיתִי בָךְ אֵת אֲשֶׁר לֹא-עָשִׂיתִי וְאֵת אֲשֶׁר-לֹא-אֶעֱשֶׂה כְּמָהוּ עוֹד*, “I will do in you that which I have never done and what I will never do like it again” (Ezek 5:9). The use of the verb *עָשֶׂה*, “do, make,” reveals the seriousness with which YHWH is approaching this horrifying and unparalleled task. The

⁷ Zimmerli, *Ezekiel 1-24*, 175; Hummel, *Ezekiel 1-20*, 182.

⁸ Block, *Ezekiel 1-24*, 202.

⁹ For other uses of this phrase see Ezek 8:18; 9:10; 16:43; 20:15, 23, 25; 21:22 and 24:9.

threefold repetition of the word עֲשֶׂה in Ezek 5:9 emphasizes YHWH's resolve to carry out, not only this punishment, but many other successive judgments.¹⁰

The book of Leviticus portrays the intensification of the judgments by the use of the number seven, an element that is not found in Ezek 5: "I will punish you seven times for your sins" (Lev 26:18). The *qal* perfect form of the verb יָסַר, "add, increase, do again," is followed by the intensive *pi'el* perfect form of the verb יָסַר, "discipline, chasten, instruct."¹¹ This construction corresponds to the form in Lev 26:21, "I will multiply your afflictions seven times over, as your sins deserve" and in Lev 26:24, "I will strike you, even I myself, seven times." The use of the expression, שִׁבַּע עַל־חַטֹּאתֶיכֶם, "seven times over your sins" is used three times (Lev 26:18, 24, 28), with a slight variation in Lev 26:21, where the form שִׁבַּע כְּחַטֹּאתֶיכֶם, "seven times according to your sins" is used. The use of this phrase underscores the intensity and seriousness of the threatened judgments.¹² Unprecedented actions call for unprecedented remedies. Israel's

¹⁰ Ringgren says that when YHWH is the subject of the verb עֲשֶׂה it often "refers to something God brings to pass in his governance of the world." Among the things that he may bring to pass are judgments of different kinds. H. Ringgren, "עֲשֶׂה," *TDOT* 11:387-403.

¹¹ See Merrill who remarks that when this verb is used with YHWH as the subject, as is the case here, it "speaks of YHWH's punishment of sin, usually of his own people and in the framework of covenant violation." E. H. Merrill, "יָסַר," *NIDOTTE* 2:479-82

¹² Rooker notes that the sevenfold nature of these punishments denotes "the completeness of these judgments." Mark F. Rooker, *Leviticus* (Nashville, Tenn.: Broadman & Holman, 2000), 317. Kaiser posits that "this adding of judgments and increasing the tempo and severity of the visitations from God is also used in Amos 4:6-12." He also observes that this severity of the punishments is "not a retaliatory device on God's part, but as a further stimulus to capture Israel's attention." Walter C. Kaiser, "The Book of Leviticus: Introduction, Commentary and Reflections," in *The New Interpreter's Bible* (ed. L. E. Keck; Nashville, Tenn.: Abingdon, 1994), 1178, 1180. Milgrom on the other hand suggests that the number seven is employed thus "because it was thought to possess a magical capacity of threat." Milgrom, *Leviticus* 23-27, 2308.

behavior is abhorrent to YHWH. He therefore sends a clear message that this kind of behavior cannot be entertained and must be met with the full force of the law.

The last of these statements of direct intent of judgment is, **בַּעֲשׂוֹתִי בָּךְ שְׁפָטִים בָּאֵף**, **וּבְחֵמָה וּבְתַכְחֻת חֵמָה**, “when I do judgments in you with anger and with wrath and with stinging rebuke” (Ezek 5:15). This statement suggests two significant aspects of divine judgment. First, it implies the fury and wrath of one who has been offended and his determination to unleash the punishment on the wrongdoers. This determination is indicated by the use of the last sentence in v. 15: **אֲנִי יְהוָה דִּבַּרְתִּי**, “I YHWH, I have spoken.” Second, it reveals the intensity with which this judgment will be carried out. This is seen in the use of the following successive nouns **בָּאֵף**, “with anger,” **וּבְחֵמָה**, “with wrath,” **וּבְתַכְחֻת חֵמָה**, “with furious punishments.” This can be likened to a nation planning to wage war against an enemy saying it will deploy the military, the air force, and the navy for the full and unquestionable impact of its intervention. YHWH’s intervention on Israel will be so concentrated that its full impact will be devastating.

These statements portray a God who has reached the end of the road and who is now determined to punish his recalcitrant people. But the statements also show that with such an angry and disappointed God, the nature of the punishments to be unleashed is going to be extremely serious. The discussion in the last chapter has shown that Israel has breached the covenant, hence YHWH stands justified in meting out retributive justice.

Statements of Withdrawal of Divine Favor

YHWH is depicted in the Hebrew Bible as “merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abounding in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity

and transgression and sin” (Exod 34:6, 7). Yet in the last part of this passage a picture of God emerges that is consistent with what we find in Ezek 5, a God who “by no means clears the guilty, who visits the iniquity of the fathers upon the children and the children’s children to the third and the fourth generation” (Exod 34:7b).¹³

This adversarial picture of YHWH emerges as we examine portions of Ezek 5:5-17. One such antagonistic stance is in the announcement, *וְלֹא-תַחֲחֹם עֵינַי וְגַם-אֲנִי לֹא אֶחַמֵּם*, “my eyes will not pity, even I myself I will not have compassion” (Ezek 5:11). Hals labels this divine stance, the “No Pity” formula and says the formula is “used occasionally in Deuteronomy and Ezekiel to underscore the seriousness of a crime and the necessity of appropriate punishment.”¹⁴ He further adds that the use of this formula in the first person in Ezekiel, as opposed to its use in the book of Deuteronomy, where it is used in the second person, is an indication of YHWH’s determination to “fully carry out an announced punishment against His people.”¹⁵ The reason for this change in YHWH’s disposition toward Israel is because they have defiled his sanctuary with vile images and detestable practices. This verse is introduced by *לָכֵן* which presents the basis for the imminent and impending judgment.¹⁶

¹³ For similar portrayals see Num 14:18; Neh 9:17; Pss 86:15; 145:8; Joel 2:13; Jonah 4:2; Nah 1:3.

¹⁴ Hals, *Ezekiel*, 361.

¹⁵ Ibid.; see also the use of this formula in Ezek 7:4, 9; 8:18; 9:5, 10.

¹⁶ The use of the oath phrase *חַי-אֲנִי*, “as I live,” immediately after *לָכֵן* in Ezek 5:11, underscores YHWH’s resolve to personally enact punishments on Israel. The phrase occurs 22 times in the entire Old Testament, with 16 of its usages in the book of Ezekiel (Ezek 14:16, 18, 20; 16:48; 17:16, 19; 18:3; 20:3, 31, 33; 33:11, 27; 34:8; 35:6, 11). For other uses in the Old Testament see Num 14:21, 28; Isa 49:18; Jer 22:24; 46:18; Zeph 2:9. Hummel observes that the

The first verb in these two clauses that merits consideration is חוּס, “pity.”¹⁷ This word that occurs 24 times in the Old Testament is found 9 times in Ezekiel.¹⁸ It is the word YHWH uses when instructing the Israelites to destroy without pity the Canaanites (Deut 7:16) or anyone who entices them into idolatry (Deut 13:9). A shift occurs here in Ezekiel where, contrary to the situation in Deuteronomy, the Israelites find themselves at the receiving end of YHWH’s mercilessness.¹⁹

The other verb used in Ezek 5:11 and which is coupled with חוּס is חָמַל, “have compassion, spare.” This word is used when YHWH instructs King Saul to annihilate the Amalekites for their hostility against Israel: “Now go and attack Amalek . . . do not spare (חָמַל) them, but kill both man and woman, child and infant, ox and sheep, camel and donkey” (1 Sam 15:3). The focus here is on Israel’s enemies. But then a shift occurs and YHWH takes personal responsibility in showing no pity to his own people. Tsevat observes that when חָמַל and חוּס are both preceded by the negative particle לֹא they portend a “pitiless and merciless event.”²⁰ These two clauses, לֹא וְלֹא-תְחוּס עֵינִי and לֹא

phrase generally occurs in the Old Testament passages where YHWH “swears to execute judgment.” Hummel, *Ezekiel 1-20*, 172.

¹⁷ Swanson states that its import is to “show mercy, have compassion, with a focus on sparing or delivering one from a great punishment.” J. Swanson, “חוּס,” n.p., *DBL* on CD-ROM. Version 3.0g. 2000-2007.

¹⁸ See Ezek 5:11; 7:4, 9; 8:18; 9:5, 10; 16:5; 20:17; 24:14.

¹⁹ The usage of the expression וְלֹא-תְחוּס עֵינִי occurs in Ezek 5:11; 7:4, 9; 8:18; 9:5, 10; 24:14 where YHWH resolves not to show any pity to the disobedient Israelites. This contrasts sharply with the expression לֹא-תְחוּס עֵינֶךָ in Deuteronomy where the Israelites are instructed to show no pity to their enemies (Deut 7:16; 13:9; 19:13, 21; 25:12). See Kohn, *A New Heart and a New Soul*, 91. Wagner notes that in the prophetic books the verb is generally used in the prophecies that deal with disaster. S. Wagner, “חוּס,” *TDOT* 4:271-77.

²⁰ M. Tsevat, “חָמַל,” *TDOT* 4:470-72.

אַחֲמוֹל, therefore underscore YHWH's relentlessness in carrying out his judgment. Israel has violated its trustworthiness by breaking the covenant, and YHWH can no longer remain the merciful and compassionate Lord.

Statement of Utter Devastation

To be effective, YHWH's judgments must touch almost every sphere of Israelite life. Using another "I" judgment statement, he declares: וְאֶתְנִיךָ לְהָרָבָה, "I will make you into a ruin" (Ezek 5:14). The word הָרָבָה, "ruins," portrays a state of utter destruction and devastation after some major calamity or catastrophe. Hummel observes that the devastating effect of YHWH's judgment will reduce Jerusalem to "rubble."²¹ It would be like a city devastated by a tornado or a place shattered by the effects of serious warfare. Jerusalem has lost favor with YHWH, and the message of judgment must be given in the most definitive terms as a warning to the serious consequences of the aberrant actions of the people of Judah.²²

Statements of Instruments of Judgment

The "I" statements that identify the armaments that YHWH is using in executing his judgments are found mainly in Ezek 5:16, 17. Block observes that Ezek 5:16, 17 "catalogues a series of agents standing at YHWH's disposal, ready to fulfill his missions

²¹ Hummel, *Ezekiel 1-24*, 186.

²² For discussion see Klaus Koch who argues that people's misguided actions can result in disastrous consequences. Klaus Koch, "Is There a Doctrine of Retribution in the Old Testament?" in *Theodicy in the Old Testament* (ed. J. L. Crenshaw; Philadelphia, Pa.: Fortress, 1983), 57-87.

of death.”²³ He also points out that the use of the verb *שָׁלַח* with YHWH as the subject delineates these calamities as divine agents.²⁴

Cannibalism

In the first section of this chapter, we saw YHWH speak with unflinching resolve as he warned, “And because of all your abominations, I will do to you what I have never yet done, and the like of which I will never do again” (Ezek 5:9). The punishment that follows this determination is made in the most unsettling language: “Surely, parents shall eat their children in your midst, and children shall eat their parents” (Ezek 5:10). Block terms this horrendous act “fratricidal cannibalism.”²⁵

The word used to designate this hideous deed is *אָכַל*, “eat.” Whereas *אָכַל* generally describes normal food consumption, it can also be used “to express destructive or other hostile activities.”²⁶ To the Israelites poised to enter the promised land, YHWH issues the following command, “You shall devour (*וְאָכַלְתָּ*) all the peoples that the Lord your God is giving over to you, showing them no pity” (Deut 7:16). In Isa 1:20, YHWH warns: “But if you refuse and rebel, you shall be devoured (*תִּאָכַלְךָ*) by the sword.” YHWH uses this word that is at times employed in destructive and hostile situations and applies it as a punitive measure upon those who have breached the covenant.

²³ Block, *Ezekiel 1-24*, 212.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid., 204.

²⁶ M. Ottosson, “*אָכַל*,” *TDOT* 1:236-41. See pp. 237-239 for discussion on the figurative use of *אָכַל* for destructive and hostile purposes.

Commenting on the enormity of this punishment, Hummel observes that while cannibalism was not uncommon in combat situations, yet the thought that “God himself would instigate it now among his chosen people was unprecedented.”²⁷

YHWH’s patience has run out because of the abominable practices of the Israelites, and now the time of reckoning has come. Part of this reckoning involves fathers eating their sons and sons eating their fathers. This would be a fulfillment of the covenant curses issued earlier (Lev 26:29; Deut 28:53-57). The punishment may appear to be harsh, but YHWH stands justified because of this covenant backdrop.

Exile

Another agent of punishment is exile. YHWH threatened to use it against the Israelites if they breached the terms of the covenant (Lev 26:33-35; Deut 28:36, 37, 64).²⁸ John Hartley, commenting on the negative consequences of exile, which included the loss

²⁷ Hummel, *Ezekiel 1-20*, 183.

²⁸ It should be noted that punishment by exile was not reserved only for the common people of the land. Ezek 12:13, 14 makes it abundantly clear that even the leaders, including the kings, were not exempted. In what appears to be a direct reference to Zedekiah, YHWH declares he would be caught in his snare and taken to Babylon where he would eventually die while the people around him would also be taken into the Babylonian captivity (Ezek 12:13, 14). This judgment on Zedekiah is reiterated in Ezek 17:19-20. This disciplinary action is not done in vain for YHWH avers, “They will know that I am the Lord, when I disperse them among the nations and scatter them through the countries” (Ezek 12:15). In Isa 39:1-8 King Hezekiah is told that his children would be taken into exile as a result of the pride he manifested when he received envoys from Babylon. For discussion on King Zedekiah of Judah see Michael Avioz, “The Historical Setting of Jeremiah 21:1-10,” *AUSS* 44 (2006): 213-19; Shimon Bakon, “Zedekiah: Last King of Judah,” *JBQ* 36 (2008): 93-101; Juha Pakkala, “Zedekiah’s Fate and the Dynastic Succession,” *JBL* 125 (2006): 443-52.

of land and the right to use the sanctuary, says that this phenomenon, apart from being the “ultimate punishment,” is without a doubt “the ultimate curse for a nation.”²⁹

Exile was a very real phenomenon in the ancient world, and it was brutal.³⁰ It was not a concocted idea, as some scholars have attempted to claim.³¹ It was one of the means

²⁹ John E. Hartley, *Leviticus*, 468, 472. See also John Ahn, who presents the physical, psychological, and social challenges the exiles faced while in Babylon. John Ahn, "Psalm 137: Complex Communal Laments," *JBL* 127 (2008): 267-289.

³⁰ Raitt, *A Theology of Exile*, 83. See also Middlemas, *The Troubles of Templeless Judah*, 40.

³¹ There are scholars who dismiss the notion of exile as a literary construct and not a historical fact. One of the leading proponents of this idea, Torrey, argued that exile is a “thoroughly mistaken theory.” Because of this, terms like “‘exilic,’ ‘pre-exilic,’ and ‘post-exilic’ ought to be banished forever from usage, for they are merely misleading, and correspond to nothing that is real in Hebrew literature and life.” Charles C. Torrey, *Ezra Studies* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1910), 288, 289. Following in the footsteps of Torrey is Robert Carroll, who also questions the historicity of the exile and posits that exile is an “ideologically contaminated term” which scholars should not use. Robert P. Carroll, "Exile! What Exile? Deportation and the Discourses of Diaspora," in *Leading Captivity Captive: 'The Exile' as History and Ideology* (ed. L. L. Grabbe; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1998), 62-79. See also idem, "Deportation and Diasporic Discourses in the Prophetic Literature," in *Exile: Old Testament, Jewish, and Christian Conceptions* (ed. J. M. Scott; New York: Brill, 1997), 63-85. Thomas Thompson, maintaining the same course of argument, contends that the exile is but a myth and there is “no narrative about the exile in the Bible.” Thomas Thompson, "The Exile in History and Myth: A Response to Hans Barstad," in *Leading Captivity Captive: 'The Exile' as History and Ideology* (ed. L. L. Grabbe; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1998), 109-18.

Contrary to these positions there is ample documentary evidence from the ancient Near East that shows that exile was real. For example, TukultiNinurta of Assyria (ca. 1243-1207 B.C.) is said to have defeated the Hittites and deported many people to Assyria. Iain Provan, "2 Kings," *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary* (ed. J. H. Walton; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009), 3:172. King Amenhotep II of Egypt prides himself of deporting “thousands of captives back to Memphis” after the war he waged against Syria-Palestine. John W. Hilber, "Psalms," *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary* (ed. J. H. Walton; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009), 5:416; see also “The Memphis and Karnak Stelae of Amenhotep II,” translated by James K. Hoffmeier (*COS* 2.3:19-23). The annals of Tiglath-pileser III (ca. 732 B. C.) report that he deported a total of 13,520 people from Samaria to Assyria. Hilber, "Psalms," *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary* (ed. J. H. Walton; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009), 5:416; see also “The Calah Annals,” translated by K. Lawson Younger, Jr. (*COS* 2.117:284-86). The Nimrud Prism states that Shalmanesser deported 27,280 people from Samaria. “Nimrud Prisms D & E,” translated by K. Lawson Younger, Jr. (*COS* 2. 118D: 295-96). See also Hilber, "Psalms," *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary* (ed. J. H. Walton; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009), 5:416. Sennacherib claims to have deported 200,000 people from Judah after the siege of Jerusalem in 701 B. C. Hilber, "Psalms," *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary* (ed. J. H. Walton; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009),

by which YHWH determined to show his utter disgust at the behavior of the Israelites.³²

Hence the declaration: וְזָרַקְתִּי אֶת-כָּל-שְׂאֲרֵיכֶם לְכָל-רוּחַ, “I will scatter all your remnants

to every wind” (Ezek 5:10; cf. 5:12).³³ What is evident here is YHWH’s personal

commitment to bring this curse upon Israel. By scattering Israel, he is completely

destroying the basic fabric of Israelite society and disrupting the status quo.³⁴ The effects

of the destruction by the Babylonians must be felt in every sphere of Judean life.³⁵

5:416. See also “Sennacherib’s Siege of Jerusalem,” translated by Mordechai Cogan (*COS* 2.119B:302-303). For further discussion on the harsh realities of the exile, see K. Lawson Younger, “The Deportations of the Israelites,” *JBL* 117 (1998): 201-27.

³² Commenting on exile as a form of YHWH’s judgment on Israel, Risa Kohn observes that “the punishment of Exile was . . . the direct result of Israel’s failure to practice the legal precepts found in both Priestly and Deuteronomic traditions. The people profaned the Sabbath (Ezek. 23.38), polluted YHWH’s sanctuary (23.38), defiled their neighbor’s wives (22.11), mistreated their fellow Israelites (34.4), introduced various idolatrous practices (5.11; 7.20; 8.10, 12; 11.18, 21 etc.), passed their children through the fire (20.31), and made offerings on ‘every mountain height and under every leafy tree’ (6.13). Even the priests failed to fulfill their task of distinguishing between the holy and the profane (22.26). Essentially, Ezekiel’s contemporaries did not follow the precepts of *either* Torah. The disaster of 587 BCE was YHWH’s just punishment for the absolute corruption of Ezekiel’s generation.” Kohn, *A New Heart and a New Soul*, 113.

³³ Hummel observes that the use of לְכָל-רוּחַ, “to every wind,” here implies that YHWH would scatter the Israelites “in every direction imaginable.” Hummel, *Ezekiel 1-20*, 183.

³⁴ See Allen Ross who says, “There is nothing in the history of Israel as devastating as the Exile. It destroyed the holy city, the temple, and the historic ritual of worship; it removed kingship and priesthood from their place in society; it drove the bulk of the people from the land; and it brought an end to Israel’s existence as an autonomous nation. . . . It was a time of destruction, death, and despair.” A. Ross, “Exile,” *NIDOTTE* 4:495-96.

³⁵ W. Lee Humphreys, *Crisis and Story: Introduction to the Old Testament* (Palo Alto, Calif.: Mayfield, 1979), 162. For further discussion on Babylonian brutality and the negative impact of exile on the Israelites see Middlemas, *The Templeless Age*, 25; H. M. Barstad, *The Myth of the Empty Land: A Study in the History and Archaeology of Judah During the ‘Exilic’ Period* (Oslo: Scandinavian University Press, 1996); Oded Lipschits, “Judah, Jerusalem and the Temple 586-539 B.C.,” *Transeu* 22 (2001): 129-142; Oded Lipschits and Joseph Blenkinsopp, eds., *Judah and the Judeans in the Neo-Babylonian Period* (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 2003), 3-20; L. E. Stager, “The Fury of Babylon: The Archaeology of Destruction,” *BAR* 22 (1996): 56-69, 76-77.

Rather than limiting the impact of the exile to the physical and environmental damages that are sure to affect the Israelites' *modus operandi*, YHWH tops it all by adding a psychological component to these judgments. To say that he was going to make them a **תִּרְפָּה**, “scorn, insult, slander, contempt, shame, disgrace, or reproach,”³⁶ among the nations was one of the greatest punishments imaginable. The people of Israel held a special status among other nations (Ezek 5:5). They were supposed to showcase YHWH's purposes to the nations. They were YHWH's prized possession, his ornaments of greatest value, people who should have been an envy of other nations. But it is to this unique and enviable community that YHWH now threatens to reverse their status and expose their nakedness in the public square so they can fully reap the consequences of their actions.

Plagues

Another covenant curse that YHWH uses in his judgments against Israel in Ezek 5:5-17 is plague, disease, or pestilence. The use of several Hebrew words in the Old Testament to describe this phenomenon attests to its pervasiveness: **נִגַּע**,³⁷ **נִגְףָה**,³⁸ **מִגִּפָּה**,³⁹

³⁶ J. E. Hartley, “**תִּרְפָּה**,” *NIDOTTE* 2:280-83. For further discussion see E. Kutsch, “**תִּרְפָּה**,” *TDOT* 5:209-215.

³⁷ This noun **נִגַּע** which occurs 78 times in the Old Testament has three basic meanings: a plague or disease sent by YHWH, leprosy, or “a technical term in the legal realm denoting bodily harm.” L. Schwienhorst, “**נִגַּע**,” *TDOT* 9:203-209.

³⁸ The noun **נִגְףָה** derives from the verb **נָגַף** and occurs 7 times in the Old Testament with the basic meaning of “plague” or “divine punishment.” H. D. Preuss, “**נִגְףָה**,” *TDOT* 9:210-213.

³⁹ The noun **מִגִּפָּה** which occurs 26 times in the Old Testament is also derived from the verb **נָגַף** and refers to a plague as YHWH's judgment directed at Israel and other nations. It is only found in Ezek 24:16 where it is used in connection with the sudden death of Ezekiel's wife. Preuss, *TDOT* 9:212-13. Block observes that **מִגִּפָּה** is generally used in connection with sudden

מִכָּה,⁴⁰ and דֶּבֶר, but the word used mostly in Ezekiel is דֶּבֶר, “plague, disease, pestilence.”⁴¹ This is the word YHWH uses when he threatens to annihilate the Israelites because of their disobedience (Num 14:12). It is דֶּבֶר that YHWH sent on the Israelites when David conducted an unauthorized census whose consequences were the death of 70 people (2 Sam 24:10-15; 1 Chr 21:1-15). Mayer observes that “pestilence is always a divinely sent punishment for disobedience.”⁴² In Ezek 5:12 YHWH’s threatens that a third of the population of Jerusalem would die of the plague. This threat is repeated in Ezek 5:17 where it is used in combination with bloodshed: “Plague and bloodshed will sweep through you.”

As can be seen, the nature of YHWH’s retributive justice in Ezek 5:5-17 is multifaceted. It encompasses an array of arsenals at YHWH’s disposal. The unfortunate thing about it is that these divine weapons are directed at his own covenant people who have refused to listen to his voice and live by divinely established standards in every area

death in war, by sword, from pestilence, by wild animals and by long-term illness or some other fatal disease. Block, *Ezekiel 1-24*, 788 n. 20.

⁴⁰ The word also refers to a devastating disease or plague that descends upon a community as a result of YHWH’s judgment upon them.

⁴¹ Notice that of its 12 occurrences in Ezekiel it is only applied two times to foreign entities (Ezek 28:23 and 38:22) and the rest of the usages are in reference to Israel: Ezek 5:12, 17; 6:11, 12; 7:15 [twice]; 12:16; 14:19, 21; 33:27.

⁴² G. Mayer, “דֶּבֶר,” *TDOT* 3:125-27. Note also Mayer’s observation on the same page that דֶּבֶר always occurs with other means of divine judgment either in *multipartite lists* such as pestilence, famine, sword, dispersion (Ezek 5:12); famine, wild beasts, pestilence, blood, sword (Ezek 5:17); famine, wild beasts, sword, pestilence (Ezek 14:12-23); sword, pestilence, blood, hail, fire, brimstone (Ezek 38:22); famine, drought, damage to crops, fall of cities, locusts, pestilence, sword (Amos 4:6-11); lack of rain, famine, pestilence, damage to crops, locusts, enemies, misfortune, disease (1 Kgs 8:36-40); disease, enemies, lack of rain, famine, wild beasts, sword, pestilence (Lev 26:16ff.) or in *tripartite lists* such as sword, famine, pestilence (Ezek 6:11, 12; 7:15; 12:16; Jer 14:12; 21:6, 7, 9; 24:10; 27:8, 13; 29:17, 18; 32:24, 36; 34:17; 38:2; 42:17, 22; 44:13; 2 Sam 24:13, 15=1 Chr 21:12, 14); pestilence, blood, sword (Ezek 28:23); sword, wild beasts, pestilence (Ezek 33:27); war, famine, pestilence (Jer 28:8).

of their lives. As we venture into Ezek 1-24, we discover that YHWH's anger has not let up. Because of the many covenant breaches in this section, he too has his ammunitions ready to meet the challenges presented by the disobedient and wayward Israelites.

Famine

Referring to the concept of famine YHWH declares, "I will bring more and more famine upon you and I will break for you the staff of bread" (Ezek 5:16; cf. 5:17). In the first part of the verse he announces, "When I shoot at you with my deadly and destructive arrows of famine, I will shoot to destroy you" (Ezek 5:16). The noun רָעַב and the adjective רָעֵב, "hungry," occur 16 times in Ezekiel.⁴³ This concentration of its usage denotes that it is one of the main instruments YHWH will deploy to discipline errant Israel. The lethal nature of famine is indicated by the statement חֲצִי הָרָעַב הָרָעִים, "dreadful arrows of famine" (Ezek 5:16).⁴⁴ This statement could have its antecedent in Deut 32:23 where YHWH threatens to spend his arrows on the Israelites. Judging from the seriousness of YHWH's judgments on Israel and taking into account the deadly nature of arrows, YHWH therefore wants to send a grim message to the Israelites regarding famine and its aftereffects.

YHWH's unrelenting determination to rob Israel of any means of sustenance is expressed by the declaration: וְשָׁבַרְתִּי לָכֶם מִטֶּה-לֶּחֶם, "I will break for you the staff of bread." The idiom occurs three times in Ezekiel: 4:16; 5:16; 14:13, with correspondences

⁴³ See Ezek 5:12, 16 [twice], 17; 6:11; 7:15 [twice]; 12:16; 14:13, 21; 18:7, 16; 34:29; 36:29, 30.

⁴⁴ Seidl also observes that the addition of the image of an arrow to רָעַב denotes "its deadliness."

in Lev 26:26.⁴⁵ The verb used here is שָׁבַר, “break,” which occurs 21 times in Ezekiel.⁴⁶

To break the staff of bread is tantamount to stopping the food supply chains and taking from the people that which is basic and essential to life. Divesting the Israelites of this basic necessity means that famine of unprecedented proportions would follow.⁴⁷ After Block acknowledges that the phrase “connotes the destruction of the food supply,”⁴⁸ he quickly adds its deeper covenantal implication (Lev 26:26) and succinctly states that the idiom affirms YHWH’s “determination to keep the covenant, and to hold his people to the fine print, the letter, of the Torah.”⁴⁹

The Sword

YHWH concludes these statements pertaining to instruments of judgment with the announcement: “I will bring the sword against you” (Ezek 5:17).⁵⁰ In a number of cases

⁴⁵ Baruch Levine cites “a bilingual statuary inscription, written in Aramaic and Akkadian, from Tell Fekherye in northeast Syria near Tell Halaf (biblical Gozan). It probably dates from the ninth century B.C.E. Like all such royal inscriptions, this text includes a section of curses. In line 22 of the Aramaic version we read: “May one hundred women bake bread in a single oven, but let them not fill it!” The Akkadian is a bit more poignant: May one hundred baking women not even fill a single oven!” The vassal treaty of Esarhaddon portrays a related curse: “May your fingertips not dip in the dough; may the dough be lacking from your kneading troughs.” Levine, *Leviticus*, 278.

⁴⁶ See Ezek 4:16; 5:16; 6:4, 6, 9; 14:13; 26:2; 27:26, 34; 29:7; 30:8, 18, 21, 22, 24; 31:12; 32:9, 28; 34:4, 16, 27.

⁴⁷ B. Knipping, “שָׁבַר,” *TDOT* 14:367-81. See esp. pp. 374-75 for discussion on many scholarly attempts to determine the meaning of “breaking the staff of bread.”

⁴⁸ Block, *Ezekiel 1-24*, 187.

⁴⁹ Block, *Ezekiel 1-24*, 187.

⁵⁰ This expression also appears in Ezek 6:3; 11:8 and 14:7. The other place in the Hebrew Bible where the same expression occurs is in Lev 26:25 where it is used as one of the threatened covenant curses should Israel fail to live up to its covenant obligations. In any case as Risa Kohn points out, “Yahweh’s bringing of the sword will result in devastation and destruction.” Kohn, *A New Heart and a New Soul*, 74.

in the Old Testament YHWH uses the sword in defense and protection of Israel. In Josh 5:13 a man is portrayed standing with his drawn sword before Joshua with an assurance of victory before he goes to fight Jericho. In Deut 33:29 YHWH is depicted as Israel's shield, helper, and glorious sword. In Ps 17:13 the psalmist appeals to YHWH to confront his enemy and deliver his soul from the wicked by the sword. In Ezekiel a great reversal occurs and YHWH turns and takes up the sword against Israel because of its many sins.

The significance of this instrument of divine justice is seen from the many occurrences of the word **חֶרֶב**, “sword,” in Ezekiel⁵¹ and more importantly, in almost all these passages it is used in the context of judgment.⁵² One other significant observation is that in a number of cases YHWH personalizes this arsenal by calling it **חֶרְבִּי**, “my sword.”⁵³ Hence even when he later employs the king of Babylon to wield the sword (Ezek 21:24), it is still his sword, to be used at his own discretion.

A number of expressions in Ezekiel indicate YHWH's resolve to use this weapon against Israel. Leaving no doubt as to the destructive nature of the sword YHWH uses

⁵¹ See Ezek 5:1, 2 [twice], 12 [twice], 17; 6:3, 8, 11, 12; 7:15 [twice]; 11:8, 10; 12:14, 16; 14:17 [twice], 21; 16:40; 17:21; 21:8, 9, 10, 14, 16, 17, 19 [thrice], 20, 24, 25, 33 [twice]; 23:10, 25, 47; 24:21; 25:13; 26:6, 8, 11; 28:7, 23; 29:8; 30:4, 5, 6, 11, 17, 21, 22, 24, 25; 31:17, 18; 32:10, 11, 12, 20 [twice], 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31, 32; 33:2, 3, 4, 6, 26, 27; 35:5, 8; 38:4, 8, 21 [twice]; 39:23.

⁵² In a number of occurrences **חֶרֶב** is used together with other instruments of judgment in what Kaiser calls the “triad of afflictions.” O. Kaiser, “**חֶרֶב**,” *TDOT* 5:155-65. These follow different sequences as in fire, sword, and exile (Ezek 5:2); plague, famine, and sword (Ezek 5:12); sword, famine, and pestilence (Ezek 6:11; 12:16; 7:15); pestilence, sword, and famine (Ezek 6:12); sword, pestilence, and famine (Ezek 7:15); sword, famine, wild beasts, and pestilence (Ezek 14:21); sword and exile (Ezek 17:21); pestilence, blood, and sword (Ezek 28:23).

⁵³ See Ezek 21:8, 9, 10; 30:24, 25; 32:10.

expressions such as **בְּחֶרֶב יִפְּלוּ**, “they will fall by the sword” (Ezek 5:12).⁵⁴ His determination is again conveyed by the phrase **וְחֶרֶב אֶרִיק אַחֲרֵיהֶם**, “and the sword I will empty after them” (Ezek 5:12; cf. 12:14). These statements relating to instruments of judgment reveal that Ezek 5:5-17 has parallel features with Lev 26. Threatened judgments in Ezek 5:5-17 must therefore be the result of covenant violation for which Israel must be punished.

Wild Animals

YHWH also threatens to send wild animals upon the Israelites (Ezek 5:17). This is stated by the compound expression **חַיָּה רָעָה**, “wild animal.” This description of the wild animals occurs four times in Ezekiel (Ezek 5:17; 14:15, 21; 34:25). In Ezek 5:17 YHWH specifically notes that when he sends out the wild animals among the Israelites they will bereave them.⁵⁵ The word used here to indicate the severity of the punishment by these wild animals is **שָׁכַל**, “be bereaved (of children)” (cf. Lev 26:22). This word occurs 25 times in the Old Testament and 5 times in Ezekiel.⁵⁶ This is the word Rebekah

⁵⁴ See also Ezek 6:11; 17:21; 24:21; 25:13; 30:5, 6, 17; 33:27; 39:23. For the other variations of this construction see Ezek 6:12; 11:10; 32:22, 23, 24; 32:12. Block notes that this is “a reference to the casualties of battle.” Block, *Ezekiel 1-24*, 210.

⁵⁵ This is a complete reversal of the covenant blessings in Lev 26:9 where YHWH had promised to make them fruitful and multiply them if they remained obedient to his commands.

⁵⁶ See Ezek 5:17; 14:15; 36:12, 13. Note that the usage of **שָׁכַל** in Ezek 36:12-13 refers to the period of the restoration when Israel, whose land had experienced so many misfortunes that were instrumental in devouring its people and bereaving its people of their children, would no longer bear the scourge of bereavement. Block is therefore right in pointing out that the promise given here reverses the curses of Ezek 5:17 since “the land will never again cut off the progeny of its population.” Block, *Ezekiel 25-48*, 334-35. For further discussion see Greenberg, *Ezekiel 21-37*, 720-22; H. Schmoldt, “**שָׁכַל**,” *TDOT* 14:677-81. Note also Hummel’s discussion of the Qere-Kethib variation of **שָׁכַל** in Ezek 36:14, 15. Hummel suggests there may have been a metathesis of the first two consonants of **שָׁכַל**, hence **כָּשַׁל** that appears in the two verses in some Hebrew Bibles. Hummel, *Ezekiel 21-48*, 1031-32.

uses when Esau threatens to kill Jacob and she is afraid she may lose both of her sons in the mayhem (Gen 27:45). Similarly, Jacob employs the same word when expressing his concern for the potential loss of Simeon and Benjamin in Egypt (Gen 42:36; 43:14). It is therefore a word that has forebodings of grief and loss. Having deprived the Israelites of physical necessities, YHWH turns to their posterity and now touches that which is dear to their lives, their children. All this is done to show YHWH's disapproval of their breach of the covenantal relationship.

The “I” Judgment Statements in Ezekiel 1-24

The “I” judgment statements to be examined in this section fall in various categories, namely those that pertain to direct intent of judgment, withdrawal of divine favor, and instruments of judgment.

Statements of Direct Intent of Divine Judgment

An examination of these statements reveals YHWH's resolve to execute judgment upon Israel. The statements fall into three categories. First, are those that show the intensity of the hostility that Israel's sins have engendered in YHWH. The use of the nouns *קִמָּה*, “wrath,” and *אַף*, “anger,” with the *pi'el* perfect form of the verb *כָּלָה*, “accomplish, end, finish,” demonstrates the level of this hostility.⁵⁷ Thus he declares, *וְכִלֵּיתִי אֶת־קִמָּתִי*, “I will exhaust my wrath” (Ezek 6:12; cf. 13:15), and *וְכִלֵּיתִי אֶפְי*, “I will exhaust my anger” (Ezek 7:8). The verb *כָּלָה* has at its core the idea of bringing a process

⁵⁷ Contrast this with the case where YHWH initially used Israel as an instrument of his wrath against the Canaanites (Deut 7:22; Josh 8:24; 10:20) and the Amalekites (1 Sam 15:18). Other uses of the same form of the verb occur in 2 Kgs 13:17 where YHWH vents his anger against the Syrians and in Isa 10:18 against the Assyrians.

to full end, the emphasis being on totality, so that whatever is done is carried out in full.⁵⁸

In Ezek 7:3 the word *וְשַׁלַּחְתִּי אֶפֶי* is used as YHWH declares, “I will send my anger.” This indignation is repeated in Ezek 7:8 where *הַמָּה* is used but with the verb *וְשָׁפַד*, “I will pour out my wrath.”

This state is further accentuated by statements of hostile orientation: *הִנְנִי אֵלֵיכֶם*, “behold, I am against you” (Ezek 13:8; cf. 21:3). YHWH’s total involvement is also seen in the declarations: “I will set my face against them” (Ezek 15:7)⁵⁹ and “I will stretch out my hand against them” (Ezek 6:14). This outstretched hand is not one that brings salvation (Pss 81:15 [Eng 81:14]; 89:22 [Eng 89:21]; Isa 10:13; 49:22); rather it brings judgment.⁶⁰ Using a striking metaphor with regard to certain crimes and social injustices,

⁵⁸ J. N. Oswalt, “*כָּלָה*,” n.p., *TWOT* on CD-ROM. Version 3.0g. 2000-2007; William R. Domeris and Cornelius Van Dam, “*כָּלָה*,” *NIDOTTE* 2:641-43; F. J. Helfmeyer, “*כָּלָה*,” *TDOT* 7:157-64. For some biblical references using the verb *כָּלָה* to convey YHWH’s determination to punish Israel for her idolatry see Josh 24:20; 32:10; 33:5; Num 16:21. The same word is used to convey king Ahasuerus’s determination to destroy Haman after his plot to annihilate the Jews is unearthed (Esth 7:7).

⁵⁹ This phrase is in direct contrast to YHWH’s stance of blessing when he sets his face upon his people. See for example the priestly benediction in Num 6:26 where the Lord is asked to “turn his face upon you and give you peace.” The phrase is used in contexts of judgment where YHWH is determined to completely rout out perpetrators of evil (see for example Lev 17:10; 20:3, 5, 6; 26:17). Its use in Jer 44:11 has special relevance to our discussion since here YHWH vows, “Behold, I am setting my face against you for evil and to cut off all Judah.” The NIV Study Bible puts it succinctly: “The greatest tragedy of sin, rebellion and disobedience is that God may set his face against us, i.e., withdraw his presence and care, his grace and strength, from us. In its place, we will be exposed to his direct judgment and to all the problems and dangers of life without his protection and guidance.” Donald C. Stamps, ed., *Life in the Spirit Study Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984), 196.

⁶⁰ For other references of the adversative use of the hand of YHWH see Isa 1:25; Jer 6:12; 15:6; 51:25; Ezek 13:9; 14:9, 13; 16:27; 25:7, 13, 16; 35:3; 39:21; Amos 1:8; Zeph 1:4; Zech 2:13.

he declares, “I will strike my hands together⁶¹ at the unjust gain you have made and at the blood you have shed in your midst” (Ezek 22:13).

The second group seeks to expose the Israelites to shame and disgrace. Hence the announcement, “I will make you an object of scorn to the nations and a laughing stock to all the countries. Those who are near and those who are far away will mock you” (Ezek 22:4; cf. 16:57). What a reversal of fortunes to those who had been YHWH’s elect! The last category involves declarations that reveal the justified nature of the judgments: “I will punish you according to your ways, and I will place upon you the penalty for all your abominations” (Ezek 7:8; cf. 18:30).⁶² The implication is that the judgment to be enacted is deserved and justified: Israel has been involved in activities that warrant this.

Statements of Withdrawal of Divine Favor

Apart from Ezek 5:5-17, statements repudiating YHWH’s favor upon the Israelites abound in the rest of Ezek 1-24. YHWH as an aggrieved spouse has reached the end of the road and is left with no alternative but to inflict punishment on Israel. The rhetorical element to note here is the frequent use of the negative particle *לֹא*. Its use has the effect of annulling the positive outlook that YHWH has previously expressed to his people. YHWH therefore declares, “I will not look upon you with pity or spare you”

⁶¹ Lamar Cooper points out that the striking of the hand by YHWH denotes “extreme displeasure.” Cooper, *Ezekiel*, 221. Hummel observes that this gesture denotes YHWH’s “patience is exhausted.” Hummel, *Ezekiel 21-48*, 687. For another reference to the hand-striking gesture in Ezekiel by YHWH see Ezek 21:22. YHWH also commands Ezekiel to strike or clap his hand in Ezek 6:11 and 21:19 as a sign of his anger with Israel.

⁶² Cooper, *Ezekiel*, 186. Barton argues that the thrust of Ezek 18 is to persuade the Israelites that YHWH’s punishments are justified. Barton, “Prophecy and Theodicy,” 77.

(Ezek 7:4, 9; 8:18; 9:10; 24:14).⁶³ He then adds, “Although they shout in my ears, I will not listen to them” (Ezek 8:18). Then to conclude the tough judgment statements, YHWH asserts in the last chapter of this judgment section on Judah, “The time has come for me to act. I will not hold back; I will not have pity, nor will I relent. You will be judged according to your conduct and your actions, declares the Sovereign Lord” (Ezek 24:14; cf. 9:10). Block calls this “the most emphatic affirmation of divine resolve in the book.”⁶⁴ The die has been cast and judgment is now inevitable. YHWH’s actions are justified because the people are being punished for the crimes they have committed.

Statements of Instruments of Judgment

The next set of “I” statements deals with the instruments of judgment. A brief exploration of these instruments of judgment demonstrates that YHWH uses a multifaceted approach as he carries out his punitive measures against the disobedient Israelites. Among these are exile, sword, famine, plague, and wild beasts.

Exile

While some statements pertaining to exile are couched in metaphors and symbolic actions (Ezek 4, 5 and 12), many of them are candid, direct, explicit, and unequivocal divine pronouncements, that show YHWH’s resolve to bring justice to the disobedient. Two things stand out with respect to exile. First, it shows YHWH’s mercilessness as he

⁶³ Contrast this with YHWH’s position during the wilderness wanderings where YHWH says the Israelites “rejected my laws and did not follow my decrees and desecrated my Sabbaths. For their hearts were devoted to idols. Yet I looked on them with pity and did not destroy them or put an end to them in the desert” (Ezek 20:16-17).

⁶⁴ Block, *Ezekiel 1-24*, 781.

enacts this process. Note the agent YHWH deploys: וְהֵבֵאתִי רָעִי גוֹיִם, “I will bring the most wicked of nations” (Ezek 7:24). This clause could be translated literally as “I will cause to come the most evil of nations.” The use of the *hip’il* perfect form of the verb בָּוֹא, “come, go,” underscores YHWH’s resolve.⁶⁵ This is because of YHWH’s role as the causative force releasing the evil nation upon Israel. The same determination is repeated in Ezek 11: 9, וְנָתַתִּי אֶתְכֶם בְּיַד-זָרִים, “I will hand you over into the hands of foreigners.” Israel has lost favor with YHWH and as such he is ready to deal ruthlessly with her.

Second, exile involves loss of valued possessions. The wicked nations YHWH intends to bring upon the Israelites will take possession of their houses (Ezek 7:24; cf. 22:15). To compound matters further YHWH declares, וְהוֹצֵאתִי אֶתְכֶם מִתּוֹכָהּ, “I will bring you out of her [the city]” (Ezek 11:9). This is an allusion to the city referred to in Ezek 11:6, 7. Through exile, YHWH is depriving the Israelites of the physical things that have deluded them with a false sense of security.

The Sword

Then follow statements pertaining to the sword. YHWH indicates his intention to use this weapon with the following declaration: “Behold, I am bringing against you a sword” (Ezek 6:3; cf. 11:10). Two features stand out as YHWH enlists this weapon against his people. First, the sword is a terrifying weapon. YHWH knows this and so tells the Israelites: “You fear the sword, and the sword is what I will bring against you” (Ezek

⁶⁵ The use of the *hip’il* has the connotation of the active involvement of the subject in effecting an action. Bruce K. Waltke and M. O'Connor, *An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax* (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1990), 433.

11:8). He knows the deadly effects of the sword and intends to use it to highlight his abhorrence of their wicked actions. The second element is the indiscriminatory nature of the sword. YHWH proclaims, “I will draw my sword from its scabbard and cut off from you both the righteous and the wicked” (Ezek 21:8; Eng 21:3).⁶⁶ Those destined to be cut off are designated as כָּל־בָּשָׂר, “all flesh” (21:9).⁶⁷ The magnitude of the destruction by the sword is further described in geographical terms as ranging מִן־צָפוֹן, “from south to north” (Ezek 21:9).⁶⁸ The use of merism here is meant to indicate totality. No one is safe. Everyone is in the crosshairs of divine judgment and must now reckon with the consequences of their actions.

Famine

Another “I” statement pertains to famine. YHWH wants to deprive them of the basic necessities of life. Making a hypothetical statement regarding a land that sins against him he asks: What if “I stretch out my hand against it, and break its staff of bread and send famine upon it?” (Ezek 14:13). Then he says that such a situation will be so dire

⁶⁶ Block points out that this wholesale punishment of both the wicked and the righteous does not nullify Ezekiel’s teaching on individual responsibility as articulated in Ezek 9:4-6; 14:12-20; 18:1-32. Although he considers the arbitrary action of the sword here as “the indiscriminate nature of war,” he however notes that the construction used is rhetorically designed “to rule out any hope for Judah” since “YHWH’s irrevocable goal is her *total* destruction.” More importantly, Block concludes that Ezekiel’s bundling of the wicked and the righteous in this judgment scenario is “a deliberately offensive rhetorical device intended to shock, designed to awaken his audience out of their spiritual lethargy.” Block, *Ezekiel 1-24*, 669-670.

⁶⁷ Zimmerli sees in this expression the extension of YHWH’s judgment to “all the world.” Zimmerli, *Ezekiel 1-24*, 425. Greenberg remarks that phrase is “a merism for ‘everybody.’” Greenberg, *Ezekiel 21-37*, 420. For a detailed discussion of the use of merismus as a literary tool in biblical Hebrew literature, see A. M. Honeyman, “*Merismus* in Biblical Hebrew,” *JBL* 71 (1952): 11-18.

⁶⁸ Joyce characterizes this as an “expression of inclusivity.” Joyce, *Ezekiel*, 156.

that no one, including the three paragons of righteousness, Noah, Daniel, and Job, would be able to save anyone. The implication is that all would feel the severe effects of such a calamity. Famine is also included among the four dreadful judgments to be unleashed upon Jerusalem: sword, famine, wild beasts, and plague.⁶⁹

Fire

YHWH then uses the imagery of fire as a means of judgment. There are four critical aspects of this fire. First, it is by divine design. YHWH himself attests, **הִנְנִי מַצְיִת-כָּךְ אֵשׁ**, “Behold, I am kindling a fire in you” (Ezek 21:3; cf. Ezek 24:9, 10).⁷⁰ The use of the *hip’il* form of the verb **יָצַת**, “kindle,” underscores YHWH’s role as the causative agent in igniting this fire. This is not going to be like some African bush fire started by some nomads or shepherd boys. It will not be like some Californian or Texas wildfire sparked by some stray smoker or lightning. Neither will it be a fire ignited by the malfunction of some gadget in a factory. Rather, it will be the outworking of an infuriated God determined to put an end to his people’s incorrigible behavior.

Second, it is all-pervasive and inescapable. “It shall devour every green tree and every dry tree in you” and “all faces from the south to the north shall be scorched by it”

⁶⁹ For other references to these divine judgments see Ezek 5:12 for plague, famine, sword, and exile; Ezek 5:16, 17 for famine, wild beasts, plague, and sword; Ezek 6:11, 12, 15 for sword, famine, and plague; Ezek 12:16 for sword, famine, and plague; Ezek 14:13, 15, 17, 19 for famine, wild animals, sword, and plague.

⁷⁰ Norman Habel contends that this fire exhibits the injustice of God on the ecosystem. Commenting on the destructive nature of the fire he says, “This burning is not a natural process, a fire ignited by a lightning strike or some such phenomenon. This fire is so total, so overwhelming.” The reason advanced for such action is that people will recognize that YHWH is the one responsible for this act. Habel does not see any justification for subjecting the natural habitat to such wanton destruction. Habel, “The Silence of the Lands,” 134.

(Ezek 21:3). The twin expressions כָּל-עֵץ-לֶחֶם וְכָל-עֵץ יָבֵשׁ, “every green tree and every dry tree,” and מִן־צָפוֹן לְמִן־צָפוֹן, “from the south to the north,” are merisms that demonstrate the gravity and seriousness of the fire in terms of the totality of its scope.⁷¹ The threefold use of the adjective כָּל, “all, every,” also attests to the fire’s pervasiveness. Hence the good and the bad, the rich and the poor, the young and the old, male and female, those far-off and those nearby, all will come under the blistering and the searing conflagration of YHWH.

Third, it is unquenchable. “The blazing flame shall not be quenched” (Ezek 21:3, 4; [Eng 20:47, 48]). The fire must run its full course and accomplish the judicial work for which it was lit. Lastly, it is a universal testimony to the judicial work of YHWH. “All flesh shall see that I, the Lord, have kindled it” (Ezek 21:4; Eng 20:48). The people must acknowledge the fury with which YHWH personally deals with sin.

The Lovers of Ezekiel 16 and 23

Then there are the “lovers” of Ezek 16:37-40 and 23:6, 7, 22.⁷² The people of Jerusalem have been guilty of sexual promiscuity;⁷³ they have indulged in various

⁷¹ Block, *Ezekiel 1-24*, 664 n. 30.

⁷² Commenting on the characteristics of the lovers in Ezek 23, Mary Shields says, “The men whom she chose as lovers are not the dregs, but rather the wealthy and powerful, the best of their society.” Shields, “An Abusive God? Identity and Power, Gender and Violence in Ezekiel 23,” 137. See also idem, “Gender and Violence in Ezekiel 23,” *SBLSP* 37 (1998): 92.

⁷³ Note that YHWH addresses her as זֹנִיָּה, “harlot, prostitute.” For discussion on the nature of Israel’s promiscuous lifestyle, see Kruger, “Israel, The Harlot (Hos. 2:4-9),” 107-16; Galambush draws parallels between the clothing of the bride in Ezek 23 and some cultic related words. Galambush, *Jerusalem in the Book of Ezekiel*, 95. Durlleser observes that the metaphorical woman “uses the clothing that her husband had given her, the very clothing that had associations with the tabernacle and the temple, for her ‘abominations and obscene sexual acts’

idolatrous practices including child sacrifice.⁷⁴ YHWH therefore announces her punishment. The first step YHWH takes is to קָבַץ, “gather,”⁷⁵ all of Jerusalem’s former “lovers”⁷⁶ against her and then shame her before them and thus judge her with the judgment befitting a whore (Ezek 16:37, 38).⁷⁷

Israel played harlotry with the “lovers.”⁷⁸ She now meets her fate at the hands of those who appeared to be so dear to her: “I will hand you over to your lovers, and they will tear down your mounds and destroy your lofty shrines. They will strip you of your

(v. 22).” James A. Durlesser, *The Metaphorical Narratives in the Book of Ezekiel* (Lewiston, N.Y.: Edwin Mellen, 2006), 113.

⁷⁴ Eichrodt suggests that such pagan cultic practices may have been introduced into Judah during the eighth and the seventh centuries with the influx of many foreign religious practices. Any Israelite who sacrificed his or her child to Molech was to be killed by stoning (Lev 20:2-5). Eichrodt, *Ezekiel*, 207.

⁷⁵ The word קָבַץ is used 16 times in Ezekiel: Ezek 11:17; 16:37 [twice]; 20:34, 41; 22:19, 20; 28:25; 29:5, 13; 34:13; 36:24; 37:21; 38:8; 39:17, 27. While this word has a wide semantic range and is mostly used positively to refer to YHWH’s gathering of his people for salvific purposes, yet it is also used in the contexts of judgment as is the case here in Ezek 16:37. For discussion on the use of קָבַץ in the contexts of judgment in Ezekiel see P. Mommer, “קָבַץ,” *TDOT* 12:486-91.

⁷⁶ For the concept of the lovers see Ezek 16:33, 36, 37; 23:22. Fisch remarks that these former lovers were the nations with which Israel had made alliances. Solomon Fisch, *Ezekiel: Hebrew Text and English Translation with an Introduction and Commentary* (London: Soncino Press, 1950), 93. Cooper adds that these were the nations from which Israel borrowed some “pagan religious ideals and practices.” Cooper, *Ezekiel*, 174. See also Hos 2:1-13.

⁷⁷ Cooper notes the “judgment of a harlot prescribed in the law included tearing off the clothes, public humiliation in nakedness, public trial, public stoning till death, dismemberment of the body, and burning of the house” (Lev 20:10-12; Deut 22:22). Cooper, *Ezekiel*, 174. Fredenburg observes that in the ancient Near East part of this public humiliation of a woman involved “unrestrained, violent physical (and sometimes sexual) abuse by the community, including throwing feces on the shamed woman, to demonstrate communal outrage.” Fredenburg, *Ezekiel*, 149.

⁷⁸ These lovers compare quite favorably to Babylon, whose trading partners had economic and political vested interests in her, in Rev 18. For discussion see Louis A. Brighton, *Revelation* (Saint Louis, Mo.: Concordia, 1999), 456-83.

clothes and take your fine jewelry and leave you naked and bare” (Ezek 16:37, 39).⁷⁹ To Oholibah YHWH declares, “I will stir up your lovers against you, those you turned away from in disgust, and I will bring them against you from every side” (Ezek 23:22). In v. 23 YHWH avers, “I will turn you over to them for punishment, and they will punish you according to their standards.”

There have been a number of suggestions regarding the identity of these lovers. Although Brownlee suggests that they are the nations of Ezek 16:26-28, which include the Egyptians, the Philistines, the Assyrians, and the Babylonians, he is quick to acknowledge that there must be a metaphorical application here because by this time Assyria was nonexistent and Egypt did not participate in the invasion of Jerusalem.⁸⁰ Cooper suggests that they were the nations with which Israel made alliances and whose religious practices and values tainted Israelite worship of YHWH.⁸¹ Baumann proposes that the lovers are “the political allies of Israel/Jerusalem (Egypt, Assyria, Babylonia) and their gods.”⁸²

⁷⁹ Ka Leung Wong suggests that in the punishment of the adulterous woman there is correspondence between her sin and her punishment. Wong, *The Idea of Retribution in the Book of Ezekiel*, 222-24.

⁸⁰ Brownlee, *Ezekiel*, 236.

⁸¹ Cooper, *Ezekiel*, 174.

⁸² Gerlinde Baumann, "Prophetic Objections to Yahweh as the Violent Husband of Israel: Reinterpretations of the Prophetic Marriage Metaphor in Second Isaiah (Isaiah 40-55)," in *Prophets and Daniel: A Feminist Companion to the Bible* (ed. A. Brenner; London: Sheffield Academic, 2001), 88-120.

Hummel on the other hand is more generous and proposes that the lovers were the Babylonians and all the nations in the Oracles against the Nations (Ezek 25-32).⁸³ Since these lovers include the ones Israel loved and those she hated (Ezek 16:37), my proposition is that the lovers were any nation with which Israel had contact, both the ones with which she made alliances and those that were antagonistic to her. YHWH uses all these “lover” nations as instruments of judgment against Israel as a universal demonstration of the dire consequences that await anyone who does not acknowledge YHWH’s distinctiveness and sovereignty.

Then in Ezek 16:40, in an unexpected turn of events, and as if the former accomplices are not equal to the entire task, YHWH declares that these “lovers” will enlist the help of a *קָהָל*, “an assembly.”⁸⁴ Together they will stone the culprit,⁸⁵ dismember her body with a sword,⁸⁶ and burn her residence.

⁸³ Hummel, *Ezekiel*, 481.

⁸⁴ For its 15 uses in the book of Ezekiel see 16:40; 17:17; 23:24, 46, 47; 26:7; 27:27, 34; 32:3, 22, 23; 38:4, 7, 13, 15.

⁸⁵ The same thought is repeated in Ezek 23:47 where YHWH orders the execution of the offenders by stoning. Deuteronomy 22:20-24 explicitly states that the penalty for those involved in harlotry were to be stoned. See also Lev 20:10 where punishment for adultery was to be capital punishment for both men and women. Gaertner points out that some of the offenses that were punishable by stoning in the Old Testament were idolatry (Deut 17:2-7; 13:6-10 [MT 7-11]; sacrificing children to Molech (Lev 20:2-5), prophesying in the name of a foreign god (Deut 13:1-5 [2-6]), divination (Lev 20:27), blasphemy (24:15-16), Sabbath-breaking (Num 15:32-36), death caused by an ox (Exod 21:28-32), adultery (Deut 22:22-24), and rebellion by children (21:18-21). D. Gaertner, “Stoning,” *EDB* 1253. For similar and other examples see R. Westbrook, “Punishments and Crimes,” *ABD* 5:546-56. Allen remarks that this punishment was going to be meted out not just because it was “prescribed by the Law for harlots and murderers, but also because stones were used as weapons of war, including stone catapult balls.” Allen, *Ezekiel 1-19*, 238.

⁸⁶ Hummel notes that although there is no biblical precedent for the dismembering of the victim’s body yet the action YHWH orders to be carried out here “illustrates the fury of Yahweh’s judgment.” Hummel, *Ezekiel 1-20*, 483. Eichrodt on the other hand sees in this action a

Rain, Hailstones, and Winds

YHWH's cache of ammunitions of judgment against recalcitrant Israel does not seem to run out. As we unlock his stockpile of arsenals in the book of Ezekiel we discover that among the weapons that are still at his disposal are some natural calamities⁸⁷ that he intends to unleash against Israel. This section of the research therefore undertakes a brief exploration of rain, hailstones, and violent winds or storms as means of YHWH's judgment against the false prophets in Israel.

The first occurrence of these elements as means of divine judgment against Israel is found in Ezek 13:10-14 where they are used in judgment against the false prophets of Israel who deceive God's people by giving them a false sense of security.⁸⁸ Hummel observes that even if these deceptive teachings were directed at the heathen people it would still have been catastrophic, "but to mislead the chosen, covenant people was incalculably worse."⁸⁹ Block notes that these prophets' preaching "produced an illusory complacency among the nation. Pretending that all is well when the nation is on the brink of collapse, spiritually, morally, and politically, would not change the reality."⁹⁰ YHWH therefore pronounces judgment upon them.

warning to other women spectators of the frightful nature of the punishment. Eichrodt, *Ezekiel*, 209.

⁸⁷ Hummel calls them "meteorological events." Hummel, *Ezekiel 1-20*, 357.

⁸⁸ For discussion on other Old Testament prophets who contended with similar charges concerning the deceptive teachings of the false prophets see Isa 28:7; 30:9, 10; Jer 6:14; 8:11; 14:13-14; 23:13-40; Mic 3:5-7.

⁸⁹ Hummel, *Ezekiel 1-20*, 370. Duguid remarks that the condemnation of these prophets stems from the fact that "they preached the wrong message at the wrong time because God had not sent them." Duguid, *Ezekiel and the Leaders of Israel*, 95.

⁹⁰ Block, *Ezekiel 1-24*, 406.

It is interesting to note that in Ezek 13:11 YHWH sends a signal that as a result of the deceptive work of the false prophets there would be a deluge of rain, great hailstones, and a stormy wind. Lest some of the false prophets listening to these words think that these are “mere meteorological phenomena”⁹¹ YHWH adds a personal touch and determination to the second announcement of judgment using the same features. This he does in Ezek 13:13 when he says, “In my wrath I will make a stormy wind break out, and in my anger there shall be a deluge of rain, and hailstones in wrath to destroy it. I will break down the wall that you have smeared with whitewash, and bring it to the ground.”

It is important to note that the driving force behind these destructive natural forces is the *חַמַּת*, “wrath,” of YHWH.⁹² This word *חַמַּת* which occurs 85 times in the Old Testament is used 31 times in Ezekiel,⁹³ and to emphasize the nature of YHWH’s action the word is repeated two times in this verse. Such human misconduct is what we meet here in Ezek 13:11, 13 where YHWH in his wrath sends out the natural elements of rain, hailstones, and violent winds⁹⁴ to “destroy the flimsy wall of comfort built by the false prophets.”⁹⁵

⁹¹ Hummel, *Ezekiel 1-20*, 372.

⁹² Several times in the Old Testament the violent storms are used figuratively to represent the wrath and fury of YHWH. For some examples of these see Ps 18:7-15; Jer 4:11-13; 23:19-20.

⁹³ See Ezek 3:14; 5:13 [twice], 15; 6:12; 7:8; 8:18; 9:8; 13:13 [twice], 15; 14:19; 16:38, 42; 19:12; 20:8, 13, 21, 33, 34; 21:22; 22:20, 22; 23:25; 24:8,13; 25:14, 17; 30:15; 36:6, 18; 38:18.

⁹⁴ Note that in Ezek 38:22 YHWH uses the elements of heavy rain, hailstones, and burning sulfur to destroy the armies of Gog.

⁹⁵ H. J. Austel, “אֶלֶּלֶבֶיִשׁ,” *NIDOTTE* 1:403.

Statements Directed at Cultic Practices

YHWH is riled by the cultic practices of the Israelites and he announces what he intends to do to rid Israel of these practices. Three aspects of these cultic places warrant consideration in the light of the “I” judgment statements. First, they are doomed to destruction. YHWH makes this clear when he says, “I will destroy your high places” (Ezek 6:3; cf. Lev 26:30, 31).⁹⁶ These had become centers of unauthorized worship and enticed many people to the worship of other gods.⁹⁷ Because of this they must be demolished as a testament to their fallacy.

But the most shocking and surprising announcement of all is when YHWH turns against his own temple and declares, “I am about to desecrate my sanctuary—the stronghold in which you take pride, the delight of your eyes, the object of your affection”

⁹⁶ Milgrom argues very strongly against the translation of *הַמִּצֵּד* as a high place and instead translates the word as “cult places.” Milgrom, *Leviticus 23-27*, 2316-17. Martens avers that in these high places “six activities may be traced: the burning of incense, sacrificing, the eating of sacrificial meals, praying, prostitution, and child sacrifice.” E. A. Martens, “*הַמִּצֵּד*,” n.p., *TWOT* on CD-ROM. Version 3.0g, 2000-2007. Schunck on the other hand suggests translating “*הַמִּצֵּד*” as “a small elevation for cultic use,” or “cult place,” based on archaeological and biblical data. K. D. Schunck, “*הַמִּצֵּד*,” *TDOT* 2:139-45. Selman contends that although *הַמִּצֵּד* was frequently situated on some raised ground, “it could in fact be anywhere, such as by the gate of a city (2 Kgs 23:8) or in a valley (Jer 7:31).” M. J. Selman, “*הַמִּצֵּד*,” *NIDOTTE* 1:670. Ziony Zevit points out three significant things about these high places: they were “accessible to all and their sacral objects were generally approachable by all”; despite some features they shared with altars, they were not altars; and the *zebah* and *minhāh* offerings were made at the *הַמִּצֵּד*. Ziony Zevit, *The Religions of Ancient Israel: A Synthesis of Parallactic Approaches* (New York: Continuum, 2001), 194-95, 262-63. For other significant scholarly contributions on this concept see W. Boyd Barrick, *BMH as Body Language: A Lexical and Iconographical Study of the Word BMH When Not a Reference to Cultic Phenomena in Biblical and Post Biblical Hebrew* (New York: T&T Clark, 2008); J. A. Emerton, “The Biblical High Place in the Light of Recent Study,” *PEQ* 129 (1997): 116-32; Mervyn D. Fowler, “The Israelite Bama: A Question of Interpretation,” *ZAW* 94 (1982): 203-13; Patrick H. Vaughan, *The Meaning of bāmā in the Old Testament* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1974); John T. Whitney, “‘Bamoth’ in the Old Testament: A Study of Etymological, Textual and Archaeological Evidence,” *TynBul* 30 (1979): 125-47.

⁹⁷ Eichrodt, *Ezekiel*, 94-95.

(Ezek 24:21; cf. 16:39).⁹⁸ YHWH had previously accused the Israelites of defiling his sanctuary with different abominations (Ezek 5:11; 8:1-17), yet now he resolves to take the action himself and defile it. This he does because of the cultic abuses prevalent in it. It no longer serves the purpose for which it was established and does not deserve to exist. Raitt puts an ominous tone to this divine action when he says by this act, “God killed the temple,” and by implication, he dashed every possible hope the Israelites had regarding the sacrosanct nature of Zion.⁹⁹

Next, the deluded worshipers are bound to destruction. YHWH declares, “I will cause your wounded to fall in front of your idols” (Ezek 6:4). “I will lay the corpses of the sons of Israel in front of their idols, and I will scatter your bones around your altars” (Ezek 6:5).¹⁰⁰ To show the disgust and aversion YHWH has for the monetary items the Israelites have used for making idols he declares, “Therefore, I will make it an unclean thing for them” (Ezek 7:20). The noun הִזְוָה, “menstruation, impurity, defilement, filthiness,” used to characterize these items in this sentence reveals the extent of this revulsion (cf. Lev 15:19-33; Num 19:13-21). YHWH has no mercy for anyone or anything that has been involved with idolatry.

⁹⁸ The word לִלְוֶה, “defile, desecrate,” used in Ezek 24:21 is the same word that YHWH used when he accused the Israelites of defiling his sanctuary. It is also the same word used in Ezek 7:22 when YHWH announces that he will turn his face from the foreign armies and the robbers and allow them to desecrate his treasured place.

⁹⁹ Raitt, *A Theology of Exile*, 70.

¹⁰⁰ The sentence here reflects the statement in Lev 26:30 where YHWH threatens disobedience, thus: “I will . . . pile your corpses on the corpses of your idols.”

Third, the worshipers face extirpation. To those who are bent on worshipping idols comes this warning, “I will set my face against that man and make him an example and a byword. I will cut him off from my people” (Ezek 14:8). The word used here is כָּרַת, “cut out, eliminate, kill, make a covenant.”¹⁰¹ Smick notes that in addition to its usual meaning, כָּרַת can also be used metaphorically to designate “to root out, eliminate, remove, excommunicate or destroy by a violent act of man or nature.”¹⁰² This is the word used to express the fate awaiting anyone who, in a state of uncleanness, ate the flesh of the sacrifice of the peace offering that belonged to the Lord (Lev. 7:20, 21).

YHWH warns that those who desecrate the Sabbath (Exod 31:14) or offer their children to Molech will face the penalty of כָּרַת (Lev 20:3). The same applies to whoever despises the word of YHWH (Num 15:30, 31). Wold has therefore rightly observed that the כָּרַת penalty, as “a conditional divine curse of extinction,”¹⁰³ was directed at crimes “deemed to be direct offenses against the Deity and/or His property.”¹⁰⁴ Since the Israelites have despised the covenant YHWH made (כָּרַת) with them, he now cuts (כָּרַת)

¹⁰¹ It is ironic that the same word which is used when YHWH established a covenant with his people is the same word that is employed here to indicate the removal of those who violate the covenant relationship.

¹⁰² E. B. Smick, “כָּרַת,” n.p., *TWOT* on CD-ROM. Version 3.0g. 2000-2007.

¹⁰³ Donald Wold notes that the seriousness of this punishment could involve not only the death of the culprit, but also the forfeiture of progeny. Donald J. Wold, “The Meaning of the Biblical Penalty *Kareth*” (Ph.D diss., University of California, Berkeley, 1978), 53, 55, 252. Collating some Jewish sources, Milgrom notes that the כָּרַת penalty could involve “childlessness and premature death,” “extirpation of descendants,” and forfeiture of the afterlife. Milgrom, *Leviticus 1-16*, 457-60. See also Baruch Schwartz, “The Bearing of Sin in Priestly Literature,” in *Pomegranates and Golden Bells: Studies in Biblical, Jewish, and Near Eastern Ritual, Law, and Literature in Honor of Jacob Milgrom* (ed. D. P. Wright, D. N. Freedman, and A. Hurvitz; Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1995), 3-21; Baruch A. Levine, *Leviticus* (Philadelphia, Pa.: The Jewish Publication Society, 1989), 241-42.

¹⁰⁴ Wold, “The Meaning of the Biblical Penalty *Kareth*,” 252.

them off from among his people. This is the fate that awaits those who persist in idolatry and turn their backs on YHWH.

Statements Directed against the Land

The other statements are those that are directed against the land. Land had been bequeathed to the Israelites as a gift by YHWH himself.¹⁰⁵ YHWH actually swore to give them the land.¹⁰⁶ It was to the Israelites as an everlasting possession.¹⁰⁷ This land was to be “a good land, a land with flowing streams, with springs and underground waters welling up in valleys and hills, a land of wheat and barley, of vines and fig trees and

¹⁰⁵ See for example Gen 12:1, 7; 15:7-21; 17:1-8; 35:12; 48:21; 50:24; Deut 1:8, 21; 6:10, 18, 23; 7:13; 8:1, 18; 9:5; 10:11; 11:9, 21; 19:8; 26:3; 27:3; 28:11; 30:20; 31:7, 20-23; 34:4. As a result of the disobedience of the desert generation, YHWH swears not to allow them to inherit this land that he had given on oath to their forefathers (Num 14:23; 32:11). For discussion on land as a divine promise and gift, see Walter Brueggemann, *The Land* (Philadelphia, Pa.: Fortress, 1977); idem, *The Land: Place as Gift, Promise, and Challenge to Biblical Faith* (Minneapolis, Minn.: Fortress, 2002); Paul R. Williamson, "Promise and Fulfillment: The Territorial Inheritance," in *The Land of Promise: Biblical, Theological and Contemporary Perspectives* (ed. P. Johnston and P. Walker; Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 2000), 15-34. In discussing the promise of land and its eventual fulfillment Alexander identifies five areas which are integrally linked with the concept of land. These are (1) The land as a place of rest, (2) The land as sacred space, (3) The land gives identity to the people of God, (4) The land as the arena where faith and obedience are tested, and (5) Land as a source of divine blessing or cursing. T. Desmond Alexander, "Beyond Borders: The Wider Dimensions of Land," in *The Land of Promise: Biblical, Theological and Contemporary Perspectives* (ed. P. Johnston and P. Walker; Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 2000), 35-50.

¹⁰⁶ See for example Gen 15:8-21; 50:24; Exod 6:8; 13:5, 11; 32:13; 33:1; Num 14:23, 30. For discussion on the promise of land as an oath see Suzanne Boorer, *Promise of the Land as Oath: A Key to the Formation of the Pentateuch* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1992). See also Brueggemann, *The Land*; idem, *Old Testament Theology: An Introduction* (Nashville, Tenn.: Abingdon, 2008), 265-81; Norman C. Habel, *The Land Is Mine: Six Biblical Land Ideologies* (Minneapolis, Minn.: Fortress, 1995).

¹⁰⁷ See for example Gen 17:8. Townsend affirms that the covenant was the basis of the promise of land that YHWH made with Abraham and his posterity, and which was fulfilled during the conquest (Josh 21:43-45; 23:14-15) and during the reigns of David and Solomon in the united monarchy. Jeffrey L. Townsend, "Fulfillment of the Land Promise in the Old Testament," *BSac* 142 (1985): 320-37.

pomegranates, a land of olive trees and honey, a land where you may eat bread without scarcity, where you will lack nothing, a land whose stones are iron and from whose hills you may mine copper” (Deut 8:7-9). It was a fertile land, a good and spacious land, a land flowing with milk and honey.¹⁰⁸ Now in this twist of events YHWH turns against the land and pronounces curses upon it.

There are two prominent features related to land with regard to the “I” judgment statements. First, the land is consigned to destruction.¹⁰⁹ Thus YHWH’s announces, “I will make the land a devastation” (Ezek 6:14; cf. Lev 26:32).¹¹⁰ The word used here is **הַמְּשָׁ**, “devastation, waste.” This is a feminine singular noun derived from the verb **הִשָּׁ**, “be desolate.”¹¹¹ Joshua is said to have “burned Ai and made it forever a heap of (**הַמְּשָׁ**) ruins” (Josh 8:28). The picture given here is that of total destruction. Other nuances of **הַמְּשָׁ** refer to uninhabited land (e.g., Exod 23:29; Isa 6:11; Jer 6:8; 9:10). Meyer observes that all occurrences of the noun **הַמְּשָׁ** are found in the “context of judgment,

¹⁰⁸ See Exod 3:8, 17; 13:5; 33:3; Lev 20:24; Num 13:27; 14:8; 16:13,14; Deut 6:3; 11:9; 26:9, 15; 27:3; 31:20; Josh 5:6; Jer 11:5; 32:22; Ezek 20:6, 15.

¹⁰⁹ For some scholars who view God’s devastation of the land as an injustice on the land see Keith Carley, “Ezekiel’s Formula of Desolation: Harsh Justice for the Land/Earth,” in *The Earth Story in the Psalms and the Prophets* (ed. N. C. Habel; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 2001), 143-157; Habel, “The Silence of the Lands”; Kalinda R. Stevenson, “If Earth Could Speak: The Case of the Mountains against Yahweh in Ezekiel 6:35-36,” in *The Earth Story in the Psalms and the Prophets* (ed. N. C. Habel; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 2001), 158-71.

¹¹⁰ It is interesting to note that the word “land” occurs 18 times in Lev 26:1-39. Six of these are between vv. 1-6 and 12 and between vv. 13-39, a section whose dominant theme is the curses. Other biblical references on this theme are found in 1 Kgs 9:6-9; 2 Chr 7:19-22.

¹¹¹ The principal notion conveyed by **הִשָּׁ** is the devastation triggered by some type of immense catastrophe which is generally attributed to YHWH’s judgment. H. J. Austel, “**הִשָּׁ**,” n.p., *TWOT* on CD-ROM. Version 3.0g. 2000-2007.

threatened or remembered.”¹¹² Tyler Williams on the other hand notes that the verb שָׁמַד occurs “with the sense to suffer destruction, with the implication of being deserted and abandoned, often as a consequence of divine judgment/and/or enemy action” and is generally “used to describe the judgment of God on Israel and its subsequent state of desolation.”¹¹³

Second, this devastation comes because of the enormity of people’s sins. This is evident from YHWH’s pronouncement, “I will make the land a desolation (שָׁמַד) because (מַעַלּוּ מַעַל) they have committed a trespass” (Ezek 15:8). The noun מַעַל, “trespass,” is used here as a cognate accusative to the verb מַעַל, “act unfaithfully.” An examination of the meaning of the word explains why YHWH has to take such a drastic action against the land.¹¹⁴

The word מַעַל signifies a conscious and deliberate action that is contrary to the established norms, and which infringes upon “the legally definable relationship of trust that exists between two persons.”¹¹⁵ Such actions can be against God or other human beings. Thus a woman who is unfaithful to her husband has committed מַעַל (Num 5:12,

¹¹² I. Meyer, “שָׁמַד,” *TDOT* 15:238-48.

¹¹³ T. F. Williams, “שָׁמַד,” *NIDOTTE* 4:167-71.

¹¹⁴ Other references to the devastation of the land of Israel in Ezekiel but which do not have the “I” component include the desolation of the land because of the violence of its inhabitants (Ezek 12:19); the desolation of the land and the devastation of the cities (Ezek 12:20); the desolation of the land in spite of the presence of Daniel, Job, and Noah in the land (Ezek 14:16); YHWH promises to make the land desolate because of the abominations (Ezek 33:28, 29). It is interesting to note that in the Ezekielian passages that address the future restoration the land that was once a devastation will be filled and “become like the garden of Eden” (Ezek 36:34, 35). In Ezek 25:3 YHWH rebukes the Ammonites for sneering at the Israelites when their sanctuary was profaned and their land devastated.

¹¹⁵ R. Knierim, “מַעַל m l to be unfaithful,” *TLOT* 2:680-82.

27). To underscore the seriousness of her sin, such a woman was to be cursed (Num 5:11-31). The tribes of Reuben, Gad, and half tribe of Manasseh committed unfaithfulness (מַעַל) against the God of their fathers by whoring after the gods of the peoples of the land (1 Chr 5:25), with the resultant consequences of captivity (1 Chr 5:26). King Saul is said to have committed מַעַל when he consulted the witch of Endor instead of YHWH (1 Chr 10:13), a sin that led to his death. King Uzziah committed מַעַל by conducting unauthorized priestly duties (2 Chr 26:16, 18), a crime for which he suffered leprosy (2 Chr 26:16-21).

King Hezekiah gives an insightful explanation of what מַעַל could mean. He says in 2 Chr 29:6: “Our fathers have committed a trespass (מַעַל וְאַבְתִּירוֹ).” Then he recounts what this מַעַל means: “They have done evil in the sight of the Lord their God, they have forsaken him, they have turned away from the Lord’s dwelling, and they have turned their backs.” As a result of this they were subjected to shame, sword, and captivity (2 Chr 29:8, 9). It is no wonder that Kneirim concludes that מַעַל signifies “‘unfaithfulness’ against YHWH/God/the God of Israel.”¹¹⁶ Milgrom, who translates מַעַל as “commit sacrilege,” observes that sins involving מַעַל “fall into two major categories: sacrilege against sancta and sacrilege involving oaths.”¹¹⁷

¹¹⁶ Knierim, “מַעַל,” *TLOT* 2:681. See also V. P. Hamilton, “מַעַל,” n.p. *TWOT* on CD-ROM. Version 3.0g. 2000-2007; H. Ringgren, “מַעַל,” *TDOT* 8:460-63; Robin Wakely, “מַעַל,” *NIDOTTE* 2:1020-1025.

¹¹⁷ Milgrom, *Leviticus 1-16*, 320. Gane also notes that the sin of מַעַל encompasses “covenant unfaithfulness of ‘sacrilege.’” This includes “desecration of something sacred (e.g. Josh 7; 2 Chron 26:16-18; 28:19-25; 36:14), and a “violation of an oath (e.g. Ezek 17:18-20), which misuses God’s holy name (Lev 19:12; cf. 20:3; Ezek 36:20-22).” Roy Gane, *Leviticus/Numbers* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004), 132-33.

Therefore מַעַל involves multifaceted infractions, things that are against the dictates of YHWH, and any such contraventions are severely punished. So when YHWH says he will make the land a desolation because the Israelites have committed מַעַל (Ezek 15:8), it is clear that they have contravened his ways and acted unfaithfully. Hence, the land which was supposed to be a blessing to the Israelites now turns out to be a devastation as a result of the unfaithfulness of the Israelites, which YHWH cannot afford to overlook.

Summary

This discussion has revealed that when YHWH's people persist in disobedience, YHWH unleashes a myriad of arsenals that he uses to chastise his people. One significant aspect of these implements of punishment is that they are derived from the covenant curses in Lev 26 and Deut 28. YHWH therefore cannot be blamed for pouncing on his covenant people without warning. To be forewarned is to be forearmed. The Israelites have neglected the foundational principles of the covenant. They have sown the wind, now they must reap the whirlwind. The punishments may cause intolerable pain and suffering, but YHWH has sufficient justification for his retributive justice. My next task therefore is to examine the character of YHWH in the light of such harsh and devastating judgments.

CHAPTER 6

THEODICY IN EZEKIEL 5:5-17 IN ITS CONTEXT

Introduction

A correct understanding of the character of God is vital in shaping how people relate to him. Terence Fretheim has articulated this well in this statement: “The images used to speak about God not only decisively determine the way one thinks about God, they have a powerful impact on the shape of the life of the believer.”¹ And to this Erick Stiebert adds, “Our view of God not only affects how we relate to God, but it also influences our behavior.”² In the introduction to his article, “The Message of God’s People in the Old Testament,” Jiří Moskala states two major undertakings of the people of God in the Old Testament: (1) “to worship and serve the Lord,” and (2) “to present a right picture of God . . . a picture which, at the beginning of human history, had become distorted in the Garden of Eden.”³ Moskala further observes: “Sinfulness makes humans

¹ Terence E. Fretheim, *The Suffering of God: An Old Testament Perspective* (Philadelphia, Pa.: Fortress, 1984), 1.

² Eric A. Seibert, *Disturbing Divine Behaviour: Troubling Old Testament Images of God* (Minneapolis, Minn.: Fortress, 2009), 5.

³ Moskala, “The Message of God’s People in the Old Testament,” 18, 36. See also Moskala, “The Nature and Definition of Sin: A Practical Study of Genesis 3:1-6,” in *The Word of God for the People of God: A Tribute to the Ministry of Jack J. Blanco* (ed. R. du Preez, P. G. Samaan, and R. E. M. Clouzet; Collegedale: School of Religion, Southern Adventist University, 2004), 289-306.

naturally afraid of God (Gen 3:10), and a twisted view of God worsens the situation. This is why the primary mission of the Old Testament Church was to present the correct character of God and His loving and righteous acts (Pss 67:1-7; 96:2-9; 105:1-2; 126:2-3; 145:11-12).”⁴ These statements strike at the core of the discussion in this chapter, as we try to explore the character of YHWH in the book of Ezekiel within the context of his harsh judgments on Israel.

In this regard, James Crenshaw’s definition of theodicy reflects the issues at stake when he writes, “Theodicy is the attempt to defend divine justice in the face of aberrant phenomena that appear to indicate the deity’s indifference or hostility toward virtuous people. Ancient Israel’s conviction that God shaped historical events to benefit a covenant nation exacerbated the issue, particularly in the wake of events associated with 722 and 587 B.C.E.”⁵ The issue at stake is how to reconcile the character of God with the harsh punishments that he brought upon his covenant people.

In chapter 2 we saw how YHWH’s character faces momentous challenges from feminist scholars, who cannot reconcile the image of a loving, compassionate deity with the seemingly abusive, brutish, and violent God in some sections of the book of Ezekiel.

Some scholars have tried to come up with various ways by which to reconcile what seems to be a disparate and discordant picture of God in the Old Testament, but attempts to atomize and compartmentalize the deity do not prove to be a productive biblical enterprise. Terence Fretheim, for example, argues that biblical characters are not

⁴ Moskala, “The Message of God’s People in the Old Testament,” 18-19.

⁵ J. L. Crenshaw, “Theodicy,” *ABD* 6:444-47.

real, they are merely “literary constructs.” By his definition, God, as presented in the Old Testament, is not real. In fact he says, “The God portrayed in the text does not fully correspond to the God who transcends the text, who is living, dynamic reality that cannot be captured in words on a page. God can give himself to us in, with, and under the text, but that God does not fully correspond to the character portrayed.”⁶ With this understanding Fretheim thus compartmentalizes God as follows: “the textual God and the actual God, the God who is character in the text and the God who transcends it.”⁷ For him the two deities are completely distinct and separate.

Following in Fretheim’s footsteps is Eric Seibert, who suggests that in order to deal with the incongruous images of God in the Old Testament, we need to “distinguish between the *characterization* of God in Scripture and the *character* of God in reality.”⁸ This means that there are some actions described in the Old Testament that only a deity who is a literary construct could have done, but which are completely incoherent with the actions of the real God. Such arguments fail to take into account the full nature of YHWH, the God of Israel. It is this failure which has led many feminist scholars to view YHWH negatively and thus ascribe to him actions that are not harmonious with his character, as discussed in chapter 2 of this study.

In this chapter, we will explore the character of God in Ezek 5:5-17 within its context. While it is true that the book of Ezekiel presents a God who confronts his people

⁶ Terence E. Fretheim, *The Bible as the Word of God in a Postmodern Age* (Minneapolis, Minn.: Fortress, 1998), 116.

⁷ Ibid., 116-17.

⁸ Seibert, *Disturbing Divine Behaviour*, 170.

with harsh judgments because of their sins, yet this same God also takes actions which show his concern for the overall welfare of his people.

The Character of God in Ezekiel 5:5-17

To any observer, the picture of God that emanates from Ezek 5:5-17 is a scary and a disturbing one. Fretheim and Siebert could very easily characterize him as a literary construct. Here is a God who is personally pitted against his own people and determined to punish them using every means at his disposal. Israel is guilty. She has broken the terms of the covenant, turned her back on God by giving allegiance to other deities, and desecrated the sanctuary. But does this warrant such harsh judgments that we meet in Ezek 5:5-17? What kind of God do these severe judgments reveal?

A cursory reading of Ezek 5:5-17 reveals a God who is negatively predisposed to his people and tells them, “I am against you” (Ezek 5:8)—a God who does not seem to care about the reputation of his people and is vowing to arraign them in the court of public arena and shame them before the masses (Ezek 5:8, 14, 15). Here is a God who appears to be merciless and pitiless. He tells Israel, “I will not spare or pity you” (Ezek 5:11; cf. 7:4, 9; 8:18; 9:5, 10). He is a God of wrath and jealousy (Ezek 5:13, 15), bent on destroying Israel, using every available means imaginable: exile, cannibalism, sword, famine, wild animals, and pestilence (Ezek 5:10, 12, 16, 17).⁹

Yet as we look at the covenant backdrop of Ezek 5:5-17 we discover that YHWH’s judgments are the reaction of a God of love, who cannot afford to stand idle

⁹ Hummel, *Ezekiel 1-20*, 185.

and see his beloved people slide on the self-destructive path they have carved for themselves.¹⁰ Commenting on the significance of this covenant context, Duguid observes that “it demonstrates that the judgment that will befall Jerusalem is neither arbitrary nor unfair. The judgments coming on that city are not random afflictions thought up on the spur of the moment, as if God has lost his temper; they are the execution of the curses on the covenant breakers.”¹¹ Craige says this is the normal reaction of “a lover to the behaviour of those that are loved.”¹² His judgments, severe though they may be, are a divine intervention mechanism aimed at stopping this downward spiral of the Israelites to spiritual suicide and obscurity.

YHWH’s reaction could be compared to a parent who loves his child so dearly and does not want the child’s life to be ruined by some of the wrong choices they have made. These judgments can be compared to the normal outworkings of a spouse who is enraged because of their partner’s infidelity and unfaithfulness and wants to take corrective measures to redeem the relationship. They are steps similar to what a civil government may take to curtail some abuses in society, knowing that left unchecked, such abuses are likely to taint and affect the overall well-being of the entire community.

What then do we make of the seeming harsh actions of YHWH in Ezek 5:5-17? Peter Craige, in his commentary on Ezekiel, makes this short but insightful statement regarding Ezek 5:5-17: “It is a frightening picture of God that emerges from this

¹⁰ Allen, *Ezekiel 1-19*, 80. See discussion of the nature of divine judgment below.

¹¹ Duguid, *Ezekiel*, 100.

¹² Peter C. Craige, *Ezekiel* (Philadelphia, Pa.: Westminster Press, 1983), 41.

prophecy of doom, but behind the words, God's fuller nature may be seen."¹³ Cooper's opening comments on Ezek 5:13-17 find resonance with those of Craige: "The closing verses of chap. 5 present one of the major themes of the book: the nature and character of God."¹⁴ It is to this "nature and character of God" that we now turn our attention.

As we explore Ezek 5:5-17 five remarkable things emerge with respect to the character of YHWH. First, the text reveals a God who elevates his people and puts them on a high pedestal.¹⁵ This is clear from Ezek 5:5 with respect to the placement of Jerusalem in the midst of the nations with countries all around her. Blenkinsopp suggests this special placement pertains to YHWH's special election of Israel.¹⁶ Jenson notes that "Jerusalem's place as the center of the nations thus depends on the Lord's personal will for her, Jerusalem's perdurance in that place depends on her correspondence to the moral content of that will, on obedience to his 'statutes and ordinances.'"¹⁷ For YHWH to have elected Israel and placed them in this unique position among the nations is a revelation of God's love for them. It is because of this love that he wanted them to be missionaries to these surrounding nations, a calling which they failed to fulfill.¹⁸

¹³ Craige, *Ezekiel*, 40-41.

¹⁴ Cooper, *Ezekiel*, 105.

¹⁵ Block says YHWH's placement of Jerusalem meant that she should be "on top of the world." Block, *Ezekiel 1-24*, 197.

¹⁶ Blenkinsopp, *Ezekiel*, 39. See also Block, *Ezekiel 1-24*, 197-198. Hummel connects this position not only with politics and commerce but also with Zion theology. Hummel, *Ezekiel 1-20*, 179-180. Tuell on the other hand argues that this placement was meant to highlight Jerusalem's wickedness. Tuell, *Ezekiel*, 30.

¹⁷ Jenson, *Ezekiel*, 60.

¹⁸ Craige, *Ezekiel*, 42.

Second, YHWH's concern about the statutes and ordinances in Ezek 5:6, 7 reveals something about his character. Jenson notes that these were "the total moral basis the Lord gave Israel . . . Torah."¹⁹ The commandments are a transcript of the character of YHWH. They show who he is and how he wants to relate to his people. The fact that YHWH complains that Israel has rebelled against his statutes and ordinances and has not followed them implies that he had given these laws to them. As a loving God he has revealed to them what he expects of them through these laws. These laws were an expression of his will, a revelation of his character. Rebellion against them was a rejection of the Lord himself. The enactment of these laws reveals that YHWH is a God of justice and righteousness.

Third, Ezek 5:5-17 also mentions the sanctuary which the Israelites have defiled with their abominations. YHWH instructed the Israelites to build him a sanctuary so he could reside in their midst (Exod 25:8). The initiative for the building of this sanctuary was YHWH's. He did not want to be far removed from his covenant people. He wanted to have constant communion with them. The sanctuary in the midst of the camp of the Israelites was in itself a testament to the character of God. It was a constant reminder of the presence of God. The God who is by nature transcendent became immanent and availed himself to them. Had they remained faithful in their worship of God their relationship to him could have been fostered. But now their actions in this sanctuary have tainted their relationship with the covenant God and instead of him being immanent to commune with them, he is immanent to judge them.

¹⁹ Jenson, *Ezekiel*, 60.

Fourth, Ezek 5:5-17 reveals the intensity and reality of God's anger and wrath. He states categorically that this anger and wrath will be spent upon the Israelites (Ezek 5:13). If one does not read the last clause of the verse the picture of God one is left with could be that of a furious God burning with uncontrollable rage. Yet, as if YHWH knows that his statements could be misunderstood, he pauses in the middle of the verse and clearly and intentionally states the purpose of his exasperation: *וַיֵּדְעוּ כִּי־אֲנִי יְהוָה*, "they will know that I am YHWH." A recognition formula in the middle of furious judgments! YHWH's fury and severe judgments are not for nothing. They are intended to reveal to the Israelites the exact nature and person of YHWH.²⁰ They are intended to demonstrate his total abhorrence of sin and his determination to rout it out so his people can have a wholesome relationship with him.

Lastly, Ezek 5:13 reveals the portrait of a God who is passionate for his people. YHWH says, *וַיֵּדְעוּ כִּי־אֲנִי יְהוָה דִּבַּרְתִּי בְּקִנְאָתִי*, "they will know that I am YHWH, I have spoken in my jealousy." The word *קִנְאָה* used here is very instructive. It is the same word that describes the reaction of the husband whose wife becomes unfaithful (Num 5:11-31). The wife's actions infuriate the man. She has failed to trust him and remain loyal to him. In wisdom literature it is expressed thus: "jealousy arouses a husband's fury" (Prov 6:34). It is because such a man loves and cares for the estranged wife that he becomes jealous. Because of YHWH's great love and concern for Israel he is brimming with jealousy because of his covenant spouse's unfaithfulness. Her worship of other gods has revealed the cracks in their relationship. He is disappointed at her inappropriate and

²⁰ Block, *Ezekiel 1-24*, 211.

unbecoming actions. This trend cannot continue unabated. His passion for this relationship is demonstrated by the harsh and severe punishments²¹ aimed at securing the errant spouse's attention and eventual comeback.²²

The Character of YHWH in Ezekiel 1-24

As we have seen in chapter 2, a number of scholars characterize YHWH quite negatively. Yet these negative depictions are not the sum total of his character. Apart from the harsh divine-judgment realities that are found in Ezek 5:5-17 and the larger context of Ezek 1-24, this portion of Hebrew literature has much to say about the other side of YHWH, which opens a window into the nature of the Hebrew deity. An exploration of these texts reveals the portrait of a God who is keen to guard his reputation, a God of covenant relations and restoration, and the God who is just and merciful. His character is further seen in the call of Ezekiel to a rebellious people, in the call to repentance, and in the infusion of the Holy Spirit. The discussion on the implications of this study for the character of YHWH will be undertaken with the understanding that the book of Ezekiel is full of YHWH's actions: actions of judgment, salvation, and restoration. As we lift the curtain on these actions, we are able to have a peek into the divine character.²³

²¹ Block, *Ezekiel 1-24*, 211.

²² Hummel, *Ezekiel 1-20*, 184-85.

²³ Zimmerli, *Ezekiel 1-24*, 52-53. See also Marti J. Steussy who considers YHWH's actions as one of the most significant determinants of his nature and character. Marti J. Steussy, "The Problematic God of Samuel," in *Shall Not the Judge of All the Earth Do What Is Right? Studies on the Nature of God in Tribute to James L. Crenshaw* (ed. D. Penchansky and P. L. Redditt; Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 2000), 127-61.

YHWH's Reputation

The first thing I want to establish is that, while scholars of different persuasions advance arguments in defense of YHWH against the mischaracterizations, YHWH himself is eager to show that he is deeply concerned about the way he is portrayed.²⁴

Concern for YHWH's reputation in the Old Testament is not something new.²⁵ Moses voiced concern for YHWH's reputation after the fallout in the worship of the Golden Calf (Exod 32:11-14). Intent on wiping out the idolatrous worshipers, Moses reminded YHWH: "Why should the Egyptians say, 'It was with evil intent that he brought them out to kill them in the mountains, and to consume them from the face of the earth'?" (Exod 32:12). The Egyptians must not be given a reason to misrepresent the character of YHWH. Echoes of the same are seen after the people's refusal to accept the favorable report of the exploration of Canaan and YHWH's threat to exterminate the rebellious Israelites (Num 14:13-16). Moses intervenes and reminds YHWH: "Now if you kill this people all at one time, then the nations who have heard about you will say, 'It is because the Lord was not able to bring this people into the land he swore to give them that he has slaughtered them in the wilderness'" (Num 14:16, 17).

Moses widens the scope of those who should not be allowed to misrepresent

²⁴ See Talstra who discusses the "divine dilemma" as YHWH tries to guard his reputation. Eep Talstra, "Exile and Pain: A Chapter from the Story of God's Emotions," in *Exile and Suffering: A Selection of Papers Read at the 50th Anniversary Meeting of the Old Testament Society of South Africa* (ed. B. Becking and D. Human; Boston, Mass.: Brill, 2009), 161-80.

²⁵ Glatt-Gilad finds the background for the protection of YHWH's reputation in the "'holy war' ideology" in which "Yahweh's very 'name' was identified with his warrior attribute (Exod 15:3)." David A. Glatt-Gilad, "Yahweh's Honor at Stake: A Divine Conundrum," *JSOT* 98 (2002): 63-74.

YHWH's name: the Egyptians, the inhabitants of the land, the nations (vv. 13, 14, 15). Following the unsuccessful attempt to conquer Ai and the death of some of the soldiers who had gone to attack the city, Joshua lamented to YHWH: "The Canaanites and the other people of the country will hear about this and they will surround us and wipe out our name from the earth. What then will you do for your own great name?" (Josh 7:9). Reverberations of the same theme also occur in 1 Sam 12:22 where Samuel assures the Israelites that "the Lord will not abandon his people for the sake of (שְׁמוֹ הַגָּדוֹל) his great name."²⁶ As good lieutenants of YHWH, Moses, Joshua, and Samuel do not want to see anything that will tarnish YHWH's reputation. YHWH's name is intrinsic with who he is. It is the sum total of his character.²⁷ YHWH's name held beyond reproach is thus a significant biblical theme.²⁸

The picture presented in Ezekiel is quite different. YHWH takes on the onus of safeguarding and vindicating his own character. Three times in Ezek 20 YHWH reviews the history of the Israelites and says he could have punished them in various ways, but restrained himself, "for the sake of his name" (vv. 9, 14, 22). Later in the book he adds, "I had concern for my holy name, which the house of Israel profaned among the nations where they had gone" (Ezek 36:21).²⁹ The same idea is repeated in Ezek 36:23: "It is not

²⁶ Tsumura avers that שְׁמוֹ הַגָּדוֹל "signifies his great fame." David T. Tsumura, *The First Book of Samuel* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 329.

²⁷ Adolph L. Harstad, *Joshua* (Saint Louis, Mo.: Concordia, 2004), 314; David M. Howard, Jr., *Joshua* (Nashville, Tenn.: Broadman & Holman, 1998), 192-93.

²⁸ Hummel observes that since "Yahweh's very character is involved in his name, his judgments are not arbitrary but follow fixed rules." Hummel, *Ezekiel 1-20*, 584.

²⁹ Block says the use of "name" here "is more than a mark of identification; it stands for the character and reputation of Yahweh." Block, *Ezekiel 25-48*, 348.

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.” The seriousness of the Israelites’ action is seen when considering the special nature of YHWH’s name. It is described as **שְׁמִי הַקָּדוֹשׁ**, “my holy name” (Ezek 20:39; 36:20-22; 39:7, 25; 43:7, 8). It is therefore an act of impunity of the highest order to thus treat YHWH’s name. This verse gives justification for YHWH’s punitive actions. The Israelites have maligned his name.

In an act of reversal of what Israel has done and in order to protect his name from any who may attempt to malign and besmirch his character in the future, YHWH declares, “I will make known my holy name among the people of Israel. I will no longer let my holy name be profaned, and the nations will know that I, YHWH, am the Holy One in Israel” (39:7). The threefold use of the word **קָדוֹשׁ**, “holy,” further highlights the uniqueness of YHWH’s name. Its third use indicates that the holy name of YHWH speaks more than just the name. It refers to the entire personality and character.³⁰

Then in Ezek 20, where the history of YHWH’s dealings with Israel is rehearsed in detail, YHWH voices his disappointment at the way Israel has responded to his gracious acts with disobedience and idolatrous worship. In spite of these rebellious tendencies, he has repeatedly restrained himself from destroying them. He has done all this in order to protect his reputation against unwarranted mischaracterization before the nations (Ezek 20:9, 14, 22). He cannot restrain himself any longer while the Israelites continue on their sinful path. He therefore issues what could be deemed an ultimatum when he announces, “You shall know that I am the Lord, when I deal with you for my

³⁰ Ibid., 463; Hummel, *Ezekiel 21-48*, 1134.

name's sake, not according to your evil ways, or corrupt deeds, O house of Israel, says the Lord God" (Ezek 20:44). His reputation is integrated with the recognition formula. Commenting on the self-introduction formula, I am YHWH, Zimmerli observes that "self-introduction is the form of self-revelation of a person in his name."³¹ YHWH therefore wants to emphasize the significance he attaches to his name by connecting the recognition formula to the protection of his name.

As the forces of evil are defeated and YHWH restores Israel, his concern for his name has not abated. That is why he can declare, "I will restore the fortunes of Jacob, and have mercy on the whole house of Israel; and I will be jealous for my holy name" (Ezek 39:25). With the restored Temple in Jerusalem YHWH can affirm that "the house of Israel shall no more defile my holy name, neither they, nor their kings, by their whoring, and by the corpses of their kings at their death" (Ezek 43:7). None of these adulterous and abominable practices that tarnished his name before are to be allowed to encroach into the sanctity of his dwelling. His reputation must remain intact, without anything that can again bring disrepute to it.

With such a concern for his reputation within the book of Ezekiel, it is ironic to find some feminist scholars attributing acts of violence and sexual abuse to YHWH. Those who say he is "tyrant and a bully"³² and an abusive husband,³³ should read such

³¹ Zimmerli, *Ezekiel 1-24*, 37.

³² Carroll, "Whorusalamin," 67.

³³ Day, "Rhetoric and Domestic Violence in Ezekiel 16," 220; Moughtin-Mumbi, *Sexual and Marital Metaphors in Hosea, Jeremiah, Isaiah, and Ezekiel*, 179; Shields, "Multiple Exposures: Body Rhetoric and Gender Characterization," 154; Magdalene, "Ancient Near Eastern Treaty-Curses and the Ultimate Texts of Terror," 326-53.

texts to see that YHWH cannot, for the sake of his name, engage in acts that would besmirch his image.

Ezekiel's Commission to Israel

One of the things that the book of Ezekiel reveals regarding God's character is his call of the prophet Ezekiel to go and confront the Israelites regarding their sins. YHWH wants to give each Israelite a chance to hear the prophetic voice of warning before the consummation of the judgment. He must be true to his word (Amos 3:7), and thus he identifies Ezekiel as the vehicle through which the message of the impending judgment will be transmitted.³⁴ Ezekiel's job description is clear: YHWH is assigning him the task of being a watchman to the people of Israel (Ezek 3:17). The word used here is **נֹכַח**, "keep watch, be a lookout." This is a special assignment. A watchman occupies a vantage position from where he/she can see any potential or impending danger and warn the people accordingly. The safety and security of the people depend on the commitment and dedication of the watchman. Knowing the impending danger facing the people of Judah, and because of YHWH's love and concern for them, he appoints Ezekiel to this task.

The description of the Israelites in Ezek 2 and 3 reveals that Ezekiel's assignment is a daunting one. The people to whom he is being sent are difficult people. They are people who should have been left alone! They seem to be the worst of the worst! They are rebellious (Ezek 2:3, 5, 6, 7, 8; 3:9, 26, 27). They are obstinate and stubborn (Ezek 2:4). They are hardened and obstinate (Ezek 3:7). Humanly speaking such people should

³⁴ We should also note that "the prophets of Israel" (Ezek 14) could have been Ezekiel's partners in this important mission had they remained true to their calling.

be left to die their own death. They seem to have reached the end of the road. What guarantee is there that they will give the prophet a chance to relay the divine message?

What makes the situation worse is the object of their rebellion. They have committed these acts of defiance against YHWH himself (Ezek 2:3; 3:7). If they have refused to listen to him, with the aura and authority that divinity entails, why should they give heed to a mere mortal? Are there no better and more fulfilling assignments for Ezekiel than this one, which, by all intents and purposes, appears to be a waste of time, energy, and resources?

It is not surprising that Ezekiel's reaction to this divine commission shows a lack of enthusiasm. Ezekiel 3:14 reveals his feelings: "I went in bitterness and in the anger of my spirit." I concur with Hummel, who suggests that this was as a result of Ezekiel's reflection on the "thankless and dangerous task God had given him."³⁵ And even after arriving at his station he testifies, "I sat among them for seven days—overwhelmed" (Ezek 3:15). The word הִנָּחֵם used here has the connotation of "horror, appallment, devastation."³⁶ These reactions indicate how the weight of the task to which YHWH assigned Ezekiel weighed heavily on him. Yet as Uffenheimer observes, "Ezekiel never expressed even the slightest doubt about God's justice. On the contrary, he was committed to the total justification of the impending disaster."³⁷

We see here YHWH's character of concern for the sinners revealed in his resolve

³⁵ Hummel, *Ezekiel 1-20*, 119. See also Cooper, *Ezekiel*, 84, 85.

³⁶ Hermann J. Austel, הִנָּחֵם, n.p. *TWOT* on CD-ROM. Version 3.0 1980.

³⁷ Uffenheimer, "Theodicy and Ethics in the Prophecy of Ezekiel," 200-227.

to send Ezekiel to these people in spite of their rebelliousness. Robert Wilson says this divine determination “stands as eloquent testimony to God's unwillingness to allow Israel to be destroyed.”³⁸ His message to them through the prophet is clear: Turn away from your wickedness or face death and destruction (Ezek 3:16-21). We also find here what I would call “theodic raison d’être.” YHWH has presented the evidence. The Israelites are culpable. They have to step up to the plate and face the reality of their actions. YHWH has taken appropriate measures to redeem the guilty. He now absolves himself of any blame for the eventual fate of those who refuse to heed the words of his emissary. By so sending Ezekiel, he has shown that he is interested in life, not death.³⁹

The Commitment to the Covenant

The covenant played a key role in the relationship between YHWH and his people.⁴⁰ In affirming his commitment to Israel at Sinai, YHWH specified some conditions to this relationship: “Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all the nations you will be my treasured possession. Although the whole earth is

³⁸ Robert R. Wilson, “Prophecy in Crisis: The Call of Ezekiel,” *Int* 38 (1984): 117-30.

³⁹ In this commission to Ezekiel, Robert Wilson observes that “even though there is little hope that the wicked will repent, God still appoints the prophet to warn them of the approaching divine wrath. God will not desert the people even if judgment is inevitable.” Wilson, “Prophecy in Crisis,” 129.

⁴⁰ YHWH’s history of covenant making with his people in the Old Testament ranges from the time of Noah (Gen 6:9-18; 9:1-17), Abraham (Gen 15:1-21; Gen 17:1-22), Moses (Exod 6:2-5; 19-24), and David (2 Sam 7:8-16), up until the establishment of the New Covenant (Jer 31:31-34). For discussion of the interrelationships between various biblical covenants in the history of God’s people see Eugene H. Merrill, *Everlasting Dominion: A Theology of the Old Testament* (Nashville, Tenn.: Broadman & Holman, 2006), 437-40. For the Abrahamic Covenant see idem, “The Covenant with Abraham: The Keystone of Biblical Architecture,” *JDT* 12 (2008): 5-17.

mine, you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation” (Exod 19:5, 6). Special relationship entails special responsibilities.⁴¹ For this special relationship to be maintained, Israel must be obedient to their covenant partner. Yet it is this covenant relationship that was threatened by Israel’s rebelliousness and YHWH’s resolve to punish them (Ezek 1-24). The question that naturally arises is whether this special relationship is still intact, considering Israel’s disloyalty and YHWH’s extreme punitive measures. A look at some concepts in Ezek 1-24 reveals that YHWH has remained a serious covenant partner in spite of his harsh judgments.

Through the covenant YHWH committed himself to be Israel’s God and the God of their descendants (Gen 17:7). Was this commitment still in operation after all that they had done as attested in many parts of Ezek 1-24? Some of the promises in the judgment-laden pages of Ezek 1-24 demand that this question be answered in the affirmative. These promises couched in covenant language attest to this. For example, YHWH says, “They will be my people and I will be their God” (Ezek 11:20; 14:11).⁴² This covenant language finds echoes in the Pentateuch (Gen 17:7; Exod 6:7; Lev 26:12; Deut 29:13) and other books of the prophets (Jer 7:23; 11:4; 30:22; 31:1, 33; 32:38; Ezek 36:28; 37:23).

⁴¹ This reminds us of Amos 3:2 in which Israel’s special relationship is reiterated. Because of this relationship, Israel’s disobedience calls for appropriate punitive measures. For discussion of this and other concepts related to being God’s special people, see Simundson’s penetrating question. Daniel J. Simundson, “Reading Amos: Is It an Advantage to Be God’s Special People?” *WW* 28 (2008): 133-49.

⁴² Rolf Rendtorff has demonstrated the significant role the covenant formula plays in the overall trajectories of covenant theology in the framework of the Hebrew Bible and notes that this formula “can express God’s relations to Israel and Israel’s to God in an extensive and comprehensive way.” Rolf Rendtorff, *The Covenant Formula: An Exegetical and Theological Investigation* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1998).

YHWH is saying that they have not honored their part of the contract and as such they will suffer the consequences of the violations as per the terms of the covenant. But I will still honor my commitment (Lev 26:44, 45; Isa 54:7, 8, 10; Jer 33:20, 21). I will not abandon or forsake them.⁴³ They will still be my people and I will be their God.⁴⁴ This concept is reiterated when he reminds them of the day he chose (בְּהַר) Israel (Ezek 20:5) and reminds them of his covenant commitment to them: “I am the Lord your God.”⁴⁵ This covenant commitment is further seen when YHWH recounts the dessert experience and the countless sins the Israelites committed. In the midst of the litany of the judicial actions YHWH says, “I will take note of you as you pass under my rod, and I will bring you into the bond of the covenant” (Ezek 20:37).

The most surprising text with regard to YHWH’s commitment to the covenant is found in Ezek 16:59-63. Israel’s sins in Ezek 16 and 23 have been recounted in graphic language that some modern scholars find offensive (see chapter 2). As ch. 16 draws to a close YHWH summarizes Israel’s sins as comprised of despising (בְּזִיתָ) his oath and

⁴³ See Olyan’s spirited argument on YHWH’s commitment to stick to the covenant despite Israel’s unfaithfulness. Saul M. Olyan, “The Status of Covenant During the Exile,” in *Berührungspunkte: Studien zur Sozial- und Religionsgeschichte Israels und seiner Umwelt; Festschrift für Rainer Albertz zu seinem 65. Geburtstag* (ed. I. Kottsieper, R. Schmitt, and J. Wöhrle; Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 2008), 333-44.

⁴⁴ The strong bond created between YHWH and his people is demonstrated by Seock-Tae Sohn, who argues that the covenant formula has its origin in the adoption and marriage formulae of the Ancient Near East. Seock-Tae Sohn, “I Will Be Your God and You Will Be My People’: The Origin and Background of the Covenant Formula,” in *Ki Baruch Hu: Ancient Near Eastern, Biblical, and Judaic Studies in Honor of Baruch A. Levine* (ed. R. Chazan, W. W. Hallo, and L. H. Schiffman; Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1999), 355-72.

⁴⁵ Eynde argues that whereas the בְּרִית, “covenant,” is integral to the understanding of the covenant formula (relationship formula), yet other immediate themes should also be considered if the covenant formula is to be fully understood. Sabine van den Eynde, “Covenant Formula and בְּרִית: The Links between a Hebrew Lexeme and a Biblical Concept,” *OTE* 12 (1999): 122-48.

breaking (לְהַפֵּךְ) the covenant (Ezek 16:59).⁴⁶ The verb בָּזָה denotes “be contemptible, think lightly of.”⁴⁷ This is what Esau did when he despised his birthright (Gen 25:34). YHWH accuses David of despising (בָּזָה) his word when he killed Uriah the Hittite (2 Sam 12:9), and on a more personal note, YHWH accuses David of despising (בָּזָה) him when he took Uriah’s wife (2 Sam 12:10).

The verb פָּרַר has the connotation of “invalidate, nullify, frustrate, foil, thwart.”⁴⁸ YHWH uses this word when he tells Moses that after his death, the Israelites will forsake him by breaking (פָּרַר) the covenant he made with them (Deut 31:16; cf. 31:20). In Isa 24:4 Israel is accused of breaking the everlasting covenant. King Zedekiah is accused of breaking the covenant he made with Nebuchadnezzar, an action which had disastrous consequences (Ezek 17:15, 16).

The analysis of these two verbs underscores the seriousness of Israel’s actions. They are actions of contempt and defiance that show Israel’s radical determination to delink itself from YHWH. One would therefore expect the chapter to end with YHWH’s strong indictment and denunciations of Israel. But this is not the case. The text ends by reaffirming YHWH’s commitment to the covenant.⁴⁹ Instead of waiting for “incorrigible

⁴⁶ For similar accusations in Ezekiel, see 17:15, 16, 18, 19.

⁴⁷ M. A. Grisanti, “בָּזָה,” *NIDOTTE* 1:628-30; M. G. rg, “בָּזָה,” *TDOT* 1:60-65.

⁴⁸ T. F. Williams, “פָּרַר,” *NIDOTTE* 3:695-98; L. Ruppert, “פָּרַר,” *TDOT* 12:114-121; E. Kutsch, “פָּרַר,” *TLOT* 2:1031-32; L. Koehler, W. Baumgartner, “פָּרַר,” *HALOT* 3:974-75. Note Weinfeld’s observation that this is the most common term employed for violation of the covenant. M. Weinfeld, “בָּרִית,” *TDOT* 2:253-279.

⁴⁹ This coheres with Dempsey’s observation that “even though God’s people have been ruthless, faithless, and stubborn of heart, their lives remain ‘graced.’ They live in the midst of divine promise of redemption, restoration, and renewal, not contingent upon their repentance, but as a result of God’s enduring compassion and fidelity to covenant relationship.” Carol J.

and unrepentant Israel”⁵⁰ to make their ways right, he takes the initiative and asserts his covenant commitment with them.⁵¹ In fact for the first time in the book of Ezekiel he says he is going to establish עוֹלָם בְּרִית, “an everlasting covenant,” with Israel (Ezek 16:60).⁵² Hummel says “its eternalness . . . depends solely on God’s forgiving grace.”⁵³ The verb קוּם, “establish,” used here with עוֹלָם בְּרִית underscores YHWH’s initiative in this gracious act of covenant making. He was the initiator when he entered into similar relationship with Noah (Gen 6:18) and Abraham (Gen 17:7, 19), and he is similarly the architect of the covenant in this context.⁵⁴ Hummel notes that by the use of this verb YHWH sends an unequivocal message that no one should be tempted to think that they “must, or even could do something to earn, deserve, or qualify for God’s gifts.”⁵⁵

Furthermore, this covenant commitment is accentuated by his other actions: He is going to make atonement (כִּפּוּר) for all that Israel has done (Ezek 16:62).⁵⁶ This is the act the priest had to perform on behalf of those who had sinned unintentionally and they

Dempsey, “‘Turn Back, O People:’ Repentance in the Latter Prophets,” in *Repentance in Christian Theology* (ed. M. J. Boda and G. T. Smith; Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical, 2006), 54.

⁵⁰ Expression used by Chris Franke, “Divine Pardon in Ezekiel,” *TBT* 37 (1999): 24-28.

⁵¹ Regarding this covenant commitment, Dempsey points out that, “for Israel’s God, the covenant was an affair of the heart. According to the biblical text God had set God’s heart in love on Israel (Deut 7:7; 10:15) and in return, God wanted Israel’s heart as well (Deut 10:12).” Dempsey, “Repentance in the Latter Prophets,” 48.

⁵² This phrase also occurs in Ezek 37:26. Hummel notes that this statement coming at this juncture in this long chapter expresses “the magnitude of God’s grace almost beyond what human language can express.” Hummel, *Ezekiel 1-20*, 492.

⁵³ Hummel, *Ezekiel 1-20*, 493.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 492.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

⁵⁶ See Jerry M. Hullinger, “The Function of the Millennial Sacrifices in Ezekiel’s Temple, Part 1,” *BSac* 167 (2010): 40-57.

would find forgiveness (e.g., Lev 4:20, 26, 31, 35; cf. Lev 16:1-34).⁵⁷ If we consider the basic meaning of כָּפַר, here to be to “wipe, clean, purge,”⁵⁸ then on the basis of what Israel has done, she does not merit an “everlasting covenant.” Israel is not worthy of the atonement after its obduracy. But YHWH reveals his gracious character by extending to Israel what she does not deserve.⁵⁹ The amazing and overwhelming grace of God is made available to “lady Jerusalem.” The anger and fury that has characterized YHWH’s actions in the earlier portions of Ezek 16 are not to be YHWH’s last words to his people.⁶⁰ His final words and actions must be those that fully reveal his character: the magnanimous words and actions of a God who, though he wounds, he ultimately heals and restores.⁶¹

One of the things that Israel lost as a result of their unfaithfulness was the land. Land was a major component of the covenant between YHWH and Israel (Gen 17:18; 26:3, 4). Its loss was therefore a major blow to the aspirations and hopes of the covenant people. God had forewarned them of this possibility should they flout the covenant stipulations (Lev 26:33-35). This they did and YHWH sent them into exile. The book of Ezekiel is written with the backdrop of those who are in the Babylonian exile. They are

⁵⁷ For discussion of כָּפַר, see Gane, *Cult and Character*; Milgrom, *Leviticus 1-16*, 1079-84; Baruch A. Levine, *In the Presence of the Lord: A Study of Cult and Some Cultic Terms in Ancient Israel* (Leiden: Brill, 1974), 55-77.

⁵⁸ R. E. Averbeck, “כָּפַר,” *NIDOTTE* 2:689-710.

⁵⁹ Marten H. Woudstra, “The Everlasting Covenant in Ezekiel 16:59-63,” *CTJ* 6 (1971): 22-48.

⁶⁰ I therefore do not agree with Mary Shield’s assertion that the woman in Ezek 16 is an excluded person and “written out of the restoration.” Shields, “Multiple Exposures: Body Rhetoric and Gender in Ezekiel 16,” 147.

⁶¹ For discussion on the covenant motif in the other parts of the book of Ezekiel, see Gregory J. Polan, “Ezekiel’s Covenant of Peace,” *TBT* 37 (1999): 18-23.

reaping the consequences of their actions. YHWH is ready however to reverse their situation and restore the full covenant privileges, including repossession of the promised land (Ezek 11:17; cf. Lev 26:40-42). YHWH's address regarding the restoration of land to Israel has much to say about his character. He punishes when people are unfaithful, yet keeps all the options open for those who are willing to make reparations.

In spite of all that YHWH had done to Israel during their wilderness wanderings, they were faced with what I would call a "covenantal crisis." Israel became disobedient and rebellious to her covenant Lord. YHWH, true to his word, released covenantal curses upon them. This coheres with A. van de Beek's observation that "when God punishes Israel for her sins, it is not a contradiction of God's covenant faithfulness but an outflow of it: because God adheres to the covenant, he also adheres to its sanctions."⁶²

This covenantal crisis had three outcomes: (1) Many Israelites went into exile, (2) they lost the land, and (3) the main cultic feature, the sanctuary, that was reminiscent of YHWH's presence among them, was no longer there. The sentiments expressed by those who did not go into exile appropriately echo their desperation: "They are far away from the Lord" (Ezek 11:15).⁶³ The dilemma facing these exiles was not just limited to the cultic sphere.⁶⁴ This experience also raised questions related to the person, nature, and

⁶² A. van de Beek, *Why? On Suffering, Guilt, and God* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 57.

⁶³ Zimmerli, *Ezekiel 1-24*, 261.

⁶⁴ B. Oded, "Yet I Have Been to Them לְמַקְדֵּשׁ מֵעַתָּה in the Countries Where They Have Gone (Ezekiel 11:16)," in *Sefer Moshe: The Moshe Weinfeld Jubilee Volume: Studies in the Bible and the Ancient Near East, Qumran, and Post-Biblical Judaism* (ed. C. Cohen, A. Hurvitz, and S. M. Paul; Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 2004), 103-14.

character of YHWH. Why did he allow them to be so humiliated? Had he abandoned them? What was this going to say about him and his character?

It is under these circumstances that, once again, YHWH is seen as a loving, caring, and compassionate God who is concerned about his people. Rather than adopting the out-of-sight, out-of-mind attitude and leaving them to languish in exile, YHWH, to the chagrin and disappointment of their fellow citizens, upholds his covenantal connection with them and says he has been “their sanctuary in small measure” (לְמִקְדָּשׁ מְעַט) ⁶⁵ in the countries where they have gone” (Ezek 11:16). ⁶⁶ Zimmerli recognizes the significance of this statement and makes the following observation: “The grace of the preservation of the exiles, almost completely obscured to men, is expressed in this formulation.” ⁶⁷

YHWH did not abrogate responsibility to the exiles. He did not desert or forsake those who had gone into the Babylonian captivity. He maintained his presence among the exiles, ⁶⁸ thus fulfilling his covenant obligation to them and disproving the erroneous

⁶⁵ Block, *Ezekiel, 1-24*, 341; Steven S. Tuell, "Divine Presence and Absence in Ezekiel's Prophecy," in *The Book of Ezekiel: Theological and Anthropological Perspectives* (ed. M. S. Odell and J. T. Strong; Atlanta, Ga.: Society of Biblical Literature, 2000), 97-116.

⁶⁶ See Oded's study in which he argues against the presence of any cultic structure for YHWH in Mesopotamia. Oded, "Yet I Have Been to Them מְעַט מִקְדָּשׁ," 103-14. See also Kutsco who translates this as 'a sanctuary for a little while' and argues that this “underscores the nature of God's presence as one of duration.” Kutsco, *Between Heaven and Earth*, 98.

⁶⁷ Zimmerli, *Ezekiel 1-24*, 262. Tuell terms this divine assurance of YHWH's abiding presence with the exiles, “the grand good news.” Tuell, *Ezekiel*, 6.

⁶⁸ Greenberg, *Ezekiel 1-20*, 190; Hummel observes that with this statement Yahweh “unambiguously personalizes the place of worship.” Hummel, *Ezekiel 1-20*, 320.

notion of their being “far away from the Lord” (Ezek 11:15)⁶⁹ and dispelling Ezekiel’s fear of YHWH’s total annihilation of the remnant of Israel (Ezek 11:13).⁷⁰

Enactment of Spiritual Transformation

Another way in which YHWH’s character is revealed in Ezek 1-24 is the initiative he takes to transform the Israelites. Restoring them to their ancestral land alone is not enough. He knows their vulnerability. In the past their ancestors had the desire to obey YHWH and to walk in his ways (Exod 19:1-8; Josh 24:16-24). But the evidence of their conduct and lack of faith in Ezek 1-24 proves otherwise. YHWH’s gracious dealing with their forefathers and his punitive actions whenever they violated the covenant does not seem to have left any lasting impressions on them (Ezek 20). YHWH must adopt a new strategy if he is going to reverse the ongoing trend of disobedience and rebellion. It is time for a complete and extreme makeover. His reputation is at stake (Ezek 20:9, 14, 22). He must undertake this task.

In his new and well-thought-out strategy, YHWH adopts a method that will bring about a total reconfiguration of the human structures from within. The outward structures, like the laws and ordinances, as well as the elaborate cultic system, have been found to be inadequate to produce and sustain the desired results. And as Greenberg has aptly put it,

⁶⁹ Block, *Ezekiel 1-24*, 349-50.

⁷⁰ Joyce concludes that the statement in Ezek 11:16 was not only an effort to grapple with the exiles’ “physical, psychological and above all theological dislocation,” but in essence “it also had a vital role in helping Israel come to terms with an ongoing diaspora situation, as the people of a transcendent, universal and gracious God.” Paul M. Joyce, “Dislocation and Adaptation in the Exilic Age and After,” in *After the Exile: Essays in Honor of Rex Mason* (ed. J. Barton and D. J. Reimer; Macon, Ga.: Mercer University Press, 1996), 58.

“God will no longer gamble with Israel as he did in old times, and Israel rebelled against him; in the future—no more experiments! God will put his spirit into them, he will alter their hearts (their minds) and make it impossible for them to be anything, but obedient to his rules and his commandments.”⁷¹

YHWH must get to the core of this problem in order to deal with it once and for all. He therefore embarks on this inward makeover process using four simple, but significant steps (Ezek 11:19): (1) He gives them לֵב אֶחָד, “one heart/undivided heart”,⁷² (2) he puts a רֹחַ הַיְּהוָה, “new spirit,” in them (cf. 36:27; 37:14);⁷³ (3) he removes from them the לֵב הָאֲבָנִי, “heart of stone”;⁷⁴ and (4) he gives them a לֵב בָּשָׂר, “heart of flesh.”⁷⁵

The threefold use of the noun לֵב, “heart,” underscores YHWH’s determination to get to the bottom of the human problem. He must deal with the heart, which is the epicenter of Israel’s spiritual depravity. This phenomenon finds correspondence in Ezek

⁷¹ Moshe Greenberg, "Three Conceptions of the Torah in Hebrew Scriptures," in *Hebräische Bibel und ihre zweifache Nachgeschichte* (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 1990), 375.

⁷² Note Joyce’s analysis of the use of לֵב which involves its use as a physical organ (Jer 4:19); metaphorical use connoting emotions (1 Sam 2:1; Isa 40:2; Ezek 36:5), the rational faculty (1 Kgs 5:9 [Eng 4:29]; Exod 36:1; Ezek 38:10), locus of the moral will (1 Sam 24:6 [Eng 24:5]; Joel 2:13; Ezek 2:4; 3:7; 6:9; 14:3; 20:16), symbol of inner reality (1 Sam 16:7). Joyce, *Divine Initiative*, 108-109.

⁷³ In Ezek 36:27 YHWH promises to put his spirit within them. Note Block’s observation that “the placing of the spirit within someone or something has an animating, vivifying effect on the recipient.” I do not, however, agree with Block’s argument that Ezek 36:26-28 addresses “national renewal and revival, not individual regeneration.” Daniel I. Block, "The Prophet of the Spirit: The Use of *Rwḥ* in the Book of Ezekiel," *JETS* 32 (1989): 27-49.

⁷⁴ Block says this heart of stone is an indication of “coldness, insensitivity, incorrigibility, and even lifelessness (cf. 1 Sam 25:37).” Block, *Ezekiel 25-48*, 355.

⁷⁵ Note similar divine promises dealing with the heart in Deut 30:6; cf. 10:16; Jer 24:7; 32:39, 40; 31:31-34.

36:26-28 where YHWH also promises spiritual renewal. Whereas in Ezek 11:19 YHWH promises to give them לֵב אֶחָד, in Ezek 36:26 he promises to give them both לֵב אֶחָד and a לֵב הָדָשׁ, “new heart.”

Some of YHWH’s descriptions of the “heart” in Ezekiel reveal the extent of this problem. The Israelites are said to be “hard-hearted” (Ezek 2:4); they have a “stubborn heart” (Ezek 3:7); they have “adulterous hearts” (Ezek 6:9); they are hearts that “go after their detestable things and their abominations” (Ezek 11:21); and even the false prophets “prophesy out of their own hearts (Ezek 13:2, 17). This heart problem is quite evident in Ezek 14. Three times YHWH complains that the Israelites have set up idols in their hearts (vv. 3, 4, 7). Why have they been so disobedient so as to reject YHWH’s laws and not follow his decrees? What is the motivation behind the desecration of the Sabbaths? It is because “their hearts were devoted to their idols” (Ezek 20:16). The steps outlined above become necessary because of this sinful heart condition. This God who loves his people and who does not want them to face divine justice and retribution takes them through the process of a heart transformation.

Note that the subject of the actions enumerated is YHWH. Note also the threefold use of the verb נָתַן, “give,” in the verse to emphasize his beneficent action on behalf of Israel. Note also the determination he has of dealing with the internal components of the Israelites’ lives in Ezek 14:5 where he talks of seizing or capturing (שָׁבַח) their hearts. He is in charge of this entire process of transforming the Israelites into an obedient and

faithful people.⁷⁶ But this heart transformation is also accompanied by the gift of a new spirit. This combination of the new heart and a new spirit will provide them with a vibrant power house that will propel them to be loyal and responsive to YHWH and his will.⁷⁷ The outcome of this process is astounding. This is introduced by the placement of the purpose clause לְמַעַן, “in order that,” at the beginning of v. 20. There will be no more disobedience to YHWH’s commands, and the basis of the covenant promise will be renewed (Ezek 11:20; cf. 36:27b).

The Call to Repentance

YHWH’s character in Ezek 1-24 can also be discerned in his appeal to the Israelites to repent. Repentance is an important aspect of theodicy. As John Barton has succinctly put it, “Theodicy is accomplished by a worshipping group mulling over its past and seeking to discern how and why things went wrong, and where God was in it all.”⁷⁸

YHWH knows that this is a significant component in their experience and so offers it to them. The first time this call is made is in the context of accusations of the Israelites’ deep involvement with idolatry (Ezek 14:1-11). This is a violation of what Mark Boda calls “the very core of the covenant relationship.”⁷⁹ Some of the elders come to seek an audience with YHWH. God tells Ezekiel that these elders have a serious

⁷⁶ Pereira calls this process “internal renovation.” Berthold A. Pereira, *The Call to Conversion in Ezekiel Exegesis and Biblical-Theology* (Rome: Pontificia Universitas Gregoriana Facultas Theologiae, 1975), 35.

⁷⁷ Joyce calls this “the dynamic power of Yahweh.” Joyce, *Divine Initiative*, 110.

⁷⁸ Barton, “Historiography and Theodicy in the Old Testament,” 33.

⁷⁹ Mark J. Boda, “Renewal in Heart, Word, and Deed: Repentance in the Torah,” in *Repentance in Christian Theology* (Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical, 2006), 8.

spiritual dilemma that must be tackled before they can seek an audience with him.

YHWH notices, however, that this deeply ingrained spiritual issue is not just restricted to the elders who came to seek an audience with him. It goes beyond the sphere of the elders and encompasses the Israelites in general. This can be seen from the repeated use of the phrase *בֵּית יִשְׂרָאֵל*, “house of Israel” (Ezek 14:4, 5, 6, 7, 11). The three methods YHWH has chosen to deal with this problem reveal much about his character.

The first thing he does is to expose the problem. They have set up idols in their hearts which have in turn become stumbling blocks (Ezek 14:3, 4, 7). Their idolatrous practice is not just an external phenomenon. It is a matter of the heart. The fourfold use of the word *לֵב*, “heart,” in this context (vv. 3, 4, 5, 7) attests to the deep-seatedness and perversity of this spiritual malady. Without mincing words, YHWH as a deity concerned with the overall welfare of his people directly confronts the elders and the Israelites in general about their situation. The idols are a problem. Dabbling with these gods inhibits not only their access to YHWH, but affects their overall relationship to him.

Second, YHWH offers a solution. Simply unearthing the critical issues involved in the spiritual lives of the people is not in itself enough. YHWH must move on to the next level and lead people to take remedial actions. He therefore appeals to them in the strongest possible terms: “Repent! Turn from your idols and renounce all your detestable practices” (Ezek 14:6).

The verb *שׁוּב*, “repent,” used in this verse alone presents three significant features. The first element is its threefold repetition. In biblical Hebrew, repetition of a

word or sentence points to some salient aspect.⁸⁰ In the article, "The Repetition of Introductions to Speech as a Feature of Biblical Hebrew," Revell says that "the purpose of repetition is, in general, to draw the item repeated to the attention of the hearer or reader, to mark it as significant."⁸¹ The repetition of שׁוּב therefore indicates the importance of the call YHWH is making to the Israelites. They must pay attention. Failure to do so would result in disastrous consequences.

But repetition has another aspect to it. It is also "a persuasive device."⁸² YHWH knows that it is not enough to just draw these people's attention to the intended action. They must be persuaded to act accordingly. This again points to YHWH's determination to change the Israelites' inclination to idolatry. They must change course. Then there is the use of the imperative form of שׁוּב in all three instances. This suggests the emphasis and urgency YHWH places on this call. The emphasis is further heightened by the two *hip'il* forms of שׁוּב used in the verse. YHWH begins by using a *qal* imperative form of שׁוּב, followed by two *hip'il* forms. It is as if YHWH is building a crescendo of the imperatives and saying, this must be done. There is no other option. One can thus hear the determination and pathos in his voice as he gives the call.

⁸⁰ Phyllis Tribble notes that repetition of words, phrases, and sentences is an important aspect in the study of the rhetoric of a given text. Phyllis Tribble, *Rhetorical Criticism: Context, Method, and the Book of Jonah* (Minneapolis, Minn.: Fortress, 1994).

⁸¹ E. J. Revell, "The Repetition of Introductions to Speech as a Feature of Biblical Hebrew," *VT* 47 (1997): 91-110. See also Johnstone et al. who say that "repetition is a mode of focusing attention." Barbara Johnstone et al., "Repetition in Discourse: A Dialogue," in *Repetition in Discourse Interdisciplinary Perspectives* (ed. B. Johnstone et al.; Norwood, N.J.: Ablex, 1994), 1:13. See also Richard S. Briggs, "The Theological Function of Repetition in the Old Testament Canon," *HBOT* 28 (2006): 95-112.

⁸² Johnstone et al., "Repetition in Discourse: A Dialogue," 1:6.

Finally, YHWH issues an ultimatum. All those who persist in their acts of idolatry will have to face the consequences: “I the Lord will answer him by myself. I will set my face against that man and make him an example and a byword. I will cut him off from my people” (Ezek 14:7, 8). As a loving God, YHWH does not want anyone to perish.⁸³ He has therefore made a solution available through repentance. Uffenheimer captures this offer by his succinct observation that “Ezekiel opens the doors and gates of repentance for each individual, no matter what his personal past.”⁸⁴ YHWH’s character, however, demands that anyone who does not accept his gracious offer be dealt with accordingly. Yet because of the offer of repentance he has made, he can no longer be held responsible for their plight.

YHWH’s concern for the salvation of Israel is again seen in Ezek 18 where the concept of repentance predominates. While all of the 13⁸⁵ occurrences of שׁוּב in the chapter underscore YHWH’s concern for the people of Israel and his desire for them to turn from their wickedness, the last three usages in vv. 30 and 31, couched in the imperative forms, depict the passionate plea he makes to Israel. This is clearly stated in v. 32 where, before making the last plea to repentance, he explicitly states that he has no pleasure in the death of anyone (cf. 33:11). In fact, those who heed to the call and repent find life (Ezek 18:21, 23, 27; 33:14, 15, 19), for YHWH is a proponent of life and not

⁸³ One of the bases of YHWH’s condemnation of the false prophets is that they encouraged the wicked not to turn from their wicked ways and save their lives (Ezek 13:22).

⁸⁴ Uffenheimer, *Theodicy and Ethics in Ezekiel*, 220.

⁸⁵ Ezek 18:7, 8, 12, 17, 21, 23, 24, 26, 27, 28, 30 [twice], 32.

death.⁸⁶ While Ezek 1-24 does not give us any indication that the people of Israel accepted this gracious offer from their gracious God, yet one thing is clear: YHWH presented the gift of repentance to them in the most impassionate and persuasive way.⁸⁷ The choice to accept this offer is entirely theirs. YHWH is not going to force it on them.

The two questions posed by Katheryn Darr⁸⁸ are therefore pertinent as we conclude this section: (1) “Is there repentance in Ezekiel? and (2) “Is repentance *possible* in Ezekiel?” I will answer both by a resounding yes. Repentance is both there and possible in Ezekiel. This discussion has revealed that YHWH has meticulously outlined it. He has presented it to Israel as a gift with clear conditions on how to obtain it.⁸⁹ But it is only going to be possible if the Israelites acknowledge and accept their depravity and take hold of this offer. By thus presenting this bargain, YHWH’s character has again been shown for what it is: a compassionate and loving God who does not want anyone to perish. He has made his case. He stands forever justified.

⁸⁶ Block, *Ezekiel 25-48*, 247.

⁸⁷ Gerhard von Rad, *Old Testament Theology: The Theology of Israel's Prophetic Traditions* (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox, 2001), 231-32 .

⁸⁸ Darr, "Proverb Performance and Transgenerational Retribution in Ezekiel 18," 199-23.

⁸⁹ Note James Crenshaw’s observation that “one of the first ways of dealing with the problem of theodicy was to recognize compassion in the deity. In short, sinners thrive because God grants them sufficient time to repent of their transgression.” Crenshaw, *A Whirlpool of Torment*, 105. But as Roy Gane rightly points out, “In the context of the expiatory ritual system, ‘sufficient time to repent’ is not granted to defiant sinners, who have unwisely chosen to sever their connection with YHWH.” Gane, *Cult and Character*, 332.

The Compassionate and Loving God

One of the passages that reveal God's character of love and compassion is Ezek

16. Yet as we have seen in chapter 2, many scholars find a different kind of God here.

Because of this, Mary Shields claims that many scholars are afraid of taking a closer look at the character of God in Ezek 16 because,

if we dare look at his character, we will be repelled by what we see. Moreover, the actions which are so appalling have the potential to cause us to re-evaluate our theology, or, at the very least, to call into question this text's validity as 'the word of God'. For example, what kind of a God could, even in a metaphorical world, not only stand by but actively gather men to rape and mutilate his wife? Most of us do not want to be confronted with such a picture of God, so it is easy to let God remain in the privileged position, not to question the justice of God's extreme actions, in short, to settle for the status quo.⁹⁰

Contrary to the views espoused here by Mary Shields, Ezek 16 presents a portrait of a God whose benevolent actions towards Jerusalem demonstrate that he is a God of love and compassion (Ezek 16:3-14).

To set the stage for YHWH's gracious actions, the text describes Jerusalem's prior condition as desperate, dreadful, and deplorable. Four things mark Jerusalem's deplorable beginnings. First, is the uncharacteristic and unexpected background—the land of the Canaanites (Ezek 16:3). Second, is the mixed parentage, an Amorite father and a Hittite mother (Ezek 16:3). Third, is a childhood characterized by what would be tantamount to parental abuse and neglect. She is not accorded the normal routines and privileges of a newborn baby: "On the day you were born your cord was not cut, nor were

⁹⁰ Shields, "Multiple Exposures: Body Rhetoric and Gender in Ezekiel 16," 150-51.

you washed with water to make you clean, nor were you rubbed with salt or wrapped in cloths” (Ezek 16:4).

Fourth, this child is born into a detached, indifferent, and insensitive society. No one looked on her with pity (חַיִּים) or had compassion (רַחֲמִים) on her (v. 5). She was discarded as a useless and unwanted object out in the open field (v. 5). Jerusalem was despised (לְעֵל) (v. 5). The eight occurrences of the word לְעֵל in the *qal* form (Lev 26:11, 15, 30, 43, 44; Jer 14:19; Ezek 16:45 [2x]) mean “to consider someone or something as dung and filth.”⁹¹ This shows the despicable state in which this foundling found herself. Galambush is right in her observation that Jerusalem’s early beginning can be characterized as “excluded, ‘other’ in terms of her family membership, her national identity, her community status, and her ritual purity.”⁹² Malul succinctly observes that Jerusalem belonged to “the ownerless domain.”⁹³ Tuell poignantly sums it thus: “She is an unwanted, abandoned child, left to die unclaimed and unloved.”⁹⁴ Left in this abject condition, Jerusalem’s existence is completely in doubt. Without an urgent and properly crafted rescue operation, Jerusalem is bound to go into oblivion.

It is when Jerusalem is in this appalling and deplorable state that YHWH enters the scene and begins to take pertinent remedial actions that change Jerusalem’s situation

⁹¹ H. F. Fuhs, לְעֵל, *TDOT* 3:47-48; M. A. Grisanti, לְעֵל, *NIDOTTE* 1:882-84.

⁹² Galambush, *Jerusalem in the Book of Ezekiel*, 91.

⁹³ Malul’s article details how the foundling’s parents, by their failure to perform duties required for a newborn baby, had, in essence, forfeited legal rights over her. On the other hand, YHWH’s actions would eventually give him legal rights over Jerusalem. Meir Malul, “Adoption of Foundlings in the Bible and Mesopotamian Documents: A Study of Some Legal Metaphors in Ezekiel 16:1-7,” *JSOT* 46 (1990): 97-126.

⁹⁴ Tuell, *Ezekiel*, 88.

and make her an admirable and honorable entity. These remedial actions give us an idea of the character of the God of Israel. They are actions that demonstrate the love, compassion,⁹⁵ and grace of God.

We need to note the use of the emphasis placed on YHWH's actions. First, there is divine interest in the foundling demonstrated by the following actions: I passed by, I saw you, I talked to you, and gave you a new lease of life (Ezek 16:6). Zimmerli notes that, implied in the command "in your blood, live" (Ezek 16:6), is not only "recalled immediately and directly an escape from the hopelessness of imminent death," but that these words denote something far more superior: "good fortune, fulfillment, the presence of God."⁹⁶ Kamionkowski suggests that YHWH's intervention in the life of the foundling gave her "a protective blessing to compensate for the neglect of proper rituals of protection."⁹⁷ Galambush observes that these actions of YHWH move "her from an excluded into a liminal state."⁹⁸ All these arguments underscore one point: YHWH's interest in Jerusalem is unmistakable. Because of this concern, he takes actions that are meant to reverse her former state.

⁹⁵ Shields concedes that one could find "a compassionate God" in other prophetic texts that use the marital metaphor (e.g., Jer 31), but categorically denies the existence of such a God in Ezekiel. She therefore says of Ezekiel: "Within Ezekiel there is no reconciliation, no restoration which includes forgiveness and absolution." Shields, "Multiple Exposures: Body Rhetoric and Gender in Ezekiel 16," 152.

⁹⁶ Zimmerli, *Ezekiel* 1, 339.

⁹⁷ S. Tamar Kamionkowski, "'In Your Blood, Live' (Ezekiel 16:6): A Reconsideration of Meir Malul's Adoption Formula," in *Bringing the Hidden to Light* (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 2007), 103-113.

⁹⁸ Galambush, *Jerusalem in the Book of Ezekiel*, 93.

Second, there is divine nurture: “I made you grow like a plant of the field. You grew up and developed and became the most beautiful of jewels” (Ezek 16:7). Third, there is divine covenant commitment (Ezek 16:8). Here again we find actions demonstrating the love of God: I passed by, I looked at you, I spread the corner of my garment over you and covered your nakedness. I gave you my solemn oath and entered into a covenant with you. I reclaimed you and you became mine (Ezek 16:8). Commenting on Ezek 16:8 in which YHWH extends his garment over the foundling, Allen observes: “For a man to spread the hem of his garment over a woman was a symbolic gesture that constituted a proposal of marriage. He thus extended over her both his authority and his willingness to support her (cf. Ruth 3:9).”⁹⁹ This view contrasts sharply with that of Paul Joyce who does not see any love in Ezek 16. Commenting specifically on the actions of YHWH in Ezek 16:8, Joyce contends that “the relationship between Yahweh and his people is here expressed in terms of marriage. It should be noted, however, that all the phrases used in this verse appear to be either legal or sexual; we do not find here much evidence of real warmth or affection.”¹⁰⁰ This argument fails to take into account all of YHWH’s gracious actions on Jerusalem in Ezek 16.

The fourth action demonstrating Yahweh’s gracious actions is divine cleansing and adornment (Ezek 16:9-13). Yahweh wants to ensure that the foundling has a clean break with her deplorable past. Her adornment must demonstrate that she is no longer a

⁹⁹ Allen, *Ezekiel 1-19*, 238.

¹⁰⁰ Joyce, *Divine Initiative*, 100. See also Shields, who contends that the text attributes only “sexual feelings to God.” Shields, “Multiple Exposures: Body Rhetoric and Gender Characterization,” 9.

commoner; her status has changed. She has now been adopted into royalty. Block says Jerusalem is “outfitted from head to toe with garments fit for a queen.”¹⁰¹ The outcome of these gracious, divine actions demonstrate their effectiveness: “Your name spread among the nations on account of your beauty, because the splendor I had given you made your beauty perfect” (Ezek 16:14). Allen sees in the actions of Ezek 16:9-14 “Yahweh’s extravagant care.”¹⁰² By these unmerited actions, Jerusalem had become a jewel of renown and a figure of international recognition.

The next chapter in Israel’s history (Ezek 16:15-34; 44-58) is, however, one of shameful acts of disgrace demonstrating her ungratefulness to the magnanimity of YHWH. In this sad episode, she is entangled in both religious (Ezek 16:15-22) and political promiscuity (Ezek 16:23-34),¹⁰³ which completely reverses the gracious acts of YHWH. The frequent use of the word נָאֵץ in these verses demonstrates the depth to which Israel had gone in her wanton and lewd acts.¹⁰⁴ Allen’s remarks are pertinent at this stage: “If Jerusalem had remembered what she was apart from God’s grace, she would not have behaved like this.”¹⁰⁵ Block’s assessment is even more incisive: “The issue is not that she had forgotten either her miserable origins or Yahweh’s unrestrained favors; she simply

¹⁰¹ Block, *Ezekiel 1-24*, 484.

¹⁰² Allen, *Ezekiel 1-19*, 238.

¹⁰³ Block, *Ezekiel 1-24*, 486-98.

¹⁰⁴ See chapter 3 for discussion on this.

¹⁰⁵ Allen, *Ezekiel 1-19*, 240.

failed to take them into account. . . . Yahweh's benevolence was answered with callousness; his covenant commitment, with infidelity."¹⁰⁶

YHWH's response to Jerusalem's infidelity is quick and decisive (Ezek 16:35-43). YHWH must deal with the offender in a way that shows his disapproval of her wanton behavior. The punishments are severe and may seem unwarranted. But YHWH has been snubbed. Israel has taken his gracious actions for granted. YHWH must therefore institute appropriate punitive measures to deal with this ingratitude.¹⁰⁷ The punishments are not, as some scholars have claimed, a case of spousal abuse,¹⁰⁸ or domestic violence.¹⁰⁹ The punishments are justified because YHWH is punishing Jerusalem based on her abominable, deviant, and incorrigible actions (Ezek 16:43, 59).¹¹⁰

As Ezek 16 draws to a close, the reader is reintroduced to the gracious, loving, and compassionate acts of YHWH. Instead of ending the chapter on condemnation and punishment, YHWH has chosen to show his real character. With YHWH, the last word is not judgment, but grace. He therefore promises to make an everlasting covenant with

¹⁰⁶ Block, *Ezekiel 1-24*, 503.

¹⁰⁷ See chapter 5 for discussion on the punishments in Ezek 16 and 23.

¹⁰⁸ Weems, *Battered Love*, 98. See also Bowen, "Women, Violence and the Bible," 186-199; Carroll, "Whorusalamin," 77. Linda Day sees in Yahweh the kind of spousal abuse that today's women experience from their abusive spouses. Day, "Rhetoric and Domestic Violence in Ezekiel 16," 205-30.

¹⁰⁹ Weems, *Battered Love*, 97. See also Darr, "Ezekiel's Justifications of God: Teaching Troubling Texts," 97-117; Exum, *Plotted, Shot and Painted*, 108-109; idem, "The Ethics of Biblical Violence against Women," 248-71.

¹¹⁰ For discussion on the punishment of an unfaithful wife in the ancient Near East see Martha T. Roth, "Gender and Law: A Case Study from Ancient Mesopotamia," in *Gender and Law in the Hebrew Bible and the Ancient Near East* (ed. V. H. Matthews, B. M. Levinson, and T. Frymer-Kensky; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1998), 173-84.

them (Ezek 16:62) and make atonement for them (Ezek 16:63).¹¹¹ By these gracious actions, YHWH's character is once again revealed. Yes, he is a God who punishes and does not overlook sin, but his grace supersedes people's sins. Once again, Swanepoel's structure of Ezek 16, which shows that Jerusalem's sins and YHWH's punishments are enveloped by YHWH's grace, demonstrates this well:¹¹²

1. Ezek 16:3-14 God's grace
2. Ezek 16:15-34 Jerusalem's sins
3. Ezek 16:35-43 Judgment of God
4. Ezek 16:44-58 Jerusalem's sins
5. Ezek 16:59-63 God's grace.

This is contrary to Mary Shields' assertion that Ezek 16 is "structured in such a way as to deflect attention from the character of YHWH."¹¹³ Rather, as we have seen, the chapter is designed to show that, in spite of Israel's sins, Yahweh's grace reigns supreme. John Day, looking at the sum total of the book of Ezekiel with regard to YHWH's action therein, appropriately sums it thus, "After confrontation and judgment, God's promise remains, and in the end, grace reigns."¹¹⁴

¹¹¹ For discussion on this, see chapter 4.

¹¹² Swanepoel, "Ezekiel 16: Abandoned Child, Bride Adorned," 93, 94. Hummel also observes that the first and last sections of Ezek 16 emphasize the Gospel while the middle segments deal with the law—Israel's whorings and the resultant punishment. Hummel, *Ezekiel 1-20*, 463.

¹¹³ Shields, "Multiple Exposures: Body Rhetoric and Gender in Ezekiel 16," 139.

¹¹⁴ John Day, "Ezekiel and the Heart of Idolatry," *BSac* 164 (2007): 21-33. See also Clements, who observes that "nowhere else in the Old Testament is the unmerited and persistent love of God more emphatically asserted than here." Clements, *Ezekiel*, 73.

Summary

An exploration of Ezek 5:5-17 has revealed that although YHWH is predisposed to punish errant Israel, this is because of his great love that cannot see them slide into destruction without taking remedial actions. The passage also shows the portrait of a God who sets his people apart and gives them special guidelines to follow. The sanctuary that the Israelites defiled was in itself a testament to YHWH's commitment to be available to them on an ongoing basis. So by defiling it, they rejected his beneficial presence. Furthermore, he is a God who is passionate with his people and wants them to understand him and know his true nature.

The exploration done in this study has also shown that the God of Ezekiel is deeply sensitive about his reputation. He will restrain himself from taking certain punitive actions just to safeguard his reputation. While he acknowledges that Israel has defiled his name, he vows that he will not allow his reputation to be tarnished any longer. The nature of his character is further revealed in his commissioning Ezekiel to the people of Israel. Because of his love, compassion, and concern, he sends them a message of warning. YHWH's commitment to the covenant is unquestionable. He will therefore take every action imaginable to ensure Israel is reinstated to that relationship. He enacts spiritual transformation by giving them a new heart and a new spirit and makes repeated calls for repentance. Overall, YHWH is a God of love and compassion. He may punish his errant children quite severely, and his judicial actions may cause untold pain and suffering, but his last word is not judgment, but grace.

CHAPTER 7

INTRATEXTUALITY AND INTERTEXTUALITY

Introduction to Intertextual Investigation

The concept of intertextuality relates to the interconnections that exist between various texts. Peter Miscall expressed this point quite poignantly when he said, “No text is an Island.”¹ They have interrelations that defy the established textual boundaries and extend into other texts with which they have constant discourse.² Ezekiel 5:5-17 is no exception in this regard. It too is in dialogue with other biblical texts, not only within the

¹ Miscall, "Isaiah: New Heavens, New Earth, New Book," 45.

² Danna Fewell, who argues for the interconnectedness of texts “by virtue of human language,” writes that “texts talk to one another; they echo one another; they push one another; they war with one another. They are voices in chorus, in conflict, and in competition.” In discussing the fluidity that characterizes “textual boundaries,” Fewell succinctly sums it up as follows: “Textual boundaries . . . are never solid or stable. Texts are always spilling over into other texts.” Fewell, "Introduction: Writing, Reading, and Relating," 12, 22, 23. Commenting on the concept of intertextuality W. R. Tate writes that a text is “an intersection of other texts. It is a conjunction of other texts of which it is a rereading. So a text is a kind of patchwork constructed out of pieces of other texts, which are themselves constructed through the interweaving of other texts and discourses.” Because of this Tate says, “A text makes sense only in terms of its interconnections with earlier uses and understanding.” Furthermore, Tate adds that with the application of intertextuality, “texts are produced in conversation with prior texts and that prior texts are renewed or reconfigured as they are appropriated by later texts.” W. R. Tate, *Biblical Interpretation: An Integrated Approach* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1991), 181, 183; idem, *Interpreting the Bible: A Handbook of Terms and Methods* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 2006). Mary Orr suggests that with the application of intertextuality, “non-hierarchical and democratically inclusive notions of text in a vast mosaic of other texts could now be prioritized.” Mary Orr, *Intertextuality: Debate and Contexts* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2003), 1. See also Freedman who discusses some scholarly examples together with the strengths and weaknesses of intertextuality. Amelia D. Freedman, *God as an Absent Character in Biblical Hebrew Narrative: A Literary Theoretical Study* (ed. H. Gossai; New York: Peter Lang, 2005), 87-118.

book of Ezekiel, but exhibits lexical, literary, thematic, and verbal correspondences with other sections of the Old Testament and some ancient Near Eastern texts. The goal of this chapter is, therefore, to investigate the various Old Testament texts with which Ezek 5:5-17 exhibits this relationship to determine what role such texts play in the interpretation of Ezek 5:5-17 and by extension the overall understanding of the character of God.

By its very nature Ezek 5:5-17 would be an intertext to a number of biblical passages within the Old Testament. The discussion in earlier chapters of this inquiry has revealed the correlation it has with its larger context of Ezek 1-24. The focus now turns to the exploration of its intratextual correspondences with Ezek 25-48 and the intertextual relations with the rest of the Old Testament. This will involve a few selected passages that have a direct bearing on Ezek 5:5-17.

Intratextuality: The Rest of Ezekiel

Ezekiel 5:5-17 and the Oracles against the Nations

The oracles against the nations are found mainly in Ezek 25-32.³ These passages will be explored for words, phrases/expressions, and themes that show a relationship with Ezek 5:5-17. The aim of the investigation is to determine how the connections, if any, contribute to the interpretation of the target text and to the understanding of the character of God.

³ For discussion on the basis of the oracles against the nations see Paul R. Raabe, "Transforming the International Status Quo: Ezekiel's Oracles against the Nations," in *Transforming Visions: Transformation of Text, Tradition, and Theology in Ezekiel* (ed. W. A. Tooman and M. A. Lyons; Eugene, Ore.: Pickwick, 2010), 187-207; idem, "Why Prophetic Oracles against the Nations?" in *Fortunate the Eyes That See: Essays in Honor of David Noel*

Similar Words

One of the first things that provide a link between Ezek 5:5-17 and the oracles against the nations is Jerusalem (Ezek 5:5; 26:2). In Ezek 5:5 it is as though YHWH is in a courtroom and wants to draw everyone's attention to the culprit, isolate her from the others for scrutiny and prosecution and thus he says, "This is Jerusalem!" Three things stand out with respect to Jerusalem: (1) she is a privileged city (Ezek 5:5), (2) she has abused her privileges (Ezek 5:6, 7, 9, 11), and (3) she is strongly castigated and indicted for her senseless and impious actions (Ezek 5:8-17).⁴ Jerusalem is also mentioned in Ezek 26:2 in connection with YHWH's indictment of Tyre partly because of Tyre's joy at the calamities that befell Jerusalem as a result of YHWH's judgment on her.

Another common element the two sections share is the use of the two words, לְכֵן "because,"⁵ and לָכֵן, "therefore,"⁶ to announce the judgment and the basis upon which the verdict is based. These features play a significant role in justifying YHWH's judicial

Freedman in Celebration of His Seventieth Birthday (ed. A. B. Beck et al.: Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 236-57; Strong, "Ezekiel's Oracles Against the Nations."

⁴ Using biblical and extra-biblical evidence Udd argues that Ezekiel's prophecies against Tyre were only partially fulfilled since in spite of the long siege on the city and the deportation of some of its people, the city, though on a lesser scale, remained a hub of international trade. Kris J. Udd, "Prediction and Foreknowledge in Ezekiel's Prophecy against Tyre," *TynBul* 56 (2005): 25-41. See also Renz who holds the same position concerning Isaiah's oracles against Tyre. Thomas Renz, "Proclaiming the Future: History and Theology in Prophecies against Tyre," *TynBul* 51 (2000): 17-58. For other sins that finally led to Tyre's diminished status after the 13 years of Babylonian siege see James A. Durlleser, *The Metaphorical Narratives in the Book of Ezekiel* (Lewiston, N.Y.: Edwin Mellen, 2006), 145-73.

⁵ This feature is used in Ezek 5:7, 9, 11 and finds its correspondence in the oracles against the nations in Ezek 25:3, 6, 8, 12, 15; 26:2; 28:2, 6; 29:6, 9; 31:10. It is also used in the context of the oracle against Gog (Ezek 35:5, 10).

⁶ For its occurrences in the two pericopes see Ezek 5:7, 8, 10, 11; Prophecies against Ammon: Ezek 25:4, 7; Moab: 25:9; Edom: 25:13; Philistia: 25:16; Tyre: 26:3; 28:6, 7; Egypt: 29:8, 10, 19; 30:22; 31:10.

activities against these nations. Just as Ezekiel had justified YHWH's threatened punishment of Judah, he therefore uses these features to show that in the cosmic framework every nation stands accountable for their actions, irrespective of their status before YHWH. Table 10 shows the interplay between יַעַן and לִכְן in Ezek 5:5-17 and Ezek 25-32.

The word pair גּוֹי, “nation,”⁷ and אֶרֶץ, “land, country,”⁸ provides another link to the oracles against the nations. Jerusalem is said to be set in the center of the nations (הַגּוֹיִם) with countries (אֶרֶצוֹת) all around her (Ezek 5:5). Then she is characterized as more wicked than the nations (הַגּוֹיִם) and countries (אֶרֶצוֹת) all around her (Ezek 5:6).

Ezekiel utilizes this format nine times in the oracles against the nations (Ezek 25:7; 29:12; 30:11, 23, 26; 31:12, 16; 32:9, 18), and these can be divided into three main areas: those that deal with punishment of the nations (Ezek 25:7; 29:12; 30:23, 26; 32:9), instruments of punishment (Ezek 30:11; 31:12), and reaction to YHWH's judgments on the nations (Ezek 31:16; 32:18).

Another correlation comes in the word הִמּוֹן, “agitation, turmoil, noise, roar, din.”⁹

This word appears only once in Ezek 5:7 where Israel is accused of being more unruly than the surrounding nations. The word occurs 16 times¹⁰ in the oracles

⁷ For its use in the oracles against the nations see Ezek 25:7, 8, 10; 26:3, 5; 28:7, 25; 29:12, 15 [twice]; 30:3, 11, 23, 26; 31:6, 11, 12, 16, 17; 32:2, 9, 12, 16, 18.

⁸ For its use in the oracles against the nations see Ezek 25:7, 9; 26:11, 16, 20; 27:17, 29, 33; 28:17, 18; 29:5, 9, 10, 12 [thrice], 14 [twice], 19, 20; 30:5, 7, 11 [twice], 12 [twice], 13 [twice], 23, 25, 26; 31:12 [twice], 14, 16, 18; 32:4 [twice], 6, 8, 9, 15 [twice], 18, 23, 24 [twice], 25, 26, 27, 32.

⁹ Koehler and Baumgartner, “הִמּוֹן,” HALOT 1:250-51.

¹⁰ Ezek 26:13; 30:4, 10, 15; 31:2, 18; 32:12 [twice], 16, 18, 20, 24, 25, 26, 31, 32.

Table 10. Use of יַעַן and לָכֵן in Ezekiel 5:5-17 and Ezekiel 25-32

Ezekiel 5:5-17	Ezekiel 25-32
v. 7 Therefore (לָכֵן) . . . because (יַעַן) you have been more tumultuous than the nations v. 11 Therefore (לָכֵן), as I live . . . because (יַעַן) you have defiled my sanctuary . . . I will withdraw my favor	31:10, 11 Therefore (לָכֵן) . . . because (יַעַן) it towered on high . . . I handed it over to the ruler of the nations for him to deal with according to its wickedness
v. 8 Therefore (לָכֵן) I am against you and I will execute judgment in you in the sight of the nations	29:19 Therefore (לָכֵן) . . . I will give the land of Egypt to King Nebuchadrezzar of Babylon 30:22 Therefore (לָכֵן) . . . I am against Pharaoh King of Egypt
vv. 9, 10 Because (יַעַן) of all your detestable idols . . . therefore (לָכֵן) fathers will eat their children	25:3, 4 Because (יַעַן) you said Aha over my sanctuary . . . therefore (לָכֵן) I will stretch out my hand against you 25:6, 7 Because (יַעַן) you clapped your hand . . . therefore (לָכֵן) I will stretch out my hand against you 25:8, 9 Because Moab and Seir said . . . therefore (לָכֵן) I will expose the flank of Moab 25:12:13 Because (יַעַן) Edom took revenge on the house of Judah therefore (לָכֵן) . . . I will stretch out my hand 25:15 Because (יַעַן) the Philistines acted in vengeance . . . therefore (לָכֵן) . . . I am about to stretch out my hand against the Philistines See also 26:2, 3; 29:6, 8, 9, 10
	28:2 Because (יַעַן) you are exalted in your heart
	28:6, 7 Therefore (לָכֵן) . . . because (יַעַן) you think you are wise . . . therefore (לָכֵן) I am going to bring foreigners against you

against the nations where it is mainly used in the oracle against Egypt with reference to YHWH's judgment on the abundance of Egypt. In Ezek 5:14 YHWH threatens to make the people of Judah a **הָרָבָה**, “waste, desolate, ruins.” This same word is used in oracles against Edom (Ezek 25:13), Tyre (Ezek 26:20), and Egypt (Ezek 29:9, 10; 30:12). The same idea is portrayed by the word **שְׁמָמָה**, “desolation, ruin, waste,” which is a near synonym of **הָרָבָה** and is coupled with it particularly in the oracle against Egypt (Ezek 29:9, 10). In v. 12 the verb **מְהַרְבוֹת**, a *hop'al* passive participle verb derived from the masculine noun **הָרָב**, “waste, desolation” is used to further reinforce the intended devastation. It is apparent that the other nations will experience the same devastation that awaits Jerusalem.

Phrases and Expressions

Also providing connections between our passage and the oracles against the nations is the use of parallel phrases or expressions. Table 11 shows these parallels in Ezek 5:5-17 and the oracles against the nations. The most common of these is the messenger formula that sets the stage for the announcement of the basis of judgment and the intended punishment. This formula occurs only three times in Ezek 5:5-17 in the form **כֹּה אָמַר אֲדֹנָי יְהוִה**, “thus says the Lord God.”¹¹

The prevalence with which the same formula occurs in the oracles against the

¹¹ Ezek 5:5, 7, 8. This formula confirms that the oracles so proclaimed are not the creation of any mortal being but the very words of YHWH.

Table 11. Expressions in Ezekiel 5:5-17 and the oracles against the nations

Ezekiel 5:5-17		Oracles against the Nations	
5: 5, 7, 8	כֹּה אָמַר אֲדֹנָי יְהוִה	“Thus says the lord God” 25:3, 6 (Ammon); 25:8 (Moab); 25:12, 13; 35:3, 14 (Edom); 25:15, 16 (Philistines); 26:3, 7, 15, 19; 27:3; 28:2, 6, 12 (Tyre); 28:22 (Sidon); 29:3, 8, 13, 19; 30:2, 10, 13, 22; 31:10, 15; 32:3, 11(Egypt); 38:3, 10, 14, 17, 39:1, 17, 25 (Gog)	כֹּה אָמַר אֲדֹנָי יְהוִה
5:8	הִנְנִי עָלֶיךָ	“Behold I am against you” 26:3 (Tyre); 28:22 (Sidon); 29:3 (Egypt)	הִנְנִי עָלֶיךָ הִנְנִי עָלֶיךָ
		“Behold I am against you” 29:10 (Egypt)	הִנְנִי אֵלֶיךָ
5:8	לְעֵינֵי הַגּוֹיִם	“in the eyes of the nations” 28:25 (Egypt)	לְעֵינֵי הַגּוֹיִם
5:11	נֹאם אֲדֹנָי יְהוִה	“A declaration of the Lord” 25:14 (Edom); 26:5, 14, 21; 28:10 (Tyre); 29:20; 30:6; 31:18; 32:8, 14, 16, 31, 32 (Egypt)	נֹאם אֲדֹנָי יְהוִה
5:11	חַי־אֲנִי	“As I live” 35:6, 11(Mt. Seir)	חַי־אֲנִי
5:13, 15, 17	אֲנִי יְהוָה דִּבַּרְתִּי	“I YHWH, I have spoken” 26:5, 14; 28:10; 30:12	אֲנִי יְהוָה דִּבַּרְתִּי
5:13	וַיֵּדְעוּ כִּי־אֲנִי יְהוָה	“They shall know that I am YHWH” 25:11 (Moab); 25:17 (Philistines); 26:6 (Tyre); 28:22, 23, 24, 26 (Sidon); 29:6, 9, 16, 21; 30:8, 19, 25, 26; 32:15 (Egypt); 35:15 (Edom/ Mt. Seir); 38:23; 39:6, 7 (Gog)	וַיֵּדְעוּ כִּי־אֲנִי יְהוָה
		“You shall know that I am YHWH” 25:5 (Ammon); 35:9 (Edom)	וַיֵּדְעֻם כִּי־אֲנִי יְהוָה
		“You shall know that I am YHWH” 25:7 (Ammon); 35:4, 12 (Edom)	וַיֵּדְעֶתָ כִּי־אֲנִי יְהוָה

nations shows that YHWH has a purpose with these neighboring countries,¹² just as he has with his covenant people. No doubt is left therefore for the veracity of his word.

Closely associated with the messenger formula is the expression אֲנִי יְהוָה דִּבַּרְתִּי, “I am the Lord, I have spoken,” which also authenticates the divine word and appears in both the oracles against foreign nations (Ezek 26:14; 30:12) and Ezek 5 (vv. 13, 15, 17). The recognition formula¹³ also makes a significant link with the oracles against the nations. This formula, which occurs once in Ezek 5:13 in a modified form, is found in every oracle that is pronounced against the nations in the following forms: וַיֵּדְעוּם כִּי־אֲנִי יְהוָה, “you shall know that I am YHWH,”¹⁴ וַיֵּדְעוּ כִּי־אֲנִי יְהוָה, “you shall know that I am YHWH,”¹⁵ וַיֵּדְעוּ כִּי־אֲנִי יְהוָה, “they shall know that I am YHWH.”¹⁶ The other formula is נֹאם יְהוָה, “a declaration of the Lord,” which is used in all the prophecies against

¹² For the oracles against Ammon (Ezek 25:3, 6); Moab (Ezek 25:8); Edom (Ezek 25:12, 13; 35:3, 14); Philistines (Ezek 25:15, 16); Tyre (Ezek 26:3, 7, 15, 19; 27:3; 28:2, 6, 12); Sidon (Ezek 28:22); Egypt (Ezek 29:3, 8, 13, 19; 30:2, 10, 13, 22; 31:10, 15; 32:3, 11); Gog (38:3, 10, 14, 17; 39:1, 17, 25). It is worth noting that sandwiched in the oracle against Sidon is a messenger formula that addresses the envisioned reversed fortunes for Israel (Ezek 28:25).

¹³ See John Strong’s work for various perspectives on the recognition formula in the oracles against the nations. He advances an argument to disqualify the recognition formula in Ezek 26:6 on p. 119 n. 14. He also posits that the oracle against the nations is of a nationalistic nature and not intended to bring these nations into the covenantal relationship with YHWH. John Strong, “Ezekiel’s Use of the Recognition Formula in His Oracles against the Nations,” *PRSt* 22 (1995): 115-33.

¹⁴ Ezek 25:5 (Ammon); Ezek 35:9 (Edom).

¹⁵ Ezek 25:7 (Ammon); Ezek 35:4, 12 (Edom).

¹⁶ Ezek 25:11 (Moab); Ezek 25:17 (Philistines); Ezek 26:6 (Tyre); Ezek 28:22, 23, 24, 26 (Sidon); Ezek 29:6, 9, 16, 21; 30:8, 19, 25, 26; 32:15 (Egypt); Ezek 35:15 (Edom/Mt. Seir); Ezek 38:23; 39:6, 7 (Gog); note that the recognition formula in Ezek 39:22, 28 is within the section on the oracles against Gog, yet they address the Israelites.

Edom (Ezek 25:14), Tyre (Ezek 26:5, 14, 21; 28:10), and Egypt (Ezek 29:20; 30:6; 31:18; 32:8, 14, 16, 31, 32).

One of the most striking expressions in this context of judgment is the formula of hostile orientation: **הִנְנִי עָלֶיךָ**, “behold, I am against you.” This clause is variously constructed to give it the needed rhetorical effect. The form directed against Israel in Ezek 5:8 is **הִנְנִי עָלֶיךָ**, “behold I am against you.” This finds correspondence in Ezek 26:3 against Tyre; 28:22 against Sidon; 29:3 against Pharaoh, King of Egypt where the same form is employed. The other type is **הִנְנִי אֵלֶיךָ** in Ezek 29:10 against Egypt. The declaration that the judicial actions against Israel will be carried out **לְעֵינֵי הַגּוֹיִם**, “in the sight of the nations” (Ezek 5:8), has a direct correlation in the planned restoration of Israel when YHWH announces that his holiness will be manifest **לְעֵינֵי הַגּוֹיִם**, “in the sight of the nations” (Ezek 28:25).

The other expression that provides connection is the divine oath **חַי־אֲנִי**, “As I live.” This divine oath, **חַי־אֲנִי**, used to ascertain the veracity and seriousness of the divine word occurs 16 times in Ezekiel, of which 14 are in reference to Israel.¹⁷ The other two occurrences of this oath in the book are in the oracle against Mt. Seir (Ezek 35:6, 11).¹⁸ Because of Edom’s hatred against Israel and as a consequence of the murderous acts they

¹⁷ Ezek 14:16, 18, 20; 16:48; 17:16, 19; 18:3; 20:3, 31, 33; 33:27 in which YHWH announces the coming judgment on those who are left after the fall of Jerusalem; 34:8 where YHWH condemns the leaders of Israel for their lack of proper leadership roles. See also its use in Ezek 33:11 where YHWH affirms his disinterest in the death of anyone.

¹⁸ For other occurrences of **חַי־אֲנִי** in the Old Testament see Num 14:21, 28; Isa 49:18; Jer 22:24; 46:18; Zeph 2:9.

committed against Israel, YHWH sets out to avenge these insults and thus declares on oath his intended punishment on Edom.¹⁹

Thematic Similarities

A number of themes run through Ezek 5:5-17 and the oracles against the nations. One thing that unites them is that they are both couched within the framework of judgment. There is, however, one major difference between them. In Ezek 5 YHWH condemns Jerusalem for its failure to live up to divine expectations. In the oracles against the nations, YHWH is Israel's advocate per excellence, condemning and punishing the nations which have reveled and rejoiced at Jerusalem's misfortunes, while at the same time holding them accountable for other sins. This is particularly evident in the oracles against Ammon (Ezek 25:3, 6), Moab (Ezek 25:8), and Tyre (Ezek 26:2).

The discussion in chapter 3 has revealed that idolatry was a major issue of contention between Israel and YHWH. The other nations were by no means immune to this practice. In Ezek 30:13 YHWH announces his intention to destroy Egyptian גלילים, "idols," and to put an end to the אֱלִילִים, "images," of Memphis.²⁰ Synonymically and

¹⁹ See the summary of the basis for YHWH's judgment on Edom as summarized in Cooper, *Ezekiel*, 309-10. Albertz notes that in the apocryphal book of 1 Esdras 4:36-46 the Edomites are found to be responsible for the destruction of Jerusalem and its temple. Rainer Albertz, *Israel in Exile: The History and Literature of the Sixth Century B.C.E.* (Trans. D. Green; Atlanta, Ga.: Society of Biblical Literature, 2003), 28. For further discussion see Lowell K. Handy, "Edom, Israel's Brother and Antagonist: The Role of Edom in Biblical Prophecy and Story," *JNES* 58 (1999): 144-145; Marten H. Woudstra, "Edom and Israel Ezekiel," *CTJ* 3 (1968): 21-35.

²⁰ This is reminiscent of YHWH's resolve in Exod 20:12 to execute judgments on all the gods of Egypt. See also Ezek 30:13 where YHWH vows to "destroy the idols of Egypt and put an end to the images in Memphis." For discussion on this motif, see Shubert Spero, "And Against All the Gods of Egypt I Will Execute Judgments," *JBQ* 27 (1999): 83-88.

thematically these correspond to the *שְׁקוּצִים*, “idols,” and *תועבות*, “detestable things, idols,” in Ezek 5:9, 11. Egypt was known for its many gods. They had a god for almost every facet of their lives.²¹ It would not be a farfetched idea that the Israelites could have been influenced by these gods in their idolatrous life. YHWH therefore plans to destroy all their idols to show their worthlessness and the futility of relying on them.²²

The other correlation with regard to idolatry is the sanctuary. YHWH accuses Israel of defiling the sanctuary (Ezek 5:11). An interesting twist occurs in the oracle against the nations where Ammon is charged with the desecration of the sanctuary (Ezek 25:3).²³ Their spiteful delight at the destruction of the Jerusalem temple is taken seriously, and for that they have to reap dire consequences. Tyre is also mentioned in connection with the desecration of its sanctuary (Ezek 28:18) by its many sins.

Another theme relates to the means of executing these judgments. One such means YHWH threatens to use is to scatter (*נָחַץ*) the Israelites to the winds (Ezek 5:10, 12). In the oracles against the nations Egypt is specifically singled out for scattering. The

²¹ Cooper, *Ezekiel*, 279. Silverman notes that the Egyptians had all kinds of gods: “gods associated with natural phenomena and abstraction,” “local and national deities,” funerary deities,” “household and personal gods,” “foreign gods,” and even kings were regarded as gods. David P. Silverman, “Divinity and Deities in Ancient Egypt,” in *Religion in Ancient Egypt: Gods, Myths, and Personal Practice* (ed. B. E. Shafer; Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991), 7-87. See also E. A. W. Budge, *The Gods of the Egyptians* (New York: Dover, 1969), iv-x; E. Homung, *Conceptions of God in Ancient Egypt: The One and the Many* (Cornell University Press, 1982); Françoise Dunand and Christiane Zivie-Coche discuss an intriguing concept regarding the concept of numbers and the gods; for instance one of the epithets of Amun, “One who made himself into millions,” underscores the idea of the multiplicity of the gods in ancient Egypt. Françoise Dunand and Christiane Zivie-Coche, *Gods and Men in Egypt: 3000 BCE to 395 CE* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2004), 5-41.

²² Isaiah says that these idols of Egypt will tremble before YHWH (Isa 19:1).

²³ Block, *Ezekiel 25-48*, 17.

words **פָּרֵץ** and **נָרַח**, “disperse, scatter,”²⁴ are used to give this action the force it deserves. YHWH declares he will “scatter the Egyptians among the nations, and disperse them among the countries” (Ezek 29:12; 30:23, 26). Ezekiel 30:17 and 18 are explicit that the Egyptian cities and villages will go into captivity. The agent YHWH employs to execute this threat is the king of Babylon (Ezek 29:19; 30:10, 11, 24, 25; 32:11, 12).²⁵ This is not surprising considering the role of the Babylonians in the captivity of Judah.

One significant difference to note here is that while in Ezek 5 YHWH does not make any promises of restoration to Israel,²⁶ in the oracle against Egypt YHWH announces that their exile would last only for 40 years, after which Egypt would be restored to her land (Ezek 29:13, 14).²⁷ Why should Egypt be eligible for restoration when this same privilege is not accorded to other nations? Hummel suggests that it is because Egypt, contrary to other nations that were condemned to total destruction by YHWH, did not rejoice at the calamity that befell Israel.²⁸ While Cooper notes that Egypt was condemned because of her pride and failure to be supportive to Israel at her time of

²⁴ Note the use of the *nip'al* perfect form of this verb **נִפְצַץ** in Ezek 28:25 where YHWH promises to gather Israel from the nations where they have been scattered, a reversal of the exilic curse announced in Ezek 5.

²⁵ YHWH declares that Nebuchadnezzar King of Babylon and his army are acting on his behalf (Ezek 29:20).

²⁶ The theme of Israel’s restoration comes later in Ezek 11:17 and forms the bulk of Ezek 33-48.

²⁷ See Isa 19:18-25 where this restoration motif is extended not only to Egypt but to Assyria as well. Jeremiah also alludes to the restoration of Egypt when he quotes YHWH saying, “Egypt shall be inhabited as in the days of old” (Jer 46:26).

²⁸ Hummel, *Ezekiel 21-48*, 888-89.

need, he points out that Egypt's "restoration was to be a limited one."²⁹ Regardless of the views espoused, the most important thing is that YHWH extends to a foreign nation the same privilege that he accords to his covenant people. And this speaks volumes about his sovereignty.

Whereas the sword (חֶרֶב) as a means of judgment is mentioned only twice in Ezek 5:5-17, its use is quite prevalent in the oracles against the nations.³⁰ Its first occurrence is in relation to the oracle against Edom. YHWH declares that because of Edom's revenge against Judah, its inhabitants would die by the sword (Ezek 25:13).³¹ A reading of Ezek 25:14 gives this sword a different connotation, since YHWH says he will employ Israel as an instrument of punishment over Edom,³² a clear reversal of the use of

²⁹ Cooper, *Ezekiel*, 274.

³⁰ See Ezek 25:13; 26:6, 8, 9, 11; 28:7, 23; 29:8; 30:4, 5, 6, 11, 17, 21, 22, 24, 25; 31:17, 18; 32:10, 11, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31, 32.

³¹ Burdon's discussion of the background of the feud between the descendants of Esau and Jacob is quite informative. See esp. p. 166 in which Burdon introduces an interesting Rabbinic interpretation of the encounter of Jacob and Esau according to which Jacob paid homage to God and not to Esau (Gen 33:3). Furthermore, Esau did not kiss Jacob (Gen 33:4), rather he bit him and as a consequence "their mutual weeping is explained by the pain this encounter gives to Esau's teeth and to Jacob's neck." Christopher Burdon, "Jacob, Esau and the Strife of Meanings," in *Self, Same and Other: Re-visioning the Subject in Literature and Theology* (ed. H. Walton and A. W. Hass; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 2000), 160-174.

³² Haney argues that Edom and Israel were not always at variance with each other and that the biblical and scholarly portrayal of Edom has been balanced. He therefore sees an Edom that received the same treatment as Israel and which was in covenant relationship with YHWH just as Israel. Linda Haney, "Yahweh, the God of Israel . . . and of Edom? The Relationships in the Oracle to Edom in Jeremiah 49:7-22," in *Uprooting and Planting: Essays on Jeremiah for Leslie Allen* (ed. J. Goldingay; New York: T&T Clark, 2007), 78-115. Ogden argues that Jer 49:7-22 and Obadiah were responses to the lament of Ps 137 in which the Israelites sought revenge for the atrocities done to it by Edom. Graham S. Ogden, "Prophetic Oracles against Foreign Nations and Psalms of Communal Lament: The Relationship of Psalm 137 to Jeremiah 49:7-22 and Obadiah," *JSOT* 24 (1982): 89-97. For further discussion see Joachim J. Krause, "Tradition, History, and Our Story: Some Observations on Jacob and Esau in the Books of Obadiah and Malachi," *JSOT* 32 (2008): 475-486; Elie Assis, "Why Edom? On the Hostility

the sword in the oracles against Israel (Ezek 5:12, 17). Israel is to execute this judgment on Edom according to YHWH's anger (אַף)³³ and according to his wrath (חַמָּה),³⁴ similar words that are employed in Ezek 5:13. In other contexts, YHWH places the sword in the hands of Nebuchadnezzar, King of Babylon, who in turn uses it against Tyre (Ezek 26:7, 8, 11; 29:18), and against Egypt and its allies (29:19; 30:10, 24, 25; 32:11).³⁵ The comprehensive nature of the work of the sword is emphasized by the use of the phrase, חָלַל־הַחֶרֶב, "slain by the sword" (Ezek 31:17, 18; 32:20, 21, 25, 28-32; 35:8), all of which are found within the context of the oracles against Egypt.³⁶

The concept of famine (רָעָב) also provides a point of contact between Ezek 5:5-17 and these oracles against foreign countries. While the word רָעָב, which appears in Ezek 5:12, 16, 17, is not explicitly mentioned in any of the oracles against the nations, there are several places in the pericope where allusions to famine are made. One such case is YHWH's threat to dry up the streams of the Nile (Ezek 30:12).³⁷ The River Nile is

towards Jacob's Brother in Prophetic Sources," *VT* 56 (2006): 1-20; Philip P. Jenson, *Obadiah, Jonah, Micah: A Theological Commentary* (New York: T&T Clark, 2008), 18-27.

³³ See Ezek 25:14 for its only occurrence in Ezek 25-32.

³⁴ It occurs in Ezek 25:14, 17; 30:15. In 25:14 it is coupled with אַף.

³⁵ Other references to the sword in relationship to Egypt are found in Ezek 29:8; 30:4, 6, 11, 17, 21; 32:10, 12, 20-32.

³⁶ In Ezek 35:8 its use pertains to the oracle against Edom.

³⁷ See also Ezek 29:10 where YHWH responds to Egyptian arrogance by declaring that he is against the streams of Egypt and as a result he would make the land of Egypt a ruin and a desolate waste. For discussion on this see Hilary Marlow, "The Lament over the River Nile--Isaiah 19:5-10 in Its Wider Context," *VT* 57 (2007): 229-242. The word סָכַר, "be shut up," used in Isa 19:4 underscores the threat that would be posed to the Nile. Arnold observes that סָכַר is "frequently used of stopping up water sources." Bill T. Arnold, "סָכַר," *NIDOTTE* 3:256-57. Hays points out that in Old Aramaic and Akkadian סָכַר has the meaning of "stopping up," and "damming up waterways." He therefore refutes translations which render סָכַר as "deliver, hand over." Christopher B. Hays, "Damming Egypt/Damning Egypt: The Paronomasia of *skr* and the

the main source of water in Egypt. It is an integral part of the land of Egypt. People in Egypt depend on it for their agricultural as well as commercial and domestic use. As Marlow has rightly observed, “the Nile represented one of the greatest and most powerful influences upon the land of Egypt.”³⁸ YHWH’s announcement, if carried out, would not only drastically affect food production, but would precipitate an ecological catastrophe of unimaginable proportions.³⁹ Echoes of the effects of such devastation upon the Nile and its streams are seen in Isa 19:5-10.⁴⁰

The three means of punishment in Ezek 28:23 make a strong link with Ezek 5:17. In 28:23 YHWH plans to unleash upon Sidon a plague (דָּבָר), make blood (דָּם) flow in her streets, and cause the slain to fall by the sword (חֶרֶב). This is in harmony with Ezek 5:17 where, referring to Jerusalem, YHWH says “pestilence (דָּבָר) and bloodshed (דָּם) shall pass through you; and I will bring the sword (חֶרֶב) upon you.” It should also be noted that YHWH is poised to use wild animals (חַיָּה) against Egypt (Ezek 29:5), just as

Unity of Isa 19:1-10,” ZAW 120 (2008): 612-617. This argument augurs well with Isa 19:5-10 which describes the devastation of the Nile as its waters dry up. An Egyptian prophecy describes the dire situation of the Egyptian water sources in the following words: “The river of Egypt is empty, One can cross the water on foot.” “The Prophecies of Neferti,” translated by Nili Shupak (COS 1.45:106-110); see also “The Prophecy of Neferti,” translated by John A. Wilson (ANET, 445).

³⁸ Marlow, “The Lament over the River Nile,” 237. See also the “Hymn to the Nile,” which underscores the significance of the Nile to the land of Egypt and appreciation for its role in their daily life. “Hymn to the Nile,” translated by John A. Wilson (ANET, 372-73).

³⁹ See Gary V. Smith, *Isaiah 1-39* (Nashville, Tenn.: B & H Publishing, 2007), 356-57. See also Joseph Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah 1-39* (New York: Doubleday, 2000), 315.

⁴⁰ Wildberger observes that the condition described in Isa 19:5-10 describes “an economic breakdown, caused when the waters in the ‘river’ dry up.” Hans Wildberger, *Isaiah 13-27* (Minneapolis, Minn.: Fortress, 1997), 234.

he proposes to use the same against Israel (Ezek 5:17). In the case against Egypt, birds of the air have been brought into the picture, a feature that is absent in Ezek 5:5-17.

This survey has revealed that Ezek 5:5-17 shares a number of lexical, verbal, and thematic features with the oracles against the nations. It is also evident that the severe and harsh punishments YHWH intended to bring upon the covenant people would also be applied to the other nations. While Israel is condemned for reneging on the covenant stipulations, the other nations are condemned mainly for their lack of sympathy for Israel during its time of misfortune. Also noteworthy is that the recognition formula assumes universal scope, since it is applied not only to Israel but to the other nations as well. YHWH wants these nations not only to understand who he is by the seriousness with which he passes out his judgments on offenders, but also to recognize his superiority and sovereignty over all nations.

Ezekiel 5:5-17 and the Restoration Passages

Although the passages included in this section mainly contain messages of hope, assurance, and restoration, there are some sections that correlate the message of doom in Ezek 5:5-17. While some of these connections will be found in the oracles against Edom (Ezek 35) and Gog (Ezek 38, 39), foreign entities whose oracles are sandwiched in the restoration passages, other links will be established in the reversal of some earlier themes and motifs. As we have noted in the last section, Ezekiel has a penchant for certain words, phrases, and expressions that he regularly employs in his prophecies. This section will focus on such features that connect the judgment prophecy of Ezek 5:5-17 and the restoration passages.

Similar Words

לָכֵן and יַעַן, which feature in Ezek 5:7, 8, 10, 11, are also employed in the restoration passages of Ezekiel. In fact, לָכֵן appears to frame Ezek 33-39, with its first appearance in 33:25 and the last in 39:25. In 33:25 לָכֵן is used in the context of judgment to introduce the sins the Israelites in Jerusalem have been committing. It is noteworthy, however, that לָכֵן, which is used 16 times⁴¹ in these restoration passages, does not appear in Ezek 40-48. It is also remarkable that יַעַן, with its nine occurrences⁴² in Ezek 34-36 is found only once (Ezek 44:12) in the rest of Ezekiel, where it features in the context of YHWH's judgment on the Levites. Striking too is the fact that the two words are used in both contexts of judgment and restoration. Just as the words introduce YHWH's judgment on those who have disregarded his ways or have maltreated his people (33:25-26; 34:7-10; 35:5-15), likewise the same words present the benefits that accrue to those who will be recipients of the promised restoration (Ezek 36:3-7; 37:12; 39:25). Furthermore, Ezek 40-48 does not need a plurality of these judgment-restorative-laden words. These chapters are written in the context of renewal. God has adequately dealt with the failures of his people. He is now into a renewed mode with Israel, a relationship expected to translate into a life of purity and holiness.⁴³

⁴¹ Ezek 33:25; 34:7, 9, 20; 35:6, 11; 36:3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 14, 22; 37:12; 38:14; 39:25.

⁴² Ezek 34:8, 21; 35:5, 10; 36:2, 3, 6, 13; 44:12.

⁴³ Block, *Ezekiel 25-48*, 505-506. Cooper characterizes Ezek 40-48 as chapters dealing with "realization of hope." Cooper, *Ezekiel*, 351. In the caption introducing Ezek 40-48, Hummel has the following to crystallize the nature of this renewed relationship: "Ezekiel 40-48: Vision of the New Temple, the New Creation, and the New Israel." Hummel, *Ezekiel 21-48*, 1147.

Other words that Ezekiel favors are nation (גֹּי) and land (אֶרֶץ) (Ezek 5:5, 6, 7, 8, 14, 15), both of which find their counterparts in Ezek 33-48.⁴⁴ It is again notable that גֹּי does not appear in Ezek 40-48. Ezekiel 5 paints a picture of Israel whose behavior is worse than the other countries and whose punishment will therefore be variously enacted before or among these nations. There are a few places where nations and lands are connected with judgment (Ezek 35:10). In Ezek 33-48, however, most of the references pertain to Israel's restoration, whereby they will no longer feel the adverse effects of the other nations (34:28, 29; 36:14, 15, 24, 30, 36; 37:22, 28) in their restored state. Other occurrences relate to the preservation of YHWH's righteous character (Ezek 38:16, 23; 39:7, 21, 27).

Other sets of words are those that relate to the basis of indictment on Israel in Ezek 5. Israel is condemned in Ezek 5 for rebelling against YHWH's ordinances (מִשְׁפָּטִים) and statutes (חֻקִּים) and flagrantly refusing to walk (הִלָּךְ) in them (Ezek 5:6, 7). This blatant disregard for these covenant terms will result in judgment, the threats of which are meticulously spelled out in Ezek 5. While מִשְׁפָּט⁴⁵ and חֻקָּה⁴⁶ have various meanings in the restoration passages, some of these relate directly to their usages in Ezek 5. Two references specifically stand out. With a fresh infusion of the Spirit YHWH

⁴⁴ For גֹּי see Ezek 34:28, 29; 35:10; 36:3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 13, 14, 15, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23 [twice], 24, 30, 36; 37:21, 22 [twice], 28; 38:12, 16, 23; 39:7, 21 [twice], 23, 27, 28. For אֶרֶץ see Ezek 33:2 [twice], 3, 24 [twice], 25, 26, 28, 29; 34:6, 13 [twice], 25, 27, 28, 29; 35:10, 14; 36:5, 18, 19, 20, 24, 28, 34, 35; 37:22, 25; 38:2, 8, 11, 12, 16 [twice], 20; 39:12, 13, 14 [twice], 15, 16, 18, 27; 40:2; 41:16, 20; 42:6; 43:2, 14; 45:1 [twice], 4, 8 [twice], 16, 22; 46:3, 9; 47:13, 14, 15, 18, 21; 48:12, 14, 29.

⁴⁵ Ezek 33:14, 16, 19; 34:16; 36:27; 37:24; 39:21; 42:11; 44:24 [twice]; 45:9.

⁴⁶ Ezek 33:15; 37:24; 43:11, 18; 44:5, 24; 46:14.

promises to enable the restored exiles to walk (הלך) in his statutes (חקים) and keep his ordinances (משפטים) (Ezek 36:27). Furthermore, under the Davidic kingship, they will be able to walk (הלך) in YHWH's ordinances (משפטים) and keep his statutes (חקים) (Ezek 37:24). This is a clear reversal of the rebellion against the statutes and ordinances that was a feature in Ezek 5.

One of YHWH's threats against Israel is to make Jerusalem a ruin (הרבה). This word finds correspondences in some of the restoration passages. In Ezek 33:24, 27 it is used in reference to the ruins of Jerusalem. YHWH threatens to make the cities of Edom into ruins (Ezek 35:4). Warnings of imminent ruin are also directed against Gog (Ezek 38:8, 12). Other usages of הרבה involve YHWH's assurance to the exiles of the rebuilding and habitation of the waste places, a major reversal of the desolation that characterized the land when the covenant curses were released on it (Ezek 36:4, 10, 33).

Phrases and Expressions

Several expressions in Ezek 5 have links with Ezek 33-48. Table 12 gives a summary of some of the common phrases and expressions in Ezek 5 and Ezek 33-48. The first notable one is the messenger formula כה אומר אדני יהוה, "thus says the Lord God" (Ezek 5:5, 7, 8). Although this may be considered a stock phrase in prophetic writings, yet its significance cannot be overstated as a vehicle for authenticating the words of YHWH. While the phrase occurs in the context of judgment in Ezek 5, in Ezek 33-48 it appears in places where impending judgments are announced,⁴⁷ in contexts of

⁴⁷ Ezek 33:25, 27; 34:2, 10, 17, 20; 35:3, 14; 36:5, 7; 38:3, 10, 14, 17; 39:1, 17; 44:6.

Table 12. Expressions in Ezekiel 5:5-17 and Ezekiel 33-48

Ezekiel 5:5-17		Oracles against the Nations	
5: 5, 7, 8	כֹּה אָמַר אֲדֹנָי יְהוִה	“Thus says the Lord God:” 33:25, 27; 34:2, 10, 17, 20; 35:3, 14; 36:5, 7; 38:3, 10, 14, 17; 39:1, 17; 44:6. Restoration: 34:11; 36:2, 3, 4, 6, 7, 13, 22, 33, 37; 37:5, 9, 12, 19, 21; 39:25. Allotment of inheritance: 46:16; 47:13. Instructions for sanctuary services: 43:18; 44:9; 45:18; 46:1, 16.	כֹּה אָמַר אֲדֹנָי יְהוִה
5:8	הִנְנִי עָלַי	“Behold I am against you” 35:3; 38:3; 39:1	הִנְנִי אֵלֶיךָ
5:8	לְעֵינֵי הַגּוֹיִם	“in the eyes of the nations” 39:27	לְעֵינֵי הַגּוֹיִם
5:11	נֹאם אֲדֹנָי יְהוִה	“a declaration of the Lord God” 33:11; 34:8, 15, 30, 31; 35:6, 11; 36:14, 15, 23, 32; 38:18, 21; 39:5, 8, 10, 13, 20, 29; 43:19, 27; 44:12, 15, 27; 45:9, 15; 47:23; 48:29.	נֹאם אֲדֹנָי יְהוִה
5:11	חַי־אֲנִי	“as I live” 33:11, 27; 34:8; 35:6, 11	חַי־אֲנִי
5:13, 15, 17	אֲנִי יְהוִה דִּבַּרְתִּי	“I the Lord I have spoken” 34:24; 36:36; 37:14; 39:5	אֲנִי יְהוִה דִּבַּרְתִּי
5:13	וַיֵּדְעוּ כִּי־אֲנִי יְהוִה	“they will know that I am the Lord” 33:29; 34:27, 30; 35:15; 36:38; 38:23; 39:6, 28	וַיֵּדְעוּ כִּי־אֲנִי יְהוִה
		“you shall know that I am the Lord” 35:9; 36:11; 37:6, 13, 14	וַיֵּדְעֻם כִּי־אֲנִי יְהוִה
		“you shall know that I am the Lord” 35:4, 12	וַיֵּדְעֶתָ כִּי־אֲנִי יְהוִה

restoration,⁴⁸ allotment of inheritance,⁴⁹ and in the framework of instructions for sanctuary services.⁵⁰ Closely associated with the messenger formula is “the prophetic utterance formula,”⁵¹ **נְאֻם יְהוָה**, “a declaration of the Lord YHWH.” The formula when preceded by the divine oath formula, **חַי־אֲנִי**, “as I live,”⁵² and surrounded by six verses before and six verses after, forms the centerpiece of Ezek 5:5-17. Ezekiel uses it in the restoration passages⁵³ to authenticate the words of YHWH.

Ezekiel closes his judgment messages in Ezek 5 by using the formula **אֲנִי יְהוָה** **דִּבַּרְתִּי**, “I the Lord I have spoken” (Ezek 5:13, 15, 17). It is mirrored in Ezek 33-48 in just a few places: first as an assurance to the restored exiles (Ezek 34:24; 36:36; 37:14), and secondly to emphasize the fate of Gog (39:5). The recognition formula, **וַיָּדְעוּ כִּי־אֲנִי יְהוָה**, “they will know that I am YHWH,” which is found only once in Ezek 5:13, also occurs in the passages of restoration.⁵⁴ It is remarkable however to learn that this formula does not appear in chs. 40-48. This, I believe, is because of the transformation YHWH plans to enact in the Israelites so that they will not need constant reminders to know YHWH (see Ezek 43:7, 10, 27; 45:15, 17, 20; cf. Jer 31:31-34).

⁴⁸ Ezek 34:11; 36:2, 3, 4, 6, 7, 13, 22, 33, 37; 37:5, 9, 12, 19, 21; 39:25.

⁴⁹ Ezek 46:16; 47:13.

⁵⁰ Ezek 43:18; 44:9; 45:18; 46:1, 16.

⁵¹ Hals, *Ezekiel*, 361-62.

⁵² For its appearance in restoration passages see Ezek 33:11, 27; 34:8; 35:6, 11.

⁵³ Ezek 33:11; 34:8, 15, 30, 31; 35:6, 11; 36:14, 15, 23, 32; 38:18, 21; 39:5, 8, 0, 3, 0, 29; 43:19, 27; 44:12, 15, 27; 45:9, 15; 47:23; 48:29.

⁵⁴ Ezek 33:29; 34:27, 30; 35:15; 36:23, 36, 38; 37:28; 38:23; 39:6, 7, 22, 28.

Thematic Similarities

One of the reasons YHWH gives for the judgment on the Israelites is their rebellious nature (Ezek 5:6), which has led them, among other things, to defile (טָמֵא)⁵⁵ YHWH's sanctuary (מִקְדָּשׁ)⁵⁶ with idols (שְׁקוּצִים) and other detestable practices (תּוֹעֲבוֹת) (Ezek 5:11). Both שְׁקוּץ and תּוֹעֲבָה are found in Ezek 33-48.⁵⁷ In these passages YHWH accuses Israel of defiling the land by their ways and deeds (Ezek 36:17), defiling his name (Ezek 43:7, 8), and he reminds them that idolatry is one of the causes of the breach of the covenant (Ezek 44:7). YHWH therefore calls on Israel to repent of their idolatry (Ezek 36:31) and because of his faithfulness to the covenant he promises an end to idolatry and its attendant effects (Ezek 37:23).

In Ezek 44:7 YHWH gives a detailed description of the cultic offenses that infuriated him. In addition to the detestable practices, the Israelites are accused of breaking the covenant by bringing foreigners, uncircumcised in heart and flesh, into the sanctuary while at the same time offering food, fat, and blood. They are also charged with putting unauthorized personnel to work in the sanctuary.⁵⁸ Note also the mention of גִּלּוּלִים, “idols,” with which the Levites dabbled (Ezek 44:10, 12).

⁵⁵ Ezek 36:17, 18; 37:23; 43:7, 8.

⁵⁶ The sanctuary, though mentioned only once in Ezek 5, appears several times in the restoration passages: Ezek 37:26, 28 [twice]; 43:21; 44:1, 5, 7, 8, 9, 11, 15, 16; 45:3, 4 [thrice], 18; 47:12; 48:8, 10, 21.

⁵⁷ For תּוֹעֲבָה see Ezek 33:29, 26; 36:31; 43:8; 44:6, 7, 13. For שְׁקוּץ see Ezek 37:23. The other designation of idolatry in the restoration passages is גִּלּוּל found in Ezek 33:25; 36:18, 25; 37:23; 44:10, 12.

⁵⁸ Eichrodt notes that employment of such temple personnel was borrowed from the Canaanites “as there is evidence for a similar custom in Phoenicia.” Eichrodt, *Ezekiel*, 564.

A number of scholars have wrestled with the issues presented in this passage. There are those who argue that the cultic sins enumerated here are not current sins because they are couched in the period of restoration. Duguid, for example, contends that Ezekiel simply recalled the cultic sins of Ezek 8 as he entered the temple through the north gate.⁵⁹ Block does not see any judgment features in Ezek 44 and instead argues that the chapter is “a series of directives issued by YHWH regulating admission to the sacred precincts, analogous to Deut. 23:2-4.”⁶⁰ Nurmela posits that the גִּלְדֵּי־לֵוִי mentioned here refers to the “golden calf as well as to non-Yahwist idolatry and that ‘the house of Israel’ in this context obviously denotes the northern tribes.”⁶¹ Allen for his part notes that the punishment of the Israelites is “overshadowed by that of the Levites.”⁶² Fishbane asserts that the threat of punishment of the Israelites is a pretext since the passage primarily concerns itself with “the exclusive elevation of the Zadokites to the priesthood.”⁶³

I contend that YHWH does not want the Israelites to forget where they have come from and what he has done to effect their restoration, including the calls to repentance and the inner spiritual makeover that he has already undertaken (Ezek 11:19; 14:6), plus his overall commitment to the reestablishment of the covenant (Ezek 11:20; 14:11;

⁵⁹ Duguid, *Ezekiel and the Leaders of Israel*, 76 n. 100. See also Rodney K. Duke, "Punishment or Restoration? Another Look at the Levites of Ezekiel 44:6-16," *JSOT* 40 (1988): 61-81.

⁶⁰ Block, *Ezekiel 25-48*, 617.

⁶¹ Risto Nurmela, *The Levites: Their Emergence as a Second-Class Priesthood* (Atlanta, Ga.: Scholars, 1998), 90.

⁶² Allen, *Ezekiel 20-48*, 261.

⁶³ Fishbane, *Biblical Interpretation in Ancient Israel*, 140.

16:62). Hence, he reminds them of this sad, but real chapter in their past history as a deterrent to any future attempts to engage in idolatry.

The punishments YHWH threatens upon Israel include רָעָב, “famine” (Ezek 5:12, 16, 17). In the restoration passages YHWH promises abundant provisions so that famine becomes a thing of the past (Ezek 34:29; 36:29, 30). It is interesting to note the use of the phrase הָרַפַּת רָעָב, “disgrace of famine,” in Ezek 36:30. While in Ezek 5:14, 15 Israel was to be a הָרַפַּת “disgrace” among the nations, YHWH now promises to remove this reproach so Israel will not suffer the רָעָב בְּגוֹיִם, “disgrace of famine among the nations” (Ezek 36:40). This is a complete reversal of this covenant curse.

Reference to the הָרַב, “sword,” in this section is mainly in reference to the work of the watchman who must warn people of an approaching danger (Ezek 33:2, 3, 4, 6). In Ezek 33:26, 27 YHWH warns the survivors who were living in the ruins of Jerusalem that they too would be subjected not only to the הָרַב,⁶⁴ but to הַיָּה, wild beasts,⁶⁵ and to the דָּבָר, “plague.” These means of judgment correlate with similar ones mentioned in Ezek 5. Other references to הָרַב involve the *lex talionis* revenge on Mt. Seir.⁶⁶ Edom handed the Israelites to the הָרַב; now she too will be given to the הָרַב (Ezek 35:5, 8). Finally the focus turns to Gog. Just as YHWH says he is against Jerusalem in Ezek 5:8

⁶⁴ For occurrences within the restoration passages see Ezek 33:2, 3, 4, 6 [twice], 26, 27; 35:5; 38:4, 21 [twice]; 39:23.

⁶⁵ For occurrences within the restoration passages see Ezek 33:27; 34:5, 8, 25, 28; 38:20; 39:4, 17. Note the reversal that takes place in Ezek 34:25, 26 where YHWH promises the end of any ravages from wild animals.

⁶⁶ For discussion on the concept of *lex talionis* in this context see Raabe, “Transforming the International Status Quo,” 198-201.

(הִנְנִי עָלֶיךָ), “behold, I am against you,” he says the same about Gog (הִנְנִי אֵלֶיךָ) in Ezek 38:3. Gog’s judgment comes not only by the חֶרֶב (Ezek 38:4, 21), but by a horde of other means, some of which are similarly found in Ezek 5: plague and bloodshed (Ezek 38:22), torrents of rain, hailstones, and burning sulfur (Ezek 38:22), birds and wild animals (Ezek 39:4, 17), and fire (Ezek 39:6).⁶⁷ By so punishing Gog YHWH intends to make himself known לְעֵינֵי גוֹיִם רַבִּים, “in the sight of many nations” (Ezek 38:23); and conversely in restoring Israel he will show himself holy לְעֵינֵי גוֹיִם רַבִּים, “in the sight of many nations” (Ezek 39:27), an expression found in Ezek 5:8.⁶⁸

Another means of punishment mentioned in Ezek 5 is דָּם, “bloodshed.” Ezekiel 33 employs it mostly in the watchman section to urge the watchman to diligently do his work (Ezek 33:4, 5, 6, 8). Other usages are of a cultic nature (Ezek 44:7, 15; 45:19). The rest of the applications which more fittingly correlate with the use of דָּם are in the judgment passages (Ezek 33:25; 35:6; 38:22; 39:17, 18, 19). Exile is intimated by the statement, “I will scatter (נָזַרְתִּי) a third to the winds” in Ezek 5:12. This corresponds to the same phenomenon in the restoration passages in Ezek 39:19 where YHWH avers that the Israelites were scattered (נָזַרְתִּי) in the countries. Other synonymous words within the pericope convey the same motif. These are פָּוֶז, “scattered, dispersed” (Ezek 36:19), the *qal* perfect verb גָּלָה, “be captive, deport, exile” (Ezek 39:23). See also v. 28 where the

⁶⁷ For discussion on the punishment of God see Francesca Stavrakopoulou, “Gog’s Grave and the Use and Abuse of Corpses in Ezekiel 39:11-20,” *JBL* 129 (2010): 67-84.

⁶⁸ Note that in Ezek 5 this expression does not have the adjective רַבִּים.

hip'il infinitive construct form of the same verb is used, underscoring YHWH's role in this calamity.

The other two references to the exilic motif are in Ezek 33:21 which records the fall of Jerusalem in the twelfth year of the exile (גְּלוֹת), and 40:1, which also uses the same word. YHWH is so enraged by Israel's behavior that he declares that Israel is to be a הֶרְפָּה, "reproach," גְּדוּפָה, "a taunt," מוֹסֵר, "a warning," and מְשֻׁמָּה, "an object of horror," to the nations (Ezek 5:15). Ezekiel reverses this curse language and says Israel will no longer suffer the insults (כְּלָמָה) of the nations (Ezek 34:29; 36:6, 15). The word has various connotations, among which are "disgrace, shame, humiliation, scorn."⁶⁹

Intertextuality: The Rest of the Old Testament

Ezekiel 5:5-17 is not a detached passage. It has links with other texts within the larger corpus of the Old Testament. These intertextual connections will be explored to enable us to situate YHWH's judgment on rebellious Israel in the larger context of the Old Testament. A few passages that exhibit direct correspondences with Ezek 5:5-17 will be selected to show these intertextual connections. No detailed study of the selected passages will be undertaken.

Ezekiel 5:5-17 and the Pentateuch

One of the Old Testament corpus of literature that the book of Ezekiel has explicit

⁶⁹ James Swanson, "כְּלָמָה," n.p., *DBL* on CD-ROM. Version 3.0 2001. See also John N. Oswalt, "כְּלָמָה," n.p., *TWOT* on CD-ROM. Version 3.0. 1980. For detailed discussion on its use see S. Wagner, "כְּלָמָה, כְּלָמוֹת, כְּלָמָה," *TDOT* 7:185-96.

parallels and correspondences is the Pentateuch.⁷⁰ This section surveys the correspondences Ezek 5:5-17 has with the first five books of the Old Testament to see how they contribute to our understanding of the target passage and what this says regarding the character of God. Of particular interest is Lev 26 that has so many correspondences with the book of Ezekiel.

I have already established in chapter 4 that Ezek 5:5-17 belongs to the genre of prophetic literature known as the covenant or prophetic lawsuit. This covenant lawsuit provides a significant link with the Pentateuch. This is particularly evident in Deut 32:1-29,⁷¹ a passage whose theme and structure reveals connections to Ezek 5:5-17. Table 13 shows the shared elements. The use of this covenant lawsuit exonerates YHWH from any accusations of injustice, since the punishments that follow are as a result of covenant violation.

Other points of contact that Ezek 5:5-17 has with various parts of the Pentateuch are in the area of disobedience and disregard for YHWH's laws. When Ezekiel characterizes Israel as people who rebel (מִרְבֵּזִים), he is simply reiterating the tradition that had long been established (Num 20:10, 24; 27:14; Deut 1:26, 43; 9:7, 23, 24; 31:27).

⁷⁰ For some examples of these, see Lyons, "Transformation of Law: Ezekiel's Use of the Holiness Code (Leviticus 17-26)," 1-32; idem, *From Law to Prophecy: Ezekiel's Use of the Holiness Code* (New York: T&T Clark, 2009); Ganzel, "Transformation of Pentateuchal Descriptions of Idolatry," 33-49; Rebecca G. S. Idestrom, "Echoes of the Book of Exodus in Ezekiel," *JSOT* 33 (2009): 489-510; Preston Sprinkle, "Law and Life: Leviticus 18.5 in the Literary Framework of Ezekiel," *JSOT* 31 (2007): 275-293; T. J. Betts, *Ezekiel the Priest: A Custodian of Tôrâ* (New York: Oxford, 2005); Wong, *The Idea of Retribution in the Book of Ezekiel*, 79-87; Millar Burrows, *The Literary Relations of Ezekiel* (Philadelphia, Pa.: The Jewish Publication Society, 1925), 19-25.

⁷¹ See Davidson, "The Covenant Lawsuit Motif in Canonical Perspective," 26.

Table 13. Covenant lawsuit in Ezekiel 5:5-17 and Deuteronomy 32:1-29

Ezekiel 5:5-17	Deuteronomy 32:1-29
Ezek 5:5 Witnesses: the nations YHWH has placed around Jerusalem	Deut 32:1 List of witnesses (heaven and earth; mountains and hills)
Ezek 5:7, 8, 11 Preamble (The Messenger formula: “Thus says the Lord”)	Deut 32:4–6 Preamble (introduction of the suzerain and call to judgment)
Ezek 5:5 Beneficent actions toward Jerusalem (I have placed her in the midst of the nations)	Deut 32:7–14 Historical prologue (review of the suzerain’s benevolent acts toward the vassal)
Ezek 5:6, 7, 11 Indictment (breach of covenant stipulations)	Deut 32: 15–18 Indictments (breach of covenant stipulations)
Ezek 5:8-10, 12, 16-17 Verdict and sentence (pronouncement of curses)	Deut 32:19–29 Verdict (guilty, “Therefore”) and sentence (pronouncement of the curses)

Table 14 shows some of the rebellious tendencies of the Israelites in Ezek 5:5-17, Lev 26, and Deuteronomy. The verb used to portray rebellion in these texts is **נִקְּחָה**, the same word used in Ezek 5:6 where the Israelites are accused of rebelling against YHWH’s statutes and ordinances. In these Pentateuchal texts, the object of the verb is either the Lord (Deut 9:7, 24; 31:27) or the command or word of the Lord (Num 20:24 27:14; Deut 1:26, 43; 9:23). Note also the emphasis placed on their rebelliousness by the use of the participle forms of the verbs (Num 20:10, *qal* participle; Deut 9:7, 23, 24; 31:27, *hip’il* participle) to show the pervasiveness of this action.

Another verb used in Ezek 5:6 and in a few sections of the Pentateuch is **סָאָה**, “reject.” In Lev 26:15, 43 the direct object of the verb is YHWH’s statutes and ordinances, just as it is in Ezek 5:6. In Num 11:20 YHWH is the object of the rejection. An interesting twist takes place in Lev 26:44 where YHWH—who himself and his word

Table 14. Rebellion in Ezekiel 5:5-17, Leviticus 26, and Deuteronomy

Ezekiel 5:5-17		Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy	
v. 6	She has rebelled (מָרָדָה) against my ordinances (מִצְוֹתַי), and my statutes (חֻקֵּי)	Lev 26:15	If you reject (סָאֲפָה) my statutes (חֻקֵּי), and abhor my ordinances (מִצְוֹתַי), so that you will not observe (עָשִׂיתָ) all my commandments, and you break my covenant
v. 7	She has rejected (סָאֲפָה) my ordinances (מִצְוֹתַי) and has not followed (לֹא עָלְמָה) my decrees	Lev 26:43	They rejected (סָאֲפָה) my ordinances (מִצְוֹתַי), and abhorred my statutes (חֻקֵּי)
	You have not followed (לֹא עָלְמָה) my statutes (חֻקֵּי) or kept my ordinances (מִצְוֹתַי), but have acted according to the ordinances of (מִצְוֹתַי) the nations	Deut 1:26	You rebelled (מָרָדָה) against the command of the Lord your God
		Deut 1:43	You rebelled (מָרָדָה) against the command of the Lord
		Deut 9:7	You have been rebellious (מָרָדָה) against the Lord
		Deut 9:23	You rebelled (מָרָדָה) against the command of the Lord your God
		Deut 9:24	You have been rebellious (מָרָדָה) against the Lord as long as he has known you
		Deut 34:27	I know how rebellious (מָרָדָה) and stubborn you are. If you already have been so rebellious (מָרָדָה) toward the Lord while I am still alive among you, how much more after death

have been rejected (מָאַץ)—promises not to reject (מָאַץ) Israel because of his commitment to the covenant.

As we have seen, YHWH's statutes (חֻקִּים) and ordinances (מִשְׁפָּטִים) are the primary object of the Israelites' rebellion and rejection (Ezek 5:6, 7). The books of the Pentateuch emphasize obedience to YHWH's statutes and ordinances (Exod 2:1-17; Lev 18:4, 5, 26; 19:37; Deut 4:1, 5, 8, 14, 45; 5:1, 31, 32; 6:1, 20; 7:11, 12; 8:11; 11:1, 32; 12:1; 26:16, 17; 30:16; 33:10, 21). Keeping these laws was a condition for staying in the land (Lev 20:22; 25:18); rejecting them exposed Israel to all kinds of hazards.⁷² Yet what we find is Israel's continual disobedience. Table 15 shows the contrast between YHWH's call for the Israelites to obey his statutes and ordinances in Deuteronomy and their outright rebellion against these laws in Ezek 5:6, 7. Israel's rebellion against YHWH's statutes and ordinances manifested itself through various avenues. One such means is idolatry, which appears to have been so widespread that it ruined the sanctity of the sanctuary.

The words תוֹעֲבָה and שְׁקִיץ, which are used to express these idolatrous practices in Ezek 5:9, 11, find correlations in the Pentateuch.⁷³ The magnitude of idolatry among

⁷² Examples of such perils include diseases (Lev 26:15, 16, 25; Deut 28:21, 22, 28, 29, 35, 59, 60, 61), military defeat (Lev 26:17), famine (Lev 26:19, 20, 26; Deut 28:17, 23, 24, 38, 39, 40, 42, 49, 50, 51), ravages by wild animals (Lev 26:22), defeat in battle (Lev 26:25; Deut 28:25, 26), cannibalism (Lev 26:29; Deut 28:53, 54, 55, 56, 57), devastation on cities (Lev 26:31, 33; Deut 28:52), devastation of cultic activities (Lev 26:30, 31), exile (Lev 26:33, 38, 43; Deut 28:32, 36, 37, 41, 63, 64), fear and terror (Lev 26:36; Deut 28:65, 66, 67), and economic and social upheavals (Deut 28:30, 31, 33, 34, 43, 44).

⁷³ For תוֹעֲבָה, see Gen 43:32; 46:34; Exod 8:22 [twice], Lev 18:22, 26, 27, 29, 30; 20:13; Deut 7:25, 26; 12:31; 13:15; 14:3; 17:1, 4; 18:9, 12 [twice], 20:18; 22:5; 23:19; 24:4; 25:16; 27:15; 32:16; for שְׁקִיץ, see (Deut 29:16 [Eng 17]).

Table 15. Call to obedience vs. disobedience in Ezekiel 5:5-17 and Deuteronomy

Ezekiel 5:5-17	Deuteronomy
5:6, 7 Israel has rebelled against my ordinances (מִשְׁפָּטַי) and my statutes (חֻקֹּתַי)	<p>4:1 You Israel, listen to the statutes and ordinances (חֻקִּים וּמִשְׁפָּטִים) which I am teaching you to do</p> <p>4:5 I have taught you statutes and ordinances (חֻקִּים וּמִשְׁפָּטִים) just as the Lord my God commanded me</p> <p>4:45 These are the . . . statutes and ordinances (חֻקִּים וּמִשְׁפָּטִים) which Moses spoke to the sons of Israel</p> <p>5:1 Hear O Israel the statutes and the ordinances (חֻקִּים וּמִשְׁפָּטִים) which I am speaking today in your hearing</p> <p>6:1 This is the commandment, the statutes and the Ordinances (חֻקִּים וּמִשְׁפָּטִים) which the Lord has commanded me to teach you</p> <p>6:2 so that your son . . . might fear the Lord your God to keep all His statutes (חֻקֹּתָיו) and His commandments</p> <p>6:24 The Lord commanded us to keep all these statutes (כָּל-חֻקֵּי הַיְיָ)</p> <p>8:11 Do not forget the Lord your God by not keeping His commandments, His ordinances and His statutes (וּמִשְׁפָּטָיו וְחֻקֹּתָיו)</p> <p>11:1 You shall love the Lord your God and Keep . . . His statutes and His ordinances (וְחֻקֹּתָיו וּמִשְׁפָּטָיו)</p> <p>11:32 You shall be careful to do all the statutes and ordinances (כָּל-חֻקֵּי הַיְיָ וּמִשְׁפָּטֵי הַיְיָ) which I am setting before you today</p> <p>12:1 These are the statutes and the ordinances (חֻקִּים וּמִשְׁפָּטִים) which you shall carefully observe in the land the Lord God has given to you</p> <p>26:16 The Lord your God has commanded you to do these statutes and ordinances (חֻקִּים וּמִשְׁפָּטִים וְאֵת-הַמִּצְוֹת אֲשֶׁר צִוָּה ה' אֱלֹהֵיכֶם לַעֲשׂוֹת)</p> <p>26:17 You have declared the Lord . . . to keep His statutes (חֻקֵּי הַיְיָ) and His commandments and His ordinances (וּמִשְׁפָּטֵי הַיְיָ)</p> <p>27:10 You shall obey the Lord your God and do His commandments and His statutes (חֻקֵּי הַיְיָ)</p> <p>28:15 If you do not . . . follow all his commands and his statutes (חֻקֹּתָיו) . . . all these curses will come upon you</p>

the Israelites is further seen in the use of other code words that also articulate this concept within the Pentateuch. These include, אֱלֹהִים זָרִים, “strange gods” (Deut 32:16), אֱלֹהֵי הַנֶּכֶד, אֱלֹהֵי הַנֶּכֶד, “foreign gods” (Gen 35:2, 4; Deut 32:12), אֱלֹהִים אֲחֵרִים, “other gods” (Exod 20:3; 23:13; Deut 5:7; 6:14; 7:4; 8:19; 11:16, 28; 13:7, 14; 17:3; 18:20; 28:14, 36, 64; 29:25; 30:17; 31:12, 20), זָנָה, “play the harlot” (Exod 34:15, 16; Lev 17:7; Deut 31:16), דֵּמִיּוֹת, “demons” (Deut 32:16), שְׂעִירִם, “goat idols” (Lev 17:7),⁷⁴ מִסֵּכָה, “molten idol” (Exod 32:4, 8; 34:17; Lev 19:4; Num 33:52; Deut 9:12, 16; 27:15), and לֹא אֱלֹהִים, “no gods” (Deut 32:17). This plurality of the vocabulary of idolatry in the Pentateuch indicates that idolatry was rampant among the Israelites in the early part of her history.⁷⁵ Table 16 shows some of the prohibitions against this illicit religious practice.

Conversely, Yahweh did not leave them without warning. Many prohibitions against dabbling in idolatry that abound in the Pentateuch attest to this (Exod 20:3, 4, 23; 34:14; 23:23, 24, 25; 34:12-17; Deut 4:24; 5:9; 6:15). Yet in spite of all these warnings Israel still found herself in idolatrous practices that infuriated YHWH like in the worship of the Golden Calf at Mt Sinai.⁷⁶ Israel’s persistence in the worship of other gods

⁷⁴ For discussion see Norman H. Snaith, “The Meaning of שְׂעִירִם,” *VT* 25 (1975): 115-118.

⁷⁵ Notice in Lev 20:3 YHWH considers sacrificing children to Molech such a grievous sin since it both defiles the sanctuary and taints his reputation. The same word טָמֵא, “defile,” is used in both Ezek 5:11 and Lev 20:3. Whether this act takes place by bringing idols into the sanctuary or by sacrificing children to Molech, the result is the same. The sanctity of the sanctuary has been compromised. In fact the penalty for this violation in Lev 20:23 is quite serious because it involves the כְּרִית penalty, which includes, among other things, the loss of descendants and forfeiture of the afterlife.

⁷⁶ McKenzie discusses the innertextual connections between the idolatrous incidences of Exod 32:7-20 and Deut 9:12-21. Tracy J. McKenzie, *Idolatry in the Pentateuch: An Innertextual Strategy* (Eugene, Oreg.: Pickwick Publications, 2010), 60-117.

Table 16. Idolatry in Ezekiel 5:5-17 vs. prohibitions in Deuteronomy

Ezekiel 5:5-17	Deuteronomy
<p>5:9 Because of your detestable idols (תועבות)</p> <p>5:11 You have defiled my sanctuary with your vile images (שְׁקוּצִים) and detestable practices (תועבות)</p>	<p>7:25 The graven images of their gods you shall burn with fire . . . it is an abomination (תועבת) to the Lord your God</p> <p>13:15 [Eng 14] If it is true that this abomination (התועבה) has been done among you</p> <p>14:3 You shall not eat any abominable thing (כֹּל־תועבה)</p> <p>17:4 If it is true that this detestable thing (התועבה) has been done in Israel</p> <p>18:9 You shall not learn to do according to the detestable things (כְּתועבות) of those nations</p> <p>18:12 For abominable (כִּי־תועבת) to the Lord are all who do these things and because of these abominable things (התועבות) the Lord your God drove them out before you</p> <p>27:15 Cursed is the man who makes an idol . . . an abomination (תועבת) to the Lord</p> <p>28:36 The Lord will drive you to a nation . . . and there you shall serve other gods (אֱלֹהִים אֲחֵרִים)</p> <p>28:64 The Lord will scatter you among all nations . . . there you will serve other gods (אֱלֹהִים אֲחֵרִים)</p> <p>32:16 They provoked Him to anger with abominations (כְּתועבות יִכְעִיסֶהוּ)</p>

continued way into the sixth century B.C. during the time of Ezekiel. It is no wonder then that YHWH has to confront them on this age-old problem and administer just punishment for their relentless disobedience. The Israelites' desecration of the sanctuary meets with abject divine disapproval. Tables 17 and 18 show the parallels in the punishments between Ezek 5:5-17 and Lev 26 and Deuteronomy. One way in which YHWH shows his disapproval is by indicating that he will not show pity (חַוֵּס) or have compassion (רַחֵם) upon them (Ezek 5:11).

This echoes Deut 13:9 [Eng13:8] where YHWH commands that no pity (חַוֵּס) or compassion (רַחֵם) be shown to any person who tries to mislead the people into worshipping other gods. Such a person must be put to death (Deut 13:10). Similarly, YHWH's use of the same expression in Ezek 5:11 leads to nothing other than death, taking into account the type of punishments that he is threatening to bring against the people who have disobeyed him and desecrated the sanctuary. The other use of this phrase is in Deut 19:21 in which YHWH commands that no pity should be shown to anyone who proves to be a false witness in a criminal case. It is therefore interesting to note that in both of these cases YHWH commands that no pity be shown to the people involved in the deceptive acts. Yet in the book of Ezekiel (Ezek 5:11; 7:4, 9.) all usages involve YHWH himself, declaring that he himself will not pity or have compassion.

Another theme Ezek 5:5-17 shares with the Pentateuch is cannibalism. In Ezek 5:9, 10 YHWH declares in the most unsettling language: "Because of all your abominations, I will do to you what I have never done before and will never do again. Therefore in your midst fathers will eat their children and children will eat their

Table 17. Punishments in Ezekiel 5:5-17 and Leviticus 26

Ezekiel 5:5-17		Leviticus 26	
v. 10	Fathers will eat (אָכַל) their children (בָּנִים) and children will eat their fathers	v. 29	You shall eat (אָכַל) the flesh of your sons (בָּנִים), and you shall eat the flesh of your daughters.
v.10	Any of you who survive I will scatter (זָרָה) to every wind	v. 33	And you I will scatter (זָרָה) among the nations
v. 12	A third I will scatter (זָרָה) to the winds		
v. 14	I will make you a ruin and a reproach among the nations (בְּגוֹיִם)	v. 33	I will scatter you among the nations (בְּגוֹיִם)
		v. 38	You will perish among the nations (בְּגוֹיִם)
v. 17	I will break your staff of bread (וְשִׁבְרֹתִי לָכֶם מִטֶּהֱ-לֶחֶם)	v. 26	When I break your staff of bread (בְּשִׁבְרִי לָכֶם מִטֶּהֱ-לֶחֶם) See also vv. 19, 20
v. 12	A third of you will die of the plague (דָּבָר)	v. 25	I will send pestilence (דָּבָר) among you
v. 17	Plague (דָּבָר) and bloodshed will pass through you		
v. 12	A third will fall by the sword (חֶרֶב)	v. 25	I will bring the sword (חֶרֶב) against you to avenge the breaking of the covenant
v. 17	I will bring (אָבִיא) the sword (חֶרֶב) against you		
v. 14	I will make you a ruin (תִּרְבֶּה)	v. 33	I will draw out (רִיק) my sword (חֶרֶב) and pursue you
		v. 31	I will turn your cities into ruins (תִּרְבֶּה)
v. 17	I will send . . . wild animals (חַיָּה רָעָה) against you, and they will rob you of your children (שָׁכַל)	v. 33	your cities will be ruins (תִּרְבֶּה)
		v. 6	I will remove wild animals (חַיָּה רָעָה) from the land
		v. 22	I will send wild animals (חַיֵּית הַשָּׂדֶה) against you, and they shall bereave you of your children (שָׁכַל)

Table 18. Punishments in Ezekiel 5:5-17 and Deuteronomy

Ezekiel 5:5-17	Deuteronomy
5:10 Fathers (אָבֹת) will eat (אָכַל) their children (בָּנִים) and children will eat their fathers	28:53 You will <i>eat</i> (אָכַל) the fruit of the womb, the flesh of the <i>sons</i> (בָּנִים) and daughters the Lord has given you 28:55 He will not give to one of them any of the flesh of his children (בָּנָיו) that he is <i>eating</i> (אָכַל) 28:57 She intends to <i>eat</i> (אָכַל) them secretly during the siege
5:10 Any of you who survive I will scatter (יָרֶה) to every wind 5:12 A third I will scatter (יָרֶה) to the winds	4:27 The Lord will scatter you (יִפְּצֶיךָ) among the peoples 28:41 Your sons and your daughters will go into captivity (שָׁבִי) 28:64 The Lord will scatter (פּוֹצֵץ) you among all peoples 30:3 The Lord your God will gather you from all the peoples where He scattered (הִפְצִידָהּ) you
5:12 A third will fall by the sword (חֶרֶב) 5:12 I will unsheathe a sword (חֶרֶב) after them 5:17 I will bring the sword (חֶרֶב) on you	13:16 [Eng 15] You shall strike the inhabitants of that city with the edge of the sword (לְפִי־חֶרֶב) 32:16 You shall strike the cattle (of that city) with the edge of the sword (לְפִי־חֶרֶב) 32:25 Outside the sword will bereave (תִּשְׁכַּל־חֶרֶב) I will sharpen the brightness of my sword (חֶרְבִּי)
5:14 Moreover I will make you a desolation and an object of mocking among the nations (בְּגוֹיִם) around you 5:15 You shall be a mockery and a taunt, a warning and a horror, to the nations around you	28:37 You will become a horror (שִׁמָּה), a proverb, and a taunt (שְׁנִינָה) among all the people (הָעַמִּים) where the Lord drives you
5:12 One third of you shall die of pestilence or be consumed by famine (רָעָב) among you 5:16 When I shoot at you with my deadly and destructive arrows of famine (רָעָב) . . . I will bring more and more famine (רָעָב) upon you 5:17 I will send famine (רָעָב) . . . against you	28:48 You will serve your enemies . . . in hunger (רָעָב), in thirst, in nakedness and in the lack of things 32:24 They will be wasted by famine (מָזִי רָעָב)
5:12 One third of you shall die of pestilence (דָּבָר)	28:21 The Lord will make pestilence (דָּבָר) cling to you. 29:21 [Eng 22] The generation to come . . . when they see the plagues (מַכָּה) of the land 32:24 They will be consumed by pestilence (וְלִחְמִי רִשְׁף)
5:17 I will send . . . wild animals (חַיָּה רָעָה) against you, and they will rob you of your children (שָׁכַל)	28:26 Your carcasses will be food for all the birds of the air and the beasts (בְּהֵמָה) of the earth 32:24 The teeth of beasts I will send upon them (וְשֹׁן־בְּהֵמוֹת אֲשַׁלֵּח־בָּם)
5:13 My anger (אַפִּי) shall spend itself, and I will vent my fury (תִּמְתֵּי) and they shall know that I, the Lord, have spoken in my jealousy, when I spend my fury (תִּמְתֵּי) on them.	6:15 Otherwise the anger of the Lord (אַף־יְהוָה) your God will be kindled against you 11:17 The anger of the Lord will be kindled (וְתִרְהַ אַף־יְהוָה) against you

fathers.”⁷⁷ Cannibalism was one of the covenant curses that YHWH had threatened to bring upon the Israelites if they did not obey the covenant stipulations. Describing the Israelites’ persistent disregard of the covenant obligations as an act of hostility⁷⁸ toward him, YHWH threatens to multiply the level of punishment seven times over and declares: “You will eat the flesh of your sons and the flesh of your daughters” (Lev 26:29). Then couched in the context of a military invasion of the homeland and the subsequent siege of the city, Deuteronomy warns of dire consequences of such an invasion, which would involve, among other atrocities, parenticidal cannibalism (Deut 28:53-57).

Then there is the idea of the shaming. In Deut 28:37 YHWH declares: “You will become a thing of horror (לְשִׁמָּה) and an object of scorn (לְמִשָּׁל) and ridicule (לְשִׁנְיָה) to all the nations where the Lord will drive you.” Ezekiel 5:14, 15 uses synonymous terms to convey the same threat: “Moreover I will make you a desolation (לְהִרְבָּה) and an object of mocking (לְהִרְפֶּה) among the nations around you, in the sight of all that pass by. You shall be a mockery (מִרְפָּה) and a taunt (גְּדוּפָה), a warning (מוֹסֵר) and a horror (מְשִׁמָּה), to the nations around you, when I execute judgments on you in anger and fury, and with furious punishments—I, the LORD, have spoken.” Although the two passages do not share the same words, yet thematically the correspondence is quite apparent.

In discussing the exile, it should be noted that this phenomenon as a means of punishment has its roots in the covenant curses of Lev 26 and Deut 28. YHWH makes an

⁷⁷ Wong suggests that Ezekiel uses this “two sided cannibalism” “in order to illustrate the extraordinary action of YHWH.” Wong, *The Idea of Retribution in the Book of Ezekiel*, 93.

⁷⁸ Note the Hebrew word used here is יָקָר, “hostility,” which as Swanson avers is “the state or condition of strife and opposition toward another.” J. Swanson, “יָקָר,” n.p., *DBL* on CD-ROM. Version 3.0g. 2000-2007.

explicit statement regarding the exile in Lev 26:33. He says, וְאַתֶּכֶם אֶזְרָה בְּגוֹיִם, “I will scatter you among the nations,” and follows this by the description of the desolation that would characterize the land and the ruin that would befall the cities during the period of exile. Deuteronomy also contains explicit statements that relate to exile. One of these makes it clear that YHWH would drive them and their king to a nation unknown to them or to their fathers, and while there, they would become an “object of scorn and ridicule” to the surrounding nations (Deut 28:36, 37). This thought is reiterated in Deut 28:64 where the Lord says he would scatter (פִּיץ) them among the nations, from one end of the earth to the other. YHWH also does not want to leave any doubt as to how the exile would affect their posterity and so he says, “You will have sons and daughters but you will not to keep them, because they will go into שְׁבִי, “captivity” (Deut 28:41). As a deterrent against sliding into disobedience, YHWH follows this warning by painting a bleak picture of what the exilic conditions would be like (Deut 28:64-68).

Another correspondence is YHWH’s use of various plagues as a means of punishment in Ezek 5:12, 17. The first time we encounter the concept of plagues in the Pentateuch is in Gen 12:17 when YHWH afflicted Pharaoh’s house with great pestilence (נִגַּע) because of Sarah, Abraham’s wife. The next major block where plagues are used as instruments of judgment is in their use as a means of punishment for Pharaoh’s refusal to let the Israelites leave (Exod 5:3; 7:14-11:10).⁷⁹ These plagues were a case of divine judgment on the gods of Egypt (Exod 12:12; Num 33:4) and should have informed the

⁷⁹ It should be noted that the word דִּבָּר that is used in Ezek 5:12, 17 appears only in Exod 5:3; 9:3, 15. Other words used for plague in the plague narratives of Exodus are מִגִּפָּה, נִגַּע, צָרָעָה.

Israelites of the impotence of such gods in comparison to YHWH. In Exod 23:28, YHWH promises to send pestilence (צִרְעָה) before the Israelites to drive out the Hivites, the Canaanites, and the Hittites. Plagues are then used as a means of punishment because of the Israelites' disobedience and worship of the golden calf (Exod 32:35).

The threat of wild animals as a means of judgment also finds correspondence in Ezek 5:17. The text does not explicitly state what role the wild animals would play as agents of judgment among the population. The author apparently assumes the reader should be aware of the extent of damage wild animals can do when released on unsuspecting victims. However in Lev 26:22, YHWH clarifies their role and declares that the wild animals he intends to unleash among the recalcitrant Israelites would create such great havoc that they would bereave (שָׁכַל)⁸⁰ them of their children,⁸¹ destroy their cattle, and reduce their population. The implication here is the decimation of both the economic and familial areas of the people's lives. A general allusion to the punishment by wild animals is in the song Moses rehearsed in the hearing of the Israelites just before his death in Deut 32:24 where coupled with hunger and pestilence that YHWH threatens to bring, he also says "I will also send against them the teeth of beasts, with the poison of serpents of the dust." Similar allusions can also be seen in the promise YHWH gave to

⁸⁰ Hamilton notes that when this verb is translated "to make childless" then the context is that of divine judgment. V. P. Hamilton, "שָׁכַל," n.p., *TWOT* on CD-ROM. Version 3.0g. 2000-2007.

⁸¹ To those critical of YHWH's extreme punitive measures against the Israelites such a treatment of the defenseless and the vulnerable would be considered a case of child abuse.

the Israelites that he would send the hornet before them to drive out the Canaanites (Deut 7:20; Josh 24:12; cf. Exod 23:28).⁸²

YHWH also announces the use of the sword in punishing Israel (Ezek 5:12, 17). The sword, as an implement of judgment, is found in a number of places in the Pentateuch.⁸³ As part of the covenant blessings Israel was never meant to fall under the impact of the sword. They were supposed to use the sword in pursuit of their enemies (Lev 26:6, 7, 8). However, in the event of disobedience YHWH was prepared to reverse the curse of the sword to fall upon Israel (Lev 26:25, 33, 36, 37; Deut 13:16). Ezekiel 5:12 has the statement, וְהִרְבֵּיתִי אֶחֶרְיָם אַחֲרֵיהֶם, “I will draw the sword after them.” This finds correspondence in Lev 26:33, וְהִרְבֵּיתִי אֶחֶרְיָם אַחֲרֵיכֶם הָרֶב, “I will draw the sword after you.”⁸⁴

Ezekiel 5:5-17 and the Former Prophets

Like the parts of the Old Testament already discussed, Ezek 5:5-17 has intertextual relations with the books of Joshua, Judges, Samuel, and Kings. Because these books recount the Israelites’ progressive drift into sin and YHWH’s justice as he deals

⁸² Neufeld posits that the hornet “prevalent in Israel and its close vicinity is *Vespa orientalis*. . . . This insect was often referred to as a dangerous animal, together with deadly serpents, etc.” Edward Neufeld, “Insects as Warfare Agents in the Ancient Near East (Ex. 23-28; Deut. 7:20; Josh. 24:12; Isa. 7:18-20),” *Or* 49 (1980): 30-57. For further discussion on the meaning of the hornet in these texts see Adolph L. Harstad, *Joshua* (St. Louis, Mo.: Concordia, 2004), 772-73; David M. Howard, Jr., *Joshua* (Nashville, Tenn.: Broadman & Holman, 1998), 432-33.

⁸³ Gen 3:24; Exod 5:3; 17:13; 22:23; 32:27; Lev 26:6, 7, 8, 25, 33, 36, 37; Num 14:3, 43; 20:18; 31:8; Deut 13:16; 20:13; 32:25, 41, 42.

⁸⁴ Similar construction aimed at Israel is also found in Ezek 5:2; 12:14. For other uses see Exod 15:9; Ezek 30:11, against Egypt; Ezek 28:7 against Tyre.

with them,⁸⁵ they are therefore perfect correlates to Ezek 5:5-17 where Israel is facing divine punishment on account of her many sins. Three major accusations leveled against Israel in Ezek 5:5-17 find correspondences in the Former Prophets: disobedience and rebellion against YHWH's מִשְׁפָּטִים, “ordinances,” and חֻקִּים, “statutes” (Ezek 5:6, 7); idolatry (Ezek 5:9, 11); and desecration of the sanctuary (Ezek 5:11). Let us first look at the concept of disobedience to YHWH's commandments. Table 19 shows the links on disobedience between Ezek 5:5-17 and the Former Prophets.

There are four verbs that YHWH uses to express Israel's relations to the statutes and ordinances. Jerusalem is accused of rebelling (מָרָדָה) against YHWH's laws and decrees, rejecting (סָרָה) the laws and not following (לֹא־הִלְכָה) the decrees, and not keeping (לֹא־שָׁמְרָה) the laws (Ezek 5:6, 7). In his farewell speech, Samuel cautioned the Israelites not to rebel (מָרָדָה) against the commandments of the Lord and that any such rebellion would incur YHWH's wrath against both the people and king (1 Sam 12:14).

The cause of the fall of the northern kingdom is partly attributed to the defiance shown by the Israelites in rejecting (סָרָה) YHWH's decrees and covenant (2 Kgs 17:14, 20). The most disheartening use of the verb סָרָה is YHWH's pronouncement during the reign of Josiah. In spite of Josiah's reformation efforts YHWH was still enraged by the deeds of Israel and so declares, “I will reject (אֶסְרֶה) Jerusalem,⁸⁶ the city I chose, and

⁸⁵ Barton, "Prophecy and Theodicy," 77-78; idem, "Historiography and Theodicy in the Old Testament," 27-33.

⁸⁶ See 2 Kgs 21:13-14 for the somber description of YHWH's intended action against Jerusalem. See also Gary N. Knoppers, "Yhwh's Rejection of the House Built for His Name: On the Significance of Anti-temple Rhetoric in the Deuteronomistic History," in *Essays on Ancient Israel in Its Near Eastern Context: A Tribute to Nadav Na'aman* (ed. Y. Amit et al.; Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 2006), 221-38.

Table 19. Ezekiel 5:5-17 and disobedience in the Former Prophets

Ezekiel 5:5-17		Disobedience in the Former Prophets	
v. 6	She has rebelled (רָמָהּ) against my ordinances (מִשְׁפָּטַי), and my statutes (חֻקֹּתַי)	1 Sam 12:14, 15	If you fear the Lord . . . and do not rebel (תִּמְרֹד) against his commands But if you do not obey the Lord, and if you rebel (וַיִּמְרֹדוּ) against his commands
v. 7	She has rejected (מָאָסָה) my ordinances (מִשְׁפָּטַי) and has not followed (לֹא הִלְכָהּ) my decrees	1 Sam 15:23, 26 2 Kgs 17:15 2 Kgs 17:20 2 Kgs 23:27	Since you have rejected (מָאָסָה) the word of the Lord, he has also rejected (וַיִּמְאָסֶהָ) you as king They rejected (וַיִּמְאָסוּ) his statutes (חֻקָּיו) and the covenant he had made with their fathers Therefore the Lord rejected (וַיִּמְאָס) all the people of Israel I will reject (וַיִּמְאָסֶנּוּ) this city, Jerusalem, that I chose
v. 7	You have not followed (לֹא הִלַּכְתֶּם) my statutes (חֻקֹּתַי) or kept my ordinances (מִשְׁפָּטַי), but have acted according to the ordinances of (מִשְׁפָּטַי) the nations	1 Kgs 11:33 2 Kgs 17:34 2 Kgs 17:37	They have not walked (וְלֹא-הִלְכוּ) in my way . . . my statue (וְחֻקֹּתַי) and my ordinance (חֻקִּי) They do not follow their statues (חֻקֵּיהֶם) and their ordinances (וּמִשְׁפָּטֵיהֶם) The statutes (חֻקֵּיהֶם) and the ordinances (מִשְׁפָּטֵיהֶם) . . . you must be careful to keep

this temple, about which I said, ‘There shall my name be’” (2 Kgs 23:27). The basic institutions that Israel relied on are now the objects of YHWH’s wrath. This declaration is tantamount to the annulment of the covenant since it also uses the word בָּחַר, “choose,” which has covenant connotations. YHWH does this because Israel has rejected their covenant obligations.

Similarly the nouns מִשְׁפָּט, “judgment, ordinance, law,” הִקָּדָה, “decree, statute, ordinance,” used in Ezek 5:6, 7 find echoes in several places in the Former Prophets. Sometimes they are used to demonstrate obedience, as when David says he did not turn from YHWH’s ordinances (מִשְׁפָּט) and statutes (הִקָּדָה) (2 Sam 22:23), sometimes to inspire and encourage obedience (1 Kgs 2:3; 6:12; 8:58; 9:4) or as a warning of consequences resulting from disobedience (1 Kgs 11:33; 2 Kgs 17:34; 17:37).

Idolatry also provides another link with the Former Prophets and Ezek 5:5-17 (see table 20). Ezekiel uses a number of words for idolatry. These include תועבה, “detestable thing, abomination” (Ezek 5:9, 7:20; 11:18, 21; 16:36), which with respect to the Former Prophets is found only in Kings (1 Kgs 14:24; 2 Kgs 16:3; 21:2, 11; 23:13). One of the usages harks back to the time of Rehoboam during whose time “the people engaged in all the detestable practices of the nations (הַתועבות הַגוֹיִם) the Lord had driven out before the Israelites” (1 Kgs 14:24). The other occurrence relates to king Ahaz who “sacrificed his son in the fire, following the detestable practices of the nations (כְּתַעֲבוֹת הַגוֹיִם) the Lord had driven out before the Israelites” (2 Kgs 16:3).

King Manasseh, regarded as the most sinful king of Israel and blamed for the fall of Judah, also “followed the detestable practices of the nations (כְּתַעֲבוֹת הַגוֹיִם) the Lord

Table 20. Ezekiel 5:5-17 and idolatry in the Former Prophets

Ezekiel 5:5-17		Idolatry in the Former Prophets	
v. 9	I will do in you that which I have not done . . . because of all your abominations (תועבותיך)	1 Kgs 14:24	The people engaged in all the detestable practices of the nations (התועבות הגוים)
v. 11	You have defiled (טמאת) my sanctuary with all your detestable things (שקוציך) and with all your abominations (תועבותיך)	2 Kgs 16:23	Ahaz . . . even made his son pass through fire, according to the abominable practices of the nations (כתועבות הגוים)
		2 Kgs 21:2	Manasseh did evil in the eyes of the Lord, following the detestable practices of the nations (כתועבות הגוים)
		2 Kgs 21:11	Because King Manasseh of Judah has committed these abominations (התועבות)
		1 Kgs 11:5	He has led Judah into sin with his idols (בגליליו)
		1 Kgs 11:7	Solomon . . . followed Ashtoreth the goddess of the Sidonians, and Molech the detestable god (שקץ) of the Ammonites
		2 Kgs 23:13	Solomon . . . built a high place for Chemosh the detestable god (שקץ) of Moab, and for Molech the detestable god (שקץ) of the Ammonites (1 Kgs 11:7).
		2 Kgs 23:24	King Josiah desecrated the high places which King Solomon of Israel had built for Astarte the abomination (שקץ) of the Sidonians, for Chemosh the abomination (שקץ) of Moab, and for Milcom the abomination (תועבת) of the Ammonites Josiah put away the mediums, wizards, teraphim, idols (הגללים), and all the abominations (השקצים) that were seen in the land of Judah and in Jerusalem

had driven out before the Israelites” (2 Kgs 21:2). Verse 11 specifies some of the detestable things (הַתְּעִבּוֹת) he did. The last use of the word touts the work of Josiah who destroyed the idolatrous institutions established by Solomon including the high place “for Molech the detestable god (תּוֹעֵבַת) of the people of Ammon” (2 Kgs 23:13).

Further correspondence is found in the use of the word תְּעִבָּה, “abomination, detestable thing, idol.”⁸⁷ Only the books of Kings⁸⁸ carry it within the Former Prophets. In two of the references the word is associated with Solomon, for it is said that he “followed Ashtoreth the goddess of the Sidonians, and Molech the detestable god (תְּעִבָּה) of the Ammonites” (1 Kgs 11:5); and he “built a high place for Chemosh the detestable god (תְּעִבָּה) of Moab, and for Molech the detestable god (תְּעִבָּה) of the Ammonites” (1 Kgs 11:7). Josiah is credited with dismantling these during his reform efforts when he “desecrated the high places that were east of Jerusalem . . . the ones Solomon king of Israel had built for Ashtoreth the vile goddess (תְּעִבָּה) of the Sidonians, for Chemosh the vile god (תְּעִבָּה) of Moab” (1 Kgs 11:7; 2 Kgs 23:13, 24).⁸⁹ Apart from these specific words for idols that have their counterparts in Ezek 5:5-17 there are many other names or expressions for idols in the Former Prophets that further inform us of the prevalence

⁸⁷ Ezek 5:11; 7:20; 11:18, 21; 20:7, 8, 30; 37:23.

⁸⁸ 1 Kgs 11:5, 7 [twice]; 2 Kgs 23:13 [twice], 24.

⁸⁹ After examining the close link that exists between Deuteronomy and Kings, Knoppers attributes Solomon’s fall to the laws and statutes in Deuteronomy which he flouted. Gary N. Knoppers, “Solomon’s Fall and Deuteronomy,” in *The Age of Solomon: Scholarship at the Turn of the Millennium* (ed. L. K. Handy; Leiden: Brill, 1997), 392-410. For more perspectives on Solomon’s malfeasance see Christopher T. Begg, “Solomon’s Apostasy (1 Kgs 11:1-13) According to Josephus,” *JSJ* 28 (1997): 294-313.

of idolatry in both Israel and Judah.⁹⁰ Some of these include אֱלֹהִים אֲחֵרִים, (other gods)⁹¹ Baal worship,⁹² high places (בָּמֹת),⁹³ hosts of heaven (צְבָא הַשָּׁמַיִם),⁹⁴ תַּרְפִּים,⁹⁵ that inform us of the Israelites' disregard for YHWH's aversion of idolatry.

In Ezekiel the Israelites desecrate the sanctuary with their idols (Ezek 5:11).

Echoes of similar actions are found in 1 and 2 Kings. Ahaz is accused of introducing an altar modeled after the altars in Damascus to the Jerusalem temple (2 Kgs 16:10-16).⁹⁶

⁹⁰ Katzenstein discusses the practice of idolatry in Israel and Judah from the time of King Solomon to Josiah's reformation. He identifies the following Phoenician deities as prevalent in Israel and Judah: Baal-Shamêm, Baal-Melqart, and Astarte. H. J. Katzenstein, "Phoenician Deities Worshipped in Israel and Judah during the Time of the First Temple," in *Phoenicia and the Bible: Proceedings of the Conference Held at the University of Leuven on the 15th and 16th of March 1990* (ed. E. Lipinski; Leuven: Departement Oriëntalistiek, 1991), 187-91.

⁹¹ Josh 23:16; 24:2, 16; Judg 2:12, 17, 19; 10:13; 1 Sam 8:8; 26:19; 1 Kgs 9:6, 9; 11:4, 10; 14:9; 2 Kgs 5:17; 17:7, 35, 37, 38; 22:17.

⁹² Judg 2:11, 13; 3:7; 10:6, 10; 1 Kgs 16:31; 22:53; 2 Kgs 10:19, 21, 22, 23; 17:16; 21:3. For discussion on Baal worship in ancient Israel, see Leslie Hoppe who suggests that the Israelites engaged in Baal worship for two basic reasons: to reap the benefits that accrued from the storm god Baal and thus "ensure their survival," and because Baalism enjoyed state patronage. Leslie J. Hoppe, "Elijah and the Prophets of Baal," *TBT* 41 (2003): 348-53. Eugene Peterson draws a distinction between the worship of Baal and the worship of YHWH and argues that Baal worship was geared toward "worship experiences" that appealed to human natural, sensual instincts while YHWH worship was a "revelation obedience oriented worship." Eugene H. Peterson, "Baalism and Yahwism Updated," *ThTo* 29 (1972): 138-43. From the study of Canaanite mythology as revealed in Ugaritic literature, Bronner concludes that the miracles and wonders done by Elijah and Elisha were aimed at refocusing the peoples' attention to YHWH and thus "undermine the belief prevalent in Canaanite circles that Baal was the dispenser of all these blessings" and "aimed to act as a foil against the claim made by pagan mythology that Baal lorded over all these elements in the universe." Leah Bronner, *The Stories of Elijah and Elisha: Polemics against Baal Worship* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1968), 140.

⁹³ 2 Sam 1:19, 25; 3:2, 3, 4; 11:7; 12:31, 32; 13:2, 32, 33; 14:23; 15:14; 22:43; 2 Kgs 12:3; 14:4; 15:4, 35; 16:4; 17:9, 11, 29, 32; 18:4, 22; 21:3; 23:5, 8, 9, 13, 15, 19, 20.

⁹⁴ 2 Kgs 17:16; 21:3, 5; 23:4, 5.

⁹⁵ Judg 17:5; 18:14, 17, 18, 20; 1 Sam 15:23; 19:13, 16; 2 Kgs 23:24.

⁹⁶ For more negative portrayal of King Ahaz's activities see 2 Chr 28:1-4, 22-25, where among other things he is accused of offering sacrifices to the gods of Damascus, removing the furnishings from the temple, and setting up altars in every street corner in Jerusalem.

Nadav Na'aman suggests that apart from the new altar Ahaz also rearranged the temple and its precincts⁹⁷ replacing the bronze altar with the newly constructed one.⁹⁸ Why a king, chosen by YHWH to lead his people, would make such changes to the national cult system defies any logic.⁹⁹ Such actions showed a clear disregard for the sanctity of YHWH's sanctuary. Manasseh is said to have taken "the carved Asherah Pole he had made and put it in the temple" at Jerusalem (2 Kgs 21:3, 4, 7).¹⁰⁰ This was also an act of desecration of the temple equivalent to what was being done in the time of Ezekiel where various idols were brought into the temple. It is thus not surprising to see YHWH's declaration to destroy Jerusalem because of Manasseh's sins (2 Kgs 21:11-13).

Other points of contact between the Former Prophets and Ezek 5 are in the use of the curse language in which YHWH announces that Israel would be banished from its land and cast out of his sight and as a consequence Israel will become "a proverb (מִשְׁלֵי) and a taunt (שִׁנְיָה) among all peoples" (1 Kgs 9:7). The words give a thematical semblance to a similar threat found in Ezek 5:14, 15: "I will make you a ruin and a

⁹⁷ Nadav Na'aman, *Ancient Israel's History and Historiography: The First Temple Period* (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 2006), 223.

⁹⁸ Smelik sees a link between King Ahaz's actions and the cult reforms of King Jeroboam of Israel. Klaas A. D. Smelik, "The Representation of King Ahaz in 2 Kings 16 and 2 Chronicles 28," in *Intertextuality in Ugarit and Israel* (ed. J. C. De Moor; Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1998), 143-85.

⁹⁹ See Smelik's article in which he discounts arguments in favor of Assyrian imposition of its cultic practices on Judah as a possible cause for King Ahaz's actions. Klaas A. D. Smelik, "The New Altar of King Ahaz (2 Kings 16): Deuteronomistic Re-interpretation of a Cult Reform," in *Deuteronomy and Deuteronomistic Literature* (ed. M. Vervenne and J. Lust; Louvain: Leuven University Press, 1997), 263-78.

¹⁰⁰ For biblical polemics against Asherah see T. Binger, *Asherah: Goddess in Ugarit, Israel and the Old Testament* (JSOT Supp. 232; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1997); R. Kletter, *The Judean Pillar-Figurines and the Archaeology of Asherah* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996); S. M. Olyan, *Asherah and the Cult of Yahweh in Israel* (Atlanta, Ga.: Scholars, 1988).

reproach among the nations. . . . You will be a reproach and a taunt, a warning and an object of horror to the nations around you.” Ezekiel 5:13 gives the intimation that YHWH’s punishments against Israel were going to be done in anger (אֵרָא) and in wrath (אֵזָרָא). Echoes of the theme of the anger (אֵרָא) of the Lord are found in all the books of the Former Prophets.¹⁰¹ Second Kings 22:13, 17 mentions YHWH’s wrath (אֵזָרָא) that is kindled against the people and the temple because of their disobedience.

Ezekiel’s prophecy reveals patricidal cannibalism as one of the covenant curses to be unleashed upon Israel (Ezek 5:10). This is reminiscent of the events in 2 Kgs 6:24-31 during Ben-hadad’s siege of Samaria when severe famine in the city forced two women to eat their children. The other major account of famine in 2 Kings occurs during the Babylonian invasion of Jerusalem (2 Kgs 25:3).

Ezekiel 5:5-17 and the Latter Prophets

The book of Ezekiel falls within the larger context of the Latter Prophets. Many issues that Ezekiel addressed were the focus of other prophets as well. Some of the prophets, like Jeremiah, were his contemporaries. It is therefore not surprising to find many correspondences that connect Ezekiel and the rest of the prophets. This section examines the intertextual links between Ezek 5:5-17 and the Latter Prophets within the framework of the following guiding questions: How does this passage fit within the overall framework of the prophetic literature? What contribution does this make to the

¹⁰¹ Josh 7:1; 23:16; Judg 2:14, 20; 3:8; 10:7; 2 Sam 6:7; 24:1; 2 Kgs 24:20.

interpretation of Ezek 5:5-17 and, furthermore, what picture of God emerges from this understanding?

Ezekiel 5:5-17 is couched in a covenant lawsuit motif. A number of passages in the other Latter Prophets bear the hallmark of the covenant lawsuit.¹⁰² I will use Mic 6:1-16 as a representative passage to illustrate the intertextual link that Ezek 5:5-17 has with other covenant lawsuit motifs in the latter prophets. Table 21 displays these links. Once again YHWH establishes his case on the basis of what he has done and Israel's failure to fulfill their part of the bargain. When YHWH unleashes the curses upon them, he is simply following the laid-out court procedure, which dictates that covenant violators suffer the consequences of their actions.

Table 21. Covenant lawsuit in Ezekiel 5:5-17 and Micah 6:1-16

Ezekiel 5:5-17	Micah 6:1-16
Ezek 5:5 Witnesses: the nations YHWH has placed around Jerusalem	List of witnesses (heaven and earth; mountains and hills): Mic 6:1-2a
Ezek 5:7, 8, 11 Preamble (The Messenger formula: "Thus says the Lord")	Preamble (introduction of the suzerain and call to judgment): Mic 6:1-2
Ezek 5:5 Beneficent actions toward Jerusalem (I have placed her in the midst of the nations)	Historical prologue (review of the suzerain's benevolent acts toward the vassal): Mic 6:3-5
Ezek 5:6, 7, 11 Indictment (breach of covenant stipulations)	Indictments (breach of covenant stipulations): Mic 6:6-8 (review of general stipulations), 9-12 (violation of the specific stipulations)
Ezek 5:12, 16-17 Verdict and sentence (pronouncement of curses)	Verdict (guilty, "Therefore") and sentence (pronouncement of the curses): Mic 6:13-16

¹⁰² For a list of some of these texts, see Davidson, "The Covenant Lawsuit Motif in Canonical Perspective," 22.

Having established that Ezek 5:5-17, as a covenant lawsuit, has affinities to some passages of the Latter Prophets, our exploration of these links now focuses on Jerusalem as a city which is the target of YHWH's judgment. In Ezek 5:5 YHWH's statement identifying the culprit is terse, candid, and outrightly targeted: "This is Jerusalem." Although we do not find such pithy and concise statements in other prophetic books, yet many prophetic writings are quite explicit on YHWH's focused and determined impending judgment on Jerusalem. Jeremiah, for example, is directed to "Go and proclaim (נִבֵּן) in the hearing of Jerusalem" (Jer 2:2); and again, "Announce (נִבֵּן) in Judah and proclaim in Jerusalem" (Jer 4:5). In Jer 5:1 Jerusalem is singled out for scrutiny to see if there is any righteous person in it. The implication is that there is no such person, hence judgment is inevitable. Thematically Jer 5:1-19 mirrors Ezek 5 in that Jerusalem is identified as the focus of judgment (vv. 1-9), followed by the section dealing with the type of judgment to be meted out to Judah. The theme of Jerusalem being put under the searchlight is also the subject of Zephaniah (Zeph 1:12). Here too YHWH promises to take stern action against the complacent who think that YHWH will do nothing.

The לִכְנֹן and יָעַן formulation that introduces the basis of judgment and the resultant punishment in a number of passages in the Latter Prophets have links with Ezek 5 (see table 22). This demonstrates in an unequivocal way that YHWH's judgments are justified. He does not dispense punishment without any proper cause.

The reasons given in Ezek 5:5-17 for the indictments have corresponding features in the Former Prophets. These correlations can be summarized as follows: Israel's failure

Table 22. לָכֵן and יַעַן in Ezekiel 5:5-17 and the Latter Prophets

לָכֵן and יַעַן in Ezekiel 5:5-17		לָכֵן and יַעַן in the Latter Prophets
לָכֵן יַעַן Therefore . . . because	<p>v. 7 Therefore (לָכֵן) thus says the Lord God because (יַעַן) you are more tumultuous than the nations which are around you</p> <p>v. 11 Therefore (לָכֵן) as I live, a declaration of the Lord God, surely, because (יַעַן) you have defiled my sanctuary</p>	<p>Isa 30:12 Therefore (לָכֵן) thus says the Holy one of Israel because (יַעַן) you rejected this word</p> <p>Jer 5:14 Therefore (לָכֵן) thus says the Lord . . . because (יַעַן) you have spoken this word</p> <p>Jer 23:38 Therefore (לָכֵן) thus says the Lord because (יַעַן) you spoke this word</p> <p>Jer 25:8 Therefore (לָכֵן) thus says the Lord . . . because (יַעַן) you have not obeyed my words</p> <p>Jer 35:17 Therefore (לָכֵן) thus says the Lord . . . I am bringing upon Judah . . . every disaster . . . because (יַעַן) I have spoken to them but they did not listen</p>

to follow the prescribed laws, rampant idolatry, and disregard for the sanctity of the sanctuary. First, Israel is accused of rebelling (מָרָה) against and rejecting (מָאָס) YHWH's statutes and ordinances (Ezek 5:6) and failing to follow them (Ezek 5:7). Table 23 shows disobedience and rebellion in Ezek 5:5-17 and in the Latter Prophets.

This accusation finds parallels in the Latter Prophets where the same words, מָרָה and מָאָס, are used in several places. Isaiah accuses the Israelites of rebelling (מָרָה) and grieving the Holy Spirit (Isa 63:10). Israel's rebellion (מָרָה) prompts YHWH to send foreign armies into the cities of Judah (Jer 4:16-17). Apparently Judah failed to learn from the fate of her northern neighbor who had been taken captive by the Assyrians, partly because she rebelled against the Lord (Hos 14:1). Yet this rebellious tendency is

Table 23. Ezekiel 5:5-17 and disobedience and rebellion in the Latter Prophets

Ezekiel 5:5-17		The Latter Prophets	
v. 6	She has rebelled (וַתִּמְרֹד) against my ordinances . . . and against my statutes	Isa 1:20 Isa 3:8 Isa 63:10 Jer 4:17 Jer 5:23 Hos 14:1	If you refuse and rebel (וַיִּמְרִי־תֶם) Jerusalem and Judah . . . their deeds are against the Lord, to provoke (לְמַרוֹת) the eyes of His glory They rebelled (מָרָוּ) and grieved his Holy Spirit They have closed in on her . . . because she has rebelled (מָרָתָהּ) against me This people has a stubborn and rebellious (וַיְמֹרֶה) heart Samaria shall bear her guilt because she has rebelled (מָרָתָהּ) against her Lord
v. 6	They have rejected (מִצֵּסוּ) my ordinances and have not followed my decrees	Isa 5:24 Isa 8:6 Isa 30:12 Jer 6:19 Jer 7:29 Jer 8:9 Jer 14:19 Jer 31:37 Jer 33:24 Jer 33:26 Hos 4:6	They have rejected (מִצֵּסוּ) the instruction of the Lord Because this people has refused (מִצֵּסוּ) the waters of Shiloah that flow gently Because you reject (מִצֵּסְכֶם) this word They have rejected (וַיִּצְטְאוּ) my teaching The Lord has rejected (מִצֵּא) and forsaken the generation that provoked His wrath The wise shall be put to shame . . . since they have rejected (וַיִּצְטְאוּ) the word of the Lord Have you completely rejected (מִצֵּסְתָּ) Judah? I will reject (מִצֵּא) all the seed of Israel because of all they have done The two families the Lord chose he has rejected (וַיִּצְטְאֵם) them Would I reject (מִצֵּא) the seed of Jacob and my servant David Because you have rejected (מִצֵּסְתָּ) knowledge I reject (וַיִּצְטְאֵךָ) you from being priest to me

Table 23—Continued.

Ezekiel 5:5-17		The Latter Prophets	
v. 6	They have rejected (מִצְוֹתַי) my ordinances and have not followed my decrees	Hos 9:17	Because they have not listened to him my God will reject (יִמְאַסֵּם) them
		Amos 2:4	For three transgressions of Judah . . . I will not revoke the punishment . . . because of their rejecting (מִצְוֹתַי) the law of the Lord
v. 6	She has rebelled against my ordinances (מִצְוֹתַי) . . . and against my statutes (חֻקֵּי)	Isa 59:2	They seek me . . . as if they are a nation that . . . did not forsake the ordinance (מִצְוָה) of their God
v. 7	You have not followed my statutes (חֻקֵּי) or kept my ordinances (מִצְוֹתַי), but have acted according to the ordinances of (מִצְוֹתַי) the nations	Jer 5:4	They do not know the way of their Lord, the law (מִצְוָה) of their God
		Jer 5:5	They know the way of the Lord, the law (מִצְוָה) of their God
		Jer 8:7	My people do not know the ordinance (מִצְוָה) of the Lord
		Jer 33:25	The ordinances (חֻקֹּת) of heaven and earth
		Jer 44:10	They have not walked in my law or in my statutes (וּבְחֻקֵּי)
		Jer 44:23	You have not walked in his law and in his statutes (וּבְחֻקֵּי) and in his decrees
		Zeph 2:3	Seek the Lord you humble of the land who do his commands (מִצְוֹתַי)
		Mal 3:22	Remember the teaching of my servant Moses, the statutes and ordinances (חֻקִּים וּמִצְוֹתַי) that I commanded him at Horeb for all Israel
		Mic 6:16	The statutes (חֻקֹּת) of Omri are kept

not just of an outward nature; it is deeply ingrained in the heart (Jer 5:3).

Israel not only rebelled against the statutes (חֻקִּים) and ordinances (טֻעֲמֹת). They have also rejected (דָּחָה) them (Ezek 5:6). In many instances where Israel is the subject of the verb דָּחָה, the direct object is expressed in relation to the word of God; for example, “they have rejected the instruction of the Lord” (Isa 5:24); “they have rejected my teaching” (Jer 6:19); “they have rejected the word of the Lord” (Jer 8:9); “they have rejected the law of the Lord” (Amos 2:4). An interesting twist takes place when YHWH is the subject of the verb דָּחָה. Israel becomes the direct object of דָּחָה. Hence Jeremiah can announce that “the Lord has rejected and forsaken the generation that provoked his wrath” (Jer 7:29); “I will reject all the seed of Israel because of what they have done” (Jer 31:37); “the two families the Lord chose he has rejected them” (Jer 33:24).¹⁰³ We can therefore see that when Ezekiel levels these accusations on Israel, his is not a lonely voice in the wilderness. He is echoing other prophetic voices, some of whom preceded him and others who are his contemporaries. They all express the concern of Israel’s disobedience, knowing quite well the dire consequences of such rebelliousness.

The second facet of Israel’s waywardness is manifested in her entanglement with idolatry. The prophets, cognizant of covenant stipulations, are very clear in upholding

¹⁰³ An interesting discussion on Israel’s relationship to YHWH during the exile is that of Saul Olyan in an article in which he suggests three possible positions of the covenant. First is the anti-rejectionists who believe YHWH did not at any time reject Israel and at no time was the covenant abrogated (Isa 54:7, 8; Jer 33:17, 18; 19:22). Their argument is that YHWH was only punishing Israel temporarily. Then there are the rejectionists who argue that because of Israel’s spurning the covenant stipulations, YHWH rejected them only later to reenact a new covenant with them (Jer 14:19, 21; 33:24; 2 Kgs 23:7). Lastly is the view that the covenant curses and the subsequent judgment can be reversed only if the people repent and confess their sins. Saul M. Olyan, “The Status of Covenant During the Exile,” 333-44.

biblical monotheism. YHWH deserves total allegiance and he alone is to be worshiped. However, the reality on the ground, as we have seen in the discussion on the Pentateuch and the Former Prophets, is that the enticement of idolatry was a constant threat to the Israelites' religious life and their relationship with YHWH. The Latter Prophets are therefore replete with polemics against idolatry.¹⁰⁴ Table 24 gives an overview of these idolatrous practices.

Ezekiel, like his counterparts in the prophetic guild, spoke against this religious menace. The words he uses like abominations (תועבה) and detestable things (שקוצים) to express this concern (Ezek 5:5:9, 11) find parallels in the other prophets as well.¹⁰⁵ In his accusation against the Israelites, Isaiah says וּבְשִׁקּוּצֵיהֶם נִפְשָׁם חִפְצָה, “they take delight in their abominations” (Isa 66:3). Jeremiah is categorical that YHWH could not stand the sight of their abominations (Jer 44:22). Malachi sums it thus, “Judah has been faithless and abomination (תועבה) has been committed in Israel and in Jerusalem” (Mal 2:11). Hosea notes that Israel became so involved in these idolatrous practices to the extent that שִׁקּוּצִים כָּאֲהָבָם, “they became detestable like the thing they loved” (Hos 9:10).

Employing similar words used in Ezek 5, the prophets portray Israel as a people who are deeply engrossed in idolatry, blatantly flouting the covenant and seemingly ignorant of the horrendous consequences. Because of this the wrath of YHWH will soon

¹⁰⁴ Joel S. Burnett, "Changing Gods: An Exposition of Jeremiah 2," *RevExp* 101 (2004): 289-99; R. Dennis Cole, "A Crisis of Faith: The Idolatry Polemics in the Book of Hosea," *TTE* 48 (1993): 63-76.

¹⁰⁵ For תועבה see Isa 1:13; 41:24; 44:19; Jer 2:7; 6:15; 7:10; 8:12; 16:18; 32:35; 44:4, 22; Mal 2:11; for שקיץ see Isa 66:3; Jer 4:1; 7:30; 13:27; 16:18; 32:34; Hos 9:10; Nah 3:6; Zech 9:7.

Table 24. Ezekiel 5:5-17 and idolatry in the Latter Prophets

Ezekiel 5:5-17		The Latter Prophets	
v. 9	I will do in you that which I have not done . . . because of all your abominations (תועבתֶיךָ)	Isa 1:13 Jer 2:7 Jer 6:15 Jer 7:10 Jer 8:12 Jer 16:18 Jer 32:35 Jer 44:4 Jer 44:22 Isa 1:13 Isa 41:24 Isa 44:19 Jer 2:7 Jer 6:15 Jer 7:10 Jer 8:12 Jer 16:18 Jer 32:35 Jer 44:4 Jer 44:22	Bringing offerings is futile, incense is an abomination (תועבה) to me When you entered you defiled (טמא) my land and made my heritage an abomination (תועבה) They acted shamefully, they committed abomination (תועבה) Then come and stand before me in this house . . . only to go on doing all these abominations (תועבה) They committed abomination (תועבה) They have filled my inheritance with their abominations (תועבה) Nor did it enter my mind that they should do this abomination (תועבה) causing Judah to sin Please, do not do this abominable (תועבה) thing that I hate The Lord could not bear the sight of your evil doings, the abominations (תועבה) that you committed Bringing offerings is futile, incense is an abomination (תועבה) to me Your work is nothing at all whoever chooses you is an abomination (תועבה) Shall I make the rest of it an abomination (תועבה) When you entered you defiled (טמא) my land and made my heritage an abomination (תועבה) They acted shamefully, they committed abomination (תועבה) Then come and stand before me in this house . . . only to go on doing all these abominations (תועבה) They acted shamefully, they committed abomination (תועבה) They have filled my inheritance with their abominations (תועבה) Nor did it enter my mind that they should do this abomination (תועבה) causing Judah to sin Please, do not do this abominable (תועבה) thing that I hate The Lord could not bear the sight of your evil doings, the abominations (תועבה) that you committed

Table 24—Continued.

	Ezekiel 5:5-17		The Latter Prophets
v. 11	You have defiled my sanctuary with all your detestable things (שְׁקִיץֶיךָ) and with all your abominations	<p>Mal 2:11</p> <p>Isa 66:3</p> <p>Jer 4:1</p> <p>Jer 7:30</p> <p>Jer 13:27</p> <p>Jer 16:18</p> <p>Jer 32:34</p> <p>Hos 9:10</p> <p>Nah 3:6</p> <p>Zech 9:7</p>	<p>Abomination (תועבה) has been committed in Israel and in Jerusalem</p> <p>And in their abominations (ובְּשִׁקְצֵיהֶם) they take delight</p> <p>If you remove your abominations (ובְּשִׁקְצֵיהֶם) from my presence</p> <p>The people of Judah have done evil in my sight . . . they have set their abominations (שְׁקִיץֵהֶם) in the house that is called my name, defiling it</p> <p>I have seen your abominations (שְׁקִיץֶיךָ), woe to you Jerusalem</p> <p>They have polluted my land with the carcasses of their detestable idols (שְׁקִיץֵהֶם)</p> <p>They set up their abominations (שְׁקִיץֵהֶם) in the house that bears my name and they defiled it</p> <p>They consecrated themselves to a thing of shame and became detestable (שְׁקִיץִים) like the thing they loved</p> <p>I will cast upon you abominations (שְׁקִיץִים)</p> <p>I will take away blood from its mouth and its abominations (ושְׁקִיץֹו) from between its teeth</p>
v. 11	You have defiled (טִמַּאתָּ) my sanctuary (מִקְדָּשִׁי) with all your detestable things and with all your abominations	<p>Jer 2:7</p> <p>Jer 7:30</p> <p>Jer 32:34</p> <p>Isa 63:18</p> <p>Jer 51:51</p> <p>Jer 19:13</p> <p>Amos 7:9</p> <p>Jer 2:23</p>	<p>When you entered you defiled (וַתִּטְמָאוּ) my land and made my heritage an abomination</p> <p>The people of Judah have done evil in my sight . . . they have set their abominations in the house that is called my name, defiling (לְטַמְאוֹ) it</p> <p>They set up their abominations in the house that bears my name, defiling (לְטַמְאוֹ) it</p> <p>Our adversaries have trampled down your sanctuary (מִקְדָּשְׁךָ)</p> <p>We are put to shame . . . for Aliens have come into the holy places of the Lord's house</p> <p>And the houses of Jerusalem and the houses of the kings of Judah shall be defiled (טִמַּא)</p> <p>The sanctuaries (וּמִקְדָּשֵׁי) of Israel shall be made waste</p> <p>How can you say, "I am not defiled (וְלֹא טִמַּאתִּי), I have not gone after the Baals"</p>

fall upon them. Other words and expressions that signify idolatry in the Latter Prophets include, but are not limited to, the following: אֱלֹהִים אֲחֵרִים,¹⁰⁶ “other gods,” אֱלִיל,¹⁰⁷ “idols,” עֲצָב,¹⁰⁸ “idol,” תְּרָפִים,¹⁰⁹ “idol, household god,” פֶּסֶל,¹¹⁰ “idol,” מִסְכָּה,¹¹¹ “molten idol,” נִסְךְ,¹¹² “molten idol,” פֶּסֶל,¹¹³ “idol, image,” אֵל, god.¹¹⁴ The prophets use every form of language available to communicate YHWH’s abhorrence of these idols and the futility of relying on them.

Ezekiel’s concern with idolatry was not just that the Israelites worshiped them. They have also brought the תֹּעֲבָה and the שְׁקִיץ into the sanctuary, thus defiling (טָמָא) it (Ezek 5:11). This concept finds a direct allusion to YHWH’s complaint in Jeremiah: “The people of Judah have done evil in my eyes, declares the Lord. They have set up their detestable idols (שְׁקִיצֵיהֶם) in the house that bears my Name (לְטִמְאֹן), to defile it” (Jer 7:30). In Ezek 5:11 the direct object of the verb טָמָא is the מִקְדָּשׁ, “sanctuary,” and the form of the verb used is טָמְאַת, a *Pi’el* perfect second-person feminine singular, indicating that the accusation is directed at Jerusalem, as a representative of the people of

¹⁰⁶ Jer 1:16; 7:6, 9, 18; 11:10; 13:10; 16:11, 13; 19:4, 13; 22:9; 25:6; 32:29; 35:15; 44:3, 5, 8, 15; Hos 3:1.

¹⁰⁷ Isa 2:8, 18, 20 [twice]; 10:10, 11; 19:1, 3; 31:7 [twice]; Ezek 30:13; Hab 2:18.

¹⁰⁸ Isa 10:11; 46:1; Jer 50:2; Hos 4:17; 8:4; 13:2; 14:9 [Eng 8]; Mic 1:7; Zech 13:2.

¹⁰⁹ Ezek 21:26 [Eng 21]; Hos 3:4; Zech 10:2.

¹¹⁰ Isa 40:19, 20; 42:17; 44:9, 10, 15, 7; 45:20; 48:5; Jer 10:14; 51:17; Nah 1:14; 2:18.

¹¹¹ Isa 30:22; 42:17; Ezek 28:13; Hos 13:2; Nah 1:14; Hab 2:18.

¹¹² Isa 42:29; 48:5; Jer 10:14; 51:17.

¹¹³ Isa 10:10; 21:9; 30:22; 42:8; Jer 8:19; 50:38; 51:47, 52; Hos 11:2; Mic 1:7; 5:12 [Eng 13].

¹¹⁴ Isa 43:10; 44:10, 15, 17; 45:20; 46:6; Ezek 28:2 [twice], 9; Mal 2:11.

Judah. Note also that **מִקְדָּשִׁי** is a singular noun with a first-person singular suffix, intentionally used to denote divine ownership. Jeremiah does not want to leave any doubt as to the identity of this institution. Therefore he uses the expression **בְּבֵית** **אֲשֶׁר־נִקְרָא־שְׁמִי עָלָיו**, “the house which is called by my name.”

A closer look at Jer 7:30 reveals how YHWH underscores the personal, yet collective role and engagement of the people of Judah (**בְּנֵי־יְהוּדָה**) by using three action verbs. The first verb is **עָשׂוּ**, “they have done,” a *qal* perfect third-person plural of the verb **עָשָׂה**, “do.” Their action is additionally aggravated by the use of the direct object **הָרָע**, “evil.” The second verb is **שָׂמוּ**, “they have placed,” also a Qal perfect third-person plural of the verb **שָׂם**, “place, set, put.” The last verb **טָמְאוּ**, “defile,” epitomizes the full force of the first two verbs by the purpose clause **לְטַמְאוֹ**, “to defile it,” a *Pi’el* active infinitive construct. The same idea is reiterated in Jer 32:34. Here, though, the antecedents of the verb **שָׂמוּ** appear in v. 32: “The people of Israel and Judah have provoked me by all the evil they have done—they, their kings and officials, their priests and prophets, the men of Judah and the people of Jerusalem.” Jeremiah emphasizes the all-inclusive nature of those involved in this cultic impropriety. This additional information helps us to understand why YHWH is so infuriated that the only recourse he has is to unleash his anger and subsequent judgments upon Israel as is the case in Ezek 5:5-17, a subject to which we now once again turn.

The discussion on Ezek 5:5-17 has revealed that YHWH uses various means to execute judgment. In some of the punishments he annuls promises made to Israel, while in a number of others he invokes the covenant curses upon Israel. In what is known as the

no-pity formula, YHWH declares he would withdraw his favor and would not look on them with pity or spare them (Ezek 5:11).¹¹⁵ It is important to note that the no-pity formula in this verse is preceded by the oath formula **יְיָ־חַיִּי**, “as I live” (see table 25), indicating YHWH’s determination to carry out the subsequent threatened judgments.¹¹⁶

Two things stand out in YHWH’s resolve to enact this punishment. First, a person’s special background, rank, or royal lineage does not shield him or her from YHWH’s judicial assaults. Because of this, even Coniah (Jehoiachin), son of Jehoiakim, and a descendant of the great king Josiah, will have to face the wrath of the great judge of the universe. YHWH has no regard whatsoever for Jehoiachin’s position, therefore he can say, even if he was a **חֶטְמָל**, “signet ring” on his right hand, even from there he would tear him off (Jer 22:24).¹¹⁷ Second, other nations are not spared in this oath. Egypt (Jer 46:18)

¹¹⁵ For discussion of these concepts see Wagner, *TDOT*, 4:271-77; M. Tsevat, “**חַיִּי**,” *TDOT* 4:470-72.

¹¹⁶ While in Ezekiel this oath is directed towards Jerusalem, Jeremiah utilizes it as YHWH swears concerning the disastrous end of king Jehoiachin at the hands of Nebuchadnezzar King of Babylon (Jer 22:24-27). The only other time Jeremiah uses the oath formula is when YHWH announces the inevitable captivity of Egypt (Jer 46:18, 19). Isaiah employs it only once in relation to the restoration of Israel (Isa 49:18), while Zephaniah applies the oath in the oracles against Moab and Ammon (Zeph 2:9).

¹¹⁷ Contrast this with Zerubbabel who YHWH promises to make “like a signet ring” (Hag 2:23). On the significance of the signet ring see F. B. Huey, *Jeremiah/Lamentations* (Nashville, Tenn.: Broadman, 1993), 209. Leslie Allen observes that this act of YHWH is “an announcement of disaster marked by flat denial and finality.” Leslie C. Allen, *Jeremiah: A Commentary* (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox, 2008), 253. See especially Kessler’s article, pp. 110-13, where he discusses “The Nature and Purpose of the Signet Ring Imagery in Jeremiah 22:24 and Haggai 2:23.” John Kessler, “Haggai, Zerubbabel, and the Political Status of Yehud: The Signet Ring in Haggai 2:23,” in *Prophets, Prophecy, and Prophetic Texts in Second Temple Judaism* (ed. M. H. Floyd and R. D. Haak; New York: T&T Clark, 2006), 102-19.

Table 25. אֶי־יָחִי “As I Live” in Ezekiel 5:5-17 and in the Latter Prophets

אֶי־יָחִי in Ezekiel 5	אֶי־יָחִי Oath in the Latter Prophets	Reversal of the אֶי־יָחִי oath in the Latter Prophets
v. 11 Therefore, as I live (אֶי־יָחִי), says the Lord God . . . I will cut you down, my eye will not spare, and I will have no pity	<p>Jer 22:24 As I live (אֶי־יָחִי), declares the Lord, even if Coniah, son of Jehoiakim king of Judah, were a seal on my right hand, I would still tear you off</p> <p>Jer 46:18, 19 As I live (אֶי־יָחִי), declaration of the King, the Lord of hosts . . . pack your bags for exile sheltered daughter Egypt</p> <p>Zeph 2:9 Therefore as I live (אֶי־יָחִי) says the God of hosts the God of Israel, Moab shall become like Sodom</p>	Isa 49:18 As I live (אֶי־יָחִי), says the Lord, you shall put all of them on like an ornament

and Moab (Zeph 2:9) are among the nations YHWH’s judgment net has caught. They may not be part of YHWH’s covenant people, but they are still answerable to the King of the universe. Third, is YHWH’s unimaginable willingness to readmit those who have offended him back into his arena of operation (Isa 9:18).

We have seen YHWH’s resolve to punish Israel by invoking the oath formula and its intertextual relations with other parts of the Latter Prophets. Let us now focus on the correspondences on the no-pity formula in Ezek 5 and the Latter Prophets (see table 26).

The two words used in Ezek 5:17 and which are echoed in the other Latter Prophets are חַסֵּד, “take pity, show mercy, have compassion, spare,” and חַמֵּל, “show mercy on, spare, take pity on, have compassion.” Speaking of the inevitability of punishment upon Israel, YHWH poses a rhetorical question: “Who will have pity (חַמֵּל) on you O Jerusalem?” (Jer 15:5). The implication is that none will! The one who could

have pitied them is the one they have rejected (Jer 15:6). Speaking of the assaults he intends to unleash on the inhabitants of Jerusalem, YHWH states that he will not let any pity (חַמִּיד), mercy (חַיִּים), or compassion (חַמִּיד) prevent him from destroying the recalcitrant Israelites (Jer 13:14).

YHWH expresses the same resoluteness in Zechariah: “I will not have pity (לֹא אַחְמִיד) on the inhabitants of the earth” (Zech 11:6).¹¹⁸ Instructions to King

Table 26. The no-pity formula in Ezekiel 5:5-17 and the Latter Prophets

Ezekiel 5:11	The No-Pity Formula	Reversal of the No-Pity Formula
v. 11 I myself will withdraw my favor and my eye will not pity (חַיִּים) and I will not show mercy (אַחְמִיד)	Isa 13:18 (The Medes) will have no mercy . . . their eye will not pity (חַיִּים) children Jer 13:14 I will not show mercy (אַחְמִיד) or pity (חַיִּים) or have compassion when I destroy them Jer 21:7 (Nebuchadnezzar) he shall not pity (חַיִּים) them or spare them (חַמִּיד) Jer 15:5 Who will have pity (חַמִּיד) on you, O Jerusalem Zech 11:6 I will no longer have pity (אַחְמִיד) on the inhabitants of the earth Hab 1:17 Is he then to keep on emptying his net, and destroying nations without mercy (חַמִּיד)	Joel 2:17 Let the priests, the ministers of the Lord weep. Let them say, “have pity (חַיִּים) on your people O Lord and do not give your people to reproach” Joel 2:18 The Lord became jealous for his land and had pity (חַמִּיד) on his people Mal 3:17 I will have pity (חַמִּיד) on them as one has pity (חַמִּיד) on his son who is serving him

¹¹⁸ For discussion on the interpretation of the particle חַי at the beginning of Zech 9:6 see George L. Klein, *Zechariah* (Nashville, Tenn.: B & H Publishing, 2008), 325-26.

Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon not to pity (יָחַד), spare (יִחְמֹל), or have compassion on the people of Jerusalem (Jer 21:7)¹¹⁹ who have persisted in their rebellion against YHWH further emphasize this divine determination to deal firmly with them. In language couched in covenant terms and in what appears to be a reversal of the no-pity statements, YHWH claims Israel as his unique possession and declares to the righteous, “I will have pity upon them (וְיִחְמֹלְתִי עַל־יָהֶם) as a person has pity (יִחְמֹל) upon his child who serves him” (Mal 3:17). Joel affirms, “The Lord became jealous for his land and had pity (וְיִחְמֹל) on his people” (Joel 2:18). Note that in Joel 2:13, synonymous words רַחֲמֶיךָ, “loving kindness, mercy,” and חַנּוּן, “compassion, pity,” are used to describe YHWH, and in 2:17 there is an imperative request from the priests for YHWH to חַנּוּן, “have pity,” on his people. In this reversal of the covenant curse we see the portrait of a deity who, because of his character, is willing to re-establish the estranged relationship.

Another mode of punishment YHWH utilizes against Israel is to expose them to shame.¹²⁰ They who had been YHWH’s elect are now to be a חֲרָפָה, “ruin,” חֲרָפָה, “a reproach,” גְּדִיפָה, “a taunt,” מוֹסֵר, “a warning,” and מְשַׁמָּה, “an object of horror” (Ezek 5:14, 15). With these tough disgraceful words YHWH expresses his intention to expose the Israelites to shame.¹²¹ Some of the words used in this shaming scheme correspond to

¹¹⁹ It is interesting to note that the Septuagint (LXX) has the first-person verbs here indicating that YHWH, and not Nebuchadnezzar, is the one who will not show mercy.

¹²⁰ Block, *Ezekiel 1-24*, 211-12.

¹²¹ See Simkins’s article in which he discusses some aspects of honor and shame in the Ancient Near East and how the Israelites must have been impacted by some of the shameful conditions YHWH exposed them to. Ronald A. Simkins, “Return to YHWH: Honor and Shame in Joel.” *Semeia* 68 (1994): 41-54.

various shaming incidences in the Latter Prophets. Table 27 displays the shaming links between Ezek 5:5-17 and the Latter Prophets.

This shaming is marked by four major elements. First, it is a perpetual shaming. The prophet Jeremiah especially emphasizes this phenomenon. Addressing the false prophets who have been leading the people astray, YHWH says, I will bring upon you עֲרֻפַּת עוֹלָם, “everlasting disgrace—everlasting shame that will not be forgotten” (Jer 23:40). These prophets do not have a divine mandate (Jer 23:18, 21). They are self-appointed prophets with a self-devised message. Prophetic office and prophetic discourse have been compromised. YHWH must act, and for that matter, act fast to halt this prophetic malpractice. He therefore brings upon these false prophets a never-ending and unforgettable shame.

Second, it is a public shaming. YHWH wants a form of punishment that will have the greatest impact. He therefore exposes these recalcitrant Judeans to public discipline.¹²² Hence concerning the people who remained in Jerusalem YHWH announces, “I will make them a horror . . . a disgrace (עֲרֻפָּה), a byword, a taunt, and a curse in all places where I shall drive them” (Jer 24:9); “I will make them a horror to all the kingdoms of the earth, to be an object of cursing, and horror, and hissing, and derision among all the nations where I have driven them” (Jer 29:18). YHWH wants transparency

¹²² Jeff Anderson has argued that in Jeremiah these curses are used specifically to legitimize the Babylonian exiles as the only authentic exiles, to the exclusion of any other Judean community. While he singles out Edom as the recipient of the curses among the foreign nations, I do not see why he has left out the curses directed at Babylon, for example, those in Jer 50:23; 51:37, 41, 43, since they also contain the string of curses similar to the ones itemized on p. 5 of his article. Jeff S. Anderson, “The Metonymical Curse as Propaganda in the Book of Jeremiah,” *BBR* 8 (1998): 1-13.

Table 27. The shaming concepts in Ezekiel 5:5-17 and the Latter Prophets

Ezekiel 5:15	The Shaming	Reversal of the Shaming
<p>v. 14 Moreover I will make you a ruin (חֲרָבָה) and disgrace (חֲרָפָה) among the nations (בְּגוֹיִם) around you, in the sight of all who pass by</p> <p>v. 15 You will be a reproach (חֲרָפָה), a taunt (גְּדִיפָה), a warning (מוֹסָר), an object of horror (מִשְׁמָה) to the nations (לְגוֹיִם) around you</p>	<p>Jer 23:40 I will bring upon you everlasting disgrace (חֲרָפָה) and perpetual shame, which shall not be forgotten</p> <p>Jer 24:9 I will make them a horror (לְשִׁמָּה) . . . a disgrace (חֲרָפָה), a byword, a taunt, and a curse in all places where I shall drive them</p> <p>Jer 29:18 I will make them a horror to all the kingdoms of the earth, to be an object of cursing, and horror, and hissing, and a disgrace (חֲרָפָה) among all the nations (בְּכָל־הַגּוֹיִם) where I have driven them</p> <p>Jer 42:18 You shall become an object of excretion and horror (לְשִׁמָּה), of cursing and disgrace (חֲרָפָה)</p> <p>Jer 44:8 Will you be cut off and become an object of cursing and disgrace (חֲרָפָה) among all the nations of the earth (בְּכָל־גּוֹיֵי הָאָרֶץ)</p> <p>Jer 49:13 Bozrah shall become an object of horror (לְשִׁמָּה) and disgrace (חֲרָפָה), a waste and an object of cursing</p> <p>Micah 6:16 I will make you a desolation and your inhabitants an object of hissing; for you shall bear the disgrace of (חֲרָפָת) my people</p>	<p>Isa 25:8 The disgrace of (חֲרָפָת) his people he will take away from all the earth</p> <p>Isa 54:4 You will not suffer disgrace (חֲרָפָה) . . . and the disgrace of (חֲרָפָת) your widowhood you will remember no more</p> <p>Joel 2:19 I will no more make you a mockery (חֲרָפָה) among the nations (בְּגוֹיִם)</p>

as he deals with these Israelites so that everyone can know that justice has been done. He is therefore not afraid to expose their dirty linen in public. This public exposure will hopefully become a deterrent to any future misconduct.

Third, this divine shaming is broad-based. YHWH spreads his net wide in this disciplinary process to include those who had gone to Egypt and other nations. Thus to those who thought Egypt would be a safe haven he says, “You shall become an object of excretion and horror, of cursing and disgrace (תִּרְפָּה)” (Jer 42:18). He further warns, “You will destroy yourselves and make yourselves an object of cursing and reproach (תִּרְפָּה) among all the nations on earth” (Jer 44:8).¹²³ Considering the strong condemnatory language contained in the curses to the Judean Egyptian diaspora, Nicholson is correct in his statement that these Judeans are condemned “in language which is amongst the most bitter and vehement in the whole book.”¹²⁴ The all-inclusive nature of the shaming is further seen in YHWH’s declaration on Babylon, “Babylon will be a heap of ruins, a haunt of jackals, an object of horror and scorn, a place where no one lives” (Jer 51:37; cf. vv. 41, 43). No nation or person is beyond the all-inclusive radar of YHWH’s justice.

Lastly, this punishment has an element of restorative justice. YHWH is forced to take punitive measures because of humanity’s waywardness. But judgment is not always his last word. Because of this, Isaiah could confidently say, “The disgrace of (תִּרְפָּה) his

¹²³ For similar curses on Israel see Jer 25:9, 18; 44:12; on Edom see Jer 49:13, 17; on Babylon see Jer 50:23; 51:37, 41, 43; Mic 6:16.

¹²⁴ Ernest W. Nicholson, *Preaching to the Exiles: A Study of Prose Tradition in the Book of Jeremiah* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1970), 111.

people he will take away from all the earth” (Isa 25:8), and YHWH himself could give the assurance, “You will not suffer disgrace (תִּרְפָּה) . . . and the disgrace of (תִּרְפֹּת) your widowhood you will remember no more” (Isa 54:4), and through Joel he reassures, “I will no more make you a mockery (תִּרְפָּה) among the nations (בְּגוֹיִם).”

Apart from the shaming strategy that we have looked at above, YHWH utilizes other forms of punishment in the Latter Prophets that have correspondences with those in Ezek 5:5-17. These include the use of cannibalism, exile, famine and pestilence, war (sword, bloodshed), and wild animals. Table 28 shows the interrelations between the punishments in Ezek 5:5-17 and the Latter Prophets.

Exile is one of the covenant curses that YHWH brings upon Israel. He uses the phrase “scatter the remnant to the winds” (Ezek 5:10, 12) to denote this punishment. This concept also finds parallels in the Latter Prophets. The verb used in Ezek 5 is נָרַח. The closest analogue to the Ezekiel texts is in the phrase וְנִזְרַתִּים לְכָל הַרְחֹחַת, “I will scatter them to all the winds” (Jer 49:36), concerning the punishment of Elam. YHWH uses the wind analogy in Jer 18:17: “Like the wind (רוּחַ) from the east I will scatter (פִּיץ) them before the enemy.” The verb פִּיץ which is a synonym of נָרַח occurs in many contexts of exile in the prophets (Isa 24:1; Jer 9:16; 14:24; 18:17; 30:11; 40:15; 52:8).

Cannibalism is one of the covenant curses mentioned in Ezek 5:10. The prophet Jeremiah speaking of the siege that would come upon Jerusalem says, “And I will cause them to eat (אָכַל) the flesh of their sons and the flesh of their daughters, and everyone shall eat (אָכַל) the flesh of his friend in the siege and in the desperation with which their enemies and those who seek their lives shall drive them to despair” (Jer 19:9). We note

Table 28. Ezekiel 5:5-17 and various punishments in the Latter Prophets

Ezekiel 5:5-17	The Latter Prophets	Reversal in the Latter Prophets
v. 10 Fathers will eat (יֹאכְלוּ) their children (בָּנִים) and children will eat (יֹאכְלוּ) their fathers	Isa 49:26 I will make your oppressors eat (וְהֹאכְלֹתִי) their own flesh Jer 19:9 I will make them eat (וְהֹאכְלֹתִים) the flesh of their sons (בְּנֵיהֶם) and daughters, and they will eat (יֹאכְלוּ) one another's flesh during the stress of the siege	
v. 10 Any of you who survive I will scatter (וְזִרְיתִי) to every wind v. 12 A third I will scatter (אֶזְרֶה) to all the winds (לְכָל-רוּחַ)	Jer 49:32 I will scatter (וְזִרְיתִי) to every wind those who have shaven temples Jer 49:36 I will bring upon Elam the four winds (אַרְבַּע רוּחוֹת) . . . I will scatter them (וְזִרְתִּים) to all these winds (הָרָחוֹת) and there will not be a nation where Elam's exiles do not go Zech 2:4 [Eng 1:20] These are the horns that scattered (נָרְה) Judah . . . the nations who lifted up their horns against the land of Judah to scatter (לְזַרְוֹתָהּ) its people	Jer 31:10 He who scattered (מְזַרְהוּ) Israel will gather him
v. 12 One third of you shall die of pestilence (דָּבָר) or be consumed by famine (רָעָב) among you; one third shall fall by the sword (חֶרֶב) around you; and will unsheathe the sword (חֶרֶב) after them v.16 I will loose against you my deadly arrows of famine (רָעָב) . . . when I bring more and more famine (רָעָב) upon you	Isa 51:19 These two things have befallen you . . . devastation and destruction, famine (רָעָב) and sword (חֶרֶב) Jer 11:22 The young men shall die by the sword (חֶרֶב); their sons and their daughters shall die by famine (רָעָב) Jer 14:12 By the sword (חֶרֶב), and by famine (רָעָב) and by pestilence (דָּבָר) I consume them Jer 14:18 Look, if I go out into the field, look, those killed by the sword (חֶרֶב), and if I enter the city, look, those sick with famine (רָעָב)	

Table 28—Continued.

Punishments in Ezekiel 5	Punishments in the Latter Prophets	Reversal of Punishments in the Latter Prophets
v. 17 I will send famine (רָעָב) . . . pestilence (דִּבְרָא) and bloodshed shall pass through you; and I will bring the sword (חֶרֶב) upon you.	Jer 15:2 Thus says the Lord: Those destined for pestilence (דִּבְרָא), to pestilence (דִּבְרָא), and those destined for the sword (חֶרֶב), to the sword (חֶרֶב); those destined for famine (רָעָב), to famine (רָעָב), and those destined for captivity, to captivity.	
	See also Jer 18:21; 21:9; 24:10; 27:8; 42:16, 17 “Famine” and “sword” are also found in Jer 5:12; 11:22; 14:13, 15, 16, 18; 42:16; 44:12, 18, 27	
v. 17 I will send . . . wild animals (חַיָּה רָעָה) against you, and they will rob you of your children (שָׁבַל)	Jer 15:7 I have bereaved (שָׁבַלְתִּי) them, I have destroyed my people	

here the use of the same verb used in Ezek 5:10 to describe patricidal cannibalism where fathers would eat (אָכַל) their children and children, too, would eat (אָכַל) their fathers.

Another interesting passage is Jer 5:17, which uses the same verb, אָכַל (four times), with regard to a foreign nation that YHWH would send upon Judah. YHWH says this nation would devour (אָכַל) their sons (בָּנֵי) and daughters. Scholars generally agree that this is not a reference to cannibalism, but to the utter devastation and havoc the invading army would bring upon the land.¹²⁵

Just like in Ezek 5:12, 17, Jeremiah brings together sword (חֶרֶב), famine (רָעָב), and pestilence (דִּבְרָא), as some of the means YHWH is going to use in punishing Israel.¹²⁶ Jeremiah also clusters together pestilence, sword, famine, and captivity (Jer 15:2); sword, dogs, birds, and wild animals (Jer 15:3); deadly diseases, sword, famine, birds, and wild animals (Jer 16:4); sword, birds, and wild animals (Jer 19:7). There are times when only sword and famine are mentioned in concert (Isa 51:19; Jer 5:12; 11:22; 14:13, 15, 16, 18; 42:16; 44:12). On some occasions sword and famine and pestilence are not paired with any other agent of destruction.¹²⁷ Contrary to Ezek 5:17 where wild animals (חַיָּה רָעָה)

¹²⁵ Lundbom specifically says that “the Babylonians were not cannibals.” Jack R. Lundbom, *Jeremiah 1-20: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (New York: Doubleday, 1999), 396. See also F. B. Huey, Jr., *Jeremiah-Lamentations* (Nashville, Tenn.: Broadman, 1993), 91-92.

¹²⁶ Jer 14:12; 15:2; 18:21; 21:7, 9; 24:10; 27:8, 13; 29:17, 18; 32:24, 36; 34:17; 38:2; 42:17, 22; 44:13. It should be noted that this clustering of sword, famine, and pestilence occurs only in these two prophetic books.

¹²⁷ Sword: Isa 1:20; 3:25; 13:15; 14:19; 21:15; 22:2; 27:1; 31:8; 34:5, 6; 37:7, 38; 41:2; 49:2; 65:12; 66:16; Jer 2:30; 4:10; 5:17; 6:25; 9:16; 12:12; 15:9; 20:4; 25:16, 27, 29, 31, 38; 26:23; 31:2; 33:4; 34:4; 39:18; 41:2; 44:28; 48:10, 4, 16; 47:6; 48:2, 10; 49:37; 50:16, 35, 36, 37; 51:50; Hos 7:16; 11:6; 13:16; Amos 1:11; 4:10; 7:9; 9:1, 10; Mic 5:6; Nah 2:13; 3:3; Zeph 2:12; Hag 2:22; Zech 9:13; 11:17; 13:7. Famine: Isa 14:30; Jer 52:6.

are briefly mentioned, Jeremiah specifies the nature of the wild animals that would ravage Jerusalem: “Therefore a lion from the forest shall kill them, a wolf from the desert shall destroy them. A leopard is watching against their cities; everyone who goes out of them shall be torn in pieces” (Jer 5:6). Bloodshed is another punishment that Ezekiel mentions (Ezek 5:17). This theme also occurs in other prophets.¹²⁸

Ezekiel 5:5-17 and the Writings

Some parts of the biblical corpus of the Writings have a lot in common with Ezek 5:5-17. This will be demonstrated from a selection of books within this corpus. The books or book sections selected for this analysis have been found to contain lexical, thematic and verbal, and in some cases structural correspondences with Ezek 5:5-17.

Ezekiel 5:5-17 and Psalm 44

Many of the Psalms have been associated with the concept of exile.¹²⁹ One of these is Ps 44.¹³⁰ Table 29 shows a number of parallels that Ezek 5:5-17 has with Ps 44.

¹²⁸ Isa 1:15; 5:7; 26:21; 33:15; 34:3, 6, 7; 49:26; 59:3, 7; Jer 7:6; 19:4; 22:3, 17; 26:15; 46:10; 51:35; Hos 1:4; 4:2; 6:8; Joel 3:19, 21; Jonah 1:14; Mic 3:10; 7:2; Nah 3:1; Hab 2:8, 12, 17; Zeph 1:17; Zech 9:15

¹²⁹ See for example Adele Berlin, who also considers Pss 74, 79, 85, 89, 102, 105, 106, and 126 as exilic. Adele Berlin, "Psalms and the Literature of Exile: Psalm 137, 44, 69, and 78," in *The Book of Psalms: Composition and Reception* (ed. P. W. Flint and P. D. Miller, Jr.; Leiden: Brill, 2005). Rainer Albertz identifies the following psalms as part of the literature of the exilic period: Pss 44, 60, 74, 79, 85, 89. Albertz, *Israel in Exile*, 1139-145. Klein affirms only Pss 44, 74 and 137 as a Psalm of exile. Klein, *Israel in Exile*, 18-22. Thomas Raitt places Pss 44, 74, 79 and 89 in this category. Raitt, *A Theology of Exile*, 87.

¹³⁰ DeClaissé-Walford suggests that it is a Psalm “for all times of unjust suffering by the people of God,” and further that one of the lessons the Psalm teaches is that “God can and should be held to account.” Nancy L. DeClaissé-Walford, "Psalm 44: O God, Why Do You Hide Your

Table 29. Ezekiel 5:5-17 and Psalm 44

Ezekiel 5:5-17		Psalm 44	
v. 6, 7	<p>She has rebelled (מָרָה) against my laws and decrees</p> <p>She has rejected (מָאַס) my laws and has not followed (לֹא־הִלְכָה) my decrees</p>	<p>v. 10 You have rejected (נִזַּןְתָּ) and humbled us</p> <p>v. 24 Do not reject (נִזַּןְתָּ) us forever</p>	
v. 10 v.12	I will scatter (יִזְרֹךְ) the remnant to every wind	v. 12	You have scattered (יִזְרֹךְ) us among the nations
v. 14	I will make you a ruin and a reproach (תִּהְיֶה לְחֵרָפָה)	v. 14	You have made us a reproach (תִּהְיֶה לְחֵרָפָה) to our neighbors, the scorn and derision of those around us
v.14	I will make you a ruin and a reproach among the nations (בְּגוֹיִם)	v. 15	You have made us a byword to among the nations (בְּגוֹיִם), the people shake their heads at us
v.15	You will be a reproach (תִּהְיֶה לְחֵרָפָה), a taunt (חֲרִירָה), a warning, an object of horror to the nations around you	v. 16 v. 17	My disgrace is before me all day long, and my face is covered with shame at the taunts (חֲרִירָה) of those who reproach me
v. 9 v.11	<p>Because of your detestable idols (תוֹעֵבָה)</p> <p>You have defiled my sanctuary with all your images (שִׁקְנִיץ) and detestable practices (תוֹעֵבָה)</p>	v. 21	If we had forgotten the name of our God or spread our hands to a foreign god (אֵל זָר)

The Psalm refers to YHWH's act of sending the people of Judah into exile.¹³¹ This is explicitly stated by the words וַיִּבְּגוּם יְרֵיתָנוּ, "you scattered us among the nations" (Ps 44:12 [Eng. 11]), which finds verbal links to the scattering concept in Ezek 5:10, 12.

Another verbal and thematic relationship that Ps 44 establishes with Ezek 5 is in the concept of shaming. Notice the graphic description of this in Ps 44:14-17 [Eng. 13-16]:

You have made us the taunt (תִּרְפָּה) of our neighbors, the derision and scorn of those around us. You have made us a byword (מִשְׁל) among the nations, a laughingstock (מְנוּד־רֹאשׁ) among the peoples. All day long my disgrace (קִלְמָה) is before me, and shame (בִּשְׁת) has covered my face at the words of the taunters and revilers, at the sight of the enemy and the avenger.

In Ezek 5:15 YHWH threatens to make Jerusalem into a תִּרְפָּה וַיְגִדּוּפָה מוֹסָר וּמִשְׁמָה לְגוֹיִם, "a reproach, a taunting, a warning and a horror to the nations."¹³² The word תִּרְפָּה is also used in Ezek 5:14.

Also noteworthy in Ps 44 are some words or expressions that give lexical connections to Ezek 5. These provide reversals of the statements in Ezek 5. In Ezek 5:6 YHWH says Israel has rejected (מָאַס) my laws and not followed (לֹא־הִקְלוּ) my decrees. Psalm 44 counters this, אַךְ־יָנִחַת וַתִּכְלִי־מִנִּי, "but now you have rejected and disgraced us" (v. 9), and underscores their innocence in the following words: "we have not forgotten

Face?" in *My Words Are Lovely: Studies in the Rhetoric of the Psalms* (ed. R. L. Foster and David M. Howard, Jr.; New York: T&T Clark, 2008), 121-31.

¹³¹ Unlike Adele Berlin who accepts Ps 44's exilic setting, Schaefer dismisses the Psalms' exilic provenance because it does not make any reference to Jerusalem and the Temple and contends that its features are very "generic" hence it can be applicable to a variety of situations. Konrad Schaefer, *Psalms* (Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 2001), 114.

¹³² Leung Lai notes that this Psalm is a protest against the abusive God. Barbara M. Leung Lai, "Psalm 44 and the Function of Lament and Protest," *OTE* 20 (2007): 418-31.

your covenant” (v. 17), “our steps have not strayed from your path” (v. 18).¹³³ Thus they appeal to YHWH, using a synonym of **סלף**, “not to reject (**סלף**) them forever” (v. 23). In Ezekiel YHWH accuses them of idolatrous practices (Ezek 5:9, 11). This accusation is countered when the composer avers that they have not “spread out our hands to a foreign god” (Ps 44:21). These reversals and claims of innocence in Ps 44 raise the question of the justice of God.¹³⁴ The psalmist does not see any justification for YHWH’s inattention to their plight and hence ends the lament with imperatives to YHWH: “Rise up, O our help and redeem us on account of your love” (Ps 44:27).

Ezekiel 5:5-17 and Psalm 50:1-22

Another Psalm that has thematic connections with Ezek 5:5-17 is Ps 50.¹³⁵ Table 30 shows the parallels. In this Psalm, as in Ezek 5:5-17, is a covenant lawsuit structure.¹³⁶ The Psalm is an oracle of judgment with covenantal overtones, and as Samuel Terrien

¹³³ For discussion on claims of innocence in Ps 44 see Gert Kwakkel, *‘According to My Righteousness: Upright Behaviour as Grounds for Deliverance in Psalm 7, 17, 18, 26, and 44* (Leiden: Brill, 2002), 185-235. See also F. Lindström, “Theodicy in the Psalms,” in *Theodicy in the World of the Bible* (ed. A. Laato and J. C. de Moor; Leiden: Brill, 2003), 291, 292.

¹³⁴ Dalit Rom-Shiloni, “Psalm 44: The Powers of Protest,” *CBQ* 70 (2008): 683-98. DeClaissé-Walford comments that Ps 44:9-22, is “a lengthy statement of accusation against God.” She however sees in the Psalm an inclusion in which the whole Psalm is enclosed by covenant motifs—verse one opens with God’s redemptive acts and the last verse ends with an appeal to YHWH’s loving kindness (**רַחֵם**). Nancy L. DeClaissé-Walford, “Psalm 44: O God, Why Do You Hide Your Face?” *RevExp* 104 (2007): 745-59. See article reprint in idem, “Psalm 44: O God, Why Do You Hide Your Face?” in *My Words Are Lovely: Studies in the Rhetoric of the Psalms* (ed. R. L. Foster and David M. Howard, Jr.; New York: T&T Clark, 2008), 121-31.

¹³⁵ Terrien suggests that this Psalm could have been written at the end of the period of the monarchy.

¹³⁶ For a listing of other psalms that have elements of a covenant lawsuit, see Davidson, “The Covenant Lawsuit Motif in Canonical Perspective,” 28, 29.

Table 30. Covenant lawsuit in Ezekiel 5:5-17 and Psalm 50:1-22

Ezekiel 5:5-17	Psalm 50:1-22
Witnesses: the nations YHWH has placed around Jerusalem: Ezek 5:5	List of witnesses (heaven and earth): Ps 50:1, 4, 6
Preamble (The Messenger formula: “Thus says the Lord”): Ezek 5:7, 8, 11	Preamble (introduction of the suzerain and call to judgment): Ps 50:1–7
Beneficent actions toward Jerusalem (I have placed her in the midst of the nations): Ezek 5:5	Historical prologue (review of the suzerain’s benevolent acts toward the vassal): Ps 50:8–15
Indictment (breach of covenant stipulations): Ezek 5:6, 7, 11	Indictments (breach of covenant stipulations): Ps 50:16–21
Verdict and sentence (pronouncement of curses): Ezek 5:12, 16-17	Verdict (guilty, “Therefore”) and sentence (pronouncement of the curses): Ps 50:22

observes, “It is on account of the Sinai Covenant that the Lord conducts a trial with his people.”¹³⁷ Here God sits as the prosecuting attorney (v. 7). He has a case against the people. He reproves of their moral and social evils (vv. 16-21). YHWH presents the case in such a manner that vindicates him and leaves no room for any accusations of miscarriage of justice.

Whereas in Ezek 5:12, 16-17 YHWH appeals to the covenant curses, in Ps 50:22 YHWH uses the word תַּרְטֹר, “tear, mangle,” to depict the kind of punishment he will unleash on the evil doers. This is the word Jacob uses when he gets the ominous report of Joseph’s death: “It is my son’s robe! A wild animal has devoured him; Joseph is without

¹³⁷ Samuel Terrien, *The Psalms: Strophic Structure and Theological Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 397.

doubt torn to pieces (טָרַף טָרַף)” (Gen 37:33). In other words, YHWH is warning the wicked of unprecedented punishments.

Ezekiel 5:5-17 and Psalm 79

Psalm 79 also contains various features that link it to Ezek 5:5-17. Table 31 has representations of the correspondences between Ezek 5:5-17 and Ps 79. The Psalm can be divided into the following categories: those sections that deal with the fulfillment of the covenant curses (vv.1, 2, 3, 4, 7); others of a cultic nature (v. 1); speeches seeking revenge on the enemy (v. 6); petitions for YHWH’s forgiveness and intervention (vv. 8, 9, 10, 12); and praise to YHWH for his expected response (v. 13). Our concern will be mainly with the sections that intersect with Ezek 5:5-17.

The Psalm begins in v. 1 with three explicit statements that relate to the events of 587/86 BCE.¹³⁸ The nations have come (בָּאוּ) into YHWH’s inheritance. They have defiled (טָמְאוּ) the temple, YHWH’s sanctuary. They have set (שָׂמוּ) Jerusalem to ruins. The three verbs used here are all in the perfect form indicating completed action.¹³⁹ Jerusalem has experienced the onslaught of destructive forces, leaving its cultic

¹³⁸ Terrien, *The Psalms: Strophic Structure and Theological Commentary*, 92-96.

¹³⁹ There has been a lot of scholarly debate regarding the dating of this psalm with others situating it in the pre-exilic period, while others arguing for the post-exilic provenance. One such scholar is Michael Goulder who dates Ps 79 to the late eighth century B.C. His argument that the appearance of Jerusalem in the Psalm is but an insertion is not convincing since the Psalm mentions the events that followed the devastation of 586/87 B.C. Michael D. Goulder, *The Psalms of Asaph and the Pentateuch: Studies in the Psalter, III* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1996). See W. M. Schniedewind, who has also challenged Goulder’s position. William M. Schniedewind, review of Michael D. Goulder, *The Psalms of Asaph and the Pentateuch: Studies in the Psalter* 3, *JBL* 117 (1998): 523-24.

Table 31. Ezekiel 5:5-17 and Psalm 79

Ezekiel 5:5-17			Psalm 79
v. 5	This is Jerusalem	v. 1	They have set (שָׁמוּ) Jerusalem to ruins
v. 11	Because you have defiled (טִמְאַתָּה) my sanctuary (מִקְדָּשִׁי)	v. 1	They have defiled (טִמְאַתָּה) your holy temple (הַיְכָל קֹדֶשְׁךָ)
v. 17	I will send . . . and wild beasts (חַיֵּה רָעָה) upon you	v. 2	They have given dead bodies . . . the flesh of your saints to the beasts (חַיֵּה) of the earth
v. 17	Plague and bloodshed (דָּם) will sweep through you	v. 3	They have poured out blood (דָּם) like water all around Jerusalem
v. 15	You will be a reproach (תִּרְפָּה), a taunt (תִּלְוָה), a warning, an object of horror to the nations around you (סִבְיבוֹתֶיךָ)	v. 4	We are objects of reproach (תִּרְפָּה) to our neighbors, a scorn and derision to those around us (לְסִבְיבוֹתֵינוּ)
		v. 12	Pay back into the laps of our neighbors . . . the reproach (תִּרְפָּה) they have hurled at you, O Lord
v. 13 v. 15	Then my wrath (חֲמָה) against them will subside . . . when I have spent my wrath (חֲמָה) upon them When I inflict punishment on you in anger and in wrath (חֲמָה) and with stinging rebuke (בְּתַכְחֹת חֲמָה)	v. 6	Pour out your wrath (חֲמָה) on the nations
v. 11	I myself will withdraw my favor, I will not look on you with pity (חֶסֶד) or spare (חַמֵּל) you	v. 8	May your mercy (רַחֲמִים) come quickly to meet us
v. 8 v. 14	I will inflict punishment on you in the sight of the nations (לְעֵינֵי הַגּוֹיִם) I will make you a ruin and a reproach in the sight of (לְעֵינֵי) all who pass by	v. 10	Before our eyes (לְעֵינֵינוּ) make known among the nations (בְּגֵיִים) that you avenge the outpoured blood of your servants

and political establishments in complete disarray.¹⁴⁰ Psalm 79 voices some of the responses in the light of this unprecedented devastation.

Among the covenant curses that the psalmist mentions and are also found in Ezek 5 are the destruction of Jerusalem, use of wild animals, bloodshed, and the scorn and reproach that the victims experience. Psalm 79 appears to be a fulfillment of some of the curses in Ezek 5. Jerusalem is identified in Ezek 5 as the object of divine wrath. In Ps 79 that wrath has come and Jerusalem has been reduced to ruins.¹⁴¹ The psalmist acknowledges the presence of bloodshed (דָּם), wild animals (חַיָּה), reproach (קִרְפָּה), and scorn in the aftermath of the destruction of Jerusalem. Note however that in Ezek 5 YHWH had said he would not extend any mercy or compassion. The psalmist on the other hand appeals to YHWH to speedily extend mercy (רַחֲמִים) to them (Ps 79:8). The reversal of the use of the phrases “in the sight of the nations,” “among the nations” (Ezek 5:8, 14), is also of interest. While YHWH’s threatened punishments were to be done in broad view of the nations, the psalmist turns this and asks YHWH to carry out revenge on the nations openly (יִדְעוּ בְּגֵיִים לְעֵינֵינוּ) for them to behold the workings of divine retribution (Ps 79:10). Another reversal is seen in the psalmist’s call for YHWH to direct

¹⁴⁰ Gerstenberger points out that this was one of the expected outcomes of warfare. Erhard S. Gerstenberger, *Psalms, Part 2 and Lamentations* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), 100. See also Dobbs-Allsopp who observes that enemy destruction culminated “in the destruction of the temples of the chief gods and goddesses.” F. W. Dobbs-Allsopp, *Weep, O Daughter of Zion: A Study of the City-Lament Genre in the Hebrew Bible* (Rome: Editrice Pontificio Istituto Biblico, 1993), 68.

¹⁴¹ This makes it difficult to accept the position of scholars who argue that references to Jerusalem in this Psalm relate to the siege of 598/97 since the destruction of Jerusalem took place in the Babylonian invasion of 587/86. For an example of such arguments see William L. Holladay, “Indications of Jeremiah’s Psalter,” *JBL* 121 (2002): 245-61.

his wrath on the nations (Ps 79:6). This sharply contrasts with the position in Ezek 5 where YHWH's wrath is directed at the Israelites.

Conspicuously absent from this Psalm is the mention of any specific sin for which forgiveness is sought in the petition phase of the Psalm. This is in stark contrast to the specific sins mentioned in Ezek 5 and which formed the basis for the judgment against Jerusalem (Ezek 5:6, 7, 9,11). While Jerusalem is mentioned twice in the Psalm, there is no statement alluding to any of its previous favored status as is the case in Ezek 5. On the cultic level the psalmist specifically mentions that these enemy forces have defiled (נִסְּפוּ) the sanctuary (v. 1), a reversal of Ezek 5 where YHWH makes a very direct accusation against the Israelites of defiling (נִסְּפוּ) the sanctuary with their idols (Ezek 5:11). In Ps 79 YHWH has left the sanctuary to be defiled by the enemy.

Ezekiel 5:5-17 and Psalm 106

Another Psalm associated with the exile is Ps 106. Table 32 shows its verbal, lexical, and thematic correspondences with Ezek 5:5-17.¹⁴² Samuel Terrien suggests that this Psalm may have been composed in “the latter part of the exile.”¹⁴³ The Psalm explicitly describes Israel's chronic rebellion against YHWH, which eventually led to the exile. Themes of disobedience and rebellion (vv. 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 25, 32, 33, 34), idolatry (vv. 19, 20, 28, 36, 37, 38, 39, 43), and bloodshed (v. 38) abound in the Psalm. It

¹⁴² Thomas Olbricht has pointed out the parallels Ps 106 has with Ezek 20. Thomas H. Olbricht, "The Rhetoric of Two Narrative Psalms 105 and 106," in *My Words Are Lovely: Studies in the Rhetoric of the Psalms* (ed. R. L. Foster and D. M. Howard, Jr.; New York: T&T Clark, 2008), 156-70.

¹⁴³ Terrien, *The Psalms: Strophic Structure and Theological Commentary*, 733.

Table 32. Ezekiel 5:5-17 and Psalm 106

Ezekiel 5:5-17		Psalm 106	
v. 6	She has rebelled (מָרָה) against my laws and decrees	v. 33	They rebelled (מָרָה) against the Spirit of God
		v. 43	They were bent on rebellion (מָרָה)
v. 9	Because of your detestable idols (תועֲבָה)	v. 35	They adopted the customs of the nations and worshipped their idols (עֲצָב)
v. 11	You have defiled my sanctuary with all images (שְׁקִינִים) and detestable practices (תועֲבָה)	v. 36	They sacrificed their children to the idols (עֲצָב) of Canaan
v. 10 v. 12	I will scatter (זָרָה) the remnant to every wind	v. 27	YHWH swore to make their seed (זָרַע) fall among the nations and scatter (זָרָה) them throughout the lands
		v. 41	He handed over to the nations
v. 17	Plague and bloodshed (דָּם) will sweep through you	v. 38	They shed innocent blood (דָּם), blood of their sons and daughters
v. 11	I will not look on you with pity (חַסָּד) or spare (חָמַל) you	v. 46	He caused them to have compassion (רַחֲמִים) before all who held them captive
v. 14	I will make you a ruin and a reproach among the nations (בְּגוֹיִם) around you	v. 47	Gather us from the nations (מִן־הַגּוֹיִם)
v. 12 v. 17	A third of your people will die of the plague (דִּבְרָה) Plague (דִּבְרָה) and bloodshed will sweep through you	v. 29	They provoked the Lord to anger by their wicked deeds and a plague (מַגֵּפָה) broke out among them

is not surprising that the psalmist notes that exile had to be their lot (vv. 27, 41).

In v. 4 a reversal of YHWH's emotions is presented. YHWH is unequivocal in his statement that because of their rebellious and idolatrous nature he is not going to pity or spare them (Ezek 5:11). The psalmist inverts this and portrays a God who, because of the covenant, relents and causes them to have compassion (רַחֲמִים) before their captors (Ps 106:44-46). Psalm 106:47 gives a contrast with YHWH's punishment expressed in Ezek 5. While in Ezek 5 YHWH had announced he would scatter them to the winds (vv. 10, 12) and they would be a ruin, a reproach, and an object of horror among the nations (vv. 14, 15), a fact that even the psalmist acknowledges (Ps 106:41), the psalmist's petition however reverses those earlier threats and appeals to YHWH to save them and gather them from the nations (Ps 106:47). This psalmist is apparently aware that YHWH can relent from his anger and punishment and be gracious to his people.

Ezekiel 5:5-17 and Lamentations

Another book within the Writings that presents links with Ezek 5 is Lamentations (see table 33). The book contains laments associated with the fall of Jerusalem, the destruction of the temple, and the ensuing suffering of the people. The people of Israel found it hard to reconcile these events with their reliance on YHWH. In this book we read of the taunt of the enemies or the enemies' reaction as they learn of Israel's exilic predicament (Lam 1:7; 2:15).

Ralph Klein points out that "what made the scorn of the enemy especially hard to bear was that it was directed against a people who prided themselves in God's special

Table 33. Ezekiel 5:5-17 and Lamentations

Ezekiel 5:5-17		Lamentations	
v. 5	This is Jerusalem	1:8	Jerusalem has sinned greatly Jerusalem has become an unclean thing among them. See also 1:7, 17; 2:10, 13, 15 for the mention of Jerusalem
v. 14	I will make you an object of reproach and horror among the nations (בְּגוֹיִם)	1:1, 3	Like a widow is she who was once great among the nations (בְּגוֹיִם) She dwells among the nations (בְּגוֹיִם)
v. 6, 7	She has rebelled (מָרָה) against my laws and decrees . . . She has rejected (מָאַס) my laws and has not followed my decrees	1:18, 20	The Lord is righteous yet I rebelled (מָרָה) against his command I have been most rebellious (מָרָה)
v. 10	I will scatter (זָרַה) your survivors to the winds	1:3	After affliction and harsh labor Judah has gone into exile
v. 12	A third I will scatter (זָרַה) to the winds	4:16	The Lord himself has scattered (זָרַה) them
v. 14	I will make you a ruin and a reproach (תִּרְפָּה)	1:11	Look O Lord and consider for I am despised
v. 15	You will be a reproach and a taunt, a warning and an object of horror	2:15	All who pass your way clap their hands at you; they scoff and shake their heads at the Daughter of Jerusalem (see also 2:17, 17; 3:14; 5:1)
v. 15	I will inflict punishment on you in anger (חֲמָה) and in great rebuke	1:12 2:3	My suffering brought on me in the day of his fierce anger In fierce anger (אַף) he has cut off the every horn of Israel (see also 2:8; 3:43; 3:66; 4:11)
v. 12	A third I will pursue with a drawn sword (חֶרֶב)	1:20	Outside, the sword bereaves
v. 17	I will bring the sword (חֶרֶב) against you	2:21	Young men and maidens have fallen by the sword (חֶרֶב)
v. 11	I will withdraw my favor, I will not look on you with pity (חַיִּס) or spare (חָמַל) you	2:2 2:17	Without pity (חֲמִל) the Lord has swallowed up all the dwellings of Jacob The Lord . . . has overthrown you without pity (חֲמִל) (see also 3:22, 23, 32)
v. 11	Because you have defiled my sanctuary (מִקְדָּשׁ)	2:7	The Lord has rejected his altar and abandoned his sanctuary (מִקְדָּשׁ)

Table 33—Continued.

Ezekiel 5:5-17		Lamentations	
v. 16	I will shoot at you with my deadly and destructive arrows of famine (רָעָב)	2:11, 12 1:11	Children and infants faint in the streets of the city. They say to their mothers, “where is bread and wine?” . . . as their lives ebb away in their mother’s arms. Other allusions to famine: people groan seeking bread, they have given their precious things for food See also 3:16; 4:9; 5:10)
v. 10	Fathers will eat (אָכַל) their sons among you and sons will eat their fathers	2:20	Should women eat (אָכַל) their offspring, the little ones who were born healthy
v. 17	Plague and bloodshed (דָּם) will sweep through you	4:13	Punishment because of the sins of the priests and prophets who shed the blood (דָּם) of the righteous They are so defiled with blood

care, his election.”¹⁴⁴ But YHWH wastes no time in providing justification for the woes he has brought on Jerusalem: “the Lord has caused her grief because of the multitude of her transgressions” (Lam 1:5). The word מַרְדּוּ, “rebellion,” is a theme that is one of the causes of YHWH’s judgments in Ezek 5.

The theme of Jerusalem’s sins is further developed and stressed in Lam 1:8 where the city is said to have sinned greatly (חַטָּאתָּהּ רַבָּה). Then in Lam 1:18 Jerusalem acknowledges the righteousness and justice of YHWH and blames her predicament on her rebellion (מַרְדּוֹ) against the Lord’s commands. The same thought is repeated in 3:42, “we have transgressed and rebelled.” It is therefore apparent that the people of Israel are taking responsibility for the calamities that are afflicting them while at the same time noting YHWH’s justice in all this.¹⁴⁵

Ezekiel 5:5-17 and Daniel 9

The last representative book in the Writings that we will consider for intertextual correspondences with Ezek 5:5-17 is Dan 9 (see table 34). Daniel, like Ezekiel, was one of the captives in Babylon. Daniel’s prayer of intercession (Dan 9:1-19) contains similarities with Ezek 5 that are worth noting. Jerusalem, which is the target of YHWH’s judgment in Ezek 5:5, is mentioned six times in Dan 9 (Dan 9:2, 7, 12, 16 [twice], 25)¹⁴⁶

¹⁴⁴ Klein, *Israel in Exile*, 10.

¹⁴⁵ See Renkema’s article in which he seems to brush off theodicy from most of the texts considered above. Johan Renkema, “Theodicy in Lamentations,” in *Theodicy in the World of the Bible* (ed. A. Laato and J. C. de Moor; Leiden: Brill, 2003), 410-28.

¹⁴⁶ Sara Japhet characterizes Dan 9:5-14 as a “repetitive and eloquent statement of theodicy.” Sara Japhet, “Theology in Ezra-Nehemiah and Chronicles,” in *Theodicy in the World of the Bible* (ed. A. Laato and J. C. de Moor; Leiden: Brill, 2003), 437.

Table 34. Ezekiel 5:5-17 and Daniel 9

Ezekiel 5:5-17		Daniel 9	
v. 5	This is Jerusalem	v. 2	Desolation of Jerusalem to last seventy years
v. 5, 6	She has rebelled (מָרָדָה) against my laws and decrees	v. 5	We have been wicked and have rebelled (מָרָדָה); we have turned away from your commands and laws
		v. 9	We have rebelled (מָרָדָה) against him
		v. 10	We have not obeyed the Lord our God or kept the laws he gave us
		v. 11	All Israel has transgressed your law
v. 9	I will do to you what I have never done before and will never do again	v. 12	Under the whole heaven nothing has ever been done like what has been done to Jerusalem
v. 10	I will scatter (יִזְרֹק) all your survivors to the winds	v. 7	People of Judah . . . are in countries where you have scattered (יִזְרֹק) us
v. 11	You have defiled my sanctuary (מִקְדָּשִׁי)	v. 17	O Lord, look with favor on your desolate sanctuary (מִקְדָּשִׁי)
v. 14 v. 15	I will make you a ruin and a reproach You will be a reproach (תִּבְזֶה) and a taunt a warning and an <i>object of horror</i> to the nations around you	v. 7, 8	We are covered with shame
		v. 16	Our sins . . . have made Jerusalem and your people an <i>object of scorn</i> (תִּבְזֶה) to all those around us
v. 15	I will inflict punishment on you in anger and in wrath	v. 16	O Lord . . . turn away your anger and your wrath from Jerusalem
v. 11	I will <i>withdraw my favor</i> ; I will not look on you with pity or spare you	v. 9	The Lord our <i>God is merciful</i> and forgiving. . . . We do not make requests of you because we are righteous but because of your <i>great mercy</i>

with five references pertaining to the city's desolation.

The word **נָדַד**, “impel, drive away, banish,” is used in Dan 9:7 with YHWH as subject indicating Daniel's awareness of YHWH's personal responsibility in executing the punishment of exile, a threat that is clearly outlined in Ezek 5:10, 12 with the use of the word **נָדַד**. Daniel reverses YHWH's threat to punish Israel in **אַף**, “anger,” and in **מַחָה**, “wrath” (Ezek 5:15), and requests him to turn away his **אַף**, “anger,” and **מַחָה**, “wrath,” from Jerusalem (Dan 9:16). In the same way Daniel also recognizes the compassion (**רַחֲמִים**) inherent in YHWH irrespective of their untoward conduct towards him (Dan 9:9, 18) and thus seeks to reverse YHWH's threat of withdrawing his favor (**חֶסֶד**) and pity (**חַנּוּן**) (Ezek 5:11). Daniel concedes that YHWH's threats have been duly fulfilled in his assertion that they have become an object of scorn (**תִּפְחָד**) to those around them (Dan 9:16), a threat that is stated in combination with other threats of shaming in Ezek 5:14, 15.

One other thematic correspondence between Daniel's prayer and Ezek 5 is the unprecedented nature of the covenantal curses. In Ezekiel YHWH declares: “I will do to you what I have never done before and will never do again” (Ezek 5:9). Daniel, now in exile, can attest to the gravity of their situation and thus declare, “under the whole heaven nothing has ever been done like what has been done to Jerusalem” (Dan 9:12).

Furthermore Daniel recognizes that what has befallen them is the outworking of the covenantal curses upon the disobedient (Dan 9:11-12) and thus a demonstration of the justice of YHWH and his punitive actions against Israel (Dan 9:7, 14, 16).

Summary

This survey has revealed that Ezek 5:5-17 has many correspondences with other texts of the Old Testament. These connections have revealed that YHWH's demand on Israel to abide by the rules and regulations he had issued was the same throughout biblical literature. Yet this exploration has also revealed Israel's failure to live by those divine standards. This refusal abide by the stipulated divine principles led to idolatrous worship in which even the sanctity of YHWH's sanctuary was disregarded. Loathsome images were introduced into the sanctuary. As a consequence of these abominable practices, YHWH unleashed on them unprecedented punishments involving exile, cannibalism, famine, pestilence, sword, bloodshed, and even exposing them to the ravages of wild animals. YHWH also withdrew to his sympathy from them and could no longer pity or have compassion upon them. Furthermore, YHWH exposed them to such shame that they faced the taunts and ridicule of the surrounding nations.

While Ezek 5:5-17 is directed against Judah, the correlations it has with other Old Testament passages have revealed that other nations also faced similar, if not worse, judgments as those that Israel experienced. Apart from the recognition formula that occurs in Ezek 5:13, Ezek 5:5-17 does not contain any call to repentance. One is therefore left wondering if there is any hope for Israel after the heavy blows that YHWH has inflicted on them. This is again where this intertextual study aids in the interpretation of the passage, since other related passages have shown not only YHWH's reversal of some of the covenant curses, but also issues promises of restoration. From this we are able to see that YHWH's judgments have a redemptive purpose.

CHAPTER 8

INTERTEXTUALITY: THE ANCIENT NEAR EAST LITERATURE

Ezekiel 5:5-17 and the Ancient Near East Literature

Ezekiel 5:5-17 is a passage teeming with judgment language and how YHWH the God of Israel reacted to their disobedience by unleashing covenant curses upon them. The passage, as part of the Old Testament, was written within the ancient Near Eastern milieu. It is therefore fitting to examine some of the literature of the period to see if they contain parallels with Ezek 5:5-17. This exploration is based on the following questions: (1) What was the basis of the punishment the gods meted out to their people? (2) What means did they use to execute the punishments? and (3) What is the implication of the reaction of these ancient Near Eastern gods regarding their character? The literature explored is divided into the following categories: Sumerian, Akkadian, Hittite, Egyptian, and Ugaritic. In the expansive ancient Near Eastern literature, this project focuses on texts showing explicit correspondences with Ezek 5:5-17.

Sumerian Texts

Some elements of Sumerian texts find echoes in Ezek 5:5-17. This section explores the similarities and differences in the following Sumerian texts: Lamentation over the Destruction of Ur, Ishkur and the Destruction of the Rebellious Land, The Curse of Agade, The Code of Hammurabi, and The Annals of Ashurbanipal.

Lamentation over the Destruction of Ur¹

Table 35 shows some similarities and differences between this lamentation and Ezek 5:5-17. In this lamentation the gods use various weapons to destroy Ur: The major weapon of destruction is the storm which Enlil brought to ravage the city and its people.² Samuel Kramer in his introduction to this lamentation describes it thus: “It is an ‘evil storm,’ a ‘storm that annihilates the land,’ ‘the great storm of heaven,’ an ‘afflicting storm,’ a ‘destructive storm’, etc. This ‘storm,’ moreover, is aided by other destructive elemental forces called by Enlil against Ur, such as ‘the evil winds,’ ‘fire,’ darkness, and

Table 35. Ezekiel 5:5-17 and the Lamentation over the Destruction of Ur

	Ezekiel 5:5-17	Lamentation over the Destruction of Ur
Famine	v. 12 A third of you will die of famine v. 16 when I shoot at you with my . . . arrows of famine v. 17 I will send famine . . . against you	In the fields of the city there is no grain In Ur weak and strong both perished in the famine
Bloodshed	v. 17 Plague and bloodshed will sweep through you	They decreed that its destiny, that its people be killed In all its streets . . . dead bodies were lying Blood of the land like bronze and lead Who was stationed near weapons by the weapons was killed
Other natural disasters		Evil winds, fire, darkness, unbearable heat

¹ The following citations of the lamentation are taken from Samuel N. Kramer, *Lamentation Over the Destruction of Ur* (Chicago, Ill.: The University of Chicago Press, 1940). See also Piotr Michalowski, *The Lamentation over the Destruction of Sumer and Ur* (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1989).

² Dobbs-Allsopp observes that Enlil bears the major responsibility for the destruction of the cities of Sumer using storms and other enemies. See also the comparison he makes of Enlil and YHWH. Dobbs-Allsopp, *Weep, O Daughter of Zion*, 55-65.

unbearable heat.”³ The fourth song states that Enlil called the storm (173-174). The lamentation recounts the devastation brought about by the storm and fire (170ff.).

Jacob Klein’s translation of this storm is quite fascinating:⁴

The city-ravaging storm, the house-ravaging storm,
The stable-ravaging storm,
the sheepfold-burning storm . . .
The storm which knows no mother,
the storm which knows no father —
The storm which knows no wife,
the storm which knows no child —
The storm which knows no sister,
the storm which knows no brother —
The storm which knows no neighbor,
the storm which knows no confidant —
The storm which caused the wife to be abandoned,
the storm which caused the child to be abandoned
The storm which caused the Land to perish —
The storm which swept (through the land)
at Enlil’s hateful command —

The god Enlil is determined to enlist the full force of the storm to execute his judgment. The petitioner’s plea that this storm be stopped goes unheeded, a demonstration of the insensitive nature of the god Enlil. Interestingly, no such petition appears in Ezek 5 in spite of YHWH’s furious judgments.

The concept of famine appears in Ezek 5:12, 16 and 17. There are allusions to famine in the Lamentation over the Destruction of Ur as attested in the following lines:

271 in the fields of the city there is no grain, gone is the field worker;

³ Kramer, *Lamentation over the Destruction of Ur*, 3. See also Matthews and Benjamin, *Old Testament Parallels*, 247-55. “Lamentations over the Destruction of Sumer and Ur,” translated by Jacob Klein (*COS* 1.166:535-39); “Lamentations over the Destruction of Sumer and Ur,” translated by S. N. Kramer (*ANET*, 611-619).

⁴ “Lamentations over the Destruction of Sumer and Ur,” translated by Jacob Klein (*COS* 1.166:538).

- 273 My palm groves and vineyards that abounded with honey and wine verily
have brought forth the mountain thorn;
274 My plain where *Kazallu and* strong drink were prepared verily like an
oven has become *parched*.

In Ezek 5:14 YHWH threatens to make Jerusalem a ruin. This corresponds with some of the sections describing the devastation of the city in the Lamentation over Ur.

- 339 The city which has been made into ruins—thou art not its *mistress*. . . . ;
345 The city has been made into ruins; now *how dost thou exist!*

Then there is also the concept of bloodshed in this lamentation as is the case in Ezek 5:17.

- 214 In its boulevards where the feasts were celebrated they were *viciously attacked*.
215 In all its streets where they were wont to promenade dead bodies were lying about;
216 In its places where the festivities of the land took place the people were *ruthlessly laid low*.
217 The blood of the land like bronze and lead . . . ;
219 Its men who were brought to an end by the ax did not cover themselves with the *helmet*;
225 Who was stationed near weapons by the weapons was killed.

The stark difference between this lamentation and Ezek 5:5-17 is that YHWH categorically outlines the offenses that merit Jerusalem's destruction. In the Lamentation over Ur there appears to be no basis for the destruction of the city, a fact supported by the following lines:

- 324 O my city *which exists no longer*, my (city) attacked without cause,
325 O my (city) attacked and destroyed, my (city) attacked without cause,

It appears the gods are bent on destroying Ur so as to curtail its line of kingship. This is not a very convincing reason for the enormous suffering that these people have to endure. Contrary to YHWH who spells out the concrete reasons for his intended judgments, the character of the gods of Sumer is unearthed as they order the destruction

of the land and the city when no moral or cultic sin has been committed, other than their desire to arbitrarily end the ruling kingship.⁵ Again we can see that YHWH stands justified in the judicial actions he takes on Jerusalem and the people of Judah who have contravened the prescribed laws, misused the sanctuary and abandoned their God, and turned to unlawful idolatrous practices. Their indictment is indeed justified. This is in contrast to the seemingly unjustified devastation the people of Ur have to endure at the hands of Enlil for no stated sin against humanity or their god. Furthermore, there is no indication or provision for repentance from these gods.

Another feature that the Lamentation over the Destruction of Ur reveals is the polytheistic nature of the Sumerian pantheons and their inability to speak with one voice. While other gods petition the divine assembly⁶ not to destroy Ur, other gods are intent on proceeding with the destruction.⁷ Hence here we have the case of a house divided against itself. None of such divine bickering, squabbling, and differences appear in Ezekiel. There YHWH is the sole divine sovereign who determines the actions to be taken against the Israelites, and there is no other opposing voice to contradict his ways.

⁵ This can be attested by Sin's question to his father Enlil, "Oh my father who begot me, what has my city done to you, why have you turned against it! Oh Enlil, what has Ur done to you, why have you turned against it!" "Lamentations over the Destruction of Sumer and Ur," translated by S. N. Kramer (*ANET*, 617).

⁶ For discussion on the concept of divine assembly in Mesopotamia, Ugarit, and Israel see E. T. Mullen, Jr., "Divine Assembly," *ABD* 2:214-17.

⁷ "Lamentations over the Destruction of Sumer and Ur," translated by Jacob Klein (*COS* 1.166:536).

Ishkur and the Destruction of the Rebellious Land

This Sumerian hymn depicts the destruction of some land that became rebellious against the god Enlil. Consequently, the god Enlil summons his son Ishkur⁸ and instructs him to destroy “the rebellious land” by using hailstones and a great storm, an instruction which Ishkur follows to the letter.⁹ The text does not reveal the exact identity of “the rebellious land” or the precise nature of its rebellion, yet it resonates with Ezek 5:5-11 on the theme of rebellion against the gods and the resultant punishment by various agents. Here again the actions of Enlil and his son Ishkur reveal the nature of gods bent on meting out severe punishment without any specific reason, quite in contrast to YHWH, the God of Israel, who wants to make sure no one is left guessing his motives for the harsh judgments because he does not want any accusations of injustice on the punishments he renders. It is for that reason that YHWH unravels the specifics of the nature of the Israelites’ rebellion.

The Code of Hammurabi

The Code of Hammurabi contains some thematic allusions to the curses in Ezek 5:5-17. Table 36 gives a brief overview of some parallels between Ezek 5:5-17 and the Code of Hammurabi. An examination of the code reveals that it has correspondence with

⁸ Ishkur is the Sumerian god responsible for storms, wind, lightning, thunder and rain. He is also known as “the destroyer who threatens fields and settlements with storm and flood . . . the young warrior who goes into battle against an enemy land on his chariot drawn by storm-demons for his old father, An or Enlil and lays waste to it.” Daniel Schwemer, “The Storm-gods of the Ancient Near East: Summary, Synthesis, Recent Studies,” *JANER* 7 (2007): 121-68.

⁹ “Ishkur and the Destruction of the Rebellious Land,” translated by S. N. Kramer (*ANET*, 577-78).

Table 36. Ezekiel 5:5-17 and the Code of Hammurabi

	Ezekiel 5:5-17	The Code of Hammurabi
Famine	v. 12 A third of you will die of famine v. 16 When I shoot at you with my . . . arrows of famine v. 17 I will send famine . . . against you	May Adad . . . bring his land to destruction through want and hunger
Exile	v. 10 I will . . . scatter all your survivors to the winds v. 12 A third I will scatter to the winds	Enlil to order the dispersion of the people of whoever changes Hammurabi's word
Statutes and ordinances	v. 6 She has rebelled against my laws and decrees v. 7 She has not followed my decrees or kept my laws	Punishment by the gods for anyone who distorts or changes Hammurabi's statutes
Bloodshed	v. 17 Plague and bloodshed will sweep through you	To a leader who spurns Hammurabi's words, an appeal is made to Innana: May she strike down his warriors, (and) water the earth with their blood
Pity or compassion	v. 11 I will not look on you with pity or spare you	May she show his warriors no mercy
Plague/ Pestilence	v. 12 A third of your people will die of the plague v. 17 Plague and bloodshed will sweep through you	May Ninkarrak . . . inflict upon him in his body a grievous malady, an evil disease, a serious injury which never heals, whose nature no physician knows
City made into a ruin	v. 14 I will make you a ruin	May he order by his forceful word the destruction of his city

Ezek 5:5-17 in the following areas: the necessity of obeying the prescribed laws; punishment for disobedience in the form of exile, famine, bloodshed, pestilence/plagues.

In another case in point Hammurabi calls on the god Adad to use his powers to bring about famine on the land:

May Adad, the lord of Abundance,
the irrigator of heaven and earth, my helper,
deprive him of the rains from heaven
(and) the floodwaters from the springs!
May he bring his land to destruction through want and hunger;
may he thunder furiously over the city,
and turn his land into the desolation of a flood!¹⁰

If the person who spurns the words of these laws happens to be a ruler Hammurabi makes a call upon Inanna to expose his warriors to bloodshed:

May she shatter his weapons on the field of battle and conflict;
may she create confusion (and) revolt for him!
may she strike down his warriors,
(and) water the earth with their blood!
May she throw up a heap of his warrior's bodies on the plain;
may she show his warriors no mercy!¹¹

Hammurabi unequivocally appeals to the god Ninkarrak to bring pestilence/plague upon the disobedient:

May Ninkarrak, the daughter of Anum, my advocate in Ekur,
inflict upon him in his body a grievous malady,
an evil disease, a serious injury which never heals,
whose nature no physician knows,
which he cannot allay with bandages,
which like a deadly bite cannot be rooted out,
and may he continue to lament (the loss of) his vigor

¹⁰ "The Code of Hammurabi," translated by Theophile J. Meek (*ANET*, 179). See also "The Laws of Hammurabi," translated by Martha Roth (*COS* 2.131:352).

¹¹ "The Code of Hammurabi," translated by Theophile J. Meek (*ANET*, 179). See also "The Laws of Hammurabi," translated by Martha Roth (*COS* 2.131:353).

until his life comes to an end!¹²

The Code of Hammurabi emphasizes the significance of adhering to the prescribed principles and regulations, failure to which the offenders are left to the mercy of the gods. This corresponds quite well with Ezek 5 where Israel has disregarded the laws and thus has to face the wrath of YHWH. It is also worth noting that while the Code of Hammurabi warns of what might happen in the event of disobedience, in Ezek 5:5-17 the people of Israel have already broken the covenant and what awaits them now is the unmitigated wrath of YHWH.

There are differences that need to be noted. The Code of Hammurabi mentions civil and social laws related to adoption, property, marriage, unlawful sexual encounters, theft, false testimony, sorcery, and medical practices. The code does not raise any issue related to the sanctuary or the worship of other gods. In Ezekiel the cultic issues are paramount. The Israelites have broken ranks with YHWH and are worshiping idols and desecrating his sanctuary. In the Code of Hammurabi there is no mention of any beneficent action that Hammurabi has done to his constituents to deserve their adherence to the stipulated laws, as is the case in Ezek 5:5 where YHWH spells out what he has done to Jerusalem. Furthermore, Hammurabi invokes curses upon those who break the laws without giving any room for repentance. This is in stark contrast to Ezekiel where, in spite of the sins of Israel, YHWH not only invites the Israelites to repent (Ezek 14:6; 18:30-32), but makes provision for spiritual transformation and renewal (Ezek 11:19, 20;

¹² “The Code of Hammurabi” (*ANET*, 180). See also “The Laws of Hammurabi,” translated by Martha Roth (*COS* 2.131:353).

36:25-27). This is a demonstration of YHWH's character of concern and commitment to his people.

The Curse of Agade

Ezekiel 5:5-17 has some similarities and differences with the Curse of Agade.

One of the accusations YHWH levels against the Israelites is that they have defiled his sanctuary with their abominations (Ezek 5:11). In the Curse of Agade, it is believed that "it was the desecration of Sumer's holiest shrine by a bitter and defiant king"¹³ that triggered the wrath of Enlil and caused the disaster that devastated the city of Akkad and the entire land.¹⁴ This devastation was so severe that among other misfortunes were the destruction of its holy shrines and rampant starvation and desolation.¹⁵ Thus, Enlil, like YHWH in Ezek 5, is jealous for his temple and unleashes unprecedented punishment on the people for its desecration. Whereas in the Curse of Agade there is no concern with idolatry as is the case in Ezekiel, yet as Cooper points out, in the Curse of Agade, "divine

¹³ "The Curse of Agade," translated by Samuel N. Kramer (*ANET*, 646). See Jerrold S. Cooper as he describes Naramsin's destructive activities on the sanctuary: He set tall ladders against the temple (Line 107); He set spades against its roots, and It sank low as the foundation of the land, He set axes against its branches, and the temple, like a dead soldier, fell prostrate— (Lines 115-118); He ripped out its drain pipes (Line 120); He removed its door frames (Line 122); At its "Gate from Which Grain is Never Diverted," he diverted grain (-offerings) (Line 123); Akkad saw the holy vessels of the gods, Naramsin cast into the fire, Its *lahama*-figures, standing in the great gateway at the temple, Though they had committed no sacrilege (Lines 130-133); Large ships were docked at the temple, Large ships were docked at Enlil's temple, and The goods were removed from the city (Lines 143-145). Jerrold S. Cooper, *The Curse of Agade* (Baltimore, Md.: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1983), 23-24, 55-57.

¹⁴ For the description the action Enlil took, including employing the "Gutium, a people who know no inhibitions, With human instincts, but canine intelligence, and monkey's features," to wreak havoc on Akkad and its land plus the subsequent curse of the gods on Agade that followed, see Cooper, *The Curse of Agade*, 57-63 (Lines 149-209; 210-280).

¹⁵ "The Curse of Agade," (*ANET*, 646).

will is the execution of divine justice, visiting upon Naramsin what he visited upon Ekur.”¹⁶ This divine motivation in the Curse of Agade corresponds to YHWH’s motivation when he punishes Israel in return for their deeds and ways (Ezek 16:43, 58).

While YHWH unleashes severe punishments on Israel, nowhere do we find any intimation of his insensitivity to the plight of the people. Yet in the Curse of Agade the god Enlil manifests such thoughtlessness: “The land was filled with wailing, lamenting, hair-tearing, and bodily laceration, but Enlil turned a deaf ear to the people’s suffering; he went into his cella, and laid himself down to sleep.”¹⁷ The Old Testament attests to the ever awakefulness of YHWH, the God of Israel (Ps 121:4), such that even in the midst of his severe judgments he would not show such callousness. Another difference to note is that unlike the gods of Sumer who decreed eternal destruction and damnation for the city of Agade, YHWH in the book of Ezekiel decrees the destruction of Jerusalem, but leaves hope for the eventual restoration of the city and its people. This is the basis of the remnant motif in the book of Ezekiel (Ezek 6:8; 12:16; 14:22).¹⁸

Egyptian Texts

A number of Egyptian texts have similarities with Ezek 5:5-17. I will examine the Destruction of Mankind and the Storm Stela to show these links.

¹⁶ Jerrold Cooper, *The Curse of Agade*, 39.

¹⁷ “Lamentations over the Destruction of Sumer and Ur,” translated by S. N. Kramer (*ANET*, 646, 650).

¹⁸ Daniel Bodi, *The Book of Ezekiel and the Poem of Erra* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1991), 278-88.

The Destruction of Mankind

The concept of rebellion in the Egyptian myth, The Destruction of Mankind, strikes a chord with 5:5-17 where YHWH is enraged by the Israelites' rebellion against his statutes and ordinances (Ezek 5:6, 7). In this myth, the Egyptian sun-god Re has decided to annihilate humanity on account of their conspiracy to rebel against him.¹⁹ It is interesting to note that the instrument Re used when he began to slaughter humans was the "Eye of Re"²⁰ (the goddess, Hathor). The myth informs us that the destruction was halted however because of the trick Re devised to confuse Hathor, who was the agent of death. Similarly in Ezek 5:5-17 YHWH confronts people who have rebelled against him with destructive and severe judgments. These judgments are carried out fully until YHWH is satisfied. The twofold use of the word *קָלַף*, "complete, finish," referring to the completion of YHWH's anger (*אֵף*) and fury (*אֵרָא*) attests to this (Ezek 5:13).

There are however some differences between the Egyptian god Re and YHWH in the way they conduct judgment on the disobedient. In the Destruction of Mankind, Re summons the gods to seek their opinion regarding the punishment of the rebels, and it is only after getting their counsel that he sends his emissary, Hathor, to execute the punishment. No such consultation exists in the book of Ezekiel. YHWH knows the sins the Israelites have committed and he has a ready assortment of the means of judgments to release on the rebellious. While the charge in the Egyptian myth pertains only to some

¹⁹ "The Destruction of Mankind," translated by Miriam Lichtheim (*COS* 1.24:36-37); "Egyptian Myths, Tales, and Mortuary Texts," translated by John A. Wilson (*ANET*, 10-11).

²⁰ Lichtheim, 36. See n. 1 in which Lichtheim explains that Re's eye is considered "as a being distinct from him."

form of rebellion, in Ezekiel, YHWH confronts Israel on being rebellious, worship of idols, and desecration of the sanctuary.

YHWH, contrary to Re, is also serious in his judicial actions. There is no room for the kind of ruse played by Re as he plotted to have Hathor get drunk and not proceed with her initial mission of punishing the rebels. He will carry out his judgments until people come to acknowledge his nature and his abhorrence of sin. There is also no provision for repentance in this Egyptian Myth as it is in the book of Ezekiel.

The Storm Stela

Another parallel is found in the Egyptian Storm Stela in which god Amon becomes angry because the king's court and the shrine of the god Amon are housed in two different cities. Amon's wrath becomes so intense that it manifests itself in the form of a great storm that devastates both the land and the people. As a result of this punishment the king goes to Thebes to pay homage to Amon and to undertake repairs to the temples. Trevisanato asserts that some of the damages to the temples "had been caused either by neglect or by voluntary vandalism (or both)."²¹ Although this is not a case of idolatry as is the situation in Ezek 5, yet it is tantamount to abuse of the sacred sphere hence the furious reaction of Amon just as YHWH was enraged with the abuses that went on in the Jerusalem temple.

²¹ Siro I. Trevisanato, *The Plagues of Egypt: Archaeology, History and Science Look at the Bible* (Piscataway, N.J.: Euphrates, 2005), 109, 110. I do not agree however with Trevisanato's argument that the Egyptian biblical plagues were not of divine origin but the result of the so-called Santorini's eruption with its accompanying "volcanic cloud over the Nile Delta and some sociopolitical consequences thereof."

These two texts show that the Egyptian gods, like YHWH, become furious when there is rebellion or any infraction involving their cultic places. Furthermore, these gods are also seen to resort to various means and instruments of punishment. It is also significant to learn that these gods are capable of rethinking their punishments and possibly giving humans a second chance.

Hittite Texts

Two Hittite texts, “The Telepinu Myth” and the “Plague Prayers of Muršilis,” are now examined to show their correspondence with Ezek 5:5-17 and the nature and character of the Hittite gods in comparison to the character of YHWH, the sovereign God of Israel.

The Telipinu Myth

Ezekiel 5:13 has a record of YHWH spending his wrath (חֲרָא) upon the Israelites as a way of showing his indignation at their rebelliousness. In the Telipinu Myth, the storm-god Telipinu is so enraged²² that he finally leaves to an unknown destination.²³ The reason behind his anger is not stated. But it is assumed that humans must have done something that infuriated this god.²⁴ Telipinu’s departure has devastating effects as “he

²² Dalley characterizes the storm-god’s rage as “irrational anger.” Stephanie Dalley, “Near Eastern Myths and Legends,” in *The Biblical World* (ed. J. Barton; New York: Routledge, 2002), 1:59.

²³ For discussion on the disappearing gods see Simon B. Parker, “KTU 1.16 III, the Myth of the Absent God and 1 Kings 18,” *UF* 23 (1989): 283-96.

²⁴ “The Wrath of Telipinu,” translated by Gary Beckman (*COS* 1.57:151-53). Goetze suggests that the reason for Telipinu’s anger may have been stated in the first twenty lines of the tablet that is broken off. “The Telepinus Myth,” translated by Albrecht Goetze (*ANET*, 126).

took away grain, the fertility of the herds, growth(?), plenty(?), and satiety into the wilderness, to the meadow and to the moor.”²⁵ As a result

barley and wheat no longer grow. Cows, sheep, and humans no longer conceive, and those who are (already) pregnant do not give birth in this time. . . . The mountains dried up. The trees dried up, so that buds do not come forth. The pastures dried up. The springs dried up. Famine appeared in the land. Humans and gods perish from hunger.²⁶

The motifs of divine wrath and famine thus tie the two texts. It should be noted, however, that while YHWH manifests his anger by means of punishments that he unleashes on the people, yet he does not immediately leave and abandon the people. And even when he becomes so infuriated that he has to show his displeasure by leaving (Ezek 9-11), he still avails himself to them in the form of a “sanctuary in small measure” (Ezek 11:16). Furthermore, unlike the Telipinu Myth where the gods are enraged but nothing specific is mentioned as the cause of divine fury, in Ezekiel, YHWH’s basis for the punishments is clearly delineated. His punishments can thus be justified on those specific moral and cultic infractions. In the Telipinu Myth, other gods make a passionate appeal for Telipinu to return to the people. No such outward appeal is documented in Ezekiel. YHWH makes his own decision when to end the punishments and to restore his people. Contrary to Telipinu who other gods have to persuade to return to the people, in Ezekiel, YHWH’s character is shown in his passionate appeals for the Israelites to repent and return to him.

²⁵ “The Wrath of Telipinu,” translated by Gary Beckman (*COS* 1.57:151).

²⁶ Ibid.

Plague Prayers of Muršilis

Ezekiel 5:5-17 also finds correlation in the Plague Prayers of Muršilis (see table 37). In this prayer King Muršilis petitions the Hattian Storm-god to end the plague that has ravaged the country for twenty years.²⁷ This plague motif correlates with the plague punishment in Ezek 5. King Muršilis prayed passionately to the gods to unravel the mystery regarding the devastating plague. The gods revealed to Muršilis that one of the probable causes was the bloodguilt incurred in the murder of Tudḫaliya the Younger during his father's reign.²⁸ Another prayer indicates that this perpetual plague is attributed to the rituals pertaining to the Mala River that had long been neglected.²⁹

Another cause is thought to be the violation of the treaty/oath earlier made by Egypt under the auspices of the deity during the days of Muršilis's father.³⁰ If this is true, then we have here correlations with Ezek 5 where the issues at stake are related to the breaking of the covenant: the people's rebellion against YHWH's statutes and

²⁷ "Plague Prayers of Muršilis," translated by Albrecht Goetze (*ANET*, 394-396); See also Itamar Singer, *Hittite Prayers* (Atlanta, Ga.: Society of Biblical Literature, 2002), 47-69; H. J. Houwink ten Cate, "Hittite Royal Prayers," *Numen* 16 (1969): 81-98; "The Ten Year Annals of Great King Muršili II of Hatti," translated by Richard H. Beal (*COS* 2.16:82-90).

²⁸ "Plague Prayers of Muršilis II," translated by Gary Beckman (*COS* 1.60:156-157).

²⁹ Contrast this with the concern and care for the temples voiced by Arnuwandas and Asmu-Nikkal after the Kashkeans sacked the temples, smashing the images of the gods and plundering the temple property in "Prayer of Arnuwandas and Asmu-Nikkal Concerning the Ravages Inflicted on Hittite Cult-Centers," translated by Albrecht Goetze (*ANET*, 399-400).

³⁰ "Plague Prayers of Muršilis II," translated by Gary Beckman (*COS* 1.60:158). See also Singer, *Hittite Prayers*, 58-60. Mursilis states categorically that he did not sin, yet at the same time he acknowledges that the concept of generational curses is at work in his situation, and thus the sin of his father has devolved upon him; see also "Plague Prayers of Muršilis," translated by Albrecht Goetze (*ANET*, 394-95).

Table 37. Ezekiel 5:5-17 and the Plague Prayers of Muršilis

	Ezekiel 5:5-17	Plague Prayers of Muršilis
Sanctuary	v. 11 Because you have defiled my sanctuary with all your detestable things and with all your abominations	When I performed festivals, I paced back and forth (in worship) for all the gods. I did not privilege any single temple. I have offered votive gifts to you I will rebuild a temple for whatever god [has no temple] I will restore whatever divine image has been destroyed
Bloodshed	v. 17 Plague and bloodshed will sweep through you	They killed [Tudḫaliya] Furthermore, they killed those of his brothers My father [died] because of the blood of Tudḫaliya This bloodshed has again ruined Ḫatti
Pity or compassion	v. 11 I will not look on you with pity or spare you	Have mercy, listen to me O storm-god, my lord
Wrath	v. 13 My anger shall spend itself, and I will vent my fury on them and satisfy myself	I sought (the cause of) the anger of the gods

ordinances (Ezek 5:6, 7) and the improper protocols with regard to the modalities of the sanctuary (Ezek 5:11). A notable difference is that the issues related to the sanctuary in the Plague Prayers of Muršilis do not include idolatry or the desecration of the sanctuary, as is the case in Ezekiel.

Muršilis knows that the wrath of the gods is upon his land and therefore says, “I made the anger of the gods the subject of an oracle.”³¹ While Muršilis gives assurance to the gods that he is ready and willing to do anything that would ensure that amends are

³¹ “Plague Prayers of Muršilis” (ANET, 395).

made for the sins that may have caused the plague,³² no such entreaty is found in Ezek 5:5-17.³³ Rather, what we find in Ezekiel is a God who himself takes the initiative to invite the Israelites to repent and promises the reestablishment of the covenant with them.

The concept of divine fury also finds a fitting correspondence with Ezek 5 where YHWH acknowledges the phenomenon (Ezek 5:13). The justice of these gods deserves to be called into question because of their indifference to Muršilis's passionate petitions. Because of their apparent indifference the ravages of the plague continue unabated. This is in stark contrast to YHWH who offers passionate appeals to the people of Israel to repent and reestablish their relationship with him.

Akkadian Texts

A number of Akkadian texts have components that correspond with some features of Ezek 5:5-17. The texts to be examined in this section include Man and his God and the Babylonian Theodicy, the Gilgamesh Epic, the Atrahasis Epic, the Poem of Erra, the Vassal-Treaties of Esarhaddon, and the Treaty of Ashurnirari V of Assyria and Marti'ilu of Arpad.

Man and His God and the Babylonian Theodicy

In this Old Babylonian text, the righteous sufferer does not know the basis of his punishment. This declaration of innocence can be seen from the following inquiry:

³² "Plague Prayers of Mursilis" (*ANET*, 394-396); Itamar Singer, *Hittite Prayers* (Atlanta, Ga.: Society of Biblical Literature, 2002), 64-66.

³³ For other references to plagues in Hittite literature see "Deeds of Šuppiluliuma," translated by Harry A. Hoffner, Jr. (*COS* 1.74:185-92). The plague reference here pertains to an outbreak in the Hittite army and there is no explanation for the cause of the epidemic.

My Lord, I did consult with myself within my reins,
[I thought it over] in my heart: the sin I committed I do not know.

Have I trodden on something abhorrent to you?
Have I accepted a very evil forbidden fruit?³⁴

The sufferer later while thanking the god for his kindness, acknowledges that there are some areas of culpability in his life:

I have not forgotten all the kindness you have done to me.
And all the blasphemy I have spoken to you.³⁵

While Bricker argues that Man and his God should not be regarded as part of Mesopotamian literature on theodicy,³⁶ yet he acknowledges that the innocent sufferer's illness could be attributed to some "hostile deity."³⁷ This in itself shows the capricious nature of some gods who exposed humanity to undeserved suffering. In the Hebrew Bible YHWH allows innocent Job to go through intense and undeserved suffering, not because of YHWH's capricious nature or some ill intent, but to demonstrate that such undeserved suffering originated from an enemy opposed to God but whom God can and will ultimately defeat.³⁸

Also noteworthy among the Akkadian texts is the Babylonian Theodicy, in which a sufferer converses with his friend and feels he does not deserve the suffering the gods

³⁴ W. G. Lambert, "A Further Attempt at the Babylonian 'Man and his God,'" in *Language, Literature, and History: Philological and Historical Studies Presented to Erica Reiner* (ed. F. Rochberg-Halton; New Haven, Conn.: American Oriental Society, 1987), 190.

³⁵ Lambert, "A Further Attempt at the Babylonian 'Man and His God,'" 190.

³⁶ Daniel P. Bricker, "Innocent Suffering in Mesopotamia," *TynBul* 51 (2000): 193-214.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ André LaCocque, "The De-construction of Job's Fundamentalism," *JBL* 126 (2007): 83-97; Bill Thomason, *God on Trial: The Book of Job and Human Suffering* (Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical, 1997); Kenneth Ngwa, "Did Job Suffer for Nothing? The Ethics of Piety, Presumption and the Reception of Disaster in the Prologue of Job" *JSOT* 33 (2009): 359-380.

have brought upon him.³⁹ His friend, on the other hand, gives a pessimistic view of the gods. These gods are unfair for they have ordained death for the good as well as the bad. Toorn has aptly summed up the position of the gods in the Babylonian Theodicy: "The gods are motivated by considerations that are impossible for humans to penetrate."⁴⁰ Human beings do not know "the plans and purposes of the gods."⁴¹ Toorn further observes that according to the Mesopotamian religion, "humans are often blind to their own faults, that they lack knowledge of their sins."⁴² The Babylonian Theodicy thus reinforces the point of human ignorance of their sins; they just do not understand the ways of the gods.⁴³ Bricker's suggestion that "the average person in Mesopotamia was not sufficiently significant to the great gods to merit individual attention"⁴⁴ could partially explain this stance the gods had towards humans.

This contrasts sharply with the relationship between YHWH and Israel in Ezekiel. He had made his ways known in the covenant he instituted with them. The recognition formula that is predominant in Ezekiel also attests to a divinity calling on humanity to get to know and understand his nature and person. The people of Israel are so important to him that even when he punishes them severely, he still takes the initiative to call them to repentance and offer them restoration.

³⁹ Toorn, "Theodicy in Akkadian Literature," 71.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 72.

⁴¹ Ibid., 73.

⁴² Ibid., 73-74.

⁴³ Ibid., 74, 80.

⁴⁴ Bricker, "Innocent Suffering in Mesopotamia, 212.

The Gilgamesh Epic

The Gilgamesh Epic recounts the destruction of humanity by the flood. However, a dispute⁴⁵ arises between Ea and Enlil⁴⁶ over this punishment.⁴⁷ Enlil accuses Ea of allowing one person to escape the destruction that was intended for everyone. Ea in his ardent defense castigates Enlil for the wholesale destruction of humanity, arguing that Enlil could have used less serious means of punishment other than the flood:

Instead of your bringing on the flood, would a lion
had risen up to diminish mankind!
Instead of your bringing on the flood, would a wolf
had risen up to diminish mankind!
Instead of your bringing on the flood, would a famine
had risen up for the land to undergo,
Instead of your bringing on the flood, would pestilence
had risen up for mankind to undergo!⁴⁸

We see in this dispute some correlations with Ezek 5. Ea in the protest suggests that wild beasts, famine, or pestilence could have been used instead of the more disastrous means of the flood. These methods of punishment are mentioned in Ezek 5. In this suggestion Ea is in essence questioning the justice of the god Enlil, a question that

⁴⁵ Bricker's contention that such disputes among the gods were not common is untenable. Bricker, "Innocent Suffering in Mesopotamia," 212.

⁴⁶ Foster notes that the depiction of Enlil in Akkadian literature is that of a god who is "inimical to humankind, angry, harsh and malevolent." Benjamin R. Foster, *Before the Muses: An Anthology of Akkadian Literature* (Bethesda, Md.: CDL Press, 2005), 652.

⁴⁷ Laato and De Moor suggest that in the polytheistic religions deity assumed different roles in which one god would cause the suffering and the other god would alleviate such suffering. Antti Laato and Johannes C. de Moor, "Introduction," in *Theodicy in the World of the Bible* (ed. A. Laato and J. C. de Moor; Leiden: Brill, 2003), xxii.

⁴⁸ "Gilgamesh," translated by Benjamin R. Foster (COS 1.132:458-60). See also Victor H. Matthews and Don C. Benjamin, *Old Testament Parallels: Laws and Stories from the Ancient Near East* (New York: Paulist, 2006), 29; Theodor H. Gaster, *Myth, Legend and Custom in the Old Testament: A Comparative Study with Chapters from Sir James G. Frazer's Folklore in the Old Testament* (New York: Harper & Row, 1969) 83-84.

could as well arise in Ezek 5 where YHWH is using unprecedented punishments on the Israelites. Once again YHWH's power is in distinct contrast to these gods who meet challenges from members of their divine councils. Because of his sovereignty, he has also ordained that there be a remnant even in the face of severe destruction.

The Atrahasis Epic

The Atrahasis Epic, like the passage in Ezek 5, has a backdrop of rebellion. This rebellion and other themes that are similar to the ones in Ezek 5:5-17 are shown in table 38. The younger gods refuse to do the menial work. They thus reach a compromise with the senior gods that humans be created to do these tedious tasks. The earth subsequently becomes overpopulated with the human beings who in turn become so noisy that the gods cannot sleep. Furthermore these humans, following the tradition of the gods, rebel and refuse to do the work for which they were created.⁴⁹ The gods introduce plagues to control the fast-growing population⁵⁰ and to force them back to work.⁵¹ Kilmer notes that this rebellion was so intense that the gods had a "raucous demonstration in which they set

⁴⁹ Scholars have offered different opinions as to the main offense man may have committed. G. Pettinato argues that the noise had a rebellious tone because of the people's refusal to do their assigned work. G. Pettinato, "Die Bestrafung des Menschengeschlechts durch die Sintflut," *Or* 37 (1968): 165-200. For similar views see Bernard F. Batto, *Slaying the Dragon: Mythmaking in the Biblical Tradition* (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster/John Knox, 1992), 29-30; Robert Oden, "Divine Aspirations in Atrahasis and in Genesis 1-11," *ZAW* 93 (1981): 197-16. Kilmer refutes this position and argues that man's offense involved overpopulation. A. D. Kilmer, "The Mesopotamian Concept of Overpopulation and Its Solution as Reflected in the Mythology," *Or* 41 (1972): 160-177.

⁵⁰ "Atra-ḫasis," translated by Benjamin R. Foster (*COS* 1.130:450-453). See also "Atrahasis," translated by E. A. Speiser (*ANET*, 104-106).

⁵¹ Matthews and Benjamin, *Old Testament Parallels*, 33, 34.

Table 38. Ezekiel 5:5-17 and the Atrahasis Epic

	Ezekiel 5:5-17	The Atrahasis Epic
Rebellion	<p>v. 6 She has rebelled against my laws and decrees</p> <p>v. 7 She has not followed my decrees or kept my laws</p>	He trans[gressed the command of] Enlil
Cannibalism	v. 10 Surely, parents shall eat their children in your midst, and children shall eat their parents	<p>When the sixth year arrived, they prepared [the daughter] for a meal</p> <p>The child they prepared for food</p> <p>One house de[voured] the other</p>
Famine	<p>v. 12 A third of you will die of famine</p> <p>v. 16 When I shoot at you with my . . . arrows of famine</p> <p>v. 17 I will send famine . . . against you</p>	<p>Reduce their food supply</p> <p>Let plants become scarce</p> <p>Let harvests be reduced</p> <p>Let the joy of the harvest be gone</p> <p>After three years . . . every worker's face was drawn with hunger</p>
Plague/ Pestilence	<p>v. 12 A third of your people will die of the plague</p> <p>v. 17 Plague and bloodshed will sweep through you</p>	<p>Cannot stand this uproar, I cannot sleep, send plagues upon the land</p> <p>The pestilence shall [prompt]ly put an end to their clamor</p> <p>[Like] a storm it shall blow upon them</p> <p>Aches, dizziness, chills, (and) fever</p> <p>[Let there c]ease the aches, the dizziness, the chills, the fever</p>
Wrath	v. 13 My anger shall spend itself, and I will vent my fury on them and satisfy myself	<p>O lord mankind cries out</p> <p>Your [an]ger consumes the land</p> <p>[The anger] of the gods consumes the land</p>

their tools on fire” then went to surround the house of the god, Enlil.⁵² Regarding the overpopulation we are told,

The workers continued to multiply.
The land bellowed like a bull,
The uproar disturbed the divine assembly.
When Enlil heard the noise,
He complained:
“I cannot stand this uproar, I cannot sleep. . . .
Send plagues upon the land. . . .”⁵³

The plague was circumvented through the intervention of Atrahasis in consultation with other gods. Since the human population continued to increase, the gods introduced drought and famine to deal with the ongoing menace.

So on *II.i:7-20* we read:

I cannot stand this human uproar,
I cannot sleep!
Reduce their food supply.
Let plants become scarce.
Adad! Withhold the rain!
Do not allow springs to rise from the deep.
Winds! Blow the earth dry!
Clouds! Gather, but do not rain.
Let harvests be reduced.
Let Nisaba, divine patron of grain, reduce their harvests.
Let the joy of the harvest be gone. . . .⁵⁴

And on *iv:11-14* we read:

After three years...every worker's face was drawn with hunger
Every worker's face looked like the crust on fermenting beer.

⁵² Anne D. Kilmer, "The Mesopotamian Concept of Overpopulation and Its Solution as Reflected in the Mythology," *Or* 41 (1972): 160-177.

⁵³ Cited in Matthews and Benjamin, *Old Testament Parallels*, 37. See also "Atrahasis: Neo-Assyrian Version II," translated by E. A. Speiser (*ANET*, 105-106); William L. Moran, "Atrahasis: The Babylonian Story of the Flood," *Bib* 52 (1971): 51-61.

⁵⁴ Cited in Matthews and Benjamin, *Old Testament Parallels*, 39. See also "Atrahasis: Neo-Assyrian Version II," translated by E. A. Speiser (*ANET*, 105-106).

Every worker lived on the brink of death. . . .⁵⁵

The conditions of this drought became so grim that it finally resulted in cannibalism.

After five years daughters watch their mothers go into the houses alone;
. . . while their own mothers lock him out of the house.
Daughters stare while their mothers are sold as slaves.
Mothers stare while their daughters are sold as slaves.
After six years daughters are cooked and eaten.
Sons are served as food.⁵⁶

In spite of these austere measures the human population kept increasing. The gods finally decided that the only option was the flood.⁵⁷

As we have seen the Atrahasis Epic corresponds to Ezek 5:5-17 regarding some form of rebellion as the basis of the punishment and plague, famine, and cannibalism as the means of punishment. In both Ezek 5 and the Atrahasis Epic there is divine justification for the punishment. For the gods in the Atrahasis Epic it is mainly worry caused by the burgeoning human population that makes it hard for the chief god, Enlil, to sleep.⁵⁸ They therefore employ various punishments to stem this growth. In Ezek 5, the people's unwillingness to remain faithful to the covenant prompts YHWH to send the

⁵⁵ See Matthews and Benjamin, *Old Testament Parallels*, 39. See also "Atrahasis: Neo-Assyrian Version II," translated by E. A. Speiser (*ANET*, 105-106). See also Debra Chase who vividly describes the toll famine and starvation had on the people's physical condition and equates this with conditions evidenced in Kwashiorkor victims. Debra A. Chase, "Ina šitkuki napišti: Starvation (Kwashiorkor-Marasmus) in Atra-ḥasīs," *JCS* 39 (1987): 241-46.

⁵⁶ Cited in Matthews and Benjamin, *Old Testament Parallels*, 39. See also "Atrahasis: Neo-Assyrian Version II," translated by E. A. Speiser (*ANET*, 105-106).

⁵⁷ Cited in Matthews and Benjamin, *Old Testament Parallels*, 41. See also "Atrahasis: Neo-Assyrian Version II," translated by E. A. Speiser (*ANET*, 105-106). See also Anne Draffkorn Kilmer, "The Mesopotamian Concept of Overpopulation and Its Solution as Reflected in the Mythology," *Or* 41 (1972): 160-177.

⁵⁸ Bernard F. Batto, *Slaying the Dragon: Mythmaking in the Biblical Tradition* (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster/John Knox, 1992), 27-30.

judgments. They rebel against his laws, engage in idolatry, and desecrate his sacred space.

Here again we meet the callousness of the gods, who are out to punish humanity for baseless reasons. One of the reasons given is the overpopulation that makes it hard for the god Enlil to sleep. The contrast here is quite evident with the Hebrew God who in his very nature “never slumbers nor sleeps” (Ps 121:4). This exposes the vulnerable human element in these gods. The gods are also concerned with overpopulation. This is not an issue in Ezekiel since YHWH is the creator God who instructed humanity to “be fruitful and increase in number and fill the earth” (Gen 1:28). For YHWH, the issues involved in his judgments are matters of grave concern and matters that have eternal consequences, not petty issues like noise or overpopulation. Furthermore, no moral or cultic reasons are found to be the basis of the punishments in the Atrahasis Epic. This differs significantly with YHWH who punishes Israel for the stated moral and cultic reasons. There is also no indication of any call to repentance in the Atrahasis Epic, as is the case in the book of Ezekiel where the nature of the Hebrew God is seen in his petition for Israel to change their ways and return to him.

The Poem of Erra

The Poem of Erra is an Akkadian literary masterpiece within the Mesopotamian corpus of literature.⁵⁹ Machinist remarks that the uniqueness of this poem can be seen

⁵⁹ Bodi, *The Book of Ezekiel and the Poem of Erra*, 52.

from its “content and literary artistry or by the evidence of its ancient popularity.”⁶⁰ Bodi maintains that the author of the book of Ezekiel must have been conversant with the Poem of Erra because of the correlation of the themes and expressions between the two sources.⁶¹ Therefore, a proper interpretation of the book entails a consideration of the “contemporary literature, religious beliefs, and practices.”⁶² Let us now explore the correspondences between Ezek 5:5-17 and the Poem of Erra as shown in table 39.

Akkadian *hubūru*, “Din” and Hebrew דָּמָוָה, “Noise”

One such correspondence is the Akkadian word *hubūru* “din,”⁶³ which has a semantic connection with the Hebrew word דָּמָוָה, “make a loud noise,” or “be turbulent.” The Akkadian *hubūru* is derived from *habāru*, “to be noisy.”⁶⁴ The Hebrew word דָּמָוָה, although variously translated, means “multitude” or “host,” with emphasis on unrest, turbulence, or noise.”⁶⁵ The word occurs 27 times in the book of Ezekiel.⁶⁶ Hummel translates it as “flagrant,” arguing that the word as used in Ezek 5:7 does not have an emphasis on “noisiness.”⁶⁷ Block connects this word to דָּמָוָה, “to make a noise, to create

⁶⁰ Peter Machinist, “Rest and Violence in the Poem of Erra,” *JAOS* 103 (1983): 221-226.

⁶¹ Bodi, *The Book of Ezekiel and the Poem of Erra*, 19.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 13.

⁶³ *CAD* H 220 *hubūru* B.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, *habāru* A.

⁶⁵ Carl P. Weber, דָּמָוָה, *TWOT*. See also L. Koehler, W. Baumgartner, “דָּמָוָה,” *HALOT* 1:250-51; A. Baumann, “דָּמָוָה,” “דָּמָוָה,” “דָּמָוָה,” “דָּמָוָה,” *TDOT* 3:414-18.

⁶⁶ Ezek 5:7; 7:11, 12, 13, 14; 23:42; 26:13; 29:19; 30:4, 10, 15; 31:2, 18; 32:12 (twice), 16, 18, 20, 24, 25, 26, 31, 32; 39:11 (twice); 39:11, 15.

⁶⁷ Hummel, *Ezekiel 1-20*, 171.

Table 39. Ezekiel 5:5-17 and the Poem of Erra

	Ezekiel 5:5-17	The Poem of Erra
Human turbulence	v. 7 Because you are more turbulent (𐎶𐎵𐎶𐎶) than the nations that are all around you	<i>huburu</i> = din, noise
The Remnant	v. 10 Any of you who survive I will scatter to every wind	For Erra had burned with wrath and planned to lay waste the countries and slay their peoples, But Išum, his counsellor, appeased him and (Erra) left a remnant
Recognition formula	They shall know that I, the Lord, have spoken in my jealousy	Let all the lands hear it and praise my might Let the people see and extol my name
Bloodshed	v. 17 Plague and bloodshed will sweep through you	You shed their blood, a[s (if it were) drain water, in the squares of the city]. You slashed their [veins and made the river flow (bloodstained)].
Wild animals	v. 17 I will send famine and wild animals against you	I shall send all the beasts of the mountain down (to the plain) They will devastate (all) the places where they s[e]t foot [Li]on and wolf will strike down Sakkan's h[er]ds.

panic.”⁶⁸ With this meaning the phrase in Ezek 5:7 could be rendered “because of your noisiness more than the nations which are around you.” In this regard the Poem of Erra enables us to understand the nature of the word *המון* as used here.

Daniel Bodi points out that in some of the sections of the Poem of Erra “the excessive noise of humans stands for insolence and irreverence.”⁶⁹ And further that this noisiness “is an expression of their rebellion and defiance of divinely imposed limits.”⁷⁰ In this regard Zimmerli’s rendition of *המון* appears to capture its essence when he says, “It was a word which would denote presumptuous human hybris against divine greatness. Not first the violent deed, but the insolent hybris which puffs itself up against God.”⁷¹ Hummel says that Israel is “brazen, and/or riotous in its misbehavior.”⁷² Eichrodt observes that it refers to “the swelling pomp, with overweening arrogance employed for its own self-glorification.”⁷³

These interpretations support Bodi’s conclusion that *המון* “stands for irreverence, hybris and insolence on the part of humans toward YHWH.”⁷⁴ Because of the prominence of the word *המון* in the book of Ezekiel and its semantic link with the

⁶⁸ Block, *Ezekiel 1-24*, 201.

⁶⁹ Bodi, *The Book of Ezekiel and the Poem of Erra*, 122.

⁷⁰ Daniel Bodi, “Ezekiel,” in *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary* (ed. J. H. Walton; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009) 4:416. Finkelstein also observes that the Akkadian does not connote ordinary noise but a spirit of rebellion. J. J. Finkelstein, “‘Bible and Babel,’ A Comparative Study of the Hebrew and Babylonian Religious Spirit,” *Com* 26 (1958): 431-44.

⁷¹ Zimmerli, *Ezekiel 1-24*, 210.

⁷² Hummel, *Ezekiel 1-20*, 181.

⁷³ Eichrodt, *Ezekiel*, 102-103.

⁷⁴ Bodi, *The Book of Ezekiel and the Poem of Erra*, 128.

Akkadian *hubūru*, and because of the related contexts in which each word is respectively used in the book of Ezekiel and in the Poem of Erra, Bodi concludes that through the process of “literary emulation” the author of the book of Ezekiel used 𒌷𒍪𒌷 to convey the nature of the Israelites which led to YHWH’s judgment upon them.⁷⁵

In Ezek 5:5-17 YHWH categorically states the methods he will use to discipline errant Jerusalem. As we have seen these include cannibalism, exile, plague, famine, sword, wild beasts and bloodshed. In the Poem of Erra there is repeated mention of ‘weapons.’⁷⁶ Erra’s major weapons (minions) are “the Sebeti and Išum.”⁷⁷ Note the terrifying designations Anum, the king of the gods, gives to the Sibitti⁷⁸ in Tablet I as he sets their destinies:

- 31 He summoned the first one and gave (him) instructions:
- 32 “Wherever you may go and spread terror, have no equal!”
- 33 To the second he said: “Burn like fire, blaze like a flame!”
- 34 With the third he spo[ke]: “Take a lion like aspect, and may he be annihilated who looks at you!”
- 35 To the fourth he said: “At the wielding of your fierce weapons, may the mountain be razed to the ground!”
- 36 To the fifth he said: “Blow like the wind, check on the (entire) orbit (of the world)!”
- 37 To the sixth he ordered: “Strike upwards and downwards: spare nobody!”
- 38 He charged the seventh with viper venom (saying): “Kill (all) that lives!”

⁷⁵ Ibid., 157-58.

⁷⁶ Tablet One: 7, 17, 44, 45, 60, 88 (war equipment), 90 (arrow), 98 (fierce weapons), 146, 147, 178, 186; Tablet Three Fragment C: 26, 66; Tablet Four: 4, 7, 16 (arrow), 22, 32 (arrow, sword), 80; Tablet V: 58 (sword).

⁷⁷ Jeffrey L. Cooley, "I Want to Dim the Brilliance of Šulpae!" *Mesopotamian Celestial Divination and the Poem of Erra and Išum*, "Iraq 70 (2008): 179-188.

⁷⁸ *Sibitti* is the Akkadian name for seven.

As Anum was handing these fierce gods to Erra he said, “Let them be your fierce weapons, let them march beside you!” (I.44). In I.98 Erra calls them “my fierce weapons.” This can be compared to YHWH’s וַיִּבְרַח הַחַיּוֹת הַמָּה, “furious punishments” of Ezek 5:15.

Note specifically the use of wild animals to cause destruction and havoc:

- 39 “I shall send all the beasts of the mountain down (to the plain):
40 “They will devastate (all) the places where they s[e]t foot.

Tablet Three specifically mentions the lion and the wolf:

- 15 “[Li]on and wolf will strike down Sakkan’s h[er]ds.

Tablet Three Fragment C mentions bloodshed:⁷⁹

- 4 “You shed their blood, a[s (if it were) drain water, in the squares of the city].
5 “You slashed their [veins and made the river flow (bloodstained)].

We should note that while in Ezek 5 YHWH mentions wild animals as one of the punishments, he does not specifically identify any by name as is the case in the Poem of Erra. Once again we can see the connections with Ezek 5: the various weapons used, the wild animals, bloodshed and the fury of divinity with a determination to enact the judgments against the offenders. The judgments, as we have seen, are not presented as single or isolated entities but are in most cases lumped in a chain of disasters to be released on the wrongdoers. Hence YHWH presents cannibalism, famine, sword, pestilence, wild animals, and bloodshed, as his weapons of choice against Jerusalem in

⁷⁹ The same lines are repeated in Fragment Four: 34, 35.

Ezek 5:5-17 and in the Poem of Erra, Ishum employs a string of catastrophes against the city of Dūr in the following manner in Tablet IV:

- 75 I shall stir up the seven old wind on this one country.
- 76 He who does not die in the struggle will die in the destruction.
- 77 Him who has not died in the destruction, the enemy will plunder.
- 78 Him whom the enemy has not pl[undered], the thief will kill.
- 79 Him whom the thief has not ki[lled], the king's weapon will hit.
- 80 Him whom the king's weapon has not hit, the prince will strike down.
- 81 Him whom the prince has not struck down, Adad will wash away.
- 82 Him whom Adad has not washed away, Šamaš will carry away.
- 83 Him who has gone outdoors, the wind will sweep away.
- 84 Him who has repaired to his house, the *rūbiṣṣu* (-demon) will strike down.
- 85 He who has gone up on a hill will die of thirst.
- 86 He who has gone down in a valley will die in the flood.⁸⁰

This barrage of methods applied indicates the seriousness of the punishments.

Jerusalem and Babylon

In Ezek 5:5 YHWH says, “This is Jerusalem; I have set her in the center of the nations, with countries all around her.” It is interesting to note that in the Poem of Erra Babylon has a designation similar to that of Jerusalem. In Tablet IV we read the following:

- 1 (It is) you, hero Erra, (who) did not fear prince Marduk's name!
- 2 You have undone the bond of Dimkurkurra, the city of the king of the gods (= Marduk), the bond of (all) the countries.

Cagni notes that the expression “Dimkurkurra” is of Sumerian origin and its literal meaning is “the bond of (all) the countries’ (*rikis mātāti*).” He goes on to say that this denotes “Babylon which, as the sacred city of the ‘king of the gods’ Marduk, came to

⁸⁰ Luigi Cagni, *The Poem of Erra* (Malibu, Calif.: Undena, 1977), 54.

be considered the ‘knot’ of the universe, or the center of the world.”⁸¹ In discussing this concept Bodi points out that “Jerusalem derives its importance from a divine decision. A similar notion of a divine election of a city is present in the Poem of Erra.”⁸²

The Remnant Motif

In Ezek 5:10 YHWH announces his intention to inflict punishment on the Israelites, and one of these punishments entails the scattering of the remnant (שְׁאֵרִית) to the winds. The word שְׁאֵרִית means “remainder, remnant, posterity, residue, survivors.” Although Ezek 5:5-17 does not address what will ultimately become of the remnant who YHWH threatens to scatter to the winds, yet taken in its entirety the book of Ezekiel addresses the restoration motif which deals with how YHWH finally graciously restores these people back to their land. The Hebrew root שָׂר is similar in many respects to many forms of the root שָׂר that occurs in a number of West Semitic languages. Gerhard Hasel in the article "Semantic Values of Derivatives of the Hebrew Root Š'R" has done a very thorough work in delineating its occurrence and usage in many of these Semitic languages, a work that need not be replicated here.⁸³

⁸¹ Ibid., 49.

⁸² Bodi, *The Book of Ezekiel and the Poem of Erra*, 229.

⁸³ Gerhard F. Hasel, "Semantic Values of Derivatives of the Hebrew Root Š'R," *AUSS* 11 (1973): 152-169. See esp. pp. 156-160 where he cites examples of the usage of this root in texts from Ugarit, Aramaic, Palmyrene, Nabatean, Arabic and Syriac and concludes that it is basically a West Semitic phenomenon. He also points out that of all the West Semitic languages it is only the Hebrew language that connects the use of the root שָׂר with those who remain in the aftermath of the devastation of war. See also idem, *The Remnant: The History and Theology of the Remnant Idea from Genesis to Isaiah* (Andrews University Monographs, Studies in Religion 5, Berrien Springs, Mich.: Andrews University Press, 1972), 50-134, in which Hasel discusses the remnant motif in Sumerian, Akkadian, Hittite, Ugaritic, and Egyptian texts.

The Poem of Erra recounts how Išum, Erra's counselor, dissuaded him from going on with his destructive work and as a result of this he left a remainder.⁸⁴ In Tablet V we read the following:⁸⁵

- 40 For Erra had burned with wrath and planned to lay waste the countries and
slay their peoples,
41 But Išum, his counsellor, appeased him and (Erra) left a remnant!

Note Hasel's pertinent statement regarding the remnant and the Poem of Erra:

What is new in the Erra Epic is not so much that there remains a remnant, but that the poet speaks of a remnant of his own people. The Akkadians were threatened with total annihilation had not the gods intervened and "left a remnant (Tablet V 41) Thus the remnant motif appears here in the context of the destruction of a capital city with its surrounding cities and their inhabitants of whom only a remnant survived. But the survival of the remnant was a gracious act on the part of the gods, because in this remnant the future existence of the Akkadians was preserved, linking past and future existence in a straight, uninterrupted line."⁸⁶

This view is in stark contrast to that of Rowley who does not see any act of mercy in the Poem of Erra with respect to the gods leaving a remnant. Rather, it is as a result of "the intervention of his counselor,"⁸⁷ Išum. In any case this tells us something about these gods. They are not bent on total eradication of humanity. They thus leave a remnant. A similar concept is found in Ezek 5 where YHWH has a remnant that he sends away in exile, to be restored later.

⁸⁴ W. G. Lambert, "The Fifth Tablet of the Era Epic," *Iraq* 24 (1962): 119-26.

⁸⁵ Citation from Cagni, *The Poem of Erra*, 60.

⁸⁶ Hasel, *The Remnant*, 86.

⁸⁷ H. H. Rowley, *The Biblical Doctrine of Election* (London: Lutherworth, 1950), 83.

The Recognition Formula

The recognition formula occurs more times in the book of Ezekiel than in any other Old Testament book. The first occurrence of this formula in Ezekiel is in Ezek 5:13 where YHWH declares that he will be appeased after he has vented his anger then the Israelites will know that “I the Lord have spoken in my zeal.” Zimmerli has aptly expressed the purpose of the recognition formula by saying that its major focus is

neither the restoration of a healthy people nor the reestablishment of social balance within the people; rather it is above all else the adoration that kneels because of divinely inspired recognition, an orientation toward the one who himself says “I am YHWH.”⁸⁸

The Poem of Erra ends with the recognition formula similar to the recognition formula occurring several times in the book of Ezekiel. While in Ezekiel the formula mainly uses the verb ‘know,’ the Poem of Erra has cases where the verbs ‘hear’ and ‘see’ are the ones employed, as can be seen in Erra V 59-61⁸⁹.

59 May this song last forever and endure for all time.
60 Let all the lands hear it and praise my might,
61 Let the people see and extol my name.

The Vassal-Treaties of Esarhaddon

In the Vassal-Treaties of Esarhaddon, the Assyrian king of the seventh century B.C.E., are recorded cases of curses that the gods should bring upon anyone who disobeyed the terms of the treaties. Table 40 gives an overview of the similarities between these curses and those in Ezek 5:5-17. Among the curses that are included

⁸⁸ Zimmerli, *I Am Yahweh*, 88.

⁸⁹ The citation here is from W. G. Lambert, "The Fifth Tablet of the Era Epic," *Iraq* 24 (1962): 119-125.

Table 40. Ezekiel 5:5-17 and the Vassal-Treaties of Esarhaddon

	Ezekiel 5:5-17	The Vassal-Treaties of Esarhaddon
Cannibalism	v. 10 Surely, parents shall eat their children in your midst, and children shall eat their parents	May a pregnant mother (and) her daughter eat the flesh of your sons; in your extremity may you eat the flesh of your sons (In) hunger may one man eat the flesh of another
Famine	v. 12 A third of you will die of famine v. 16 When I shoot at you with my . . . arrows of famine v. 17 I will send famine . . . against you	[May the] locust who diminishes the land [devour] your harvest, may [there be no mill or oven] in your houses; may no grain be poured out for grinding May the dough be lacking from your kneading-troughs
Wild animals	v. 17 I will send famine and wild animals against you	May dogs and swine eat your flesh
Bloodshed	v. 17 Plague and bloodshed will sweep through you	May Nergal, hero of [the gods] extinguish your life with merciless dagger; may he send slaughter and pestilence among you
Wrath	v. 13 My anger shall spend itself, and I will vent my fury on them and satisfy myself	May the great gods of heaven and earth who dwell in the world,] [as many as are named in this tablet,] [strike you, look (fiercely) at you,] [with an evil curse may they curse you angrily]

are floods, famine, and cannibalism that have allusions to similar concepts in Ezek 5:5-

17.⁹⁰ The following citation also contains these curses.

[May Adad, controller of the waters of heaven and earth,] (Wiseman, 62)
[(dry up) your ponds,]
with a great flood (may he submerge) your land, [may the]
locust who diminishes the land [devour] your harvest, may
[there be no mill or oven] in your houses; may no grain be
poured out for grinding; instead of grain may they grind
[your bones] (and those of) your sons (and) your daughters, may your
finger-tips not dip in the dough; may the dough be
lacking from your kneading-troughs; may a pregnant mother (and) her
daughter eat the flesh of your sons; in your extremity may you eat the
flesh of your sons [.. ..].
(In) hunger may one man eat the flesh of another; may one man
clothe himself in another's skin; may dogs and swine eat your flesh; (Wiseman,

64).

May your [ghost] have none appointed as funeral-libation pourer. (440-452).

Treaty of Ashurnirari V of Assyria and Mati'ilu of Arpad

Ezekiel 5:5-17 has concepts that are reflected in the Treaty of Ashurnirari V of Assyria and Mati'ilu of Arpad as shown in table 41. In the treaty between Ashurnirari V of Assyria and Mati'ilu of Arpad there is a reference to famine and cannibalism, pestilence, no pity: In the event that Mati'ilu does not follow Ashurnirari's orders in the event of a declaration of war, the god Sin should empty the following curses upon him.

May Adad, the carnal inspector of heaven and earth, put an end to Mati'ilu, his land and the people of his land through hunger, want and famine, so that they eat the flesh of their sons and daughters and it taste as good to them as the flesh of spring lambs. May they be deprived of Adad's thunder so that rain be denied them.⁹¹

⁹⁰ D. J. Wiseman, "The Vassal Treaties of Esarhaddon," *Iraq* 20 (1958): 1-99. See also "The Vassal Treaties of Esarhaddon," translated by D. J. Wiseman (*ANET*, 534-541).

⁹¹ "Treaty Between Ashurnirari V of Assyria and Mati'ilu of Arpad," translated by Erica Reiner (*ANET*, 533).

Table 41. Ezekiel 5:5-17 and the Treaty of Ashurnirari V of Assyria and Mati'ilu of Arpad

	Ezekiel 5:5-17	Treaty of Ashurnirari V of Assyria and Mati'ilu of Arpad
Cannibalism	v. 10 Surely, parents shall eat their children in your midst, and children shall eat their parents	May Adad . . . put an end to Mati'ilu, his land and the people of his land through hunger, want and famine, so that they eat the flesh of their sons and daughters and it taste as good to them as the flesh of spring lambs.
Famine	v. 12 A third of you will die of famine v. 16 When I shoot at you with my arrows of famine v. 17 I will send famine . . . against you	May Adad, the carnal inspector of heaven and earth, put an end to Mati'ilu, his land and the people of his land through hunger, want and famine [May want and famine, hunger and plagues] [never be removed from you]
Pity or compassion	v. 11 I will not look on you with pity or spare you	[May Ishtar who] dwells in Erbil not grant you mercy and kindness
Plague/ Pestilence	v. 12 A third of your people will die of the plague v. 17 Plague and bloodshed will sweep through you	May Nergal, hero of [the gods] extinguish your life with merciless dagger; may he send slaughter and pestilence among you [May Gula, the great physician put sickness, sleeplessness,] [poison (and) torment in your body]
Wrath	v. 13 My anger shall spend itself, and I will vent my fury on them and satisfy myself	May the great gods of heaven and earth who dwell in the world,] [as many as are named in this tablet,] [strike you, look (fiercely) at you,] [with an evil curse may they curse you angrily

On pestilence he commands,

May Nergal, hero of [the gods] extinguish your life with merciless dagger; may he send slaughter and pestilence among you. (455-456).

Regarding mercy and kindness, he says,

[May Ishtar who] dwells in Erbil not grant you mercy and kindness.

Regarding pestilence, he says:

[May Gula, the great physician put sickness, sleeplessness,
[poison (and) torment in your body,
[may she make you sweat blood instead of water.] (461-463).
[May the great gods of heaven and earth who dwell in the world,]
[as many as are named in this tablet,]
[strike you, look (fiercely) at you,]
[with an evil curse may they curse you angrily] (472-475).

On famine he says,

[... May food and water abandon you.]
[May want and famine, hunger and plagues]
[never be removed from you; ...] (479-481)
May Gira, who gives food to [small and great,]
[burn up] your seed and your (seed's) seed.
Ditto; ditto; may as many gods as are (cited) in this tablet
assign for you the ground (into) as many bricks.
May they make your ground (hard) like iron so that
[none] of yur may flourish].
Just as rain does not fall from a brazen heaven
so may rain and dew not come upon your fields
and your meadows; may it rain burning
coals instead of dew on your land. (524-533)

As can be seen this treaty contains concepts that relate to similar themes in Ezek 5:5-17 where YHWH invokes punishment for moral and cultic violations. What we see here is the wisdom of the kings, as divine representatives, invoking the curses upon a person who does not abide by the terms of the treaties. This shows the seriousness with which such agreements were held and enables us to see why YHWH the sovereign God

of the Israelites should be incensed when his covenant stipulations are flouted. He therefore stands justified for the exceptional steps he took to remedy the situation.

Ugaritic Texts

In this section I discuss two West Semitic texts that deal with the issue of divine justice. These include The Legend of Kirtu and The Legend of Aqhatu.

The Legend of Kirtu (Keret)

The Legend of Kirtu⁹² involves a case of a king who loses his seven wives before any of them delivers a child, has a dream from Ilu, the chief god, with promises of posterity. The intrigues between Ilu, the chief god, and his wife, Athiratu, subject king Kirtu to undeserved suffering. Ilu appears to be powerless to the extent that he cannot restrain his wife Athiratu from the devastation she brings on Kirtu and his family. De Moor is right in his assessment that “Kirtu is a righteous sufferer, the tragic victim of the whims of the gods.”⁹³

A comparison of this legend with the book of Ezekiel reveals some similarities and differences between the role of YHWH and the role of the gods in the Legend of Kirtu.⁹⁴ Kirtu’s failure to honor the conditions of the vow he had evidently made to

⁹² For discussion on the structure of the legend see Klaas Spronk, "The Legend of Kirtu (KTU 1.14-16): A Study of Structure and its Consequences for Interpretation," in *The Structural Analysis of Biblical and Canaanite Poetry* (ed. W. van der Meer and J. C. de Moor; Sheffield: Journal for the Study of the Old Testament, 1988), 62-82.

⁹³ de Moor, "Theodicy in the Texts of Ugarit," 120.

⁹⁴ Spronk, "The Legend of Kirtu (KTU 1.14-16)," 81.

Athiratu⁹⁵ is similar to the Israelites' failure to follow the statutes and ordinances of YHWH (Ezek 5:6, 7), a failure which led to severe punishments. Athiratu's punishment of Kirtu with drought and famine and the devastating illness is reminiscent of the famine and pestilence in several parts of the book of Ezekiel as punishments from YHWH.

However, the intrigues that characterize the Ugaritic gods is something unheard of in the book of Ezekiel. Spronk poignantly summarizes these maneuverings:⁹⁶ First, Ilu is Kirtu's helper in section one of the legend. Next, Athiratu, Ilu's wife, turns against Kirtu. Finally, Ilu once again comes to the aid of Kirtu. It is evident from these intrigues that the gods are in conflict and oppose each other, and Kirtu is the innocent victim of these machinations. Such intrigues are not found in the book of Ezekiel. There, YHWH's sovereignty is revealed. He determines what actions to take against human misconduct without the interference of any other divinity. Hence the dissonance that appears to characterize the West Semitic gods in the Legend of Kirtu is alien to him.

The Legend of Aqhatu

Another Ugaritic text of interest is the Legend of Aqhatu.⁹⁷ This legend tells the story of Aqhatu who refuses to do the will of the goddess, Anatu, and subsequently faces

⁹⁵ "The Kirta Epic," translated by Dennis Pardee (*COS* 1.102: 333-43). See also Nicolas Wyatt, *Religious Texts from Ugarit* (London: Sheffield Academic 2002), 176-243; Simon B. Parker, ed., *Ugaritic Narrative Poetry* (translated by Edward L. Greenstein; Atlanta, Ga.: Scholars Press, 1997), 9-48; Johannes C. De Moor, *An Anthology of Religious Texts from Ugarit* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1987), 191-223.

⁹⁶ Spronk, "The Legend of Kirtu (KTU 1.14-16)," 81.

⁹⁷ "The Aqhatu Legend," translated by Dennis Pardee (*COS* 1.103: 343-56). See also Nicolas Wyatt, *Religious Texts from Ugarit* (London: Sheffield Academic 2002), 246-312; Simon B. Parker, ed., *Ugaritic Narrative Poetry* (translated by Simon B. Parker; Atlanta, Ga.: Scholars

severe divine retribution.⁹⁸ Wyatt argues that the confrontation that pits Aqhatu against Anatu “is the inevitable consequence of the character of the two.”⁹⁹ What we find here is the picture of a strong-willed person who is ready to challenge the gods.¹⁰⁰ The enviable bow Anatu wants Aqhatu to surrender legally belongs to Aqhatu, having been given to him by the gods. Anatu’s promises of money and eternal life do not change Aqhatu’s mind to surrender the bow. He sarcastically turns down the request and accuses Anatu of fabricating lies. Although we may blame Aqhatu for the strong language he uses in challenging Anatu, yet he must be commended for standing up for his rights, in spite of the goddess’s unreasonable demand.

This legend is a portrayal of a goddess who not only makes the unreasonable demands on humans, but one who metes out punishment for inconsequential reasons. The pettiness of this goddess is seen in the demand she makes of the bow, and when her request is rebuffed she resorts to killing the human challenger. Here then is a case in which a god subjects a person to unjust and undeserved suffering.¹⁰¹ Such capriciousness of divinity is not found in the book of Ezekiel. It is true that YHWH’s threatened punishments are severe, but they are as a result of a broken covenant. Israel has rebelled

Press, 1997), 49-80; Johannes C. De Moor, *An Anthology of Religious Texts from Ugarit* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1987), 224-73.

⁹⁸ Wyatt, *Religious Texts from Ugarit*, 247.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid. It is interesting that Anatu characterizes this challenge as “‘rebellion’ and ‘presumption.’” Johannes C. De Moor, “The Rebel in Bible Lands,” in *Reading from Right to Left: Essays on the Hebrew Bible in Honour of David J. A. Clines* (ed. J. Cheryl Exum and H. G. M. Williamson; New York: Sheffield Academic, 2003), 339.

¹⁰¹ de Moor, “Theodicy in the Texts of Ugarit,” 147-48.

against his laws, engaged in the worship of idols, and desecrated his sanctuary. YHWH does not act erratically or maliciously. He punishes Israel for the sins they have committed against his will and so there is no accusation of injustice on his part.

Another character trait of goddess Anat is revealed in her threats to Ilu, her father. At one point she threatens to smash the head of this super-centenarian god if he does not meet her wishes.¹⁰² Under such intense pressure Ilu has no option but to acquiesce to her demand.¹⁰³ This again reveals the fissures that existed among some ancient Near Eastern gods. De Moor is correct in suggesting that these deities are “struggling for dominion.”¹⁰⁴ In the book of Ezekiel, YHWH has no challengers within the divine realm. All he is dealing with are humans who have refused to acquiesce to his will and the false gods that people have determined to worship.

Summary

A comparison of YHWH's character with the character of the gods of the ancient Near East mythology has revealed striking similarities and differences. Contrary to YHWH, who spells out the concrete reasons for his intended judgments, the character of most of the gods of the ancient Near East is revealed as they order the punishment of

¹⁰² “The ḏAqhatu Legend,” translated by Dennis Pardee (*COS* 1.103:348). See also Johannes C. De Moor, “The Rebel in Bible Lands,” in *Reading from Right to Left: Essays on the Hebrew Bible in Honour of David J. A. Clines* (ed. J. Cheryl Exum and H. G. M. Williamson; New York: Sheffield Academic, 2003), 333; idem, *An Anthology of Religious Texts from Ugarit* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1987), 135-36.

¹⁰³ “The ḏAqhatu Legend,” translated by Dennis Pardee (*COS* 1.103:348-49).

¹⁰⁴ de Moor, “Theodicy in the Texts of Ugarit,” 122.

their people when no moral or cultic sin has been committed. In this regard YHWH stands justified in the judicial actions he takes on Jerusalem and the people of Judah who have contravened the prescribed laws, misused the sanctuary, abandoned their God, and turned to unlawful idolatrous practices. YHWH specifies the basis for the harsh judgments because he does not want any accusations of injustice on the punishments he renders. He does not act erratically or maliciously.

The callousness of the gods, who are out to punish humanity for baseless reasons, is evident, for example, in the *Atrahasis Epic*, where the reason advanced for the punishment is overpopulation that makes it hard for the god Enlil to sleep. This exposes the vulnerable human element in these gods. There is unmistakable contrast here with the Hebrew God who in his very nature “never slumbers nor sleeps” (Ps 121:4).

Another feature is the polytheistic nature of the Sumerian pantheons and their inability to speak with one voice. While other gods petition the divine assembly not to destroy Ur, other gods are intent on proceeding with the destruction. Hence here we have the case of a house divided against itself. None of such divine bickering, squabbling, and differences appear in Ezekiel where YHWH is the sole divine sovereign who determines the actions to be taken against the Israelites, and there is no other opposing voice to contradict his ways.

Hammurabi invokes curses upon those who break the laws, without giving any room for repentance. This is in stark contrast to Ezekiel, where, in spite of the sins of Israel, YHWH not only invites the Israelites to repent (Ezek 14:6; 18:30-32), but makes

provision for spiritual transformation and renewal (Ezek 11:19, 20; 36:25-27). This is a demonstration of YHWH's character of concern and commitment to his people.

While YHWH unleashes severe punishments on Israel, nowhere do we find any intimation of his insensitivity to the plight of the people. Yet in the Curse of Agade, the god Enlil manifests such thoughtlessness. Another difference to note is that unlike the gods of Sumer who decreed eternal destruction and damnation for the city of Agade, YHWH in the book of Ezekiel decrees the destruction of Jerusalem, but leaves hope for the eventual restoration of the city and its people.

YHWH, contrary to Re, is serious in his judicial actions. There is no room for the kind of ruse played by Re as he plotted to have Hathor get drunk and not proceed with her initial mission of punishing the rebels. YHWH will carry out his judgments until people come to acknowledge his nature and his abhorrence of sin. It should also be noted that, while YHWH manifests his anger by means of punishments that he unleashes on the people, he does not immediately leave and abandon them. Even when he finally leaves to show the intensity of his wrath, he still avails himself to them in the form of a "sanctuary in small measure" (Ezek 11:16).

In the Mesopotamian literature, Man and his God, there is an indication of the capricious nature of some gods who expose humanity to undeserved suffering. In the Hebrew Bible YHWH allows innocent Job to go through intense and undeserved suffering, not because of YHWH's capricious nature or some ill intent, but to demonstrate that such undeserved suffering originates from an enemy opposed to God but whom God can and will ultimately defeat. Also noteworthy among the Akkadian texts is

the Babylonian Theodicy, in which people complain about undeserved suffering. This is partly because humans are not privy to divine plans and purposes and as a result they are ignorant of the demands of the gods or any sins they may have committed. Bricker's suggestion that "the average person in Mesopotamia was not sufficiently significant to the great gods to merit individual attention"¹⁰⁵ could partially explain this stance the gods had towards humans. This contrasts sharply with the relationship between YHWH and the people of Israel in Ezekiel. He had made his ways known in the covenant he instituted with them. The recognition formula that is predominant in Ezekiel also attests to a divinity calling on humanity to get to know and understand his nature and person. The people of Israel are so important to him that even when he punishes them severely, he still takes the initiative to call them to repentance and offer them restoration.

¹⁰⁵ Bricker, "Innocent Suffering in Mesopotamia," 212.

CHAPTER 9

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

This dissertation set out to examine the concept of theodicy in Ezek 5:5-17 and how this relates to the character of God within the context of Ezek 1-24. The burden of the research was therefore to explore justification for YHWH's severe judgments on the people of Israel.

Disparate Views on the Character of God

After the introductory material in chapter 1, chapter 2 looked into the challenges confronting the character of God in the light of his harsh punishments in Ezek 5:5-17 and the larger context of Ezek 1-24. This has taken us through an interaction with feminist and traditional biblical scholars to determine the nature of these challenges. We have discovered the deep divide that exists among these biblical scholars as they seek to understand the character of YHWH in the book of Ezekiel. From the same texts of Ezekiel they come out with two diametrically opposed views regarding the nature and character of God.

Feminist Characterizations

This study has shown that many feminist scholars see in these texts the picture of God who is abusive, and whose maltreatments are directed mainly at the female

characters in the book. This God is so domineering and full of anger and rage that he resorts to physically abusing his victims. To some of them the violence exhibited by YHWH in these biblical texts is unjustified, inexcusable, and incompatible with divinity. To most feminist scholars, YHWH is also a champion of sexual abuse, a God who will seek sexual favors for the gracious actions he performs, and when his sexual advances are repulsed he resorts to physical and psychological abuse. This is a God who many of these scholars consider to have no love, grace, or compassion. They thus consider the marriage metaphors in Ezekiel and other biblical books to be especially offensive to women.

While not all feminist scholars characterize YHWH negatively, it is clear that many of them read these biblical texts with suspicion. We cannot, however, simply dismiss their work. Their interpretations present biblical scholars with a unique challenge, for they bring a different slant to the interpretation of Scripture. There is therefore a need for mainstream biblical scholars to engage them in dialogue. The feminist scholars need to be informed that these texts are not intended to denigrate, discriminate against, or shame women. They contain no gender bias. They are simply couched in metaphors YHWH uses to illustrate his relationship with his people, whether male or female, and the resultant effects of deviating from his covenant.

Traditional Characterizations

The mainstream/traditional scholars for the most part depict YHWH quite positively. To them, YHWH is gracious, loving, and merciful. These scholars argue that even the shocking language used in passages like Ezek 16 and 23 reflect YHWH's love. They see in the metaphors of Ezek 16 and 23 a depiction of YHWH's relationship with

Israel. YHWH has done so much for her, yet she has spurned those gracious acts, gone after other deities, and relied on other nations for safety and security. For such ungracious response YHWH unleashes upon them the covenant curses. They specifically challenge feminist scholars on their interpretation of Ezek 16 and 23 and argue that the sexual violence depicted in Ezek 16 and 23 is justified because of Israel's unfaithfulness.

Basis of Yahweh's Retributive Justice

The third chapter investigated the basis of YHWH's retributive judgment in Ezek 5:5-17 within the larger context of Ezek 1-24. The examination revealed lapses in three major areas: cultic, ethical, and social. These momentary failures provided YHWH with a legal basis on which to judge Israel.

Cultic Aberrations

An exploration of Ezek 5:5-17 has shown that Israel blatantly rebelled against YHWH's laws, engaged in idolatry, and failed to honor the sanctity of the sanctuary. Israel's behavior is deemed worse than that of the other nations that surround them. Prophetic voices of warning have gone unheeded and now Israel is poised to reap the consequences of her actions. Those who disregard YHWH's stipulations must know that there is a day of reckoning when each person must reap the consequences of their actions, a time when YHWH has to unleash retributive justice upon the disobedient.

The investigation of the larger context of Ezek 1-24 has revealed further evidence of cultic aberrations. Here too Israel is accused of flagrant violation of divine laws and decrees, dishonoring the Sabbath, more elaborate cases of idolatry, and desecration of the sanctuary (e.g., Ezek 8). The Israelites have failed to make a distinction between the holy

and the common. By failing to uphold the prescribed statutes and ordinances, they had contravened the covenant and were now subject to the covenant curses. By practicing idolatry they had not only consigned God to the periphery, they had, in essence, rejected and replaced him with the objects they found to be more appealing. These sins had a more serious import than would have been imagined. They made the people unable to have a wholesome relationship with YHWH and therefore set the stage for the ensuing divine judgment upon the offenders.

Ethical Aberrations

Rejection of divine laws among the Israelites set the stage for various moral infringements. Among these were crimes of violence and bloodshed, disrespect to parents, and sexual immorality.

The value of human life was diminished. There were unwarranted murders and disregard for human life. The land is described as “full of bloodshed” (Ezek 9:9). Jerusalem is characterized as a “bloody city” (Ezek 22:2). Jerusalem is described as “a city shedding blood” (Ezek 22:3). They even slaughter their own children for idolatrous purposes. This indiscriminate assault on human life could not go unpunished. Then there were those who disregarded the fifth commandment and treated their parents with contempt.

A number of aberrant sexual behaviors were prevalent among the Israelites. These included incest, adultery, and other inappropriate sexual relations. These were indicative of the low state of morality among the Israelites. There were those involved in incestuous relations and sleeping with their father’s wives, there were also some who violated their

daughters-in-law, while others violated their own sisters. Still others are said to have been guilty of sleeping with women during their menstrual periods. Others were involved in adulterous relations. Such illicit sexual acts were proscribed in the Old Testament and would now meet with the full force of YHWH's indignation.

Socio-Economic Aberrations

Apart from the cultic and ethical deviations, the Israelites were also guilty of some social crimes. Among those that were discussed in this study are those involving the mistreatment of the vulnerable members of the society—the stranger, the orphan, the widow, and the poor. Then there were those who were accused of taking bribes and made unjust gain from their neighbors by extortion. Taking advantage of others or subjecting other people to injustices of various kinds was in complete disregard of Yahweh's injunctions. Yahweh must act to protect these vulnerable members of society from the hands of unscrupulous people bent on causing them harm.

Function of Divine Judgment

The Just God

The investigation in chapter 4 has revealed that God is not the cruel tyrant that some people have made him to be. Rather he is a God who, though wronged by those who do not obey his word, adheres to the judicial process, so that in the end he is found to be just and righteous in all his ways. This judicial process is evident in the covenant lawsuit in Ezek 5:5-17, which follows the pattern of the Hittite Suzerainty treaties. In this covenant lawsuit, YHWH's justice is demonstrated in the following areas: his strategic and beneficent act towards Jerusalem; the sufficient evidence he provides before

the guilty verdict is pronounced; the impartial nature with which the proceedings are conducted; the presence of witnesses to be privy to the judicial measures and the openness with which the proceedings are conducted. Even the pronouncement of the impending judgments is a display of his justice. He is prompted to act because of evident breaches of the covenant. The judgments that he brings upon the Israelites may cause pain and suffering, but they are deserved and justified.

The Covenant God

With the evidence of rampant sin presented in chapter 3 of this dissertation and YHWH's utter abhorrence of those sins, one wonders whether there is any hope for Israel. Yet what we discover is that in spite of Israel's unfaithfulness, YHWH remains committed to them. The concern he has on the statutes and ordinances is evidence of his dedication to his covenant with them. His passion and jealousy towards the Israelites when they stray after other gods shows his dedication and commitment to them as a covenant partner. Even the covenant curses that he unleashes upon them is an affirmation of this devotion. The use of the covenant formula in Ezek 1-24 shows he has not given up on the Israelites. YHWH's faithfulness to Israel reaches its culmination when he assures Israel that he will establish an everlasting covenant with them (Ezek 16:60). YHWH's judgments are therefore a confirmation of a God who loves and won't let go so easily.

God and Worship

YHWH's judgments are also enacted to show his concern for the sanctity of the sanctuary and proper worship. The Israelites have rejected the established worship practices and replaced them with worship styles of their own choosing. They have even

replaced the chief object of worship with idols. They have relegated the word of God, which is one of the central pillars of worship, to the periphery. Some of their leaders have been accomplices in these religious abuses, teaching their own words. All these cultic abuses have infuriated YHWH, and as such he has to take remedial actions to correct the malpractices so that worship can regain its original purpose and meaning.

This inquiry therefore suggests that YHWH's judgments were not meant just to condemn abuses that characterized worship in ancient Israel. They were also designed to raise an awareness of what proper worship entails. This inquiry has therefore concluded that for proper worship to take place, it must have a high regard for God's word, it must acknowledge the superiority and uniqueness of YHWH as the object of worship, and it must have respect for his sanctuary and other related worship structures. Adhering to this "irreducible minimum of worship" has the potential of not only enhancing the divine human relationship, but acting as a deterrent to any misplaced and misguided forms of worship.

Renewed Knowledge of God

YHWH's judgments also have been found to lead to a renewed knowledge of God. This is why the recognition formula is attached virtually to every aspect of these judicial actions. The judgments are meant to make people know and understand YHWH better. The examination of this formula has revealed that even with YHWH's harsh and severe judgments, his ultimate goal is to reclaim his people by inviting them to understand his nature and person. Such an understanding will enable the people to come to terms with the suffering brought by YHWH's punishments, but will also challenge

them to make radical changes in their lives. YHWH is a covenant God. He is a God of relationships and as people come to know him through these judgments and discover that he has their eternal destiny in mind, they will acknowledge his unfailing love and respond accordingly.

The Punishments

This discussion has revealed that when YHWH's people persist in disobedience, YHWH unleashes a myriad of arsenals that he uses to chastise his people. The nature of these judgments is such that they are multifaceted and targeted. There are statements of direct intent of judgment, statements of withdrawal of divine favor, and others pertain to instruments of judgment. Other statements are directed against the land, while others are intended to cause disruption in the misplaced cultic practices. One significant aspect of these implements of punishment is that they are derived from the covenant curses in Lev 26 and Deut 28. YHWH cannot be blamed therefore for pouncing on his covenant people without warning. To be forewarned is to be forearmed. The Israelites have neglected the foundational principles of the covenant. They have sown the wind, now they must reap the whirlwind. The punishments may cause intolerable pain and suffering, and may give a negative portrait of YHWH and lead people to question his character, but there is sufficient justification for YHWH's retributive justice. Therefore he will not shy away from using these implements, if this is what it takes to awaken the people from their spiritual lethargy.

The Ultimate Goal

Chapter 6 explored the character of YHWH in Ezek 5:5-17 in its context.

Questions naturally arise why YHWH would expose Israel, the chosen nation, to extreme suffering through exile and other related hardships. It is true that Israel breached the covenant, but did this warrant such unprecedented judgments on the part of YHWH? What implications would this have on his character?

This exploration has revealed that although YHWH is predisposed to punish errant Israel, this is because of his great love that cannot see them slide into destruction without taking remedial actions. These are his people by special election. These are people whom he has given special guidelines to follow. They are his covenant people, his special possession. YHWH's character is therefore revealed as he provides the spiritual vehicles necessary for restructuring and renovating the messed up components of these people's lives, so that those who respond appropriately can once again have a wholesome relationship with their God.

The first thing we note is that the God of Ezekiel is deeply sensitive about his reputation. He will restrain himself from taking certain punitive actions just to safeguard his reputation. While he acknowledges that Israel has defiled his name, he vows that he will not allow his reputation to be tarnished any longer. This is because he still wants to have a proper channel through which other nations can have a proper revelation of himself (cf. Gen 12:2-3). The nature of his character is further revealed in his commissioning Ezekiel to the people of Israel. Because of his love, compassion, and concern, he sends them a message of warning through this prophet. YHWH's

commitment to the covenant is unquestionable. He will therefore take every action imaginable to ensure Israel is reinstated to the covenantal relationship. This he does by providing a new heart, puts his spirit within his people, makes repeated calls for repentance, and gives assurance of ultimate restoration. Overall, YHWH is a God of love and compassion. He may punish his errant children quite severely, and his judicial actions may cause untold pain and suffering, but his last word is not judgment, but grace.

The Larger Biblical Context

The intratextual and intertextual study undertaken in chapter 7 has shown that Ezek 5:5-17 is interconnected and intertwined with other texts within the biblical canon. The intratextual connections with the oracles against the nations (Ezek 25-32) revealed that YHWH punished other nations the same way he punished Israel, only that some of the nations' chastisement meant complete annihilation. One difference however was that most of the other nations were punished for what they did to Israel. It is interesting to note that the recognition formula that is a common phenomenon in the judgment messages against Israel also characterizes the judicial declarations against other nations. This means that just as Israel is challenged to understand the nature and person of YHWH, so are the other nations invited to know his being and how he deals with sin. This also shows that YHWH is no respecter of persons.

The intertextual links with the Pentateuch have shown that the threats YHWH issued in Ezek 5:5-17 have their basis in the Pentateuch, where Yahweh made the covenant with Israel. It is these covenant stipulations that Israel has breached, with the disastrous consequences of the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple, and eventual loss

of the land of Judah, as the Israelites were taken into captivity. Here again, the intertextual links between the covenant lawsuit structure in Ezek 5:5-17 and Deut 32:1-29 attest to the justice of YHWH's judgments, since the threatened punishments in Ezek 5:5-17 are a result of covenant violation.

Ezekiel 5:5-17 also has many correlations with both the former and the latter prophets, both in terms of the basis of punishment and the means of punishment. Justification for YHWH's judgments can be demonstrated in the covenant lawsuit that also connects Ezek 5:5-17 and other prophetic literature, as we saw in the representative text of Mic 6:1-16. Israel has breached the covenant, ignored prophetic voices of warning, and now the nation has to reap the unpalatable harvest of divine retribution. While many prophets announced YHWH's judgments on Israel, yet there are places in those prophecies where YHWH's covenant curses are reversed and Israel's restoration declared. This reversal of fortunes says a lot about YHWH. He is a God who punishes justly, while at the same time he is willing to give his people a second chance.

The literature on the Writings found to have links with Ezek 5:5-17 not only laments the destruction and punishment that befell Israel, it also speaks of the reversal of fortunes for Israel. Daniel 9 however gives justification for YHWH's punishments as Daniel declares that Israel has sinned before YHWH. In summary, we can confidently say that Ezek 5:5-17 is "not an island" in the wide and expansive ocean of biblical texts. These biblical texts inform its interpretation and elucidate its meaning.

Yahweh vs. the Ancient Near Eastern Gods

Beyond the biblical corpus, Ezek 5:5-17 has echoes in some literature from the ancient Near East. A comparison of YHWH's character with the character of some of the gods of the ancient Near Eastern mythology has revealed striking similarities and differences. These can be categorized as follows: divine capriciousness, divine callousness, and divine dissonance.

Divine Capriciousness

One of the areas in which YHWH, the God of Israel, differs from some of the gods of the ancient Near East is in their capricious nature. For example, in the Lamentation for the Destruction of Ur, the gods are bent on destroying Ur for the sake of curtailing its line of kingship. This is not a very convincing reason for the enormous suffering that these people have to endure. Similarly, in Ishkur and the Destruction of the Rebellious Land, the actions of Enlil and his son, Ishkur, reveal the nature of gods bent on meting out severe punishment without any specific reason.

The capricious nature of the gods, who are out to punish humanity for baseless reasons, is also evident in the Atrahasis Epic, where one of the bases of punishment is the overpopulation that makes it hard for the god Enlil to sleep. This exposes the vulnerable human element in these gods. There is an unmistakable contrast here with the Hebrew God who, in his very nature, "never slumbers nor sleeps" (Ps 121:4). Overpopulation is not an issue in Ezekiel, since YHWH is the creator God who instructs humanity to "be fruitful and increase in number and fill the earth" (Gen 1:28). Furthermore, no moral or cultic reasons are found to be the basis of the punishments in the Atrahasis Epic. This

differs significantly with YHWH who punishes Israel for the stated moral and cultic reasons. The same scenario can be seen in the Telipinu Myth where the gods are enraged but nothing specific is mentioned as the cause of divine fury. In Ezekiel, YHWH's basis for the punishments is clearly delineated.

In the Mesopotamian literature, Man and his God, there is an indication of the capricious nature of some gods, who expose humanity to undeserved suffering. In the Hebrew Bible YHWH allows innocent Job to go through intense and undeserved suffering, not because of YHWH's capricious nature or some ill intent, but to demonstrate that such undeserved suffering originates from an enemy opposed to God, but whom God can and will ultimately defeat.

The Legend of Aqhatu is a portrayal of a goddess who not only makes the unreasonable demands on humans, but one who metes out punishment for inconsequential reasons. Such capriciousness of divinity is not found in the book of Ezekiel. YHWH does not act erratically or maliciously. He punishes Israel for the sins they have committed against his will and so there is no accusation of injustice on his part.

Contrary to YHWH, who spells out the concrete reasons for his intended judgments, the character of the gods of the ancient Near East is revealed as they order the punishment on their people when no moral or cultic sin has been committed. In this regard YHWH stands justified in the judicial actions he takes on Jerusalem and the people of Judah who have contravened the prescribed laws, misused the sanctuary, and abandoned their God and turned to unlawful idolatrous practices. Their indictment is indeed justified.

Divine Callousness

While YHWH unleashes severe punishments on Israel, nowhere do we find any intimation of his insensitivity to the plight of the people. Yet in the Curse of Agade the god Enlil manifests such thoughtlessness. King Muršilis gives assurance to the gods that he is ready and willing to do anything that would ensure that amends are made for the sins that may have caused the plague. The justice of these gods deserves to be called into question because of their indifference to Muršilis' passionate petitions. Because of their apparent apathy, the ravages of the plague continue unabated. This is in stark contrast to YHWH who personally offers passionate appeals to the people of Israel to repent and reestablish their relationship with him.

The motifs of divine wrath and famine connect Ezekiel and the Telipinu myth. It should be noted, however, that while YHWH manifests his anger by means of punishments that he unleashes on the people, yet he does not immediately leave and abandon the people. Even when he finally leaves to show the intensity of his wrath, he still avails himself to them in the form of a "sanctuary in small measure" (Ezek 11:16), thus demonstrating his concern for them. In the Telipinu Myth, other gods make a passionate appeal for Telipinu to return to the people. No such outward appeal is documented in Ezekiel. YHWH makes his own decision when to end the punishments and to restore his people. Contrary to Telipinu who other gods have to persuade to return to the people, in Ezekiel, YHWH's character is shown in his passionate appeals for the Israelites to repent and return to him.

Also noteworthy among the Akkadian texts is the Babylonian Theodicy, in which people complain about undeserved suffering. This is partly because humans are not privy to divine plans and purposes and as a result they are ignorant of the demands of the gods or any sins they may have committed. Bricker's suggestion that "the average person in Mesopotamia was not sufficiently significant to the great gods to merit individual attention"¹ could partially explain this stance the gods had towards humans. This contrasts sharply with the relationship between YHWH and the people of Israel in Ezekiel. He had made his ways known in the covenant he instituted with them. The recognition formula that is predominant in Ezekiel also attests to a divinity calling on humanity to get to know and understand his nature and person. The people of Israel are so important to him that even when he punishes them severely, he still takes the initiative to call them to repentance and offer them restoration.

In the Code of Hammurabi, there is no mention of any beneficent action that Hammurabi has done to his constituents to deserve their adherence to the stipulated laws, as is the case in Ezek 5:5 where YHWH spells out what he has done to Jerusalem. Furthermore, Hammurabi invokes curses upon those who break the laws, without giving any room for repentance. This is in stark contrast to Ezekiel, where, in spite of the sins of Israel, YHWH not only invites the Israelites to repent (Ezek 14:6; 18:30-32), but makes provision for spiritual transformation and renewal (Ezek 11:19, 20; 36:25-27). This is a demonstration of YHWH's character of concern and commitment to his people.

¹ Bricker, "Innocent Suffering in Mesopotamia, 212.

Divine Dissonance

Another feature that the Lamentation over the Destruction of Ur reveals is the polytheistic nature of the Sumerian pantheons and their inability to speak with one voice. While other gods petition the divine assembly not to destroy Ur, other gods are intent on proceeding with the destruction. Hence here we have the case of a house divided against itself. None of such divine bickering, squabbling, and differences appear in Ezekiel where YHWH is the sole divine sovereign who determines the actions to be taken against the Israelites, and there is no other opposing voice to contradict his ways.

YHWH, contrary to the Egyptian god Re, is also serious in his judicial actions. There is no room for the kind of ruse played by Re as he plotted to have Hathor get drunk and not proceed with her initial mission of punishing the rebels. Yahweh will carry out his judgments until people come to acknowledge his nature and his abhorrence of sin. The intrigues that characterize the Ugaritic gods is also something unheard of in the book of Ezekiel. There, YHWH's sovereignty is revealed. He determines what actions to take against human misconduct without the interference of any other divinity. Hence the dissonance that appears to characterize the West Semitic gods in the Legend of Kirtu is alien to him.

Conclusion

This dissertation set out to investigate the concept of theodicy in Ezek 5:5-17. A survey of the biblical corpus has revealed that YHWH's commitment to the covenant is unwavering. This means that those who flout the covenant receive just recompense. This retributive justice produces pain and suffering which makes some people question

whether he is a loving and compassionate God. Yet the calls he makes for people to repent and his promises of restoration attest to his commitment to his people. He is not a callous or capricious God, like some of the gods in the ancient Near East. He is a just and loving God whose punishments have a salvific purpose.

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