

**“CAN THESE BONES LIVE AGAIN?”
A RHETORIC OF THE GOSPEL IN
EZEKIEL 33-37, Part II**

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*A Summary of the Literary-Rhetorical
Development of Chapters 33-37*

The general structural overview presented in Part 1 serves as a background for the examination of the constituent structure of Ezekiel's evangel core (chaps. 33-37) as a cohesively arranged, progressively developed, and rhetorically shaped compositional entity.¹ My analysis will follow the alternating sequence of principal discourse units of this section. Only the most salient, thematically related aspects of a given structural and stylistic segment are included. Each pericope is entitled, delineated, and elucidated in relation to its ostensive pragmatic or interpersonal function. My purpose is to demonstrate how the main literary features manifested in this text serve to enhance the persuasive impact and appeal of the prophet's overall message, not only to his “dry bones” audience of Jewish exiles, but also to all members of the elect people of God who live as “exiles” in this world (cf. 1 Pet 1:17; 2:11), even as they prepare for the new life so vividly promised by Ezekiel in this dramatic portion of Scripture. This exercise also serves to illustrate how a close, text-rhetorical analysis may contribute to the understanding and appreciation of the artistic form and communicative function of any biblical pericope, large or small.

*33:1-20: YHWH Renews Ezekiel's Call as a
Watchman for the House of Israel*

The divine oracle covering vv. 1-20 presents a carefully crafted combination of instructions previously given to the prophetic “watchman” (33:2; cf. 3:16) regarding individual responsibility (the corporate dimension is also implied, e.g., in the expression “house of Israel,” v. 11).² The message is

¹See Ernst R. Wendland, “‘Can These Bones Live Again?’ A Rhetoric of the Gospel in Ezekiel 33-37, Part I,” *AUSS* 39 (2001): 85-100.

²The boundaries of this introductory compositional unit are sharply demarcated by the close of the mock lament of condemnation against Egypt (and similar pagan nations) in 32:32 and by a final, impassioned vocative exclamation (“O house of Israel,” v. 20b), along with the onset of a dated narrative segment in 33:21.

presented with an emphasis on "righteousness" (or "wickedness") in relation to the all-discerning judgment of the Lord and on the basis of his immutable, authoritative word.

In keeping with its judicial nature, this section consists of a combined divine casuistic + disputational speech that is reinforced with a certain measure of divine *irony*, e.g., the particular danger that the chosen lookout must warn his people about originates from YHWH himself, not some foreign enemy (v. 7). This closely knit piece may be divided on the basis of introductory formulae of prophetic address and parallels in content into five topical-structural units. These may in turn be arranged in two primary divisions, each dealing with a serious pastoral problem: one pertaining to the prophet, and the second, to his people. These are linked by a transitional bridge, which summarizes the only possible solution for both prophet and people as far as the Lord is concerned: sincere repentance and steadfast obedience to God's merciful call. Figure 1 shows the arrangement of the parts of this passage.

The structural and topical symmetry manifested in this oracle, made apparent by the abundant lexical recursion (in varied, intricate, incrementally overlapping sequences), is clear from the preceding outline.³ The formally balanced, topically measured discourse represents a literary reflection of its judicial content—a *theodicy* which concerns the perfect justice and righteous equity of YHWH's judgments and dealings with Israel. Neither the people, who are punished for their sins, nor the unfaithful messenger has any cause for complaint. They have been duly warned by God's chosen prophets of the dire consequences of covenantal disobedience—from the very beginning of their initial, divinely worked establishment as a nation (Lev 26:14-44). This constructive rebuke had to be penitently understood and acted upon before there could be any hope of an optimistic word concerning future restoration. The several chiasmic formations that occur within the text are typical of such contrastive, antithetically phrased, forensic discourse in Hebrew literature.⁴

³See M. Greenberg, vol. 22B, AB (New York: Doubleday, 1997), 676. Observe that Ezekiel seems to favor compositional patterns based on segments of two, three, and/or four.

⁴This passage is viewed as a compositional hinge because of its reversal from the order of appearance in the parallel verses of chap. 18, i.e., 33:10-11 = 18:30-32; 33:12-20 = 18:21-29 (no inversion appears in part 1, 33:2-9, from the corresponding text in 3:17-21). This device, therefore, functions to focus attention on what occurs in the middle (v. 11), the boundless mercy of YHWH in relation to both prophet (1+2) and people (4+5). His pastoral appeal is sealed, as it were, by a personal oath, which itself expresses the key concept of "life" (חַיִּים, "As I live!"), coupled with the emphatic divine appellation "Sovereign Lord" (or "Lord YHWH" אֲדֹנָי יְהוָה) at the very midpoint of the pericope (11a). Such an obvious textual foregrounding of God's intense desire to deliver his people (of every age and place) underscores the fact that "this cardinal feature of Ezekiel's theology needs to be written underneath every oracle of judgment that his book

<p>I.</p>	<p>a) <i>General task</i>: the responsibility of God's prophet to warn his people (2-6) A: the watchman does warn (2-5) + B: the watchman does not warn (6)</p> <p>b) <i>Specific task</i>: the responsibility of Ezekiel to warn "the house of Israel" (7-9) B': the watchman does not warn (7-8) + A': the watchman does warn (9)</p> <p style="text-align: center;">= > c) <i>Hinge</i>: question—How can we live? answer—Repent! (10-11)</p>
<p>II.</p>	<p>d) <i>General principle</i>: both the "righteous" and the "wicked" need to repent (12-16) C: the righteous sins/dies (12a) + D: the wicked repents/lives (12b) + C': the righteous sins/dies (12c-13) + D': the wicked repents/lives (14-16)</p> <p>e) <i>Specific principle</i>: the justice of the Lord in relation to Israel (17-20) E: complaint (17) + C": the righteous sins/dies (18) + D": the wicked repents/lives(19) E': complaint (20a) + divine conclusion (20b)</p>

Figure 1. Structural outline of Ezek 33:1-20.

The key element in Ezekiel's prophetic message, which pointedly mimics the priestly "case-law" legislative style of Deuteronomy (e.g., chap. 13), is situated in its center (segment [c], v. 11; cf. 18:23, 32; 14:6), which is thereby structurally and also topically highlighted. Here in the midst of his "dispute" with "the house of Israel," the Lord himself plaintively calls his wayward people to spiritual "life" (חיה), through repentance (שובו, שובו), rather than "death" (מות) on account of their continued rebellion. This is in response to their confession of sin and anguished plea for a way out of their misery (v. 10b)—in words that fulfill God's prior predictions through Ezekiel (e.g., 4:17; 24:23). They were afflicted with a progressive "rotting away" on account of their sins (cf. Lev 26:39). This was a spiritual problem that could be divinely addressed only if they received the correct message from YHWH through his prophet (cf. vv. 7-

contains" (J. B. Taylor, *Ezekiel: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 20, Tyndale Old Testament Commentary [Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1969], 215).

9) and adopted the proper attitude toward God and the prophet (cf. 17-20).

The thematic center is complemented at the conclusion of this section by a parallel, rhetorically constructed “disputation” (i.e., thesis + dispute + counterthesis), which dramatizes, through the use of hypothetical quotations, a related “wisdom” debate concerning the “way” of God’s “justice” (יִחְזֵק דִּרְךָ; cf. 11 and 17-20). This judicial message was not really new to the people, for Ezekiel (the Lord) was simply reiterating the covenant principles given to them through Moses in the Torah (e.g., as stated in Lev 26 and Deut 30, an instance of authoritative intertextuality).⁵ They therefore had no excuse for their wickedness, and the only option for the “reasonable” among them (the leadership in particular, to whom this didactic discourse appeals) was a complete turnaround with respect to heart and life.

In this incontrovertible, either/or way, despite the impious “protest” that is rhetorically allowed (vv. 17, 20, as an additional instance of human self-incrimination), the Lord’s proclamation is set forth by Ezekiel as he is about to begin a new tack in his prophetic ministry. It was a course during which the related threats of indifferent accommodation, blind nationalism, fanatical resistance, and/or demoralized fatalism on the part of his congregation[s] (cf. Part 1) had to be firmly, but gently, combated in order to prepare the ground for a genuine religious reformation and spiritual renewal. YHWH needed to be recognized, revered, and trusted not only as a willing Savior (v. 11), but also as the supreme, righteous Judge of each and every human being (v. 20).

33:21-33: Report of the Fall of Jerusalem and a Twofold Unrepentant Response

In addition to some obvious lexical links (e.g., “blood” + “sword” in 25-26; cf. vv. 4-6), several notable literary-structural features tie this unit into the preceding pericope, thus welding chapter 33 into a coherent segment.⁶ The whole discourse functions as a transitional bridge that leads

⁵We may also discern here an allusion to the Noachic covenant through a repetition of the key term “blood” (cf. Gen 9:5-6 + 9-17).

⁶Verses 21-33 constitute a distinct compositional division, as indicated by the new temporal setting in v. 21 coupled with the dramatic quotation recorded there (“The city has fallen!”). Another section begins in 34:1, where we find an *anaphoric* reiteration of the prophetic reception formula (cf. also 33:1, 23), the command to “prophesy” (הִנְבֵּא), and the distinct content of the following passage (“shepherd”—“flock”). This unit ends with a climactic word of warning of impending judgment to all the impenitent (v. 33a): “Now when it comes [and] behold it is coming” (וּכְבֹּאֵהוּ הוּנָה בְּאוֹרָה, which puns on the people’s complacency concerning their ominous future; cf. vv. 30b-31a). The punitive events of world history serve to confirm the prophetic word as well as to vindicate both the Lord and his faithful preachers of repentance (cf. 2:1-3:11, *inclusio*).

off the larger rhetorical-thematic portion covering the book's remaining chapters. Before the blessed promises of chapters 34-48 can be appropriated aright, a complete change of heart and life on the part of the recipients is necessary (cf. vv. 11, 32). In very general terms, the prevailing *connotative* progression of the book as a whole is that shown in Figure 2.

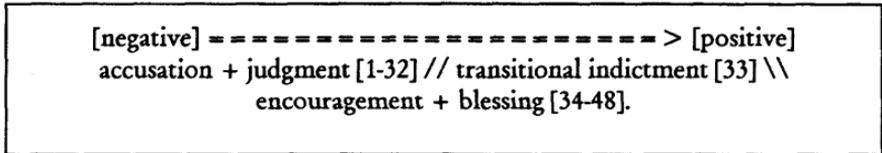


Figure 2. The overall movement from judgment to blessing in Ezekiel.

Fundamental to chapter 33 as an integral unit is the referential *inclusio* that ties in Ezekiel's vocal restoration by the Lord (v. 22) with his certification as a true "prophet" (v. 33) and a moral-religious "watchman" (v. 2; cf. 2:1-5). Within this wider framework a basic topical chiasmus incorporates the larger textual segments of the chapter, which assume the following centrally spotlighted pattern, as seen in Figure 3.

This general structure may help to explain the present arrangement of the

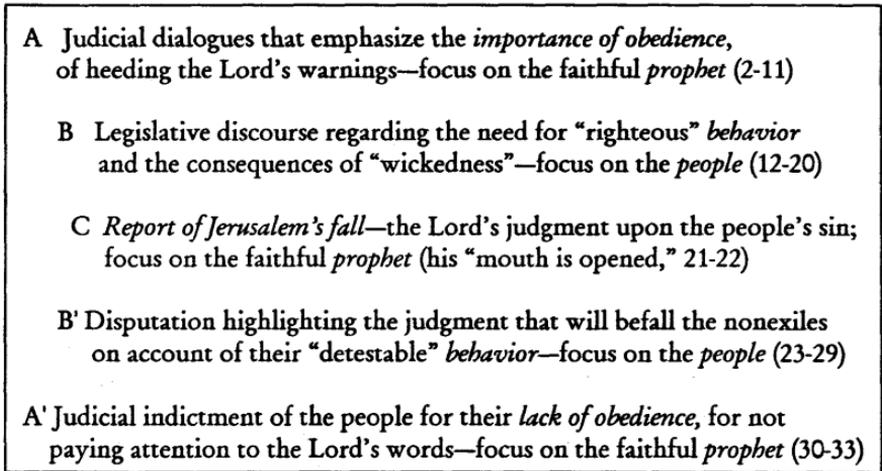


Figure 3: Rhetorical arrangement of Ezek 33.

chapter, that is, with the spatial displacement of the important (and relatively rare) autobiographical narrative away from what might seem to be a more logical or expected location at the beginning (or ending) of the pericope. It is now situated in an equally prominent position at the center of the larger chiasmic arrangement, which balances messages of divine warning (1-20) with those of condemnation upon the people for not listening to the word of the Lord (23-33). Neither the Babylonian exiles (30-32) nor those lesser folk who remained in "the land of Israel" (24-29) appeared to have learned their lesson from history, as epitomized in the formally medial exclamation, "The city has fallen!" (21). The validity and authority of the word of the Lord, as faithfully proclaimed by his chosen messengers, is thereby vindicated structurally as well as semantically in chapter 33.

Turning to the internal construction and rhetorical style of this chapter's second half (vv. 23-33), we note its clear, twofold, mutually complementary division, 23-29 and 30-32 (v. 33 acts as a summary conclusion for both portions). First, there is a well-formed judgment oracle, beginning with the "reception [or "prophetic word"] formula" ("Then the word of YHWH came to me," v. 23).⁷ This is pronounced against a group of arrogant, impenitent boasters who were left in Judah and had smugly concluded that the "land" was still theirs by divine right no matter what had happened to Jerusalem, their nation, or indeed, to their fellow countrymen who had been exiled to Babylon (cf. 11:15). It is cast in the form of another judicial disputation speech: *thesis* (a self-indicting utterance, v. 24) + *dispute* (accusation, vv. 25-26) + *counterthesis* (= condemnation, vv. 27-29). The latter is a characteristic instance of *lex talionis*—a punishment being molded to fit the crime.⁸ To be specific: a spiritual desecration of the land + relying (lit., "standing") on the sword = > physical desolation of the land + falling by the sword (vv. 26-27; cf. chaps. 5-6, Lev 26:14-39).

This is followed by a "unique passage in the prophetic writings,"⁹ a stinging divine indictment of the many hypocrites living within the community of Babylonian exiles.¹⁰ These fickle folk (cf. v. 30b) were

⁷For a survey of common prophetic discourse formulas, see M. A. Sweeney, *Isaiah 1-39: With an Introduction to Prophetic Literature*, Forms of OT Literature 16 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 544-547.

⁸Cf. P. D. Miller Jr, *Sin and Judgment in the Prophets: A Stylistic and Theological Analysis* (Chico, CA: Scholars, 1982); M. Fishbane, "Sin and Judgment in the Prophecies of Ezekiel," in *Interpreting the Prophets*, ed. J. L. Mays and P. J. Achtemeier (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987), 170-187.

⁹L. Boadt, "The Function of the Salvation Oracles in Ezekiel 33-37," *Hebrew Annual Review* 10 (1990): 7.

¹⁰As in virtually all of Ezekiel's oracles, the two constituent pieces of this pericope (vv.

superficially enthralled with or entertained by Ezekiel's dramatic prophecies of word and deed, but they failed—or rather, refused—to take his clear moral admonitions to heart. The prophet could draw a large, enthusiastic crowd; but they were not coming for the right reason, and they had no intention of “putting his words into practice” (v. 31-32).¹¹ What happened to the land of Israel was a concrete symbolical index of an inner spiritual reality: the relative health of the covenantal relationship between YHWH and his people.¹² When they violated the Lord's trust by their repeated acts of infidelity, his last resort was to startle them into a recognition of his righteous, holy nature, will, and purpose by despoiling the politically unstable piece of territory in which they had placed their vain earthly hope.

The rhetorical effect of such carefully placed and interconnected reiteration is to reinforce the validity of the punishment that this insolent and ungrateful people deserved for their repeated covenant violations (cf. Deut 28:58-68). The only cure for a stubborn and rebellious attitude such as theirs (cf. 2:4-5) was a judgment so awesome and pervasive (i.e., the total destruction of Jerusalem and Judah, 33a; cf. 21b, 24a) that as many as possible would be driven to contrition (if not complete repentance, 33:10). Then even the most skeptical in their ranks would be forced to admit “that a prophet has been among them” (33b). The purpose of this chapter is to emphasize the concrete coming to pass of this potentially demoralizing prediction (33a; cf. 31b-32a and 21b).¹³ Such a ruinous

23-29 and 30-33) are clearly demarcated structurally, both internally and externally, by some key elements of lexical recursion. These embody crucial aspects of the Lord's urgent message to his people, both near (in Babylon) and far (in Judah), i.e., the initial *anaphoric* vocative “son of man” (vv. 24, 30; cf. 33:2, 7, 10, 12), and the concluding *epiphoric* “recognition formula” (“then they will know that;” vv. 29, 33). We also note the paired occurrences of the “messenger formula” (“this is what the . . . Lord says;” vv. 25, 27) and popular sayings (vv. 24, 30) along with other thematically prominent expressions, e.g., the accusatory rhetorical question, “Should you then possess the land?” (vv. 25, 26). Finally, there is a negative response, “I will make the land a desolate waste” (vv. 28, 29), along with its incriminating reason, “They hear your words but do not put them into practice” (vv. 31, 32).

¹¹I do not think, as does D. I. Block, that Ezekiel's problem of communication was that the “rhetorical form [of his message] has overshadowed rhetorical function; [or that] artistry has interfered with communication” (*The Book of Ezekiel, Chapters 25-48*, NICOT [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans], 267). It was rather that unbelief had so blinded the majority of his audience that they were unable to penetrate this prophetic form in order to perceive its divinely intended function.

¹²As D. I. Block, 262, observes: “The integrity of the tripartite deity-people-land relationship depended on covenantal fidelity.”

¹³The absolute certainty expressed by the divine assertion here may constitute an implicit indictment of a possible earlier reference to the illicit use of “blood” during certain Near Eastern divinatory procedures (v. 25; cf. Greenberg, 684).

realization was nothing less than a cathartic preparation, as it were, for the new message of spiritual life, restoration, and reconciliation (between YHWH and his people) to follow. However, this message would make sense only to those who had truly turned (שיב) from their wickedness to the Lord in sincere penitence and with faith in a future under his merciful, sovereign rule (33:11 = > chaps. 34-37).

The subtle *irony* that closes this section, the image of a popular singer of "lustful [possibly "erotic"] lyrics" that everyone listens to but nobody takes seriously,¹⁴ highlights the point that the repentance being demanded would have to be a matter of the "heart," not only of the "mouth" (33:31-32). The present, unreligious and unknowing "people" ("my" = more bitter *irony*) would surely get to "know" by personal experience the Lord (and his messenger), whether in the day of their destruction (33:28-29) or through their eventual deliverance (34:29-30). Indeed, such a renewal of divine "knowledge" was "the aim of classical prophecy" (e.g., Jer 31:34; Hos 2:8; 4:1).¹⁵ It constituted the "pathetic dimension" of YHWH's message via Ezekiel, that is, his fervent longing to be recognized and revered as the covenant Lord by a heretofore faithless people (cf. Exod 6:7; 7:5; 14:4, 31).¹⁶

34:1-33: YHWH Declares a Woe upon Negligent Shepherds, but Weal for Needy Sheep

This chapter, which manifests a strong connection with Jer 23:1-6, may be divided into three principal portions as shown in Figure 4, on the basis of thematic focus coupled with the usual delineative discourse markers (for Ezekiel, *recursion* patterns + topical *shifts* + prophetic speech *formulas*)¹⁷ (see Figure 4).

In the first two sections (vv. 1-16 and 17-24) the prophet's message mainly concerns the unjust socioreligious conditions within Israel. The

¹⁴Cf. *ibid.*, 686-687. Even their seemingly pious exhortation, "Come now, listen to the message that has come from the Lord" (v. 30), is probably sarcastically or insincerely meant.

¹⁵C. H. Bullock, *An Introduction to the Old Testament Prophetic Books* (Chicago: Moody, 1986), 251.

¹⁶On this point, see Fishbane, 186.

¹⁷This relatively long unit is bounded by a reiteration of the "prophetic word" saying, which also occurs *anaphorically* at the start of the next compositional section in 35:1. There are multiple instances of closure, including a variant of the "divine recognition formula" coupled with covenantal terminology (30), a double occurrence of the accentuating "signatory formula" (גַּם אֲרֵץ יְהוָה, 30-31), and an *inclusio* formed by the "sheep/flock-shepherd" metaphor (cf. vv. 2/31). The latter also gives a perceptible cohesive unity to the entire pericope (obviously related intertextually to Jer 23:1-2). Block, 274, offers a rather different perspective on the larger construction of this chapter. We appear to use similar criteria for demarcating the salient units of prophetic discourse, but interpret the textual evidence somewhat differently.

third unit (vv. 25-31) adopts a global viewpoint, as foreign enemies are also included in the divine judgment. As a rhetorical whole, the role of the Shepherd-Lord as the faithful Protector, Provider, and Peace-Maker for his faithful flock is foregrounded throughout.

Sheep-Shepherd Oracle One (1-16)

- a) *indictment* — of the rapacious shepherds (1-6)
- b) *verdict* — against the shepherds (7-10)
- c) *deliverance* — of the Lord's flock (11-16)

Sheep-Shepherd Oracle Two (17-24)

- a) *indictment* — of the oppressive rams and goats (17-19)
- b) *verdict* — against the fat aggressive sheep (20-21)
- c) *deliverance* — of the Lord's flock (22-24)

Covenant of Peace Oracle (25-31)

- a) removal of wild animals (25) —a') (28b)
- b) blessings upon the land (27a) —b') (29a)
- c) rescue from the nations (27b) —c') (29b)

Figure 4. Structural outline of Ezek 34.

It is common in Ezekiel (and the prophets generally) for a sudden shift in perspective to appear as the discourse develops. So here, grim descriptions of the current adverse situation—defenseless sheep scattered in exile (vv. 5-6, evoking the sorry scene portrayed in 1 Kgs 22:17)—are later transformed into glorious promises of salvation under the leadership of the saving Shepherd (e.g., vv. 11-16). Thus, the overall thematic movement is in a positive direction, giving the section as a whole strongly optimistic overtones as the temporal setting moves from the past (vv. 1-10) through the present (vv. 17-21) and on to a predicted future of great blessing (vv. 11-16, 23-24, 25-31). Certainly, this glorious outlook should have given much encouragement to the displaced and, for the most part, leaderless Jewish refugees who were languishing with little hope in a foreign land—if only they would listen (cf. 33:31-32)!

Another typical feature of Ezekiel's literary style evident in this chapter is the complex thematic interweaving that links the several distinct, internal subsections. This promotes an essential *unity in diversity* that appeals to listeners (readers), to whom the main point of his message becomes crystal clear, but not at the expense of boring his audience.

Complementing the prophet's powerful diction and colorful depiction, which features connotatively effective sensory evocation, with imagery that is both negative (v. 18) and positive (v. 26), is a great deal of strategically placed *repetition* (the symbolic expression "mountains of Israel" הרי־ישראל in vv. 13-14; cf. chap. 36). Such lexical-semantic recursion renders the text rhetorically persuasive, even on the microtextual level of pronominal usage (e.g., the ironic contrast between "my flock" and "my shepherds" in v. 8). The discourse thus captivates its receptors on several communicative strata (including such important inter- and intratextual resonances as Jer 23:1-4 and Ezek 20:40-42).¹⁸ This is illustrated, for example, in the diversely picturesque pastoral scenes, set within a temporal framework of Jerusalem's judgment ("a day of clouds and thick darkness," v. 12; cf. Joel 2:2, Zeph 1:15), which are graphically depicted in each of the three oracles that comprise the first section (vv.1-16).

Just before an announcement of the divine verdict, in this case condemnation, the initial accusation against Israel's exploitative leaders is reiterated in summary fashion (v. 8, cf. vv. 2-6), thus reinforcing the magnitude of their crimes of commission and omission against the political and religious community of which they were given charge. In another instance of the ironic principle of corresponding retributive justice, the Defender-Lord deprives the greedy shepherds of food (אכל) in the end (vv. 2-3/10, an obvious *inclusio*). The calamities that had earlier befallen the defenseless sheep (vv. 4-6) are then wonderfully undone, both denotatively and sequentially, in the closing passage of divine restoration (vv. 11-16).¹⁹ The unit concludes with contrastive emphasis upon the Lord's shepherding (רעה) with beneficent judgment (שפט, 16c—cf. 2, *inclusio*) and a mirrored reversal of the internecine crimes recorded in v. 4.²⁰

The transitional middle segment (17-24) begins with a direct address by

¹⁸W. E. Lemke calls attention to the subtle nature of Ezekiel's intertextual irony. The rare expression "you ruled harshly" (בְּחֹקֵי רִדְיוֹת; 34:4), with reference to the iniquitous shepherds of Israel, is used to describe how the Egyptians treated their Hebrew slaves (Exod 1:13-14). Thus, "he accuses Israel's rulers of doing what their own history should have taught them to abhor and what the law of Moses [Lev 25:43, 46] expressly forbade" ("Life in the Present and Hope for the Future," in *Interpreting the Prophets*, ed. J. L. Mays and P. J. Achtemeier [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987], 207).

¹⁹For the details, see Greenberg, 706; H. McKeating, *Ezekiel*, OT Guides (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993), 913. The expressions of divine deliverance in v. 13 reflect "new exodus terminology," to "bring out from" (וּרְצֹא מִן), "gather together from" (וּקָבַץ מִן), and "bring to/into" (וּבְרִיא אֵלַי); cf. 20:34-35, 41-42; Mic 2:12, 4:6-8; Block, 286).

²⁰Block, 291, states: "By inverting the sequence Ezekiel emphasizes that with Israel's restoration the tragedies of the past will be reversed. By recasting negative statements as positive affirmations, he deliberately portrays Yahweh as a good shepherd, the antithesis of the earlier evil shepherds."

YHWH to his entire flock (especially the unrighteous oppressors among them).²¹ This pericope clearly culminates with its stylistically distinct closing portion,²² which proposes a divine substitutionary solution for ineffective human leadership. In addition to being messianic (נשיא = the "exalted," ideal intercessor and sin-bearer; cf. 4:4-6), these words are also topically pivotal. That is to say, they look backward by means of the ongoing shepherd-sheep imagery, but also forward through citation of the correlative interpersonal language of the covenant (ברית, cf. v. 25): "I [אני] the Lord will be their God." The other half, "they . . . are my people," occurs *epiphorically* at the close of the next compositional unit, vv. 30-31.²³ As in the preceding section, there is an emphasis upon YHWH's simultaneous salvation (שעו) and judicial vindication (שפט) of his faithful flock (v. 22), but without the ominous word of punishment for any guilty offenders.

The concluding salvation oracle of wholesome peace (שלום, vv. 25-31), which strikingly reflects the earlier or contemporaneous prophecies of Jeremiah (e.g., 30:8-10; 31:8-14), sounds a joyous note throughout, with

²¹The transitional middle segment too is clearly divided into three subsections (vv. 17-19, 20-22, 23-24) by an artful combination of literary devices: first, the prophetic "message formula" (*anaphoric* aperture at vv. 17 and 20 [+ "therefore" לכן]); by a sequence of inductive rhetorical questions (vv. 18-19) that end with an *inclusio* in the striking expression "my flock" (vv. 17a-19a); by another internal *inclusio* ("I will judge between," vv. 20b-22b); by the sudden introduction of the foregrounded messianic "single shepherd" motif (v. 23; cf. Ps 78:70-72; 2 Sam 7:12-16; note the verb "I will place" and the stressed pronoun "he" הוא); and finally, by an emphatic utterance of closure, "I [אני] the Lord have spoken" (v. 24b), which matches the initial accented "but you" ואינך, v. 17a).

²²*Contra* Boadt, 9. Note the repeated stress upon the key notion of "servant-shepherding" (רעה עבד). In a significant reversal of 17:11-21, there is a metonymic-metaphorical prediction of the coming of a divinely endowed "David," who would accomplish what all the human "Davids" in Jerusalem manifestly failed to do in their role as covenant leaders, guides, and models (cf. Jer 30:8-9).

²³In a patent example of circular reasoning, McKeating asserts that "the figure of the messiah is not prominent in the book of Ezekiel" (105) and then concludes that "in each case the messianic oracle looks like an addition . . . [and] that the messianic ideas present in the book have entered the Ezekiel tradition at a later stage of development" (108-109). The hermeneutical problem arises here because in the case of such key theological notions, it is not necessarily *quantity* that counts or makes the case one way or another. Rather, it is *quality*, that is, how and where a particular passage containing such a concept is utilized. Thus, by virtue of its reiterated occurrence in climactic positions (34:23-24 = > 37:22, 24-25) in the thematically focal section of chaps. 33-37, the Messiah-motif is clearly *one* prominent feature of Ezekiel's total message (cf. also 17:22-24, 29:21). Similarly, in view of what he regards as Ezekiel's "narrowly nationalistic" vision of the future, Block argues that his "messiah" is correspondingly only a "national ruler," for such a construal would seem to be at "home in the ideological and cultural milieu of ancient Mesopotamia" ("Ezekiel: Theology of," *NIDOTTE*, 4:625-626). A more immediate and hence relevant context for interpretation, however, would be the writings of earlier prophets, who surely had a much greater, yes divine, figure in mind (e.g., Isa 9:1-7, 11:1-16 + 12:1-6; Mic 5:1-5a; Hos 3:5; Zec 9:9-10; Jer 23:5-6; 30:8-9, 21-22; 33:15-16, 26).

unmistakable echoes of the salubrious promises recorded in Lev 26:4-13 (cf. Ezek 20:33-44).²⁴ This comforting passage represents what is surely a major high point within the larger division covering chapters 33-37, and indeed in the book of Ezekiel as a whole. It is a thematic peak that anticipates the climactic, triumphant close of the entire unit in 37:21-28. The "house of Israel" would one day live again; the "Sovereign Lord" would mercifully see to that according to the outworking of his "covenant of peace" (34:25; cf. 37:26; = the "new covenant" of Jer 31:31-34).²⁵ This pronounced covenantal outlook is emphasized at the very end of the section by means of a chiasmic expression of its two fundamental correlates, that is A = "the Lord their God" (v. 30a) + B = "the house of Israel . . . my people" (v. 30b); B' = "the sheep of my pasture . . . [my] humanity" (v. 31a) + A' "your God . . . the Sovereign Lord" (v. 31b). Thus this passage, both directly and by way of contrast, also underscores the Lord's trenchant warning ("woe!") against any arrogant pastoral abuse (vv. 2/10; cf. Jude 12) and the selfish, discriminatory affliction of weaker members of the flock by the strong (18, 21; cf. John 10:27-29), especially

²⁴For a synoptic comparison of Lev 26:4-13 and Ezek 34:25-30, see Block, 304. This segment is given cohesion and is at the same time roughly divided into two by a reiteration of the integrated motifs of "wild animals" (vv. 25a/28a), agricultural fertility (vv. 26-27/29), and deliverance from pagan nations (vv. 28a/29b). Intertextual allusion, periodically woven into the discourse, adds much to the richness of the verbal tapestry, e.g., "and no one will make them afraid," v. 28 (cf. 39:26; Lev 26:6; Jer 30:10; Mic 4:4). The sustained focus on the symbolic blessings of the covenant reaches its climax in the twofold, literal, and metaphorical articulation of the Lord's providing, protective presence with his people in vv. 30-31 (with YHWH once more suddenly addressing [This] flock/sheep" directly as in v. 17; = *inclusio*). These two verses, taken with the preceding primary pair of vv. 23-24, effect a *means + result* relationship as well as an implicit theological identification of the Messianic "shepherd" (v. 23) with the Lord himself (v. 31; cf. 37:24-28). Thus, "every new paragraph of this chapter opens out the analogy [of the Messianic Shepherd] still further; . . . if each section is taken separately it will be obvious that new ideas are added all along" (Taylor, 222). This builds up to a culmination in which the "servant shepherd, David" (v. 23) and "the Sovereign Lord" are viewed as being one.

²⁵*Contra* R. H. Alexander, *Ezekiel*, vol. 6, The Expositor's Bible Commentary, ed. F. E. Gaebelin (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1986), 914. This "new" covenant foregrounded in Jeremiah may itself be a divine restatement of the ancient salvational "covenant of peace" (Ezek 34:25-30; cf. Lev 26:3-6; Isa 54:7-10): "Understood in terms of ancient Near Eastern symbolism, planting peace was a powerful statement about divine rule and its implications. Set in the context of human rebellion against divine authority, the planting of peace in the earth was a statement of confidence in divine mercy to forgive human offenses and to take the initiative in bringing peace and harmony to a world disrupted by sin and violence" (B. F. Batto, "The Covenant of Peace: A Neglected Ancient Near Eastern Motif," *CBQ* 49 [1987]: 211). Jeremiah, of course, put proper emphasis on the human, spiritual nature of this inward "peaceful," covenantal relationship (e.g., Jer 31:31-34), while Isaiah focused upon the essential divine motivating factor of "unfailing love" *חסד* (Isa 54:10). Taylor, 224, proposes a more dynamic interpretation of this notion: "The word *peace* is used to describe the harmony that exists when covenant obligations are being fulfilled and the relationship [between parties] is sound."

in view of the universal judgment to come (vv. 17, 20; cf. Matt 25:17-22).
*35:1-15: Edom Will Be Punished for Its Wicked
 Attitude toward God and His People*

After the preceding gospel peak in 34:30-31, there is a sharp contrast in topic and tone as the discourse unexpectedly reverts by means of its opening formulas (vv. 1-2; cf. 25:1-2) to another one of the "oracles against the nations," which had seemingly terminated with chapter 32. This one in fact sounds as if it were a continuation or reiteration of the unusually short oracle against Edom found in 25:12-14. Accordingly, the "vengeance" (5 times) that is so prominent in that text is satisfied by the "desolation" which characterizes this one (9 times). This intratextual structural connection aside, there is another, rhetorical reason for the inclusion of this judgment pericope at this juncture: to serve as a sharply contrastive backdrop to the following salvation oracle proclaimed to "the mountains of Israel" (chap. 36). In other words, a deliverance of the righteous is often coupled in the prophetic literature with an announcement of their express vindication in the face, so to speak, of their enemies (hence the device of direct address, vv. 2-3). Edom, the "brother" nation which played such an inimical role in the dramatic history of God's people (cf. Obadiah), serves that very purpose here as the extreme negative, hence also an accentuating counterfoil, to "Israel" within the larger divine message of encouragement to his faithful remnant. Thus, the Lord's "vengeance" would focus upon and find a definite fulfillment in the disastrous fate of their supercilious neighbor to the southeast, "Mount Seir" (vv. 2-3).

There is another prominent connection with the context—in this case, the prior passage in chapter 33 that explained the reason for the fall of Judah and the transformation of the land into "a desolate waste" (שָׁמָה וּמִשָּׁמָה, vv. 28-29; this emphatic alliterative expression becomes a key motif in the condemnatory oracle of chap. 35; cf. 6:14). As with "the mountains of Israel" (33:28), so also with "Mount Seir" (35:2), a complete devastation is destined for all people, even those who think they are specially chosen, whose wickedness is characterized by sins involving "blood" and the "sword" (i.e., gross immorality and callous oppression, 33:25-26; cf. 35:5-6). It may be that the doom of Edom in chapter 35 is chosen to stand as a vivid object lesson and an obvious warning to any other inimical or iniquitous nation that would have contact with God's chosen community of faith. First, they are liable to the same just judgment for similar evils, but more important, when the Lord graciously decides to defend and restore his people, no enemy dare object, deride the decree, or endeavor to stand in the way (35:5, 12; cf. 36:3-4).

The Yahwistic recognition formula referred to above occurs four times in chapter 35, three times *epiphorically* to conclude a prophetic

paragraph (vv. 4, 9, and 15). This designative expression appears to be displaced for special rhetorical effect to emphasize the act of divine “judgment” (v. 11b), that is, from the close of the unit ending in v. 13 (where an iterative “tag” remains, “I heard” שָׁמַעְתִּי) and to its compositional center at the beginning of v. 12. In its place is the *anaphoric* “prophetic messenger” formula—“So speaks YHWH” (כֹּה אָמַר אֲדֹנָי יְהוִה) in contrast to the blasphemy of Edom, vv. 10-13)—at the beginning of the final subsection (v. 14). There are thus four balanced paragraphs of structure in chapter 35, namely, vv. 2-4, 5-9, 10-13, and 14-15,²⁶ and the entire passage is bounded by an *inclusio* based on the crucial terms “Mount Seir” (the accused) and “desolation” (the punishment) (vv. 2-3/15). These segments combine to form the chiasmic topical pattern (Figure 5), which reinforces the measured, immutable nature of the Lord’s righteous retribution.²⁷

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| <p>A Result: Focus on the desolation wrought by YHWH [<i>inclusio</i> of the divine name] (vv. 1-4)</p> <p>B Reason: Specification (because יָטַן) of the iniquity and punishment of Edom (vv. 5-9)</p> <p>B' Reason: Specification (because יָטַן) of the iniquity and punishment of Edom (vv. 10-13)</p> <p>A' Result: Focus on the desolation wrought by YHWH [<i>inclusio</i> of the divine name] (vv. 14-15)</p> |
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Figure 5. Structural outline of the double doom oracle in Ezek 35.

Several specific wordplays also appear to highlight the calamity (אֲדָם, v. 5) that will befall Edom (אֲדוּמִים, v. 15, as the epitome of every subsequent, ungodly, corporate villain) and to demonstrate the absolute righteousness of “the Sovereign Lord” (אֲדֹנָי יְהוִה, v. 6). Indeed, he is the ultimate “kinsman-redeemer/vindicator” of his chosen people (בָּאֵל), who is referred

²⁶Block, 314, also indicates four internal segments, but corresponding to vv. 3-4, 5-9, 10-12a, and 12a β -15. In a later schema, however, he, 324, proposes four that correspond to those listed above, based on the difference between “absolute” and “motivated” declarations of judgment.

²⁷In addition to the various markers already mentioned, the two internal paragraph units are also defined by the device of *inclusio* (“forever” שָׁלֵם, vv. 5/9 + references to Seir’s speech, vv. 10/12-13) and by the prophetic “inversion (crime \rightarrow corresponding punishment) sequence” (also exhibited in vv. 14-15).

to metonymically under the graphic, personified figure of the "blood[shed]" דם (reiterated four times), which, according to the Levitical principle of *lex talionis*, relentlessly "pursues" (הרף) all their former "Edomic" persecutors (v. 6; cf. Num 35).

*36:1-15: The Lord Will Renew the Desolate
"Mountains of Israel" and Its People*

The respective oracles against (על) Edom and unto (אל) Israel (35:1-15 and 36:1-15) are obviously interrelated, although it is appropriate to view them as distinct but parallel and contrastive literary units. This is indicated by the strongly disjunctive formulaic aperture at the onset of chapter 36, which is indeed quite conspicuous (or audible!) in itself. It leads off with an emphatic "now you" (ואתה), followed by no less than four conventional *anaphoric* elements (vv. 1-2, two of which are reiterated in v. 3). While 36:1-7 evinces much topical overlap with chapter 35, the second half of the section (vv. 8-15, beginning with ואתה; cf. v. 1, *anaphora*) is very different due to its concentration of restoration imagery. It also has many features that anticipate the *next* compositional pericope in 36:16-38, especially vv. 33-35. Just as chapter 35 may be viewed as a renewal of the oracle against Edom in 26:12-14, so also 36:1-15 functions as a prominent reversal of the oracle *against* "the mountains of Israel" in chapter 6.²⁸ Thus, all nations "will know" (personally experience) who the Lord is when he vindicates his people and testifies to his own supreme power and authority by bringing a devastating judgment upon all their adversaries (cf. 34:30).²⁹ There is simply no escaping the "living" (= eternally active) God who is "always there" (vv. 10b-11a), both to witness the crimes committed against his people and to avenge them.

Even the obvious emotional agitation with which this oracle begins (יען ביען . . . יען "because . . . because, yea because," vv. 2-3) would suggest a new text unit here (cf. the opening exclamation of the initial quotation: אהא "Aha!"—v. 2). Continuity with the preceding pericope is established, however, by an overlapping reference to the people in focus and their land, i.e., "house of Israel" (35:15) and "mountains of Israel" (36:1, an instance of structural *anadiplosis*). We also hear another derisive and boastful, but in effect self-incriminatory, speech by "the enemy" (האויב, 36:2; cf. 35:10, 12-13), who is not revealed as "Edom" until v. 5. The Edomites wanted to permanently expropriate the "eternal highlands" given by

²⁸For a listing of some of the chief similarities, see Greenberg, 723.

²⁹Block, 310, attempts to demonstrate a "close structural parallel" between 35:1-36:15 and chap. 34. His scheme is marred, however, by a certain reductionistic tendency, i.e., excluding 34:17-21 as an instance of a "judgment oracle" pertaining to the "old order" of leadership in Israel. Similarly, 34:25-29 concerns "the land of Israel" just as much as 36:1-15 does.

YHWH ("my land," v. 5) to his chosen people (cf. Deut 32:13, 33:15). But an angry ("burning," v. 5; cf. v. 6) God would "assuredly" (אִם־לֵא, v. 5; cf. v. 7) intervene for the sake of his honor, that is, put an end to the scornful calumny of the heathen (vv. 6-7). This passage is a solemnly sworn warning (v. 7) that all revilers of the Lord of Scripture need to hear.

Indeed, it is clear that this pericope, considered by some to be "misplaced,"³⁰ is intended to be foregrounded by way of thematic contrast to the one just concluded. The punishment that is inflicted upon the erstwhile persecutors of YHWH's covenantal community (a rhetorical extension from "Edom" to all impudent adversaries) will be complemented by a dramatic reversal in the status of "Israel." All her trials and tribulations (35:1-15 + 36:1-7) would one day—"soon" (v. 8, that is, according to the Lord's reckoning, i.e., initially at the time of Cyrus the Persian)—be transformed into a new era of prosperity and plenty (chap. 36:8-12; cf. Lev 26:1-13). The prevailing desolation (שׁוֹמֵמָה, ten times) would become a divinely worked possession (מורשה) for God's people³¹—in marked contrast to the punitive judgment that was predicted for these same "mountains of Israel" in chapter 6. Whether or not the horror of intervening events had worked some salutary effects upon at least a remnant of the nation is not revealed (cf. 36:22-23). In any case, the Lord here promises "with uplifted hand" (v. 7, i.e., under a self-imposed imprecatory oath) to reactivate his covenant with them and their (spiritual) descendants.

The prophecy of 36:1-15 is Yahweh's personal address to the personified, symbolical "mountains of Israel" (a natural representation of God's everlasting protective and purifying presence among his people; see 20:40, 28:14, 39:17, 40:2; cf. Ps 48:1, Mic 4:2, Zech 14:4, Mark 9:2, Acts 1:11-12). This prophecy may be divided into three portions, in the form of an A-B-A' "ring construction" with a parallel beginning and ending which surround a distinctive, and thereby foregrounded, middle section, as shown in Figure 6.

In the first segment, vv. 1-7 (A), the basic thrust of which is resumed in vv. 13-15 (A'), the abundance of explicit references to the Lord's speech (e.g., כֹּה אָמַר אֲדֹנָי יְהוִה—vv. 2, 13; = *anaphora*) is meant to counteract the blasphemous and threatening talk of all of Israel's pagan adversaries. This rhetorically motivated verbal superfluity may render the piece "form-critically less coherent,"³² but it is nevertheless an effective device that stresses the powerful performative authority of God's efficacious word in

³⁰See, i.e., the discussion in J. W. Wevers, *Ezekiel*, The New Century Bible Commentary (London: Thomas Nelson, 1967), 186-188.

³¹Greenberg, 724.

³²L. C. Allen, *Ezekiel 20-48*, vol. 29, *WBC* (Dallas: Word, 1990), 169. Block, 322, refers to 36:1-15 as being very "repetitive" and "disjointed."

contrast to the empty, malicious slander of these impious, but comparatively petty, human enemies. It also emphasizes the fierce protective zeal (קנאה) of YHWH for his land (v. 5)—his “divine patriotism.”³³ Thus again according to the Lord’s retributive justice (*lex talionis*), their hateful scorn (כלמה) would one day be undone and heaped upon their own heads (vv. 6-7 + 15, = *epiphoric closure*).³⁴

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| <p>A <i>Woe oracle</i> (לכן . . . יען) against Edom and other pagan “nations”:
 These enemies will be punished for their malevolent behavior and scornful speech against the land/mountains of the Lord (vv. 1-7)</p> <p>B <i>Salvation oracle</i>—contrast (“But you” ואחם):
 Messianic/eschatological blessings are predicted
 for both the land/mountains and the people of Israel (vv. 8-12)</p> <p>A' <i>Woe oracle</i> (לכן . . . יען)—continued:
 The scornful talk against the land/“nation” of Israel on the part of hostile “nations” will be completely silenced by YHWH (vv. 13-15)</p> |
|---|

Figure 6. Structural outline of Ezek 36:1-15.

Surprisingly, there are no references to speech at all in the contrastively marked (ואחם “but you [pl.]”) medial segment (36:8-12), where we find the only occurrence of the divine name within the recognition formula that appears near its close (v. 11b) just prior to the summary and hinge passage of v. 12. The latter reiterates the essence of the Lord’s promise for “[his] people” (vv. 8/12, *inclusio*) and looks forward to the negation of Israel’s status as a nation “deprived of children” (vv. 12/13, *anadiplosis*). This eschatological piece amplifies its precedent in chapter 34 (e.g., vv. 14-15, 26-27, 29) and also anticipates its further elaboration in the next literary unit, especially in 36:33-36, where the land once despised yet also desired by Edom (אדום) will be transformed into an

³³J. Skinner, cited in Greenberg, 724.

³⁴In addition to the wicked speech motif (cf. 35:10-13), there are a number of noteworthy lexical correspondences—often involving some dramatic reversal—that tangibly link this prophetic passage directed against “Edom and the rest of the nations” (36:5) to the preceding one. These include, e.g., enmity (איבה, 35:5) and enemy (אויב, 36:2); ruins (רובה), predicted for Edom (35:4) but now the current condition of Israel (36:4), which the Lord will in future reverse (36:10); YHWH’s restored humanity (אדם) filling the very land (אדמה) to which the oppressors of Edom (אדום) greedily aspire (35:15; 36:6,10-12). For other items of similarity, see Allen, 170-171; cf. Greenberg, 724.

Eden (עֵדֶן, v. 35) for God's people (אֲדָמָה, vv. 10-12). The unexpected revelation of the Lord's mercy upon unworthy recipients, begun in chapter 34, is thereby expanded to highlight his goodness and glory as he graciously showers blessings upon them.³⁵ Ezekiel's pastoral rhetoric of reassurance is progressively and impressively building up to a thematic and emotive climax, also for those of us who are reading/hearing it, as it were, from a more distant vantage point.

*36:16-38: YHWH Will Vindicate His Holy Name by
Cleansing His People and Their Land*

This pericope develops one important aspect of the rhetoric of the preceding unit (36:1-15) and takes it to an even higher, more intense affective plane.³⁶ This issue concerns the divine honor of YHWH—"my name of holiness" (שֵׁם קִדְשִׁי, e.g., v. 20)—which the nation of Israel had horribly profaned (חָלַל, e.g., v. 20) by their persistent rebellion and wickedness (most notably bloodshed and idolatry, v. 18), leading to the disaster of their national judgment (שָׁפַט, v. 19b). Such activity had in turn provoked the scorn of surrounding pagans in mocking both the Lord and his now-exiled people (due to their ignominious exit from "his land," v. 20; cf. 36:6, 13, 15). So what was God going to do about this sacrilegious behavior on the part of "the house of Israel," which elicited such public vilification from all observing nations? Contrary to all human expectation—but according to inviolate, irrevocable prophecy—he himself would bring about their miraculous return, renewal, and restoration as a covenant community by means of his chosen messianic servant-shepherd (34:12-16, 23-24).

This gracious divine action was not in the least a result of any virtue or value in the human objects of such mercy, as might be suggested perhaps by the preceding oracle (vv. 1-15). It was due solely to the Lord's righteous "concern for [his] holy name" (v. 21), a synecdoche which denotes the whole ineffable being, nature, person, and purpose of God. Here, in contrast to the sacred excellence of YHWH, we have yet another prominent instance of "the

³⁵Thus, we see here both "continuity and development in the gospel of salvation for the shell-shocked exiles" of every world age (Allen, 174; he helpfully provides a list of the key correspondences between chaps. 34 and 36). This manifestly includes the multitudes that stir the emotions of our own supposedly enlightened times, over two and a half millennia later.

³⁶The *anaphoric* prophetic reception formula, reinforced by the vocative "son of man," indicates in typical fashion the start of this new structural division (36:16), which closes with the *epiphoric* divine recognition formula in v. 38, just before another principal sectional opener, the revelational formula of 37:1. A minor *inclusio* is formed by the reference to the house/people of Israel in marked relation to the nations (vv. 17-19/36-37). The former group is spoken of in the third person throughout the respective bounding subsections, i.e., vv. 16-21 and 37-38 (in contrast to the medial portion, vv. 22-36).

stress in the book of Ezekiel on Israel's unworthiness to be chosen,³⁷ or indeed, to be shown any sort of special favor at all. The shocking imagery of menstruation dispels all such illusions (vv. 17-18).

Most of the essential elements of this vital God-centered aspect of Ezekiel's message to "the mountains of Israel" have already been introduced within chapters 34-35, and even earlier, in chapter 20, in particular.³⁸ But here once again they serve in the distinct context of *theodicy*, demonstrating the absolute justice and perfect wisdom of YHWH's dealings with humanity in the world—the good as well as the evil—and now in relation to the righteousness of his own inviolate character. Indeed, "Ezekiel's [vigorous] apologetic for the nature of God can be traced throughout the book,"³⁹ but the issue is expressed with particular clarity and conviction in this pericope (e.g., vv. 20-21, 22-23, 32).

Another critical feature of the inclusive benevolent design for the future of the Lord's people (in keeping with his "holy name") is prominently foregrounded here. This concerns his provision for "the house of Israel" of that crucial dual internal component: a "new heart" (לב חדש) and a "new spirit" (רוח חדשה) (v. 26; cf. 11:19; 18:31). This refers to a life-giving, God-effected resuscitation of a person's morality and spirituality, an event powerfully dramatized in the next unit (37:1-14). The reassuring promise of a regenerated total personality to go along with a new covenant, as foretold earlier by Jeremiah (31:31-34; cf. also Ezek 16:60-63), is here reinforced and significantly expanded⁴⁰ by explicit mention of the animating Spirit (רוח) of YHWH, the dynamic divine agent of the people's repentance and renewal (cf. 37:14).

Three occurrences of the prophetic messenger formula (כה אמר אדני יהוה) (vv. 22, 33, 37) function to divide the section covering 36:16-38 into four segments (vv. 16-21, 22-32, 33-36, and 37-38). The first two antithetically expressed units are interlocked by means of the following inverted topical pattern shown in Figure 7.

Thus the central problem of desecration, brought out in the first part of the section (A-B), finds its divinely occasioned resolution in the second portion (B'-A').⁴¹ Segment A is clearly demarcated by the *inclusio* forged by the

³⁷McKeating, 80.

³⁸Cf. Boadt, 13.

³⁹Bullock, 251.

⁴⁰Taylor, 232; *contra* Boadt, 14.

⁴¹A prominent iterative overlap (*anadiplosis*) involving the second expression, coupled with the repeated antithetical key terms "profaned" + "name of holiness," accents the point of structural and thematic transition (22b).

chiastically arranged reason-result judicial sequence: “they defiled [the land] by their conduct and by their deeds” (17b) = > “according to their conduct and according to their deeds I judged them” (19b). Another patent *inclusio*, one that highlights the public shame of Israel’s offense, bounds paragraph B: “among the nations, wherever they went [there]” (20a/21b). The focal majestic name “Sovereign Lord” encircles the B’ element (22a/23b), which is given strong internal cohesion through the mention of either Israel or the nations in every line, with an emphatic pronominal juxtaposition at the very end: “in you, to their eyes” (23c). These continuous references to the mutually contrastive (but purposefully interrelated) pair of human participant-groups in the soteriological drama of judgment and restoration are reiterated in reversed order to sharpen the outer borders of segment A’, i.e., “from the nations” (24a) and “house of Israel” (32c).⁴²

- A Defilement of the people and their land—Means (vv. 16-19)
 B Consequent *pollution* of YHWH’s holy name—Result (vv. 20-21)
 B’ Revelation of the *purity* of YHWH’s name—Reason (vv. 22-23)
 A’ *Cleansing* of the people and their land—Means (vv. 24-32)

Figure 7. Structural outline of Ezek 36:16-32.

The thematic core of A’ (and correlate of the “great/holy name” peak of B’) is distinguished by a concentrated reiteration of primary terms and imagery that stresses divine initiative (*means* = > *result*) in the process of corporate (and by way of implication also personal) regeneration. The effect is heightened by a reiteration of selected terms and concepts from A-B (vv. 16-21), but with a reversed reference and connotation.⁴³ This message is intricately patterned for additional emphasis by means of parallel (as well as chiasmic) phrasing and set off within the discourse by a twofold surrounding internal *inclusio* (frame a/b), as synopsised on Figure 8:⁴⁴

⁴²The close of this composite unit is further marked by three elements: the oracle formula (נאם אלהי יהוה), an imperatival rebuke in direct speech, and an *inclusio* (for the B-A’ resolution portion) “it is not (emphatic כ) for your sake that I am doing [this]” (22b/32a).

⁴³For a summary of these topical inversions, see Greenberg, 734. Greenberg, 738, also draws attention to certain “unusual vocabulary [in this section that] injects freshness into what otherwise might have been only an anthology of Ezekielian speech and is now a vehicle for a new idea.” Some of this diction undoubtedly stems from the prophet’s priestly background, i.e., a cleansing that reflects the rituals performed on the Day of Atonement (v. 25, cf. Lev 16; 731).

⁴⁴Thus, the blessed “result” of YHWH’s motivating action (the “means,” repeated for emphasis) is a renewal of the covenantal correlates: the people’s faithful *obedience* (27), and the Lord’s *promise* to protect and provide for his “adopted” people (28). Further benefits for

- frame-a*: divine restoration of Israel to "the[ir] land" (v. 24)
frame-b: divine spiritual "cleansing" of the people (v. 25)
- means-a*: YHWH "gives" [A] the people a "new heart"[B] and a "new spirit" [B] he "puts" [A'] inside (v. 26a)
- means-b*: YHWH removes their "stony heart" and he "gives" [A] them a "fleshy heart" [B] (v. 26b) and the divine "spirit" [B] he "puts" [A'] inside (v. 27a)
- result-a*: "my decrees [C] you will follow [D], and my judgments [C] you . . . will do [D]" (v. 27b)
- frame-a*: divine restoration of Israel to their "land" (v. 28a)
- result-b*: "you will be [X] to me [Y] as a people [Z], and I will be [X'] to you [Y'] as a God [Z']" (v. 28b)
- frame-b*: divine spiritual "cleansing" of the people (v. 29a)

Figure 8: Compositional emphasis on divine initiative (36:24-29).

In this masterful way, Ezekiel has stylistically shaped his message in order to foreground its principal restoration themes of *renewal* for God's people/nation (A', = the initial purpose) and *reverence* for God's person/name (B', = the ultimate purpose). In the process he also rhetorically underlines its dramatic (emotive-volitional) implications for all to hear (primarily) and to see (when reading the text). Indeed, a powerful scriptural proclamation, such as we have here, needs to be forcefully and competently read, and reread—aloud—and just as carefully listened to in order for the desired verbal-religious impact to be felt.⁴⁵

The two final oracles of this major section serve to emphasize by way

the "elect" (i.e., "taken" and "gathered" from among all the nations on earth, v. 24) are revealed in the surrounding frame: a home-"land," and spiritual "cleansing." The close connection between these concepts, which reflect a "new exodus motif" (Block, 353), and the ideational core is suggested by the intercalation of "frame-a" before the occurrence of "result-b" in the expected sequence.

⁴⁵For some helpful comments concerning these fast-fading faculties in the contemporary church, see J. C. Rang, *How to Read the Bible Aloud* (New York: Paulist, 1994). I agree with the assertion that the "exalted literary style" of 36:16-38 stems from the fact that here "the theology of the book reaches its zenith," especially in the segment covering vv. 24-30, which "contains the most systematic and detailed summary of Yahweh's restorative agenda in Ezekiel, if not in all the prophetic books" (Block, 340, 352-353).

of recursion some of the main motifs of the prior messages of salvation, to keep them current in the minds and hearts of Ezekiel's audience. The first (36:33-36) begins with a citation formula followed by a reminder of the people's moral cleansing (טוהר, 33a; cf. 25) and by implication, its marked opposites, defiled (טמא, vv. 17-18) and polluted (חלל, vv. 20-23).⁴⁶ Then the land-based, physical notions—as an extended metaphor for underlying spiritual realities—of “rebuilding ruins” (prosperity) and “replanting wastelands” (productiveness) are highlighted (cf. 34:27; 36:10, 29-30) in a graphic reversal of previous judgment passages such as 5:14-17. These golden-age prophetic concepts⁴⁷—in essence, Paradise regained in “the Garden of Eden” (גן עדן, v. 35; cf. Isa 51:3)—give cohesion to the unit as an integral compositional segment. They also act as the evidential background for a variant of the divine recognition formula in v. 36a (cf. 23c)—significantly manifested on behalf of the remnant (שאר—of believers?) among “the nations.”⁴⁸

A rhetorical procedure similar to the preceding is observed in the final paragraph (36:37-38), except that here the key recognition formula occurs as a marker of discourse closure (v. 38c). The reiterated ideas of this restoration oracle (“again this” שד זמא; cf. “never again” לא עוד, v. 30) suddenly reintroduce the metaphor of sheep and flocks (along with associated imagery—cf. 34:11-16 + 31),⁴⁹ which are endowed with numerical increase (cf. 36:11, 30). In this picturesque, down-to-earth poetic manner the great Shepherd-Lord is memorably depicted as both vindicating his name (vv. 22-23) and vivifying his people (vv. 26-28, with a further emphasis upon divine instigation) in a God-established realm of future glory. Furthermore, YHWH will once again “allow himself to be appealed to [by name!]” on the part of his penitent people (37, a notable *nip'al* use of the verb דרש). The essential thematic concerns of theodicy and theocracy are thus forcefully combined. And so the literary stage is set for the onset of the grand climax of this prominent gospel portion of Ezekiel's prophetic collection (chap. 37; cf. 11:19-20).

⁴⁶On the importance of such “priestly/cultic language” in Ezekiel, see McKeating, 86-88.

⁴⁷Taylor, 233.

⁴⁸Although there is certainly room for debate on this issue, such expressions of testimonial, when read in the mutually reflective light of similar passages, e.g., the final two (Hebrew) words of v. 23 (literally, “in you to their eyes”) convey a definite *missiological* implication. Other OT passages also reflect on this issue, most notably the Psalter (22:27, 47:9, 66:8, 67:1-7) and Isaiah (42:6, 54:17, 55:4-5). The individual books of the Holy Scriptures, of both Old and New Covenants, were not composed, communicated, or canonized in a vacuum. Therefore, due to the ever-present influence of the literary principle of *intertextuality*, they cannot correctly be interpreted or applied in isolation either from one another or from the main hermeneutical tradition of the church throughout the ages.

⁴⁹For a discussion of this figurative usage, see Allen, 180.

37:1-14: *The Spirit of the Lord Resurrects the Skeleton of the House of Israel*

The dramatic depiction of a divinely inspired life-infusion with respect to a vast landscape of dry bones is undoubtedly one of the best known (and perhaps also most misunderstood) of Ezekiel's prophecies (cf. the possible allusion to vv. 10-13 in Matt 27:52-54).⁵⁰ Moreover, it is, like many of the others, very tightly and symmetrically constructed by means of parallel patterns of lexical recursion, both synonymous and contrastive.⁵¹ It is chiasmatically arranged, perhaps as a further literary reflection of the spiritual *reversal* that is being revealed with regard to God's people. This dialogic and autobiographical vision-report also exhibits a progressive, seminarrative plot-like development as shown in Figure 9.

- A *Problem*: YHWH shows Ezekiel a scattered multitude of human bones (vv. 1-3)
 B *Complication*: the dry bones are raised up and embodied, but still no life! (vv. 4-8)
 B' *Peak*: the bodies are infused with the breath of life, and an army arises (vv. 9-10)
 A' *Resolution*: YHWH reveals to Ezekiel his plans for the resurrected bones (his people) (vv. 11-14)

Figure 9. Structural outline of the drama of Ezek 37:1-14.

Many lexical correspondences and formulas serve to demarcate these four subsections and also to interrelate them into a tightly connected rhetorical unit. The purpose of the whole is to spiritually "inspire" the disoriented,

⁵⁰Why have all these bones not been buried? Block, 378, plausibly suggests that "Ezekiel probably viewed the present scene as evidence of Yahweh's own covenant curse in Deut 28:25-26" (cf. Jer 34:17-20). But the Lord is about to graciously undo his punishment—for the glory of his name/person (v. 14).

⁵¹The twofold announcement of visionary reception, in which divine impression (his "hand upon me") is coupled with a reference to spiritual inspiration (v. 1), replaces the usual "prophetic word" formula as an *anaphoric* signal of a primary textual aperture (cf. 1:3, 8:1, 40:1). This expression reappears at the onset of the next pericope in 37:15, while the "divine utterance" formula marks the close of the present unit, as does an *inclusio* formed by the pair of similar-sounding terms, "spirit" (רוח) and "settle" (רש) in vv. 1 and 14. It is noteworthy that the setting specified here ("the valley/plain" הַבְּקָעָה) appears to be the same as that of Ezekiel's initial vision of the glory of the Lord (cf. 3:22). Thus, God is viewed as being powerfully operative in the whole wide world, wherever the objects of his merciful action may happen to be.

displaced, and depressed exilic community of Israel (the immediate referent of the "dry bones," v. 11; = "my people," vv. 12-13). The initial compound speech-opener "And he [YHWH] said to me . . . , 'Prophesy unto . . . and say to . . . : "Thus says the Lord'" *anaphorically* occurs at the beginning of each paragraph (vv. 4, 9, 11-12). The variation, or deviation, evident in the final instance, which includes the transitional double quotation of v. 11, with reference to both (a) vv. 1-10 and (b) vv. 11-14,⁵² functions to distinguish the second segment as the *thematic* climax of the entire passage—as distinct from the *dramatic* peak which appears in vv. 9-10. Thus the physical resurrection of a sea of scattered skeletons captures the imagination of the audience, while the spiritual resurrection of a dead and buried people conveys the main religious import of the passage.

A number of other artistic touches highlight the prophetically delivered, but divinely authored, message that is conveyed within this vision (vv. 1-10) and the subsequent interpretive comment (vv. 11-14). The second section begins with Israel's complaint, which leads to a divine salvation oracle that predicts the rejuvenation of God's people and a restoration to their promised land (cf. 37:27-28). The apparently doubtful (from a human perspective) rhetorical question of v. 3a (A, coupled with Ezekiel's ambiguous reply) is balanced by the hopeless communal lament of v. 11b (A').⁵³ Similarly, the emphatic divine recognition formula in the middle of the section in v. 6b is reinforced by its corresponding expansion in vv. 13-14 at the close of the unit. The sequence of words and actions that comprises the Lord's command to the bones in B is basically duplicated in B' with his summons of the breath/wind/spirit. However, an inversion takes place at the respective endings of each unit: Bodies appear in v. 8 but with "no breath in them." In v. 10, on the other hand, "breath enters them" and the bodies "come to life"—"a very very (מאד מאד) great host,"⁵⁴ which is the result of the Spirit-effected transformation of the "very many . . . very dry" heaps of bones in the vision's opening scene (2). The redundant qualifier "dry" (יבש) serves to emphasize the stark and utter deadness of the individuals concerned.

A string of deictic beholds (הנה + an emphatic אני when Yahweh speaks) punctuates the discourse throughout (vv. 2, 5, 7, 8, 11, 12). It brings the audience—including the prophet—sensorially into the heart of this amazing, cinematic revelation (its sounds as well as sights, cf. the

⁵²F. C. Fensham, "The Curse of the Dry Bones in Ezekiel 37:1-14 Changed to a Blessing of Resurrection," *Journal of Northwest Semitic Languages* 13 (1987): 59.

⁵³Cf. Lemke, 212; for some psalmic parallels, see Allen, 186.

⁵⁴Note one of a number of significant word/soundplays in this section: חיל . . . חיו (v. 10).

clattering, שׁעֵר of v. 7). The graphic discourse thus invites all subsequent receptors "to look in on the theater that is going on inside the prophet's head."⁵⁵ It is true that "as one reads [or hears such] an apocalyptic vision, he feels as if he is there, for the details are given in the first person by the recipient."⁵⁶ The dramatically prolonged, two-staged resurrection of the bones—first embodiment (v. 8), then em-breath-ment (v. 10, paralleling the account of man's creation in Gen 2:7)—is reproduced in the nonsymbolic expression of the vision's meaning. First, there is a predicted exit of the people from their metaphorical graves, then an Exodus-like transferal to their land (vv. 12-14, another dual sequence of corresponding events). The great army left standing at attention at the end of B' is finally brought home to their God-given rest at the conclusion of A', where the doing of the Lord is foregrounded at the very close (14c; cf. 36:32,36; = structural *epiphora*).

This inspired and inspiring spectacle is a vivid, visual, and verbal reaffirmation of the reliability of *all* the Lord's predictions or promises given in the preceding oracles, as well as those still to come. Indeed, the same basic hope-filled theme of renewal and restoration (following punitive punishment or disciplinary chastisement, as the case may be) is being recycled throughout these pericopes, but from varied viewpoints and with differing emphases. This recursive feature serves to further demonstrate the authenticity, veracity, and authority of God's chosen mouthpiece, the human vehicle for his holy word (note the repeated בָּנָא). Everything thus comes meaningfully together in this potent depiction of an entire "people" resurrected, beginning not from lifeless bodies, but from the ultimate negative—dry, desiccated bones scattered in the dust. The repentant among Ezekiel's discouraged addressees should know that they most surely did have a happy future in store. They might look and feel quite dead in a religious sense, but they had only to depend on the energizing breath of YHWH, and new life would one day be theirs, as noted by Greenberg: "The despondency of the exiles, betokened by their drastic death and burial metaphors, is met by the prophet's stunning counter-metaphors of resurrection and disinterment [vv. 11-12]."⁵⁷

"Will these bones live again?" (v. 3): The Sovereign Lord (v. 5) answers his

⁵⁵McKeating, 14.

⁵⁶Alexander, 924.

⁵⁷Greenberg, 47. For some helpful "background to Ezekiel's notions of resurrection," see Block, 383-387. Block's, 392, comments on the gospel significance of this pericope are especially appropriate: "As in his earlier representations of the netherworld, Ezekiel's vision of the resuscitated dry bones offers his compatriots powerful declarations of hope. The gospel according to Ezekiel affirms that there is life after death, and there is hope beyond the grave. Yahweh remains the incontestable Lord not only of the living but also of the dead."

own provocative question through word and deed in a vision so lifelike, albeit surrealistic, that it must have seemed as if it were taking place in the very imaginative presence of the prophet's audience. This distinctive mode of message transmission served to highlight the fact that the revitalization was as good as done. God's own indwelling Spirit was the unfailing guarantor (v. 14; cf. v. 10 and 36:26-27), and God himself was the gracious initiator of the entire process (note the strong first-person focus in vv. 12-14).⁵⁸

37:15-28: A Prophetic Object Lesson in Support of the Divine Message of Restoration

After the drama of the preceding revelation in support of his message, what more could Ezekiel say? In short, just about everything positive that he has already proclaimed as an authoritative "word from the Lord" (37:15; cf. its next announcement in 38:1) in earlier passages (11:17-20; 16:60-63; 20:40-44; 28:25-26), but especially from the immediately antecedent selections in 34:11-31; 36:5-15, 24-38; and 37:12-14. Thus after the initial object lesson (37:15-19), which is an effective symbolical follow-up and scene-setter,⁵⁹ what we have in vv. 21-28 is a cohesive pastiche of prophecies that review and reinforce virtually every one of the principal components of Ezekiel's gospel message to "the house of Israel"—here now specified as the whole, unified nation (וי, v. 22), namely, Joseph (Ephraim, = N) as well as Judah (S, v. 19).

A pair of significant new elements is added to increase the impact and implication of the Lord's words in the final portion of this pericope. First, the notion of *permanence*: the promise of salvation is good—guaranteed by YHWH himself—"forever" (עולם, as stressed in vv. 25-28). Second, the crucial concept of covenantal *presence*: the concrete symbol of "my dwelling place" (משכני) or "my sanctuary" (מקדשי) is here introduced (vv. 26-28; note the distinctive alliteration—cf. the contrasting "their idols" וילוליהם and "their detestable things" שקוציהם in v. 23). The Sovereign Lord is present with, indeed residing in the midst of, his people—in anticipation of the last major compositional division of the book (its heavenly denouement, chaps. 40-48).

⁵⁸This same resurrection promise (cf. Isa 26:19) has the divine power and potential to renew and restore the flagging hearts and minds of God's faithful saints today—no matter how "dead" they may feel, or how deeply they might be psychologically, socially, and perhaps even spiritually, "buried" (12-13).

⁵⁹McKeating, 14, observes: "Ancient Israel never, as far as we know, produced any drama or developed a theater, as did the Greeks. Any drama which did take place was probably confined to the liturgy, and the cult may well have satisfied any dramatic urge which Israelites may have felt. It is significant that it is from a cultic background that Ezekiel, the priest, emerges. . . . His parables are essentially dramatic, and his visions are pure spectacle."

Another patterned structure is manifested in this section. In contrast to the framework that defined the first half of chapter 37, this one is not chiasmic. Rather, it is sequential and conceptually overlapping ("terrace-like") in its overall organization, as outlined in Figure 10.

A *Command*: God tells Ezekiel to take two enscribed sticks and join them into one (vv. 15-17)

A' *Explanation*: The preceding prophetic sign-act is transformed into a divine metaphor (vv. 18-19)

B *Interpretation*: Basic renewal of the Lord's covenant blessings ("one king," vv. 20-23)

B' *Interpretation*: Elaborated renewal of the Lord's covenant blessings ("David," vv. 24-28)

Figure 10. Parallel patterning of the conjoined sticks passage (Ezek 37:15-28).

Both A' and B' serve to restate, expand upon, sharpen, and intensify the semantic material contained in the corresponding A and B segments—with reference to the singular solidarity of God's regenerated people (stressed also in the earlier resurrected-bones vision). The paired units thus function here as discourse-level equivalents of the technique of parallelism, or "seconding," which is so characteristic of biblical Hebrew poetry.⁶⁰

The same principal set of symbolic actions concerning the stick/tree/wood (קֶטֶף) is reiterated in A and A'.⁶¹ Each ends with an emphasis upon the divinely desired outcome of indissoluble "one"-ness (אחד, vv. 17, 19c). Note the reversal in the order of eponymic names: Judah-Ephraim-Joseph [A]: Joseph-Ephraim-Judah [A'], making the two into one. Similarly, paragraphs B and B' are formed within the thematic framework provided by promises regarding the land, one king, divine cleansing, and an expression of the divine-human covenantal correlates. The latter concludes each portion—but in a

⁶⁰Cf. J. L. Kugel, *The Idea of Biblical Poetry: Parallelism and Its History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981), 51-52; see also E. R. Wendland, *The Discourse Analysis of Hebrew Prophetic Literature: Determining the Larger Textual Units of Hosea and Joel* (Lewiston, NY: Mellen, 1995), 266-268.

⁶¹Cf. Greenberg, 758-759. Block presents a strong case for understanding קֶטֶף as a "wooden writing table" (399-401, 409; cf. Isa 30:8; Hab 2:2). This would certainly make the action of writing (כָּתַב, vv. 16, 20) more plausible, though the possible royal allusion (of stick/scepter) would be lost.

reversed order to further underscore the envisioned harmony between the people(s) and their Lord ("they will be my people, and I will be their God," v. 23c—"I will be their God, and they will be my people," v. 27b). A noteworthy variation in the divine recognition formula brings the pericope, as well as the larger section (chaps. 33-37), to a close: "Then *the nations* will know that I, YHWH, make *Israel* holy" (v. 28).

Significant areas of conceptual overlap (*anadiplosis*) function to progressively tie one discourse unit into the next within the complete composition. Thus, the query of the curious exiles in v. 18 links A with A'; YHWH's command to hold the two sticks (tablets) together before the people's eyes (20) acts as a transition between the two halves of the text, A-A' and B-B'; and reference to the single Davidic-Messianic king (24) binds the initial divine prediction in B to its expansion in B' and back again to A-A' by virtue of the fact that the stick is a symbol of kingship (scepter) as well as of undivided nationhood (cf. 19:10-14; Gen 49:10). The prophetic object lesson also reflects the preceding vision through the reiterated notion of attaching (נָחַץ) and joining together (קָרַב)—bone (עֶצֶם) to bone and stick (עֵץ) to stick (37:6, 19; 37:7, 17). This leads in turn to the Exodus-evoking prediction that God's people will be brought together from all points of the world to be reunited in their own land (vv. 12, 14, 21-22).

A less overt but equally eminent manifestation of intratextuality, as already noted, is the concentration of citations, allusions, and reminiscences that appear in this section, especially the B-B' constituent. This significant topical recycling acts as a climactic summary of the preacher's urgent message of encouragement to his fellow exiles on behalf of the Lord.⁶² In short, this stirring recapitulation "combines the promise of purification of the people with restoration of the land, under a new David, in a covenant of peace, when God's dwelling is reestablished in their midst."⁶³ Using the scriptural symbolism and concrete imagery from past salvation oracles and promises, Ezekiel proclaims a gospel message of hope in the Lord for all obedient members of the flock of the royal Shepherd (v. 24).

Such an evangelical rehearsal naturally includes many prominent instances of intertextuality with reference to such primary covenantal text precursors as Exod 6:7; Lev 26:4-13; Deut 28:4-13; 2 Sam 7:11-16; and 1 Kgs

⁶²Greenberg, 758. Allen, 192, advances the suggestion that "37:1-13 seems to have been intended as a commentary on 36:27a . . . and likewise 37:15-24a as a commentary on 36:27b." Such an argument is rather too intricate to be credible. Besides, what is one to do then with vv. 24b-28, where we have an equally impressive convergence of prior primary salvation terms and texts?

⁶³Boadt, 15.

9:4-5, along with historically more immediate passages like those of Jeremiah (especially chaps. 30-33). The recurrent, theophanic refrain ("then you will know that I [am] the Lord") is itself a constant reminder of the supreme archetypal instance of divine deliverance (37:6, 13-14, 8; cf. Exod 6:2; 7:17; 10:2; 14:4; 16:12). The result is an expertly fused, Scripture-packed prophetic kaleidoscope that fairly bristles with denotative import and connotative impact. It is indeed a nuclear prophecy that resonates with the heart of OT theology, yet one which is stamped with the unique viewpoint and experience of its human mouthpiece, the pastor-prophet-priest Ezekiel.⁶⁴

*Rhetorical Drama in the Service of
The Resurrection Dynamic*

Obviously, this entire section covering chapters 33-37 presents a carefully and consummately crafted compositional whole. It is indeed a prophetic sermon that is admirably suited to perform its primary rhetorical purpose of highlighting key aspects of the intended message. At the same time it also incites the emotions and captures the imagination of its audience. It does this through the heart-inspiring "hand of the Lord" (37:1), by means of the various parallels, correspondences, and contrasts manifested simultaneously on several conceptual and affective levels in a compelling yet appealing manner. In the end, the thematic spotlight is fixed once more upon the text's central character—YHWH, the sovereign, holy God who will inevitably demonstrate his integrity (note the periodic divine "I" [אני] appearing emphatically throughout the text, e.g., 37:19, 21, 23, 28) by establishing both a people and a place that are completely holy unto himself (27-28; cf. 23bc and 36:23, 26-28).⁶⁵

The preceding analysis of the topical *selection* and structural *arrangement* of Ezekiel, both internally and in relation to the work as a whole, has shown how and why the discourse has been organized as it stands. Certainly there is no need for apologies on account of any supposed infelicities in terms of either compositional artfulness or rhetorical effectiveness.⁶⁶ In "classical" rhetorical

⁶⁴The validity of his glorious vision of future everlasting fellowship with the Lord dwelling amidst his people (לִי לְעַמּוֹ) is certified at the very end of the sacred canon in the reaffirming vision of Rev 21:3. The essential unity in ethnic diversity that John seems to emphasize by his choice of terms in this passage is perhaps an interscriptural commentary on the intended interpretation of Ezek 37:27.

⁶⁵Block's summary is again apropos: "The presence of his sanctuary (*miqdaš*) in the midst of the people will be the ultimate demonstration of his commitment to them ('I will be your God'). His sanctification (*qiddes*) of Israel will be the final proof of them as a holy nation, consecrated to himself for his glory ('You will be my people')" (*Ezekiel*, 421).

⁶⁶For an overview of such alleged textual discontinuities and disruptions from the point of view of many older Ezekiel scholars, see L. E. Cooper Sr., *Ezekiel*, vol. 17, NAC

terms, the book evinces a convincing combination of *ethos* (e.g., through the constant involvement of the authorial “son-of-man”), *pathos* (e.g., in the many striking, emotionally touching, evocative images), and the preeminent *logos* (the dominant, authoritative “word of the Lord”). Similarly, we have an engagingly varied mixture of the three basic functional types of *epideictic*, *judicial*, and *deliberative* rhetoric. These are passages that express praise or blame of the nature of some character, event, or situation; that refer to human activity which is either right/just or wrong/unjust according to some legislative norm or juridical case; and that pertain to what is advantageous or harmful with respect to some behavior, which is correspondingly either encouraged or discouraged.⁶⁷

What remains, then, in the following portions of the prophecy is to demonstrate this divine motive, mandate, and message also on a cosmic scale and within an eschatological framework at the expense of Gog and all other godless, antagonistic nations on earth (chaps. 38:1-39:20). This penultimate passage foregrounds the holiness of YHWH (38:16, 23; 39:7, 27) even further as it demonstrates his omnipotent power and sovereign control over the entire universe. The almighty Lord is in complete charge of this world’s events, and will surely see to it that the ultimate victory is won over all the forces of evil and enemies of his people (Rev 20). After all this vigorous action and high emotive tension, the victorious community of faith—this new Israel of the heart—can finally rest in peace (chaps. 40-48). They can bask in the radiant glory of the Lord’s everlasting presence (43:7; 48:35) within the sacred precincts of his temple sanctuary, from which the river of regenerative spiritual life forever flows (47:1-12).⁶⁸

(Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1994), 32-35.

⁶⁷G. A. Kennedy, trans., *Aristotle—On Rhetoric: A Theory of Civic Discourse* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 48-49. In view of all of the stylistic features which the author seemingly puts to good rhetorical use in the text of Ezekiel, it is difficult to see M. Zulick’s point that Hebrew prophetic rhetoric tends to be passive in that it makes “the hearer rather than the speaker the deciding figure in a rhetorical act” (“The Active Force of Hearing: The Ancient Hebrew Language of Persuasion,” *Rhetorica* 10 [1992]: 377; cf. Y. Gitay, *Isaiah and His Audience: The Structure and Meaning of Isaiah 1-12* [Assen: Van Gorcum, 1991], 4-7).

⁶⁸As “was common in the judgment-speech literature of the sixth and fifth centuries B.C.” (Alexander, 929), this section includes a reiterative recycling to heighten the drama of God’s revelation (39:1-8 basically repeats the sense of 38:1-23). It concludes with a cohesion-fixing flashback to the messianic age in the summary of 39:21-29 (cf. chaps. 34:11-37:28; 28:25-26; Deut 30:1-10). In keeping with the earlier text-material that it summarizes, 39:21-29 is another instance of a neatly patterned pericope: A: The Lord’s glory is revealed in his justice (“face hidden,” 21-24); B: The Lord demonstrates his holiness by restoring the fortunes of his people (25-26) = B: the nations are witnesses (27); A’: The Lord’s glory is revealed in his mercy (“face not hidden,” 28-29). It may be noted that this segment makes it apparent that YHWH’s restoration of Israel was not completely unconditional—a “unilateral act of God”

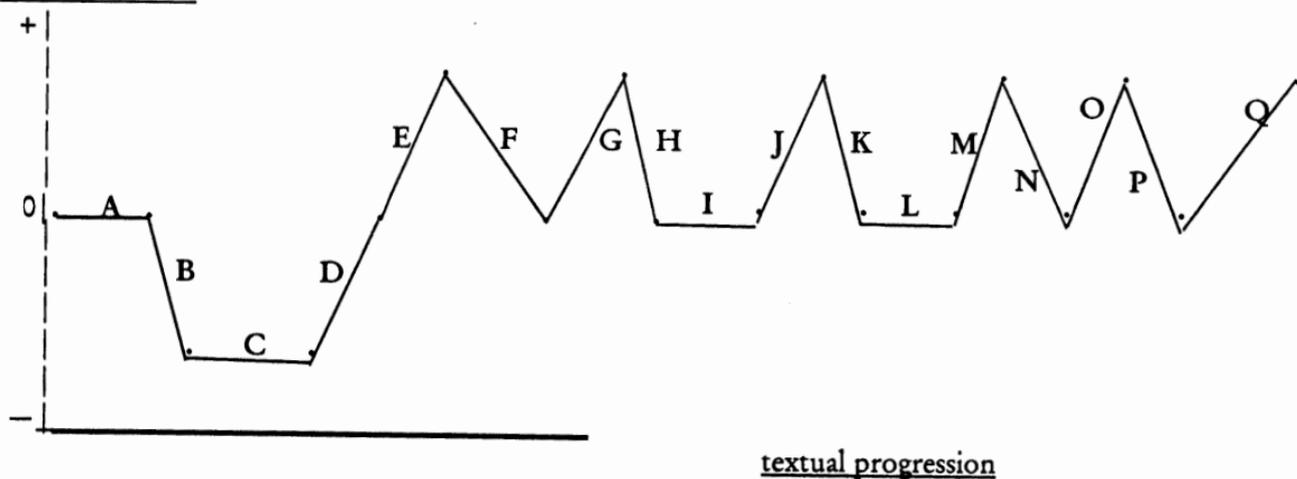
In closing, we might display the varied, rhetorically captivating, "gospel"-centered—but "law"-confirmatory—principal text portion of chapters 33-37 by means of another (admittedly impressionistic) visual summary of its prophetic plot and associated connotative flow. Figure 11 provides a more "scenic" view of the "panoramic" display given at the beginning of this essay in Part 1.

As shown in Figure 11, our focal section begins with the connotatively neutral (0) judicial text of A, but this bearing takes a sudden emotive plunge with the news of Jerusalem's fall (B). The overall depression continues in the judgment oracles of C, but this is relieved to some extent by the just condemnation of the unfaithful shepherds (D). The connotation then moves in a decidedly positive (+), upward direction as YHWH assumes the role of Shepherd for his scattered flock (E), but again there is another perceptible downward trend (not really negative or totally condemnatory in tone), as unrighteous oppressors within the external community are rebuked (F). This wave-like, positive (blessing) < = > neutral (warning), thematic movement continues in rhythmic progression throughout the rest of the unit—up to its quiet, spiritually consolatory close at the end of chapter 37 (Q).

The cleansing mercy of God's gospel message thus stands out more clearly when contrasted with the ugly reality of the sinful human condition, both individual and communal,⁶⁹ as evaluated and judged according to the eternal covenantal principles of YHWH. A person's faithful obedience or rebellious wickedness, as the case may be, will inevitably be met with either the Lord's abundant grace or his punitive justice. According to the prophetic philosophy of Ezekiel, the former option is always the utmost divine desire (18:23, 30b-32; cf. Hos 11:8-11). One major implication of this prophetic messenger's proclamation to the dry bones that so often pass for contemporary religion, concerns the importance of experiencing a genuine spiritual resurrection, both individual and corporate. Such a vital inner regeneration (along with its corresponding outer manifestation) is not only a priority from a covenantal peace perspective (34:25/37:26), but it also constitutes an essential aspect of YHWH's glorious self-revelation to the entire world (יהוה וידעם כִּי־אני יהוה (37:13a).

or an imposition—in the sense that absolutely no response or reaction on their part was necessary—"a future bliss without the precondition of repentance" (cf. Greenberg, 735-737). Rather, the fact of sin and the need for personal cleansing is strongly emphasized (39:23, 26), even in retrospect within the eternal temple of the Lord's presence (43:7).

⁶⁹Cf. Alexander, 746; *contra* McKeating, 84.

religious connotation

A = 33:1-20	D = 34:1-10	G = 34:20-31	J = 36:8-12	M = 36:24-38	P = 37:15-19
B = 33:21-22	E = 34:11-16	H = 35:1-15	K = 36:13-15	N = 37:1-8	Q = 37:20-28
C = 33:23-33	F = 34:17-19	I = 36:1-7	L = 36:16-23	O = 37:9-14	

Figure 11. A depiction of the macrostructural dramatic movement of chaps. 33-37.