

Radical and Subversive Theology of Ezekiel 1

An Intertextual Reading

Danijel Kevešević, B. Th (Hons), Flin

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**Flinders University
School of Humanities and Creative Arts
Faculty of Education, Humanities and Law
Adelaide, South Australia**

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I certify that this thesis does not incorporate without acknowledgment any material previously submitted for a degree or diploma in any university; and that to the best of my knowledge and belief it does not contain any material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the text.

Name: Danijel Kevešević

Signature: _____

Date: 23/08/2016

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Abstract

This thesis examines Ezekiel's vision of the glory of the Lord found in the first chapter of the book of Ezekiel. The primary aim of the study is to explore the radical and subversive theology used by the author to communicate his message to the exiles.

A combination of literary criticism and intertextuality will be used as interpretative lenses to identify this controversial theology contained in Ezekiel 1.

Intertextuality will be used to explore how two texts interact. The aim of intertextuality is to identify the texts that the author is calling upon and how he develops and modifies longstanding traditions to address his circumstances while advancing a new theology. The principles of intertextuality will be applied not just to different biblical and extrabiblical texts but also to iconography of the Ancient Near East.

This thesis has found that the living creatures described in Ezekiel 1 are supernatural beings who bear little resemblance to cherubim or seraphim but are very similar to the four beings called "the Destructive, the Pitiless, the Trampler and the Flier" depicted in Enuma Elish.

The author's audience expected Marduk on his war chariot to come to Babylon re-affirming his victory over YHWH. However, it is El Šadday who is described as coming to Babylon riding Marduk's own war chariot pulled by four monstrous beings. The author is using a well-known Ancient Near Eastern tradition and radically transforms it, reinstating YHWH as the supreme deity.

The author of the book of Ezekiel proclaims that YHWH was never defeated by Marduk and that it is YHWH who is responsible for the destruction of Jerusalem, the temple and the exile.

The author is controversial in the way he describes the prophet Ezekiel as the new Moses, because his audience needs someone like Moses to lead them away from syncretism and assimilation to Babylonian culture and religion.

This thesis has found that the author of the book of Ezekiel depicts King Jehoiachin as the only true political leader and declares his allegiances to King Jehoiachin and his opposition to

Zedekiah. YHWH is in Babylon and the Lord supports King Jehoiachin and the exiles. Even though the role of King Jehoiachin is vital, it is YHWH who is depicted as the true king.

The author's highly anthropomorphic description of YHWH in Ezekiel 1 is conceptually dependent on the Ancient Near Eastern understanding of the divine body. An abstract God found pre-exilic time is not an option for the author and his audience who are living in Babylon. By radically stating that the glory of the Lord seemed to have "a human form" the author exalts the human race to a new level. It is of paramount importance to the author to make the vision of YHWH as corporeal as possible. Only by the author doing this would the exiles who were immersed in Babylonian religion and society see YHWH as being real and present in Babylon.

Chapter One

Introduction

The first chapter of the book of Ezekiel is one of the most fascinating parts of the Hebrew bible. The highly detailed imagery inspires awe and fear. Great artists such as Raphael, William Blake, Marc Chagall and Salvador Dali have been inspired by the first chapter of the book of Ezekiel and have tried to depict the vision. A simple internet search will reveal countless digital images of Ezekiel's vision created by ordinary people in the last 10 to 15 years. On the other hand, the text has been so controversial that over the centuries Jewish scholars forbade anyone younger than 30 years of age to read it.¹

The author gives an extraordinary description of the movement of the glory of the Lord in the heart of the Babylonian empire. He sets the scene by fixing the time and the place of the vision and identifies the person who received the vision as Ezekiel son of Buzi. The next 25 verses are dedicated to the bizarre and amazing description of the "living creatures". This is followed by an extraordinary description of the highly anthropomorphic glory of the Lord sitting on the throne held by the living creatures.

In the past, Ezekiel 1:1-28 has been often overlooked, and the most radical and subversive elements have been minimised and often harmonised because of a lack of understanding. The first chapter of the book of Ezekiel was often seen as a stepping stone to more orthodox and easy to understand messages, such as the prophet's stance on idolatry, judgment against Judah and other nations, and the vision of the new temple.

The main purpose of this thesis is to argue that a radical and subversive theology is contained within the first chapter of the book of Ezekiel which has been neglected. This thesis will answer a number of questions:

- Why does the author put so much energy and effort into the description of the "living beings"?

¹ Paul Elmen, "The Merkabah Wheels and Their Work," *Anglican Theological Review* 71, no. 4 (1989): p.368.

- Why are they so bizarre and why does he call them חַיִּיּוֹת the “living beings” and not כְּרֻבִּים “cherubim” as they are referred to in Ezekiel 10?
- Why does the author describe YHWH in highly anthropomorphic terms?
- Why does the author clearly state, dangerously bordering blasphemy, that the glory of the Lord had humanoid form?
- Why does the author mention the name of an insignificant Judean king who is in exile with no power or authority?
- Why does he refer to him as “King Jehoiachin”?

In the process of describing the vision, the author of the book of Ezekiel describes YHWH as a mobile God who is not bound by the walls of the temple in Jerusalem or the geographical boundaries of Judah. I will answer the question why the mobility of God was so important to the author and his audience. I will argue that the author depicts the prophet Ezekiel as someone who is equal to Moses or more precisely why the relationship between the prophet Ezekiel and YHWH is as unique as the one between Moses and YHWH.

The answers to the questions mentioned above have not been fully addressed until now, creating a significant gap in the current scholarship. The significance of the mention of King Jehoiachin has been usually overlooked or examined only in the sense of its connection of the dates used in the book of Ezekiel. The living creatures are almost automatically harmonised with the cherubim, and the anthropomorphic characteristics of the glory of the Lord are overlooked and minimised.

The aims of this thesis are to examine these areas and answer the questions mentioned above, to stimulate further discussion and to contribute to the current knowledge. To identify the radical and subversive theology contained in the first chapter of the book of Ezekiel, I will use literary criticism and intertextuality as my interpretative lenses. Literary criticism will ensure that the allusions to other texts which will be identified in the course of the thesis will be examined and identified in a systematic way, significantly diminishing the possibility that some of them might be omitted.

Once the markers are identified, I will use intertextuality to explore how two texts interact. The aim of intertextuality is to identify the texts that the author is calling upon and how he develops and modifies longstanding traditions to address his circumstances while developing a new theology.

Due to the circumstances in which the author of the book of Ezekiel and his audience found themselves (the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple and the exile), it was crucial to modify longstanding theological concepts.

The destruction of the temple is narrated in Ezekiel 33:21 "In the twelfth year of our exile, in the tenth month, on the fifth day of the month, someone who had escaped from Jerusalem came to me and said, "The city has fallen.""

The aim of this thesis is not to examine the historical prophet and the author of the book or to answer the questions such as who wrote the book, was there more than one author, when was the vision of Ezekiel 1 written or edited?

The aim of this thesis is to do exegesis of the text, as it stands now, in its canonical form and not to attempt to establish a chronological account of when the text was formed and included in the canonical form.

The aim of intertextuality as an exegetical tool is to examine the dialogue between two or more texts or iconographic images and establish how they intersect rather than exploring and establishing the chronology in the text and of the text.

When proclaiming his understanding of God, the author of the book of Ezekiel modifies and transforms traditional concepts found mainly in the book of Genesis and the book of Exodus. These will form intertext.

Furthermore, in this thesis I will apply the principles of intertextuality not just to different biblical and extrabiblical texts but also to the iconography of the Ancient Near East. Besides being radical and subversive, the author of the book of Ezekiel is innovative in the way he conveys the new doctrine of God. The writer is innovative in his intentional use of symbolism from the dominant religions of his time, radically adapting them to create a theology that despite

the reality of the exile, YHWH is still the supreme being of the whole universe and will always be in absolute control of all historical events.

The author of the book of Ezekiel is responsible for one of the most significant paradigm shifts in theology. According to the author of the book of Ezekiel, YHWH is God of the exiles, God of the remnants of the Jewish people in Jerusalem, God of all the nations and God of the forces of life and death. God is not confined to a place or a nation or subject to human political and religious systems and ideas. The author of the book of Ezekiel uses the Babylonian imagery of Marduk on his chariot pulled by four supernatural beings and transforms it into the vision of YHWH coming to Babylon on a chariot pulled by four living beings. YHWH is victorious and it is the Lord who is responsible for the destruction of Jerusalem and the exile. YHWH is in control of all historical events.

The author of the book of Ezekiel uses 25 verses to describe the living beings which bear little resemblance to cherubim or seraphim. The living creatures are supernatural, monstrous, dangerous beings which are completely subdued by YHWH. The entire chariot resembles the chariot of Marduk described in Enuma Elish and the living beings are very similar to the four beings called “the Destructive, the Pitiless, the Trampler and the Flier”.

The radical and subversive theology that the author of the book of Ezekiel proclaims is that YHWH was never defeated by Marduk and that he is at the heart of Marduk’s realm on Marduk’s chariot. According to this theology, it is YHWH who is responsible for the destruction of Jerusalem, the temple and the exile. YHWH is in control of all historical events and Nebuchadnezzar is YHWH’s tool.

Another profound notion is that the author describes the prophet Ezekiel as the new Moses. His relationship with YHWH is described as unique as the one between the Lord and Moses. In some areas Ezekiel is superior to Moses. For instance, Ezekiel’s vision of YHWH is definitely more detailed than the one of Moses at Mt Sinai.

In this thesis I will argue that the reason why the author mentions King Jehoiachin is both radical and subversive. The author of the book of Ezekiel depicts King Jehoiachin as the only true leader, so significant that Ezekiel counts the time of his first vision in relation to the time of King Jehoiachin’s exile. The author thus subtly declares his opposition to Zedekiah.

It is important to understand the immediate context of Ezekiel 1 to be able to understand the role of the first chapter of the book of Ezekiel. Only when this is achieved can the intertextual connections with other texts be explored.

Context

The book of Ezekiel begins with the superscription (1:1-3), followed by the first vision of the glory of the Lord (1:4-28), the first audience with the divine glory (1:28b-3:21), and the second audience with the divine glory (3:22-5:17).² The major structural components within Ezekiel 1 are: the superscription (1:1-3), the vision (1:4-28), the living creatures (1:4-14), the wheels (1:15-21), the dome (1:22-25) and the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the Lord (1:26-28).³

In Ezekiel 4-5 the symbolic acts are continued. The main intention of the symbolic acts is to give the audience a rationale for the destruction of Jerusalem and the exile of the people, which emphasises the inevitability of YHWH's judgment.⁴

In Ezekiel 4:1-3 the prophet receives two instructions: the first one is to draw a city (presumably Jerusalem) on a tile and to depict the tools of the siege being employed against the city. The second instruction is to place an iron plate between himself and the city, symbolising the total rejection of Jerusalem by YHWH. Both symbolic acts are performed by the prophet with the intention of showing the audience in a very visual and confronting way what will happen to the city due to their rebellious actions against YHWH.

The prophet is instructed to lie on his left side for 390 days and then on his right side for 40 days, each day symbolising a year of punishment for Israel and Judah respectively (Ezek. 4:4-8). In verse 5, the prophet is described as the bearer of the punishment.

In the following verses (Ezek. 4:9-17) the prophet receives instructions on how to make bread for himself while he lies on his left side for 390 days. This is followed by the instruction that food and water must be rationed to a mere 227 grams of bread and 750 millilitres of water per day. The lack of basic necessities during the siege was seen as part of YHWH's punishment of the people.

² Margaret S. Odell, *Ezekiel, Smyth and Helwys Bible Commentary* (Macon, Ga: Smyth & Helwys, 2005), pp.14-53.

³ *Ibid.*, pp.13-38.

⁴ C. R. Biggs, *The Book of Ezekiel, Epworth Commentaries* (London: Epworth Press, 1996), p.13.

The prophet is then instructed to prepare his bread using human excrement as fuel for the fire, which would make the food ritually unclean and therefore unsuitable for consumption. After Ezekiel implores YHWH to reconsider, stating that he never eats anything that would make him ritually unclean, YHWH instructs the prophet that he is allowed to prepare his food using cow dung as fuel for the fire. Through his actions the prophet warns his audience in exile that they must remain ritually pure and observe the laws even in an unclean land.

Ezekiel 5:1-4 describes YHWH instructing the prophet to shave off his hair and his beard with a sharp sword and then to dispose of his hair in three ways: one third is to be burned inside the city, one third is to be struck by a sword and one third is to be scattered to the wind, symbolising the fate of the inhabitants of Jerusalem after the siege. The prophet is also instructed to save some hair and to put it in the skirts of his robe. This symbolises a remnant of faithful exiles who will be saved. This remnant will be purified through the fire of exile, which will enable them to restore a proper relationship with YHWH.⁵

The prophet in his sermon also reminds the audience of the unique role of Jerusalem and her inhabitants. The prophet reminds them that because the people disobey God, Jerusalem will be destroyed and the people will be punished by pestilence, famine and war and finally exiled. Through these actions YHWH will be known among the nations. The chapter finishes with YHWH's statement "I the Lord have spoken" which would be a definite signal to Ezekiel's audience that they have been judged for their iniquities but also that they are the remnant and that if they become faithful again they could rebuild the relationship between themselves and their God.

YHWH's judgment on Jerusalem is described in Ezekiel 4-5. This is expanded to YHWH's judgment of the land of Israel in Ezekiel 6-7 and followed by the departure of the glory of God from the temple and Jerusalem in Ezekiel 8-11.

My translation and a short overview of the state of scholarship of Ezekiel 1

In this section I will outline my translation of Ezekiel 1:1-28 and give a brief overview of the state of the scholarship. I will examine the major commentaries on the book of Ezekiel. I will

⁵ Ibid., p.17.

especially focus on Ezekiel 1 and examine if the commentaries draw any parallels between Ancient Near Eastern iconography, the living creatures and the chariot. The articles dealing with the first chapter of Ezekiel will be interwoven throughout this thesis.

The aim of this thesis is not to use form/tradition criticism or to examine the uniformity of the text. However, I will briefly mention scholars such as Zimmerli who argue that Ezekiel 1 contains some later additions. I will look at the text as it is presented to us in its canonical form. I will examine briefly how a number of scholars divide Ezekiel 1 in different ways.

The following is my literal translation of Ezekiel 1:1-28:

וַיְהִי בַשְּׁלֹשִׁים שָׁנָה בְּרַב־יַעֲיִ בַחֲמִשָּׁה לְחֹדֶשׁ וָאֲנִי^{Eze 1:1}

בְּתוֹךְ־הַגּוֹלָה עַל־נְהַר־כְּבָר נִפְתְּחוּ הַשָּׁמַיִם וָאֲרָאָה מְרָאוֹת אֱלֹהִים:

Ezekiel 1:1 And as it happened, in the thirtieth year, in the fourth [month], of the fifth [day] of the month, as I [was] among the exiles by the river Kebar, the heavens were opened and I saw a divine vision.

בַּחֲמִשָּׁה לְחֹדֶשׁ הַיָּמָה הַחֲמִישִׁית לְגָלוֹת הַמֶּלֶךְ יוֹיָכִין:^{Eze 1:2}

Ezekiel 1:2 On the fifth day of the month it [was] the fifth year of the deportation of King Jehoiachin.

הָיָה הַיָּמָה רַב־יָחִזְקִיאֵל בֶּן־בוּזִי^{Eze 1:3}

הַכֹּתֵן בְּאֶרֶץ כַּשְׂדִּים עַל־נְהַר־כְּבָר וַתְּהִי עָלַי שֵׁם יְרֵיחוֹהָ:

Ezekiel 1:3 The word of the Lord came expressly to Ezekiel, son of Buzi, the priest by the river Kebar in the land of the Chaldeans, and there the hand of the Lord was upon him.

וַאֲרָא וְהִנֵּה רוּחַ סְעָרָה בָּאָה מִן־הַצָּפוֹן עָנָן גָּדוֹל וְאֵשׁ^{Eze 1:4}

מִתְלַקַּחַת וְנִגְהָ לּוֹ סָבִיב וּמִתּוֹכָהּ כְּעֵיִן הַחֲשֵׁמֶל מִתּוֹךְ הָאֵשׁ:

Ezekiel 1:4 And I looked, and behold wind-storm came out of the north, a great could and a fire flashing itself and a brightness [was] around it and out of its centre the like of colour of amber out of the centre of the fire.

וּמִתּוֹכָהּ דְּמוּת אַרְבַּע חַיּוֹת וְזֶה מִרְאִיהֶן דְּמוּת אָדָם לְהִנָּה:^{Eze 1:5}

Ezekiel 1:5 And out of its centre [came] the likeness of four living creatures and this [was] their appearance was that of the likeness of a man [was] to them.

וְאַרְבַּעָה פָּנִים לְאַחַת וְאַרְבַּע כַּנְּפִים לְאַחַת לָהֶם:^{Eze 1:6}

Ezekiel 1:6 And four faces to each and four wings to each of them.

וּרְגְלֵיהֶם רִגְלֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וְכַף רְגְלֵיהֶם כְּכַף רִגְלֵי עֹלָל וְנִצְצִים כְּעֵיִן נְחֹשֶׁת קָלֵל:^{Eze 1:7}

Ezekiel 1:7 And their feet [were] straight feet and the sole of their feet [was] like the sole of a calf's foot, and they sparkled like the colour of polished copper.

וַיֵּדְדוּ וַיֵּדְדוּ אֲדָם מִתַּחַת כַּנְּפֵיהֶם עַל אַרְבַּעַת רַבְעֵיהֶם^{Eze 1:8}

וּפְנֵיהֶם וְכַנְּפֵיהֶם לְאַרְבַּעֵתָם:

Ezekiel 1:8 And they had hands of a man under their wings on their four sides and their four had their faces and their wings

חִבְרַת אִשָּׁה אֶל-אַחֻזְתָּהּ כַּנְּפֵיהֶם לֹא-יִסְבּוּ בְלִכְתָּן אִישׁ אֶל-עֵבֶר פָּנָיו יֵלְכוּ:

Ezekiel 1:9 Joining each one to the other one their wings they turned not in their going each one toward the front of their face they went

וְרַמְוֹת פְּנֵיהֶם פְּנֵי אָדָם וּפְנֵי אַרְיֵה אֶל-הַיָּמִין^{Eze 1:10}

לְאַרְבַּעֵתָם וּפְנֵי-שׁוֹר מִהַשְּׂמֹאל לְאַרְבַּעֵתָן וּפְנֵי-נֶשֶׁר לְאַרְבַּעֵתָן:

Ezekiel 1:10 And the likeness of their faces the face of a man, and the face of a lion on the right [side], and their four had the face of an ox on the left [side], and they four also had the face of an eagle

וּפְנֵיהֶם וְכַנְּפֵיהֶם פְּרָדוֹת מִלְּמַעְלָה לְאִישׁ שְׁתֵּי^{Eze 1:11}

חֲבֵרוֹת אִישׁ וּשְׁתַּיִם מִכְסוֹת אֶת גְּוִיתֵיהֶנָּה:

Ezekiel 1:11 And their faces and their wings [were] stretched upward to each [lit. man/male] the two [wings] were joined to each one and two [wings] covering their bodies

וְאִישׁ אֶל-עֵבֶר פָּנָיו יֵלְכוּ אֶל אֲשֶׁר יִהְיֶה-שָׁמָּה ^{Eze 1:12}

הָרוּחַ לָלֶכֶת יֵלְכוּ לֹא יִסְבוּ בְּלִכְתָּן:

Ezekiel 1:12 And each went toward the front of their faces to where was there the spirit to go they went not they did turn when they went

וְדַמוֹת הַחַיּוֹת מִרְאֵיהֶם כְּנֹחַל־אֵשׁ בְּעֵרוֹת כְּמִרְאֵה הַלְּפָרִים ^{Eze 1:13}

הִיא מִתְהַלֶּכֶת בֵּין הַחַיּוֹת וְנֹגַהּ לְאֵשׁ וּמִן-הָאֵשׁ יוֹצֵא בָרָק:

Ezekiel 1:13 And the likeness of the living creatures their appearance [was] like burning coals of fire [and] like the appearance of torches it [went] up and down among the living creatures and bright the fire [was] and out of the fire went forth lightning

וְהַחַיּוֹת רָצוּא וְשׂוֹב כְּמִרְאֵה הַבּוֹק: ^{Eze 1:14}

Ezekiel 1:14 And the living creatures kept running and returning like the appearance of lightning

וְאֵרָא תַחִיּוֹת וְהִנֵּה אֹפֶן אַחַד בְּאֶרֶץ אֶצֶל הַחַיּוֹת לְאַרְבַּעַת פָּנָיו: ^{Eze 1:15}

Ezekiel 1:15 And as I looked the living creatures and behold wheel one [was] on the earth beside the living creatures with the four of its faces

מִרְאֵה הָאוֹפָנִים וּמַעֲשֵׂיהֶם כְּעֵין תְּרִשִׁישׁ וּדְמוּת אַחַד ^{Eze 1:16}

לְאַרְבַּעֶתָּן וּמִרְאֵיהֶם וּמַעֲשֵׂיהֶם כְּאִשֶּׁר יִהְיֶה הָאוֹפֵן בְּתוֹךְ הָאוֹפֵן:

Ezekiel 1:16 The appearance of the wheels and their work like the colour of beryl and the likeness one [was] to the four of them and their appearance and their work like was the wheel in the centre of the wheel

עַל-אַרְבַּעַת רַבְעֵיהֶן בְּלִכְתָּם יֵלְכוּ לֹא יִסְבוּ בְּלִכְתָּן: ^{Eze 1:17}

Ezekiel 1:17 On the four of their sides in their going they went not did the turn in their going

וְגִבֵּיהֶן וְגִבְהַת לָהֶם וַיִּרְאֶה לָהֶם וְנִבְתָּם מִלְּאֵת עֵינַיִם סָבִיב לְאַרְבַּעַתָּן׃ Eze 1:18

Ezekiel 1:18 And their rims even high to them even dreadful to them and their rims [were] full of eyes all around the four of them

וּבְלִכְתֹּת הַחַיֹּת יֵלְכוּ הָאוֹפָנִים אַצְלָם וּבְהַנָּשָׂא

הַחַיֹּת מֵעַל הָאָרֶץ יִנָּשְׂאוּ הָאוֹפָנִים׃

Ezekiel 1:19 And in the going of the living creatures went the wheels beside them and in the lifting up the living creatures from upon the earth were lifted up the wheels

עַל אֲשֶׁר יִהְיֶה־שָׁם הָרוּחַ לְלִכְתֹּת יֵלְכוּ שָׁמָּה הָרוּחַ

לְלִכְתֹּת וְהָאוֹפָנִים יִנָּשְׂאוּ לְעִמָּתָם כִּי רוּחַ הַחַיָּה בְּאוֹפָנִים׃

Ezekiel 1:20 Whereupon was there the spirit to go they went there the spirit [their] to go and the wheels were lifted up along with them for spirit of the living creature [was] in the wheels

בְּלִכְתָּם יֵלְכוּ וּבְעִמָּדָם יַעֲמִדוּ וּבְהִנְשָׂאָם מֵעַל הָאָרֶץ Eze 1:21

יִנְשְׂאוּ הָאוֹפָנִים לְעִמָּתָם כִּי רוּחַ הַחַיָּה בְּאוֹפָנִים:

Ezekiel 1:21 In their going these went and in their standing still these stood still and in their being lifted from upon the earth were lifted up the wheels along with them for spirit the living creature [was] in the wheels.

וְרָמּוֹת עַל־רֵאשֵׁי הַחַיָּה רְקִיעַ כְּעֵין תְּקַרַח הַנּוֹרָא נְטוּי עַל־רֵאשֵׁיהֶם מִלְּמַעְלָה: Eze 1:22

Ezekiel 1:22 And a likeness [was] over the heads the living creature a firmament like the colour of the crystal awesome stretched out over their heads from above.

וְתַחַת הַרְקִיעַ כְּנַפְיָהֶם יִשְׁרֹת אִשָּׁה אֶל־אֲחֹתָהּ לְאִישׁ שְׁתֵּימָּם Eze 1:23

מִכַּסּוֹת לְהִנָּה וּלְאִישׁ שְׁתֵּימָּם מִכַּסּוֹת לְהִנָּה אֵת גְּוִיתֵיהֶם:

Ezekiel 1:23 And under the firmament their wings [were] straight the one [lit. woman] toward the other [lit. its sister] to each [lit. to man] two [wings] covering on this [side] and to each two [wings] covering on that [side] of their bodies

וְאִשְׁמַע אֶת־קוֹל כְּנַפְיָהֶם כְּקוֹל מַיִם רַבִּים כְּקוֹל־שָׁדַי Eze 1:24

בְּלִכְתָּם קוֹל הַמְּלָה כְּקוֹל מַחְנֵה בְּעַמָּדִים תִּרְפִּינָה כְּנִפְיָהֶן:

Ezekiel 1:24 And I heard the noise of their wings like the noise of great waters like the voice of Šadday in their going the sound of commotion like the sound of an army in their standing still they let down their wings

וַיְהִי-קוֹל מֵעַל לְרִקִיעַ אֲשֶׁר עַל-רֹאשָׁם בְּעַמָּדִים תִּרְפִּינָה כְּנִפְיָהֶן: ^{Eze 1:25}

Ezekiel 1:25 And there was a voice from upon the firmament that [was] over their heads in their standing still [and] they let down their wings

וּמִמֶּעַל לְרִקִיעַ אֲשֶׁר עַל-רֹאשָׁם כְּמֵרָאָה אֶבֶן-סַפִּיר דְּמוֹת ^{Eze 1:26}

כֶּסֶף וְעַל דְּמוֹת הַכֶּסֶף דְּמוֹת כְּמֵרָאָה אָדָם עָלָיו מִלְמַעְלָה:

Ezekiel 1: 26 And from above the firmament that [was] over their heads appearance of something like a stone of a sapphire the likeness of a throne and on the likeness of the throne [was] a likeness in appearance a man on it from above

וַיֵּרָא כְּעֵין חֲשֹׁמֶל כְּמֵרָאָה-אֵשׁ בֵּית-לָהּ סְבִיב מִמֵּרָאָה מִתַּנּוּי ^{Eze 1:27}

וּלְמַעְלָה וּמִמֵּרָאָה מִתַּנּוּי וּלְמַטָּה רְאִיתִי כְּמֵרָאָה-אֵשׁ וְנָגַהּ לוֹ סְבִיב:

Ezekiel 1:27 And I saw [him] like the colour of amber as the appearance of fire within it all around from the appearance of his loins and upward and from the appearance of his loins and downward I saw him as if it were the appearance of fire and brightness to it all around

כְּמֵרֵאָה תִּקְשֶׁת אֲשֶׁר יִהְיֶה כְּעֹנָן בַּיּוֹם הַזֶּשֶׁם כִּן מֵרֵאָה תִּגְנֶה סָבִיב הוּא ^{Eze 1:28}

מֵרֵאָה דְּמִנּוֹת כְּבוֹד־יְהוָה וְאֵרֵאָה וְאֶפְלָל עַל-פְּנֵי וְאֶשְׁמַע קוֹל מְדַבֵּר:

Ezekiel 1:28 As the appearance of the bow that is in the cloud in the day of the rain so appeared the brightness all around. This [was] appearance of likeness of the glory of YHWH. And [when] I saw I even fell on my face and I heard a voice of one speaking.

Textual Notes

Ezekiel 1:1

The book starts with וַיְהִי “And as it happened.” Waw consecutive ׀ is used to indicate the continuation of the text. This expression can also be found at the beginning of the books of Joshua, Judges, 1 Samuel, 2 Samuel, Ruth and Esther.⁶ In the case of Ezekiel 1, it clearly indicates the start of a completely new book. Even though it is often omitted in the English translation, I have kept it, as it signifies a new narrative.

The singular abstract noun “exile” גּוֹלָהּ is translated in English as “the exiles”, a group of exiled individuals. הַשָּׁמַיִם is a dual noun, and in the context of the revelatory experience should be translated as “the heavens”. מֵרֵאָה אֱלֹהִים literally translated means “visions of God”.

⁶ Horace D. Hummel, *Ezekiel 1-20, Concordia Commentary* (Saint Louis: Concordia Pub. House, 2005), p.33.

However, אֱלֹהִים is not a proper noun but a common noun “divinity”. Therefore, “a divine vision” is a more accurate translation in this context.⁷

Ezekiel 1:2

The noun גְּלוּת is similar to the noun “exile” גּוּלָּה mentioned in the previous verse. The context and the feminine ending ת common in abstract nouns suggest that the abstract translation “deportation” is required.

Ezekiel 1:3

The verb is highlighted by the infinitive absolute הִיָּה with the perfect form הִיָּהּ which can be translated as the intensifying adverb “expressly”. There are 58 instances in the book of Ezekiel where the word of God is mentioned, and this is the only time הִיָּהּ is found, highlighting the significance of the first vision.⁸ The author switches to the third person when referring to Ezekiel וַתֵּהִי עָלָיו שָׁם “the hand of YHWH was upon him”. The word שָׁם “there” emphasises the extraordinary fact that the word of God came to Ezekiel in Babylon.

Summary

Ezekiel 1:1-3 forms a superscription. The author outlines the basic facts. The precise date, unlikely location and the main protagonists are outlined. The scene for an extraordinary encounter between YHWH and the prophet Ezekiel is set and the heavens are opened.

The Hebrew in the first chapter of Ezekiel is difficult to translate. This can be attributed to the inadequacy of human language to describe the divine vision and the psychological effect it had on Ezekiel.

Ezekiel 1:4

The verse starts with another waw consecutive וַאֲנִי “and I looked” connecting this section to the previous three verses and highlighting what follows. רִיחַ סַעָרָה literally means “wind storm”. Depending on the context and the presence, definite articles רִיחַ can have multiple

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid., p.34.

meanings, such as “spirit”, “wind”, “the spirit.” However, in the context of Ezekiel 1:4 it can be translated as “stormy wind”. סַעֲרָה signifies a powerful storm often accompanied by destruction and hail (Isa. 29:6, Jer. 23:19), and in the book of Job, YHWH speaks to Job out of a סַעֲרָה stormy wind/whirlwind.⁹

וַאֲשֶׁר בִּתְלַחֲתָהּ is the hithpael feminine singular participle, and the closest translation is something similar to “fire flashing forth continually”. This phrase is only repeated one more time in Exodus 9:24, describing atmospheric phenomena following one of the plagues.¹⁰

The noun נִגְהָה means “brightness” or “radiance”. The preposition לִּי denotes possession, and combined with the third person masculine singular pronoun (it) refers either to the “fire” or the “great cloud”.

The combination כְּעֵין means “something like”, “like” or “like the appearance of”. The meaning of הַחֲשָׁמַל is uncertain. The context suggest a bright, radiant fire, and therefore the expression הַחֲשָׁמַל might denote something gleaming and yellowish such as amber. The expression is repeated in Ezekiel 1:27 and 8:2 in the context of theophany.

The inadequacy of human language is already becoming evident. There are changes in gender, unknown words and imprecise constructs which are used to describe the indescribable. “Already here the infinite gulf between Creator and creature is indicated.”¹¹

Ezekiel 1:5

וּבְתוֹכָהּ is the third instance of the word “middle” or “midst” in Ezekiel 1:4-5. It appears that as the vision becomes clear to the prophet he is able to see more detail. חַיִּיִּם often denotes “animals”. However, in this context this translation would be too limiting. The best translation of the word is “the living creatures”. Even though the living creatures have some animal attributes they are also anthropomorphic. In Ezekiel 10 the living creatures are called כְּרֻבִּים “cherubim”.

⁹ Ibid., p.36.

¹⁰ Ibid., p.37.

¹¹ Ibid.

Grammatically, **חַיִּוִּת** are feminine. However, the grammatical inconsistency is evident when the text refers to the living creatures. In only 12 cases out of 45 references are the living creatures referred to as feminine, and this sometimes occurs in the case of the “wheels”.¹²

Ezekiel 1:6

The living creatures are described as having **אַרְבַּע כַּנְפִּים** “four wings”. The number four plays an important part in the book of Ezekiel and is mentioned over 50 times. The living creatures appear to be different from the cherubim, who have at least two wings, or the seraphim described in Isaiah 6, who have six wings.

Ezekiel 1:7

The literal translation of **וְרַגְלֵיהֶם רְגֵל** is “and their feet, a straight foot”. The plural is followed by the singular, implying that each leg was **יְשָׁרָה** “straight” and each foot was close to the other so that there was no gap between the legs. **כַּכֵּף רְגֵל עֵגֶל** “the sole of a calf’s foot” is an interesting phrase. It might function as an early sign not to worship the living creatures as the Israelites worshipped the golden calf.

וַנִּצְצִים “and they sparkled” is a masculine plural participle even though it is expected to be feminine. **כְּעֵיִן** “like the colour” is used to introduced simile and it might refer to the entire creature, not just the feet or legs. In the book of Daniel the identical phrase **כְּעֵיִן נְחֹשֶׁת קָלָל** is used to describe the “man” who appears to the prophet Daniel by the river Tigris.¹³

Ezekiel 1:8

The author informs the audience that the living creatures had human hands, and multiple hands, wings and faces. The Hebrew is ambiguous, as it literally means “on the four of their fourths”. “Each creature had four faces, four wings and perhaps four hands under the wings, or perhaps

¹² Ibid., p.39.

¹³ Ibid., p.40.

four pairs of hands, corresponding to the way a human has one pair of hands and one face.”¹⁴
 However, it is more likely that each creature had one pair of hands.

Ezekiel 1:9

The inconsistency in gender continues in this verse. הִבְרִיתָ “joining” is feminine plural matching כַּנְפֵיהֶם “their wings”. However, in the second part of the verse each living creature אִישׁ “each one” becomes grammatically masculine. The literal translation of the verse states that the living creatures went אֶל-עֵבֶר פָּנָיו “toward the front of their face” which is often translated as “straight ahead”. The idiom literally contains the word פָּנָיו “face”, which is significant as the following verse describes the faces of the living creatures in much more detail.¹⁵

Ezekiel 1:10

The Hebrew does not specify which face was at the front. It is an assumption that the last face of an eagle is at the back and that the first face of a human is at the front, since the faces of an ox and a lion are on the left and the right. The word דְּבָרֶיהֶן “likeness” is used again and highlights the inadequacy of human language to describe the vision. According to the text, all the faces are a “likeness” or something resembling the true faces of a human, an ox, a lion and an eagle. They are not exact copies. The inconsistencies in grammatical genders לְאֶרְבַּעַתָּן and לְאֶרְבַּעֵיהֶם are remarkable.¹⁶

Ezekiel 1:11

וּפְנֵיהֶם “and their faces” phrase is placed awkwardly at the beginning of the verse. It could be seen as the conclusion of the previous verse. וְכַנְפֵיהֶם “their wings” were stretched upward and הִבְרִיתָ “and were joined” to another pair of wings. This expression is similar to Ezekiel 1:9 where the wings were also joined. The second pair of wings covered each living creature’s body.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid., p.41.

¹⁶ Walther Zimmerli, *Ezekiel: A Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Ezekiel*, 2 vols., *Hermeneia-a Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1979), p.84.

נְוִיתֵיהֶנָּה is an unusual form of the third feminine plural suffix.¹⁷ Perhaps the gender inconsistencies are intentionally highlighting the supernatural character of the living beings. Similarly to the seraphim in Isaiah 6, the living creatures cover their bodies out of modesty in the presence of YHWH.

Ezekiel 1:12

וְאִישׁ אֶל-עֵבֶר פָּנָיו יֵלְכוּ is an almost verbatim repetition of the second part of Ezekiel 1:9 with one crucial addition. It is הַרְרִיחַ “the spirit” who directs the living creatures where to go. “The spirit” is different from רוּחַ “wind” in Ezekiel 1:4. The context implies that the spirit is more than an atmospheric phenomenon, rather something more like an animating force.

Ezekiel 1:13

In this verse the author is struggling to describe what the prophet sees. דְּמוּת “the likeness” is used followed by כְּמֵרְאָה and מְרֵאִיהֶם “their appearance” and “like the appearance”.

וַנִּגְוֶה לְאֵשׁ “bright the fire [was]” recalls וַאֲנִשׁ and וַנִּגְוֶה which were mentioned in Ezekiel 1:4. The motif of fire is repeated three times in this verse.

Ezekiel 1:14

This verse is missing entirely in LXX. רָצַוּ “kept running” and הַבֹּזֵק “lightning” are hapax legomenons as this is the only time they appear in the Hebrew bible.¹⁸ The word כְּמֵרְאָה “like the appearance” is the same word found in the previous verse.

Summary

The main subject of Ezekiel 1:4-14 are the living creatures. The author of the book of Ezekiel starts describing the living creatures, their composite form, with the focus on the wings, and faces. After the superscription this can be seen as a separate unit. The author is focusing on the living creatures, describing them and finishing with emphasis on their movement.

¹⁷ Hummel, *Ezekiel 1-20*, p.42.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p.43.

Ezekiel 1:15

The verse starts with waw consecutive and the author introduces אֲוֹפָן “wheel” which was touching the ground. I have chosen to translate כְּאֶרֶץ as “the earth” rather than “ground” or “land” due to being opposite to the “firmament” mentioned in Ezekiel 1:22. לְאַרְבַּעַת פָּנָיו “with the four of its faces” most likely means “one for each of four of the”.

Ezekiel 1:16

The verse contains two instances of מְרֹאָה “appearance”, two instances of וַיַּעֲשִׂיהֶם “they work” and one instance of וַדְּמוּת “and the likeness”, highlighting the complexity of what the prophet sees. The meaning of תַּרְשִׁישׁ is uncertain and is often transliterated as “tarshis”.¹⁹ I have chosen to translate it as “beryl” as it incorporates a wide variety of colours. In the phrase וַדְּמוּת אֶחָד “and the likeness one” gender fluctuation is present again, as the first word is feminine while the second one is masculine. The subject is “the wheel” and perhaps the author is pointing out the supernatural character of the wheels, similar to the living creatures. הָאֲוֹפָן כְּאֲשֶׁר יְהִיָה הָאֲוֹפָן בְּתוֹךְ “a wheel in the centre of the wheel” is often interpreted as a wheel intersecting another wheel at a 90 degree angle.

Ezekiel 1:17

The phrase עַל-אַרְבַּעַת רַבְעֵיהֶן בְּלִכְתָּם יֵלְכוּ contains inconsistency in the grammatical genders. רַבְעֵיהֶן “sides” has a feminine plural suffix while the verb יֵלְכוּ is masculine plural and the subject from Ezekiel 1:15 הַחַיֹּת is feminine plural.²⁰

Ezekiel 1:18

The plural וַנְּבִיָּהֶן “and their rims” is masculine with a third person feminine plural suffix. However, later in the verse וַנְּבִתָּם a feminine plural form with a third person masculine plural

¹⁹ Ibid., p.44.

²⁰ Ibid.

suffix is used. The phrase **וְנִבְיָהֶן וְנִגְבְּהָ לָהֶם וַיִּרְאֶה לָהֶם** is unintelligible.²¹ I have translated it as “their rims were tall and dreadful”, highlighting the size and fearsome aspect of the rims.

Ezekiel 1:19

The verse emphasises the unity of the movement between the living creatures and the wheels. It gives the sense that the entire chariot can fly upwards.

Ezekiel 1:20

The verse contains two references to **רוּחַ הַיְהוָה** “the spirit” and one reference to **רוּחַ הַחַיָּה** “spirit of the living creature”. The living creatures have so far been referred to in the plural and this is the first instance of the reference to “the living creature”. There is a distinction between “the spirit who animates the entire chariot and the “spirit” of the living creature who animates the wheel to protect the holiness of YHWH who is not touching the earth.

Ezekiel 1:21

The verse repeats the information stated in Ezekiel 1:19-20, highlighting the uniformity of the movement of the chariot. The subject is not explicitly identified until the last part of the verse where the author mentions **כִּי רוּחַ הַחַיָּה בְּאוֹפְנֵיהֶם** “for spirit the living creatures [was] in the wheels.”

Summary

Ezekiel 1:15-21 can be seen as a separate unit within the first chapter of the book of Ezekiel as it deals with the description of the wheels and the rims. The focus of this section is on the uniformity of the movement of the chariot. The living creatures and the wheels move as one and the movement is initiated by the spirit. While the wheels were touching the earth they could also rise from the earth. The distinction is made by stating the “spirit” of the living creatures was in the wheels.

²¹ Zimmerli, *Ezekiel: A Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Ezekiel*, p. 45.

Ezekiel 1:22

The word “likeness” רְמוּתֵהוּ is mentioned again and the inconsistencies in grammatical gender continue in this verse. הַחַיִּיהַּ “the living creature” is singular while the pronoun רָאשֵׁיהֶם “their heads” is plural. The author is again struggling with the language while pointing out the unity of the four living creatures. I have translated the word רְקִיעַ as “firmament”. The same word appears in Genesis 1 and denotes the barrier which divides the waters below and the waters above. In the context of Ezekiel 1 it is a platform on which the throne of YHWH is situated. The phrase הַקֶּרֶחַ הַנוֹרָא “awesome crystal” echoes Exodus 24:10 where the pavement was described as לְבִנְתַּת הַסַּפִּיר “a pavement of sapphire”. Looking from below, the author sees the firmament which is in fact the pavement on which the throne of YHWH is positioned.

Ezekiel 1:23

The author describes the living creatures facing each other and with covering אֶת גְּוִיתֵיהֶם “of their bodies” with two wings. The holiness of YHWH is emphasised by the fact that the living creatures are covering themselves in YHWH’s presence.

Ezekiel 1:24

The noun קוֹל is mentioned five times in this verse. As the vision comes closer, the prophet can hear more clearly. What he hears is אֶת-קוֹל כְּנַפְיָהֶם the noise of the wings of the living creatures. The author employs three distinctive similes to describe the noise: כְּקוֹל-שִׁדַּי “like the noise of great waters, like the voice of Šadday” followed by another simile with militaristic overtones קוֹל הַמְּלָחָה כְּקוֹל מִחַיָּה “the sound of commotion like the sound of an army”.

The simile “the noise of great waters” again echoes Genesis 1 and reappears in Ezekiel 43:2 when the glory of YHWH returns to the temple. The phrase “like the voice of Šadday” is expanded in Ezekiel 10:5 כְּקוֹל אֵל-שֹׁדֵד “like the voice of God Almighty”.

Ezekiel 1:25

In the previous verse the author is describing the noise caused by the living creatures, stating that at the end when they stood still the living creatures would let their wings down. This implies that the noise caused by the living creatures stopped for an instant in anticipation of the noise/voice from above the firmament. In this verse קול “a voice” is heard coming from above the firmament and the fact that the living creatures are silent is emphasised again by the repetition of the phrase בְּעִמּוֹם תִּרְפִּינָה כְּנִפְיָהֶן “they were standing still, they let down their wings”, which is also found in the previous verse.

Summary

Ezekiel 1:22-25 focuses on the firmament. After the author introduces the main protagonist and states the date and the place, and as the vision moves closer, the description of the living creatures and the wheels becomes clearer. In this section the author focuses on the barrier which is above the living creatures. Auditory phenomena are more prominent in this section. The noise is deafening until abruptly the living creatures stop and the noise stops. This section can be seen as a separate unit, as the “firmament” is the main subject of those four verses.

Ezekiel 1:26

In this verse the author uses דְּמִיּוֹת “likeness” three times and מְרִאָה “appearance” twice to carefully describe the climax of his vision.²² The word סַפִּיר “sapphire” is the same word that appears in Exodus 24:10 as mentioned above. The difference is that the author of the book of Ezekiel applies it not to the pavement but to the throne of YHWH. In the phrase כְּמִרְאֵה אָדָם the author uses “likeness” and “appearance” as well as the preposition כְּ “like” to make one of the most controversial statements. The prophet sees the likeness of אָדָם “human” sitting on the throne.

Ezekiel 1:27

The author now describes the human. From the waist upwards the human is described as having the colour of הַחֹשֶׁמֶל “amber”, which is also mentioned in Ezekiel 1:4. The “amber” is also

²² Hummel, *Ezekiel 1-20*, p.48.

described as **כְּמִרְאֵה־אֵשׁ בֵּית־לֶהָ סָבִיב** “fire enclosed all around”. The lower part of the human’s body is described slightly differently as **כְּמִרְאֵה־אֵשׁ וְנֹגַהּ לּוֹ סָבִיב** “something that appeared like fire and there was brightness all around”. The lower and the upper parts of the human are not exactly identical. The suffix of the preposition **לוֹ** is masculine, most likely referring to the human (lit. a man).

Ezekiel 1:28

The author finally identifies what he sees by stating **הִוא מִרְאֵה דְמִנּוֹת כְּבוֹד־יְהוָה** “this was the appearance of the glory of YHWH”. The phrase **תִּלְשֶׁת אֲשֶׁר יְהִיָּה בְּעָנָן בַּיּוֹם הַהַנֶּשֶׂם** **כְּמִרְאֵה** recalls Genesis 1 again by mentioning “the bow”, “the clouds” and “rainy day”.

כְּבוֹד־יְהוָה will be examined in more detail in Chapter Seven of this thesis. The prophet finally distinguishes **קוֹל מְדַבֵּר** the “voice of someone talking” as opposite to the noise that he has heard so far. In the second chapter of the book of Ezekiel the prophet will hear the voice of God.

Summary

Ezekiel 1:26-28 is the climax of the entire chapter and deals specifically with the glory of the Lord. It describes a human like character sitting on the throne and for the first time the prophet is about to distinguish the voice of YHWH from the other noise. This section can be seen as a separate unit.

The examination of the Hebrew and the textual notes suggest that the first chapter of the book of Ezekiel is best divided as following:

1. The superscription (1:1-3)
2. The living creatures (1:4-14)
3. The wheels (1:15-21)
4. The firmament (1:22-25)
5. The glory of the Lord (1:26-28)

Each section focuses on a certain topic, and the literary devices which emphasise this division will be examined in more detail in the rest of the thesis. This thesis will be based on the division outlined above.

The following is my translation of Ezekiel 1:1-28:

1:1 And as it happened, in the thirtieth year, in the fourth month, of the fifth day of the month, as I was among the exiles by the river Kebar, the heavens were opened and I saw a divine vision.

1:2 On the fifth day of the month (it was the fifth year of deportation of King Jehoiachin)

1:3 The word of the Lord came expressly to Ezekiel, son of Buzi, the priest by the river Kebar in the land of Chaldeans and, there, the hand of the Lord was upon him.

1:4 And I looked and behold a stormy wind came out of the north, a great cloud with brightness around it and fire flashing forth continually and in the middle of the fire, something like gleaming amber.

1:5 In the midst of it was something like four living creatures. This was their appearance: they were of human form.

1:6 Each had four faces, and each of them had four wings

1:7 And their legs were straight, and the soles of their feet were like the sole of a calf's foot and they sparkled like burnished bronze.

1:8 And under their wings on their four sides they had human hands, and the four had their faces and their wings.

1:9 Their wings were joining one another, each of them moved straight ahead without turning as they moved.

1:10 As for the form of their faces: the four had the face of a human being, the face of a lion on the right side, the face of an ox on the left side, and the face of an eagle

1:11 And such were their faces and their wings were stretched upward, each creature had two wings, each of which joined the wing of another and two covered their bodies

1:12 Each moved straight ahead, wherever the spirit go, they went, without turning as they went

1:13 And the likeness of the living creatures there was something that looked like burning coals of fire, like torches moving to and fro among the living creatures; the fire was bright, and lightning issued from the fire.

1:14 And the living creatures darted to and fro like the appearance of lightning

1:15 And as I looked at the living creatures and behold, a wheel on the earth beside the living creatures, one for each of the four of them.

1:16 As for the appearance of the wheels and their construction: their likeness was like the colour of beryl; and the four had the same appearance, their construction being something like a wheel in the centre of the wheel

1:17 When they moved, they moved in any of the four directions without veering as they moved.

1:18 Their rims were tall and dreadful, for the rims of all four were full of eyes all around.

1:19 When the living creatures moved the wheels moved beside them; and when the living creatures rose from the earth, the wheels rose.

1:20 Wherever the spirit would go, they went, and the wheels rose along with them, for spirit of the living creature was in the wheels.

1:21 When they moved, the others moved; when they were standing still, the others stood still; and when they rose from the earth, the wheels rose along with them; for spirit of the living creature was in the wheels.

1:22 Over the heads of the living creature there was likeness of a firmament shining like an awesome crystal, stretched out above their heads.

1:23 Under the firmament their wings were stretched out straight, one toward another; and each of the creatures had two wings covering its body.

1:24 When they moved, I heard the sound of their wings like the sound of mighty waters, like the voice of the Almighty, a sound of commotion like the sound of an army; when they were standing still, they let down their wings

1:25 And there came a voice from above the firmament over their heads; when they were standing still they let down their wings

1:26 And above the firmament over their heads there was likeness of a throne, in appearance like sapphire; and seated above the likeness of a throne was a likeness human in appearance.

1:27 Upward from what appeared like the loins I saw something like colour of amber, what appeared like fire enclosed all around; and downward from what appeared like the loins I saw something that appeared like fire and there was brightness all around.

1:28 As the appearance of the bow in the cloud on a rainy day, such was the appearance of the brightness all around. This was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the Lord. When I saw it, I fell on my face, and I heard the voice of someone talking.

In the next section of this thesis I will give a brief overview of the scholarship and I will examine how other scholars have divided the first chapter of the book of Ezekiel and highlight those who agree with the division adopted in this thesis.

A brief overview of the scholarship pertaining to the thesis

In this section I will outline a brief overview of the scholarship dealing with the book of Ezekiel and more specifically Ezekiel 1. I will examine the major commentaries and highlight the presence or absence of any comments about parallels between Ancient Near Eastern texts or iconography and the first chapter of the book of Ezekiel. The more detailed examination of the commentaries mentioned below and the articles will be interwoven throughout this thesis.

I will acknowledge different divisions of the chapter as well as that some scholars such as Zimmerli argue that the text has gone through a significant editing phase. I will also examine

Odell's division of Ezekiel 1 and her proposition that Ezekiel 1–5 can be seen as a coherent unit. Odell's division agrees with my division outlined above.

In 1924 Gustav Hölscher declared that only 144 out of the 1273 verses found in the book of Ezekiel are genuine.²³ He argued that the original prophet was a poet, hence the original work would be found in prophetic oracles. Hölscher suggested that Ezekiel 1:5-27 and 28aβ are later additions. He also excluded some of the poetry and the entire section of Ezekiel 33–48.

C. C. Torrey in 1930 argued that the prophecies found in the book of Ezekiel originated in the seventh century as a result of Manasseh's idolatry and that the book itself was written during the Seleucid period (approximately 230 BCE).²⁴ Both of these propositions have been discounted since then.

The first major study of the book of Ezekiel with the focus on the original Hebrew came in two volumes in 1969 by Walther Zimmerli. He focuses on form/tradition criticism and argues that the original text of 1:1-3:15 can be divided as introduction and heading 1:1-3, the manifestation of the glory of Yahweh 1:4-28 and the commissioning of the prophet (2:1-3:11).²⁵

Zimmerli thoroughly examines the Hebrew text and its variations. He concludes that the original text has been "heavily commented upon and...has been expanded in the circles of the school who transmitted Ezekiel's words".²⁶ He argues that the parts of verses 1:4b (electrum), 1:6a (four faces), 1:7 (the feet and hands), 1:8a (further reference to the hands), 1:9 (expansion of the statement about faces and wings), 1:11 (a statement about wings spread out above is closely connected to the description of the temple cherubim), 1:12b (the remark about "wherever the spirit would go, they went"), 1:13 ("like torches" and "moving to and fro between the creatures) are all later additions.²⁷

²³ Gustav Hölscher, *Hesekiel, Der Dichter Und Das Buch: Eine Literarkritische Untersuchung*, vol. 39 (Walter de Gruyter, 1924).

²⁴ Charles Cutler Torrey, *Pseudo-Ezekiel and the Original Prophecy: And Critical Articles, Library of Biblical Studies* (New York: KTAV, 1970).

²⁵ Zimmerli, *Ezekiel: A Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Ezekiel*, pp.100-06.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p.124.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, pp.124-27.

According to Zimmerli, Ezekiel 1:15-21 is a secondary addition to the original text, and he attributes it to the “school of Ezekiel”.²⁸ In 1:22 the original text continues, while in 1:23-25 an editorial addition of an audio phenomenon is highlighted. In 1:24 Zimmerli sees an attempt to harmonise Ezekiel 1 and Isaiah 6. He finishes by stating that the “school of Ezekiel” was heavily involved in the description of what was below the firmament. However, the “school” is silent about the description of what lies above the firmament.²⁹

Zimmerli noticed that only in Ezekiel 10 does “the school” harmonise the living creatures from Ezekiel 1 with cherubim. He states that “any further speculation about the place of such mediating creatures, which become prominent in later Judaism, is far removed from the reference here”.³⁰

In terms of stating any parallels between ANE texts or iconography, Zimmerli comments on Ezekiel 1:6a and 1:6b. Ezekiel 1:6b is seen as an original part of the verse, while 1:6a is an addition. In regard to Ezekiel 1:6b, Zimmerli states: “the visualising of the four-winged creatures was certainly anticipated by some representations in the religious art of Mesopotamia”, citing the reliefs from Nimrud, the Assyrian bronze statuette of the storm demon Pazuzu, and the character on the right side of the tree of life from Tel Halaf.³¹

The closest parallel to Ezekiel 1:6a and the four-faced divine beings can be found in Egypt and the representation of the sun as a four-headed ram, the four heads of the god of the north wind and the he-goat from Mendes.³² Zimmerli draws a more detailed parallel between the human like character sitting on the throne in Ezekiel 1:27 and the ANE image of the god Ashur (Asshur) who is depicted on a coloured ceramic.³³

The god Ashur is a winged god and is depicted emerging from a flaming sun disk while wielding his bow. Ashur’s upper body is depicted differently from his lower body. The upper body clearly resembles a human being while the lower body is engulfed in fire.³⁴ Apart from those instances,

²⁸ Ibid., p.128.

²⁹ Ibid., p.131.

³⁰ Ibid., p.120.

³¹ Ibid., p.121.

³² Ibid., p.125.

³³ Ibid., p.122.

³⁴ Ibid.

Zimmerli does not make any additional parallels between ANE texts/iconography and the first chapter of the book of Ezekiel.

In 1977, Othmar Keel in his book *Jahwe-Visionen und Siegelkunst* examines Ancient Near Eastern and Anatolian royal and religious iconography and makes an extensive study of the parallels between throne imagery and Ezekiel 1.³⁵ He explores the similarities between the living creatures and their resemblance to throne bearers who appear carved into the throne and sky bearers who with their hands stretched upwards bear a winged deity or a plate representing the sky.

According to Keel, the multiplicity of the faces indicates the omnipresence of the god, or in the case of skybearers unceasing vigilance with the aim of protecting the heavenly realm from desecration.³⁶ He adds that a feature of Assyrian and Babylonian art was to represent skybearers as bull-man composite beings with two legs.³⁷ Furthermore, Keel states that there are examples of humanoid winged skybearers with two eagle, lion, bull or human heads.³⁸

In regard to the wheels depicted in Ezekiel 1, he also gives the example of the representation of Mithras from eastern Asia Minor or northern Syria, where the winged god with a lion's head stands on a globe consisting of two intersecting wheels.³⁹ Furthermore, the eyes on the rims can be seen as the nail studs fixed all around the rims. Keel states that the metamorphosis of the nail studs into eyes has a parallel in Egyptian statuettes of the demon Bes, which were studded all over with nails, but later on the nails also transformed into eyes.⁴⁰

In 1983 Moshe Greenberg published a two-volume commentary on Ezekiel looking at the text as it stands now. Contrary to Hölscher and Zimmerli, he argues that the text is “decisively shaped by him, if not by the very words of Ezekiel himself”.⁴¹ The commentary explores all significant phrases in the text. He argues for the following structure: Ezekiel's call—the vision (1:1-28b),

³⁵ Othmar Keel, *Jahwe-Visionen Und Siegelkunst: Eine Neue Deutung Der Majestatsschilderungen in Jes 6, Ez 1 Und 10 Und Sach 4*, vol. 84-85, Sbs (Stuttgart: Verlag Katholisches Bibelwerk, 1977), pp.125-273.

³⁶ Ibid., p.230.

³⁷ Ibid., p.215.

³⁸ Ibid., p. 231.

³⁹ Ibid., pp.264-65.

⁴⁰ Ibid., pp.193-94.

⁴¹ Moshe Greenberg, *Ezekiel 1-20: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, 1st ed., *The Anchor Bible* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1983), p.27.

the commissioning (1:28bβ-3:15), the lookout (3:16-21) and confinement and symbolic acts (3:16-21).⁴² Like Zimmerli, Greenberg compares the divine figure that is described in Ezekiel 1 with a coloured ceramic depicting the god Ashur.⁴³

He also makes general comments about the similarities between Mesopotamian and Syrian iconography and the living creatures described in Ezekiel 1.⁴⁴ The similarities between the chariot from Ezekiel 1 and an eighth century Assyrian palace relief that shows servants carrying an empty wheeled throne are pointed out briefly.⁴⁵ Greenberg states that “virtually every component of Ezekiel’s vision can thus be derived from Israelite tradition supplemented by neighbouring iconography...”⁴⁶

He examines the composite beings of Egypt and Mesopotamia and concludes that in Mesopotamia lesser deities and demons are portrayed in composite form but multi-faced supernatural beings are extremely rare.⁴⁷ In regard to multiple faces, Greenberg states that in ANE these animals “served as bearers or pedestals of images of gods”.⁴⁸ He then proceeds with the example of ANE iconography where the deity is borne by mythical beings, but admits that the concept is complicated by the inclusion of the wheels in the vision of prophet Ezekiel.⁴⁹ Greenberg is the first commentator who starts to make a more systematic connection between the living creatures, the chariot vision and ANE iconography.

In 1986, William H. Brownlee’s commentary was published posthumously. It consists of detailed textual notes, explanation and comments. Brownlee divides the chapters as locale and dating (1:1-3), the vision (1:4-28), Ezekiel’s commission (2:1-3:11), going to exile (3:12-16a), Ezekiel’s appointment as watchman (3:16b-21) and Ezekiel’s commission as suffering servant (3:22-27).⁵⁰ In his commentary, Brownlee only discusses one parallel between the living

⁴² Ibid., pp.37-98.

⁴³ Ibid., p.54.

⁴⁴ Ibid., p.55.

⁴⁵ Ibid., p.57.

⁴⁶ Ibid., p.58.

⁴⁷ Ibid., p.55.

⁴⁸ Ibid., p.56.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ William Hugh Brownlee, *Ezekiel 1-19, Word Biblical Commentary V. 28* (Waco, Tex.: Word Books, 1986), pp.2-52.

creatures and the Babylonian four chief deities, where the ox face represented Marduk, the lion face was Nergal, the eagle face was Ninib and the human face represented Nabu.⁵¹

However, he does not expand on it or examine it in a systematic way. In regard to the first chapter of the book of Ezekiel, there are no other parallels between ANE texts/iconography and the vision. Instead, Brownlee examines how the imagery of Ezekiel influenced the book of Revelation and touches on Jewish mysticism.

Hals published his commentary in 1989. He divides Ezekiel 1-3 into four parts: superscription to the book and introduction to the throne vision (1:1-3), report of the vision of the glory of Yahweh as preliminary to the prophet's call (1:4-28a), the report of the call and commissioning (1:28b-3:11) and the report of the prophet's return to his people (3:12-15).⁵² The commentary on Ezekiel 1 is very brief and there are very brief textual notes and no explicit connections between the vision and ANE iconography.

In 1994, Cooper published his commentary on the book of Ezekiel. The commentary is millennialistic and makes connections with the New Testament parallels, which is limiting.⁵³

Cooper argues that chapters 1-3 consist of the introduction to the call (1:1-3), the vision of the glory of God (1:4-28), and the call of the prophet (2:1-3:15), followed by the prophet's appointment as a watchman (3:16-21) and the reaction of the prophet (3:22-27).⁵⁴

Cooper states that Ezekiel 1:4-28 is extremely complex and that the issues are attributed to later scribes and editors.⁵⁵ He does not make any connections between the living creatures and the chariot and Babylonian iconography, apart from a footnote where he cites Zimmerli, who stated that the idea of a mobile throne is not unique to Ezekiel but appears in ANE literature.⁵⁶

Leslie C. Allen published his commentary on the book of Ezekiel in 1994. He offers a more detailed division of the chapter. He divides Ezekiel 1:1-28ba in the following way: 1:1

⁵¹ Ibid., p.11.

⁵² Ronald M. Hals, *Ezekiel, Forms of the Old Testament Literature V. 19* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1989), p.9.

⁵³ Lamar Eugene Cooper, *Ezekiel, The New American Commentary* (Nashville, Tenn.: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1994), p.45.

⁵⁴ Ibid., p.57.

⁵⁵ Ibid., p.62.

⁵⁶ Ibid., p.68.

introduction, 1:3a chronological clarification and general introduction, 1:3b-4 a theophany of storm, fire, and radiant aura, 1:5-12 the winged beings who fly, 1:13-14 the fire and aura of the storm theophany, 1:15-21 the wheels that could move on the ground, 1:22-25 the firmament platform and the noise made by the flying wings, 1:26-28b α conclusion.⁵⁷ The first chapter is a part of the larger unit, Ezekiel 1:1–3:15, called Ezekiel's vision call. Allen offers extensive textual notes carefully examining the Hebrew of Ezekiel 1.

Allen describes in detail the parallels between ANE iconography and the living creatures, and offers a number of illustrations. He states that the vision of the living creatures holding the throne of YHWH is an amalgam of two separate traditions.⁵⁸ The first tradition is of two lions, bulls or cherubim supporting a firmament above which the throne was situated. The second tradition is of two- or four-winged genii who support with their upper wings the sun or sky. The number of throne bearers in ANE iconography is two, while skybearers might be four if two dimensional art limitations are lifted.

According to Allen, the four faces described in Ezekiel 1 find a partial parallel in the representation of gods or genii where they are depicted with the same four human or animal faces.⁵⁹ In some cases the skybearers were depicted with two lion faces and a human body. The living creatures are identified as supernatural beings and are seen as YHWH's mediators.⁶⁰ Like Zimmerli and Greenberg, Allen also compares the vision of the human like figure sitting on the throne to the depiction of the god Ashur.⁶¹

In 1997, Daniel Block published his two-volume commentary on Ezekiel. Block proposes the following structure of Ezekiel 1: the superscription (1:1-3), the inaugural vision (1:4-28a), the commissioning of Ezekiel (1:28b-3:11), the preparation of Ezekiel (3:12-15), YHWH's induction speech (3:16-21) and the initiation of Ezekiel (3:22-27).⁶²

The commentary contains some textual notes. In regard to Ezekiel 1:4-28, Block states that only chapter 41 has more textual notes in BHS which can be divided in four categories: morphology

⁵⁷ Leslie C. Allen, *Ezekiel 1-19, Word Biblical Commentary V. 28* (Dallas, Tex.: Word Books, 1994), p.20.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, pp.27-28.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p.29.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p.31.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p.36.

⁶² Daniel Isaac Block, *The Book of Ezekiel: Chapters 1-24, The New International Commentary on the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: W.B. Eerdmans, 1997), p.78.

(inconsistent, rare spelling), grammar (confusion of gender and number), style (choppy staccato sentences) and substances (enigmatic images incoherently connected).⁶³ Rather than attributing the difficulties to the editors, Block attributes them to the limitations of the human language.

The prophet sees the magnificent vision of the Lord and “things cannot be described for what they really are, but only in relation to other familiar ideas and concepts”.⁶⁴

Block does acknowledge the similarities between the vision and ANE iconography. He notes the striking similarity between the living creatures and the figures “that guarded the doorways to Ashurbanipal II’s palace at Nimrud”.⁶⁵ Block also states that the composite, winged, multi-faced beings are attested in the Mesopotamian and Syrian iconography.⁶⁶ However, while acknowledging that some aspects of the vision arise from ANE cultural context, he does not explore it in a systemic way.⁶⁷ Block finishes the exegesis of the chapter by briefly exploring the connections between the vision and the New Testament.

In 2005, Hummel published his commentary on Ezekiel. He divides Ezekiel 1–3 into three parts: Ezekiel’s inaugural vision (1:1-28), the prophetic commissioning of Ezekiel part 1 (2:1-10) and the prophetic commissioning of Ezekiel part 2 (3:1-27).⁶⁸ Hummel also highlights numerous textual issues in Ezekiel 1 and attributes them to the prophet’s inability to describe what he sees in a verbally accurate and lucid way.

He also points out that in Ezekiel 10 the prophet’s description of the vision is much smoother as it does not come to him as a surprise. The commentary offers a plethora of textual notices on the Hebrew text. However, apart from a sentence acknowledging that many elements found in Ezekiel 1 can be found in Mesopotamian culture, Hummel does not explore the connection between the living beings and the chariot and ANE iconography.⁶⁹ Instead he focuses on the parallels between Isaiah 6 and the book of Revelation. Hummel also does not question the unity of the texts.

⁶³ Ibid., p.89.

⁶⁴ Ibid., p.90.

⁶⁵ Ibid., p.98.

⁶⁶ Ibid., p.97.

⁶⁷ Ibid., p.91.

⁶⁸ Hummel, *Ezekiel 1-20*, p.29.

⁶⁹ Ibid., p.68.

Paul M. Joyce published his commentary on Ezekiel in 2007. Joyce proposes the following structure: the superscription (1:1-3), the throne-chariot vision (1:4-28a), and a series of commissions (1:28b-3:27).⁷⁰ He only superficially mentions the connection between the living creatures and the statues that stood before palaces in Mesopotamia, stating that the imagery is deliberately elusive and mysterious.⁷¹

In 2005, Margaret S. Odell published her commentary on Ezekiel. She clearly outlines the connection between the vision and the ANE iconography. She states:

Ezekiel does not simply borrow from or imitate this tradition, but instead deploys it to develop a startling new claim about the power and sovereignty of Yahweh. In doing so, he not only expands on his own traditions, he also creatively adapts symbolism from the dominant theologies of the empires of his time.⁷²

Odell continues to outline the similarities between what the prophet sees and the layout and decoration of the Assyrian throne room.⁷³ According to Odell, the living beings should be more closely identified with the demons of the Mesopotamian tradition, such as *umu-apkallu*, *kusarikku*, *ugallu* and *apkallu*.⁷⁴ She states that in ANE texts and iconography “these demons were regarded as supernatural powers but not as gods”.⁷⁵ The demons’ role was to enact the will of the gods and subdue the chaotic forces.

She continues to draw parallels between the vision and the ANE iconography, where she highlights the similarities between the description of the god Ashur and Ezekiel 1:26-28. However, Odell points to two significant differences between the depiction of the god Ashur and the vision of the prophet Ezekiel. The first is that the aura around Ashur resembles rays of sun, not the bright colours of the rainbow. The second difference is that the glory of the Lord is depicted as sitting on the throne while the god Ashur is on his way to battle.⁷⁶

⁷⁰ Paul Joyce, *Ezekiel: A Commentary, Library of Hebrew Bible/Old Testament Studies 482* (New York: T&T Clark, 2007), p.61.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p.71.

⁷² Margaret S. Odell, *Ezekiel, Smyth and Helwys Bible Commentary* (Macon, Ga: Smyth & Helwys, 2005), p.19.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, p.22.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p.27.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, p.31.

Odell states that “Ezekiel’s appropriation of Assyrian cultural materials is radically subversive”.⁷⁷ She states that Ezekiel uses elements of Assyrian royal ideology that emphasise the universal sovereignty of Assyria’s human king. The human king had an epithet of “king of the four quarters” which appears to be invoked in the vision of the four living creatures.⁷⁸ The author subversively states that it is YHWH alone who is in control, not a human king.

Odell proposes that Ezekiel 1–5 is a coherent unit and divides the chapter into five parts: the superscription (1:1-3), the living creatures (1:4-14), the wheels (1:15-21), the dome (1:22-25) and the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the Lord (1:26-28). In this thesis, verse 28 will be examined separately in Chapter Seven due to the significance of the phrase “the glory of the Lord”. Verse 28 still belongs to the Ezekiel 1:26-28 section and is not seen as a separate unit.

Robert W. Jenson published his commentary on Ezekiel in 2009. Jenson divides the chapters as: a double call (1:1-3), the theophany (1:4-24), the man on the throne (1:25-28b), and the ordination and commission (1:28c-3:15).⁷⁹ The commentary does not examine the parallels between ANE iconography and the vision of the glory of the Lord.

This short overview of the scholarship suggest that a great majority of the authors did not mention, or mentioned only briefly, any parallels between ANE iconography and the vision found in the first chapter of Ezekiel. As demonstrated above, the major structural components within chapters 1–3 are easily identified. However, the scholars divide the chapters slightly differently. All the scholars mentioned above, except perhaps Brownlee (who identifies the section 1:1–5:17 as Ezekiel’s commission as prophet)⁸⁰, presume that the call of Ezekiel (1:4–3:21) and the following symbolic acts (3:22–5:5) are two separate units.

Ezekiel 1–5 as a coherent unit

I will argue, following Odell’s structural analysis of the text, that Ezekiel 1–5 can be seen as one coherent unit and that this division is the most satisfactory one and the most helpful to my further research of the book of Ezekiel. I will demonstrate that Odell’s division clearly identifies the first

⁷⁷ Ibid., p.35.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Robert W. Jenson, *Ezekiel, Scm Theological Commentary on the Bible* (London: SCM Press, 2009), pp.31-46.

⁸⁰ Brownlee, *Ezekiel 1-19*, p.2.

three scenes in the narrative: the vision, the first audience with the divine glory and the second audience with the divine glory.

Odell challenges this argument. She highlights that there is no clear boundary between the two units, highlighting instead the literary links between the two, the fact that there is no textual evidence that the acts were performed publicly, and the fact that Ezekiel does not proclaim the word of YHWH until chapter eight.⁸¹ She argues that the symbolic acts were part of the process of the initiation and transformation of Ezekiel the priest into the prophet Ezekiel and that chapters 1–5 form one coherent unit.⁸² Odell divides the chapters as: the superscription (1:1-3), the vision (1:4-28), the first audience with the divine glory (1:28b–3:21), and the second audience with the divine glory (3:22-5-17).⁸³

She argues that there is a literary warrant for reading Ezekiel 1–5 as a coherent unit and that Ezekiel 1–5 should be interpreted as a prolonged initiation account in which the prophet renounces certain elements of his priestly identity to become the prophet of YHWH.⁸⁴ Within Ezekiel 1–5 two genres are usually identified: Ezekiel 1:1–3:15, the call narrative/vocation account and Ezekiel 3:16–5:17, the account of symbolic acts.

The two units are usually treated as separate units due to being written in different genres. Odell argues that these two different types have been combined into a coherent unit dealing with the prophet's inaugural experience. Since there is no clear introductory formula to establish Ezekiel 3:16–5:17 as a separate unit and because Ezekiel 3:16–5:17 contains literary links to the call account, it is plausible to say that we are dealing with one coherent unit.⁸⁵

The literary links between Ezekiel 1:1–3:15 and Ezekiel 3:16–5:17 are “the hand of the Lord” (3:14/3:22), “the appearance of the glory of the Lord” (1:28/3:23), and the spirit lifting up Ezekiel to his feet (2:2–3:24). The concluding formula “I, the Lord, have spoken” is only found in Ezekiel 5 at the end of the verse 17, which reinforces the argument that Ezekiel 1:1–5:17 comprises one coherent unit.

⁸¹ Odell, *Ezekiel*, p.53.

⁸² Margaret S. Odell, "You Are What You Eat : Ezekiel and the Scroll," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 117, no. 2 (1998): p.229.

⁸³ Odell, *Ezekiel*, pp.14-53.

⁸⁴ Odell, "You Are What You Eat : Ezekiel and the Scroll," p.229.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, p.231.

Odell's structure of chapters 1–5 clearly identifies the first three scenes in the narrative: the vision, the first audience with the divine glory and the second audience with the divine glory.

Following her example, chapters 1–5 can be further divided into:

- A. The inaugural vision (1:1-28)
 - 1. The superscription (1:1-3)
 - 2. The vision (1:4-28)
 - I. The living creatures (1:4-14)
 - II. The wheels (1:15-21)
 - III. The dome (1:22-25)
 - IV. The appearance of the likeness of the glory of the Lord (1:26-28)
- B. The first audience with the divine glory (1:28b-3:21)
 - 1. Sending (2:3-5)
 - 2. Reassurance (2:6-7)
 - 3. Testing (2:8-3:3)
 - 4. Advanced warning of difficulty (3:4-9)
 - 5. Commands to speak (3:10-11)
 - 6. The ordeal and its result (3:12-21)
 - 7. The sentinel (3:16-21)
- C. The second audience with the divine glory (3:22–5:17)
 - 1. The second audience (3:22-24)
 - 2. Instructions to perform symbolic acts (3:25–5:4)
 - I. Binding and dumbness (3:25-27)
 - II. The besieged city (4:1-3)
 - III. Bearing guilt (4:4-8)
 - IV. Rations for the siege (4:9-17)
 - V. The sword (5:1-4)
- D. Explanatory oracles

1. This is Jerusalem (5:5-17)
2. Against the mountains of Israel (6:1-14)
3. Against the land of Israel (7:1-27)⁸⁶

Summary

As can be seen from the relevant overview of the scholarship, there have been only sporadic mentions of the parallels between ANE iconography and Ezekiel 1. Apart from Keel, Allen and Odell, who dedicate more attention to the subject, the great majority of scholars only briefly mention the connections.

The focus of recent scholarship has been on examining the Hebrew text, form/tradition criticism or in some cases drawing parallels between the book of Ezekiel and the New Testament.

It is also evident that the scholars mentioned above divide Ezekiel 1–3 in different ways. Odell's proposition that Ezekiel 1–5 can be seen as a coherent unit is convincing, and her division of the first chapter of the book of Ezekiel is in agreement with my proposed division outlined above.

One of the aims of this thesis is to offer a systematic presentation and examination of the parallels between Mesopotamian imagery and the vision of the glory of the Lord in Ezekiel 1. It is evident that this topic has not been examined in a systematic way in the recent scholarship. Furthermore, I will argue that there are strong parallels between the Enuma Elish account and the first chapter of the book of Ezekiel which have not been identified in the recent scholarship.

Outline of the thesis

The next chapter of this thesis will describe the methodology that will be used. I will define the words “radical” and “subversive” and follow with my definition of literary criticism and how it can be used to identify the “markers” in the first chapter of the book of Ezekiel. The history of intertextuality as a literary theory will be outlined.

The focus will be on the work of the Russian literary critics Mikhail Bakhtin⁸⁷⁸⁸⁹ and Julia Kristeva,⁹⁰ who built on Bakhtin's ideas. Intertextual terms such as “utterance”, “dialogism”,

⁸⁶ Odell, *Ezekiel*, pp.13-55.

“polyphony” and “heteroglossia” will be defined. The terms “allusion”, or more precisely “marker”, and “quotation” will be examined in detail as they are of paramount importance in connecting two or more texts. At the end of the second chapter of this thesis I will outline my methodology.

Chapter Three of this thesis will concentrate on an exegesis of Ezekiel 1:1-3. Firstly I will discuss the prominence of the references to dates in the book of Ezekiel and secondly the significance of the mention of King Jehoiachin, whom the author sees as the only legitimate Davidic king. The author’s focus on describing YHWH as a mobile God will be highlighted. Phrases such as “the heavens were opened”, “a divine vision” and “the hand of the Lord” will be examined.

Chapter Four will examine intertextual connections between Ezekiel 1:1-3 and other biblical texts such as Genesis 7:11. By alluding to the flood narrative, the author of the book of Ezekiel states that if God has spoken to Noah, and at a time when there were no recognisable geographical features, there is no reason why YHWH could not speak to the prophet Ezekiel in Babylon, an “alien” land.

The communication between YHWH and his people is established again through the prophet Ezekiel. The author modifies the longstanding idea of YHWH as a territorial and static God bound by geographical borders, and portrays YHWH as distinctively different, a dynamic God who is not bound by space.

It will be argued that the difference between *מְרִאָּה* and *חֲזוֹן* is as following: *מְרִאָּה* is a vision in which the prophet looks and sees, and the things that he sees are taking place in the present and the visions are pinpointed in time by the exact date, while *חֲזוֹן* on the other hand is

⁸⁷ M. M. Bakhtin, *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays*, trans. W. V. McGee (Austin, Texas: University of Texas Press, 1986).

⁸⁸ M. M. Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997).

⁸⁹ M. M. Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination - Four Essays by M. M. Bakhtin* (Austin: University of Texas, 1998).

⁹⁰ Julia Kristeva, *Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art* trans. Alice Jardine Thomas Gora, and Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1980).

concerned with future time and not the prophet's present world as in the case of Ezekiel. Hence, the author of the book of Ezekiel uses **מְרִאָּה** when describing his vision.⁹¹

Numbers 12:5-8, Genesis 46:2-4 and Ezekiel 1:1 share some striking lexical and thematic concepts and the author consciously alludes to those two passages with the intention of depicting the prophet Ezekiel as equal to Moses and certainly someone who had a unique relationship with YHWH, someone who was able, just like Moses, to lead his people back to God.

By alluding to Numbers 12, the author of the book of Ezekiel pre-empts any kind of uprising and reinforces his authority as the prophet in exile. By alluding to the story of Jacob, the author gives hope to the remnant that one day they might return to Jerusalem, but more particularly reminds them that YHWH was and is with them throughout their journey.

The mobility of YHWH will be discussed in more detail. This will be followed by more detailed discussion of the significance of the mention of King Jehoiachin. King Jehoiachin is the only legitimate king who obeys the word of YHWH and is not interested in political machinations or overthrowing the Babylonian rule as Zedekiah was.

The phrase "hand of YHWH" will be examined. Initial examples can be found in Egyptian royal titles, where the title is used to portray the pharaohs as divine warriors. The author of the book of Ezekiel uses a similar phrase to describe YHWH as the warrior God. The author's audience expects Marduk—the warrior god—to be described in the prophet's vision, but instead it is YHWH who is riding Marduk's chariot pulled by the four living beings. The expression "the hand of YHWH" is used in the book of Ezekiel more times than in any other prophetic material.

In the book of Ezekiel the supremacy of YHWH is best demonstrated in 30:20ff, where YHWH breaks both of the pharaoh's arms and will strengthen the arms of the king of Babylon. As a twist, the prophet's own people will feel the might of YHWH's hand in 20:33-34, in which YHWH will use his mighty hand to assert his kingship over his people. Once again the author of the book of Ezekiel explicitly states that the king of Babylon is an instrument of YHWH and the power that he has comes from YHWH, not Marduk.

⁹¹ Pradis CD-ROM, *The Teacher's and Pastor's Library-Biblical Communication Resources for the Classroom and the Pulpit*, 6.0 ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007).

All Hebrew references in this thesis are copied from Hebrew Old Testament (BHS) using Pradis CD-ROM

The expression “the hand of YHWH was upon him” implies a deeply personal, urgent and sudden experience. In the book of Ezekiel, YHWH has absolute control over the prophet’s movements. YHWH seizes the prophet, who does not have any choice but to declare his message to the disobedient house.

The first chapter of the book of Ezekiel shares common words and phrases with four different texts: 1 Kings 18:46; 2 Kings 3:15; Isaiah 8:11; Jeremiah 15:15. Those intertextual connections will be examined in detail. According to the author of the book of Ezekiel, the revelatory experience is not caused by some external means such as music. It is YHWH who induces a revelation. By alluding to the story of Elisha, Jehoshaphat and Jehoram, the author supports the genuine Davidic king even if he is in exile.

The writer alludes to the story of the contest between Elijah and the prophets of Baal, and the fight against idolatry on all levels of the society. The author is warning his audience not to fall into the trap of assimilation or syncretism. In fact, the author of the book of Ezekiel is proclaiming a most radical message: YHWH will leave his temple because of the level of apostasy and spiritual apathy.

Unlike the author of 1 Kings 18, the author of the book of Ezekiel describes YHWH as transparent and the heavens as opened. The focus is on the visual elements of the vision, allowing the prophet to see the glory of the Lord, in a valley, next to a river, thus highlighting the unique relationship between the prophet and YHWH.

The author of the book of Ezekiel also draws upon Isaiah 8:11 and reminds his audience that any open, military resistance against Babylon would be futile and would be against YHWH since it is YHWH who brought Babylon into a position of power.

The author declares a radical message: YHWH is in control of historical events. YHWH sometimes allows the inconceivable to happen. The Lord uses the enemy as an instrument to punish the people for their sins. Unlike Jeremiah, Ezekiel accepts his mission and all the hardships, knowing that he has to proclaim words of judgment to an unreceptive audience.

Chapter Five of this thesis will focus on an exegesis of Ezekiel 1:4-27. The author describes monstrous looking living creatures with four faces and four wings. They bear little resemblance

to seraphim or cherubim. The language is almost inadequate to describe what the author sees. The author repeatedly uses words such as “appearance” and “likeness” to describe what he sees. The living beings are supernatural, monstrous, dangerous beings which are completely subdued by YHWH.

Even though there are some superficial similarities between 1 Kings 7:27-37 and the wheels described in Ezekiel 1, the author could be alluding to Marduk’s war chariot described in Enuma Elish Table IV 39-53. However, the author overturns the expectation that it is Marduk who is coming on the chariot and reveals that it is YHWH who is coming to Babylon.

The author then makes a very controversial, almost blasphemous, statement: above the firmament he sees a throne and a humanoid form sitting at the throne. This must be El Šadday. The prophet scandalously compares the Creator with a creature. The audience for the first time realises that it is not Marduk who is on the chariot but YHWH.

Chapter Six of this thesis will focus on intertextual connections between Ezekiel 1:4-27 and Ancient Eastern iconography. I will explore in detail the Megiddo plaques, the iconography of Judah and Israel: a ram-headed winged lion, a human-headed winged bull, a human-headed lion and an aquiline-headed winged lion, the Taanach cult stand, the four-winged boy recurring motif, and Samarian ivories, which all correspond to the typological profile of the biblical cherubim.

I will argue that the author, who was immersed in Babylonian culture, decided to use it to convey his message. The author starts the process of “elite emulation”, a process in which a peripheral social group, often oppressed or threatened by a larger social group, seeks “legitimacy by symbolically imitating the prestigious culture that dominates them”.⁹² The author of the book does not only imitate, he radically transforms the concepts of the prestigious culture.

The message is that YHWH is the supreme God who is in absolute control of all historical events. YHWH never lost the battle and is now triumphantly coming to the heart of Marduk’s empire with the spoils of war. The dangerous and terrifying living creatures which were once the forces of chaos are now completely subdued by YHWH. The idols are not just breathless molten images. They are living creatures, terrifying but under the absolute control of YHWH.

⁹² K.L. Sparks, ““Enuma Elish” and Priestly Mimesis: Elite Emulation in Nascent Judaism,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 126, no. 4 (2007): pp.625-26.

Instead of using the word **צֶלֶם** “image” the author uses words such as “idols” **גְּלוּלֵיכֶם**, “abominations” **תועבותיהם**, “detestable things” **שְׂקוּצֵי**, “image” **סִמּוּל**, “harlotry” **זוֹנָה** are used by the author of the book of Ezekiel. The author also avoids using the word “gods” **אֱלֹהִים**, because its meaning would be confusing in the Babylonian context as it could give credibility to other gods/idols and their final legitimisation.

The author of the book of Ezekiel also describes YHWH in anthropomorphic terms. In order to portray YHWH as the supreme God, the author had to describe him as similar to Marduk but superior to him or any other god.

In Chapter Seven of this thesis I will examine one of the most important derivatives of the root **כבד** -*kbd* is **כָּבֵד**, “heavy”. This study has found that **כְּבוֹד**, “weight, honour, majesty” is used in the Hebrew bible to describe physical “heaviness”, majesty or honour in human relations, and YHWH’s majesty and honour.⁹³ Depending on the context it can also have the meaning of “body”, “substance”, “mass”, “power”, “might”, “multitude”, “fatness”, “strength”, or “wealth”. The glory of the Lord **כְּבוֹד־יְהוָה** is a technical term for the manifestation of YHWH’s presence to the people. In the book of Ezekiel **כְּבוֹד** occurs in three contexts: at the conclusion of the call vision and the conclusion of commissioning, in the context of abandonment of the temple and in the context of return of **כְּבוֹד** to the temple. However, in the book of Ezekiel **כְּבוֹד־יְהוָה** becomes mobile and not confined by the walls of the temple or geographical boundaries.

I will also explore intertextual connections between the book of Ezekiel and the book of Exodus, as well as the similarities between the main characters, Moses and Ezekiel. The two books share many similar themes and motifs.

By alluding to Exodus 16:9-12, the author of the book of Ezekiel radically challenges another well-known tradition, namely the movement of the glory of the Lord. The radical theology states

⁹³ Ernst Jenni and Claus Westermann, *Theological Lexicon of the Old Testament* trans., M. E. Biddle, vol. 2 (Peabody, Mass: Hendrickson Publishers, 1997), p.593.

that the glory of the Lord can leave the tabernacle/temple and come back when conditions are right, namely once the temple is restored.

The author of the book of Ezekiel alludes to Exodus 24:9-11, 15-17. In Exodus 24, Moses and others see the glory of the Lord. The reason for this is the author's desire to portray Ezekiel as the new Moses. The prophet Ezekiel has seen the glory of the Lord and the author reminds his audience that the prophet survived just as Moses, Aaron and others survived in the Sinai encounter with the divine.

The prophet Ezekiel has seen much more than Moses saw. Rather than seeing the burning bush or the back of the Lord, the prophet Ezekiel sees the glory of the Lord in great detail. The author of the book of Ezekiel consciously describes the prophet Ezekiel as someone equal to Moses because his audience needed someone just like Moses to wake them up from spiritual apathy and lead them to YHWH and away from syncretism, assimilation and idolatry.

This study will show that the word קֶשֶׁת “bow” is a polyvalent symbol which has three distinct yet interconnected meanings: military (a weapon of war), meteorological (rainbow) and cosmic (rainbow as the cosmic firmament).

The author of the book of Ezekiel is portraying YHWH as God the warrior who is coming to the heart of Marduk's dominion with Marduk's own bow on Marduk's war chariot, signifying the total defeat of Marduk. The bow is pointed upwards, symbolising his support for King Jehoiachin and later on in the book for the Babylonian king, Nebuchadnezzar (Ezek. 29-32). The rainbow reminds the audience that YHWH is the only true king who is in absolute control of primordial forces, other gods and their earthly representatives, even of the destruction of the temple and the exile itself.

King Nebuchadnezzar is the agent of YHWH responsible for bringing order. King Jehoiachin is recognised as the legitimate Davidic king in Ezekiel 1. The major modification is the fact that behind King Nebuchadnezzar is YHWH and not Marduk as the audience assumed. Behind the destruction of the temple and the exile is YHWH, through the Babylonian king and not Marduk.

As stated at the beginning of this thesis, the first chapter of the book of Ezekiel remains one of the most captivating parts of the Hebrew bible, and should be examined in depth. In the course of

this thesis I will show that the author of Ezekiel 1 had a number of controversial messages for his audience, transforming some longstanding ideas about God and the relationship between YHWH and his people.

The combination of literary criticism and intertextuality employed in this thesis will offer a new perspective on what the author of the book of Ezekiel was communicating to his audience, and will hopefully stimulate further discussion among scholars.

In Chapter Eight I will summarise the main arguments of this thesis and my findings, and suggest possible areas of further research.

Chapter Two

Methodology

The main focus of this thesis is to investigate the radical and subversive theology found in the first chapter of the book of Ezekiel. To accomplish this aim I will use literary criticism and intertextuality as my interpretative lens. The uniqueness of this study lies in employing those two particular methodological approaches to Ezekiel 1:1-28 as well as other biblical and extrabiblical texts and Ancient Near Eastern (ANE) iconography.

In this chapter I will demonstrate the potential and suitability of using a combination of literary criticism and intertextuality to identify a radical and subversive theology. Intertextuality combined with literary criticism will contribute to a new understanding of the first chapter of the book of Ezekiel.

This thesis will challenge the conventional understanding of the living creatures as cherubim. It will also challenge the traditional understanding of the role of King Jehoiachin as an insignificant king who only reigned for a little over three months. Furthermore, intertextuality is essential in challenging the conventional understanding of the relationship between YHWH and the prophet Ezekiel as well as between YHWH and King Jehoiachin and King Nebuchadnezzar. The author portrays the prophet Ezekiel as a new Moses who is even superior to Moses in terms of how much is revealed to him in his vision.

The traditional description of the glory of the Lord will be challenged. The vision of the prophet Ezekiel is detailed, transparent and confronting. Intertextuality is crucial in detecting the relationships between ANE literature and imagery and the vision described in the first chapter of the book of Ezekiel. The author of the book of Ezekiel radically transforms ANE stories and imagery to proclaim his message. This thesis will describe how the author of the book of Ezekiel radically challenges the conventional understanding that Marduk was victorious over YHWH and therefore was responsible for the destruction of the temple and the exile.

According to the Macquarie Dictionary, the word “radical” can be defined as: **1.** going to the root or origin; fundamental: *a radical change*; **2.** thoroughgoing or extreme, especially towards

reform; **3.** (*often upper case*) **a.** favouring drastic political, social or other reforms; **b.** belonging or relating to a political party holding such views; **4.** innovative; **11.** someone who holds or follows extreme principles, especially left-wing political principles; an extremist; **12.** (*often upper case*) **a.** someone who advocates fundamental and drastic political reforms or changes.⁹⁴

The word “subversive” comes from the verb “subvert” which can be defined as: **1.** to overthrow (something established or existing); **2.** to cause the downfall, ruin, or destruction of; **3.** to undermine the principles of; corrupt.⁹⁵

In this thesis I will argue that the theology of the author of the book of Ezekiel is radical in the sense that he is arguing for a fundamental, indeed radical, change, favouring drastic socio-political and religious reforms, and that the author’s theology is innovative.

While radical in his approach, the author of the book of Ezekiel is also subversive. He is undermining some established theological concepts. For instance, in the first chapter of the book of Ezekiel the author is constantly calculating the dates of the visions from the date of the deportation of King Jehoiachin. By doing this, the author covertly supports King Jehoiachin as the only legitimate Davidic king.

The author of the book of Ezekiel states in the first verse that the heavens were opened and that he saw visions of God in Babylon. By doing this, the author modifies the longstanding notion of YHWH as a territorial and static God bound by geography, and instead portrays YHWH as a dynamic God who is not bound by space.

The writer compares the quality and the nature of the relationship between the prophet Ezekiel and YHWH to that between Moses and YHWH. The prophet Ezekiel has seen more than Moses ever did. His relationship with YHWH is deeply personal, to the point that the prophet is seized by the hand of God and unable to move, sometimes for days.

The living beings depicted in Ezekiel 1 do not resemble cherubim or seraphim as conventionally described in Hebrew tradition. They are supernatural, monstrous, dangerous beings which are very similar to the four beings described pulling Marduk’s war chariot in Table IV 39-53.

⁹⁴ A. Delbridge et al., *The Macquarie Dictionary* Third Edition ed. (Macquarie University, NSW: The Macquarie Library Pty Ltd, 1999), p. 1756.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 2113.

The author describes what he sees in such a way that his audience expects to see Marduk riding his chariot. However, the writer informs the audience that it is not Marduk who is coming but an undefeated YHWH riding the supernatural, dangerous, composite but totally subdued living creatures. YHWH comes to the heart of the Babylonian empire in all his splendour.

The most controversial statement made by the author borders on blasphemy. Above the firmament he sees a throne and a humanoid form sitting at the throne. The God of Israel is in Babylon and it appears that El Šadday has a human form. The prophet scandalously compares the Creator with a creature. The tradition of YHWH being described as abstract and formless is inadequate in the Babylonian setting.

The parts of YHWH's body are metaphorically depicted numerous times in anthropomorphic terms throughout the Hebrew bible.⁹⁶ Physical human traits (eyes, ears, nose, mouth, lips, arms, heart) as well as human emotions and actions (kindness, anger, love, speaking, thinking, planning, loving, hating, commanding, moving from place to place) are attributed to YHWH. However, the imagery used is extremely restrained. The author of the book of Ezekiel describes the glory of the Lord as having human form due to living in an overtly iconic society. YHWH is described as corporeal rather than abstract and formless, due to the author's desire to portray YHWH as a living God who is not defeated by Marduk. Furthermore, YHWH cannot be represented by idols as in the case of Marduk, but only by human form—the pinnacle of God's creation (Psalm 8:5).

The author and his audience are aware of the strong reciprocal relationship between Marduk and Nebuchadnezzar. Therefore, the writer re-introduces the role of the king to the exiles. The author of the book of Ezekiel re-establishes the relationship between King Jehoiachin and YHWH by describing the glory of the Lord in an extremely anthropomorphic way. According to the author of the book of Ezekiel, only the king can represent YHWH in exile and not idols or statues. The author is radically and subversively mirroring and developing Babylonian political theology to re-assert YHWH's dominance and confirm King Jehoiachin as his earthly representative.

⁹⁶ Gen. 3:8, 8:21, 31:49; Exod. 3:4, 33:11, 33:21-23; Num. 11:18; Deut. 8:3, 9:10, 32:18, 33:12; 2 Sam. 22:7, 9, 16; 2 Chron. 7:16; Job 33:4, 40:9; Psalm 29:10, 34:15, 37:13, 89:34, 95:4-5; Isa. 30:27, Dan. 7:9; Amos 7:7

The author of the book of Ezekiel proclaims that King Nebuchadnezzar is the agent of YHWH responsible for bringing order. Behind King Nebuchadnezzar is YHWH and not Marduk. Behind the destruction of the temple and the exile is YHWH through the Babylonian king and not Marduk.

These are some of the most radical, subversive and innovative elements of theology found in the first chapter of the book of Ezekiel. In this study I will use the terms “radical” and “subversive” frequently as they are fundamental to my thesis. Only if emphasised can the radical and subversive theology come clearly to light; otherwise there is a possibility that the theology could be overlooked or misinterpreted by the reader.

In the second part of this chapter I will examine how literary criticism is essential in identifying the “markers”. I will examine the historical development of intertextuality, starting with the works of the Russian literary critic, Mikhail Bakhtin,⁹⁷⁹⁸⁹⁹ followed by the development of Bakhtin’s idea by Julia Kristeva.¹⁰⁰ Finally I will examine the further development, adaptation and implementation of intertextuality as a biblical exegetical method used by scholars such as Hays¹⁰¹ and Lyons.¹⁰² The historical overview will help me to develop my own intertextual methodology.

I will also define the term “intertextuality” and focus on defining the two literary devices, allusion and quotation. I will focus on identifying “markers” whose purpose is to “activate” one or more biblical or extrabiblical texts contributing to a better understanding of the theology of the text.

This study will be based on the possibility of detection rather than on presumption that the original audience would recognise every allusion employed by the author of the book of Ezekiel.

⁹⁷ Bakhtin, *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays*.

⁹⁸ Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*.

⁹⁹ Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination - Four Essays* by M. M. Bakhtin.

¹⁰⁰ Kristeva, *Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art*

¹⁰¹ Richard B. Hays, *Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989).

¹⁰² Michael A. Lyons, *From Law to Prophecy: Ezekiel's Use of the Holiness Code, The Library of Hebrew Bible/Old Testament Studies* (London ; New York: T & T Clark, 2009).

The focus will be on discussion of the author's intended message and his radical and subversive theology evoked by allusions, rather than on any presumed knowledge of his audience.¹⁰³

Finally, I will outline my own methodology to be used in this thesis. The methodology will consist of the following steps: identification of the texts that may share common concepts, questioning the availability of the proposed text to the author and audience, exploring the lexical and syntactic dependence of the texts, establishing if the two texts share the same themes and motifs, and exploring thematic developments in the text and showing how these affect the theology.

Literary criticism

The focus of the study will be mainly on a semantic and linguistic reading of selected texts. Semantic reading of the text focuses on the interpretation of the different terms used in the text with the aim of understanding why one term has been used and not another.¹⁰⁴ Linguistic reading of the text focuses on the importance of the relationship between one word and another. The focus is on why the author chooses certain vocabulary and how the association of certain words affects understanding of the text.¹⁰⁵

I will focus on exploring why a certain word or phrase was used in the text rather than any other and what is the connection between the different terms within the text as a whole. Semantic and linguistic reading will help identify certain words or phrases which might be seen as "markers" whose purpose is to "activate" one or more different texts, enriching the theology of the passage. The "markers" will be further examined using intertextuality.

Literary criticism is crucial in defining the literary structure of the text. It answers questions such as: Is the text under examination a literary unit? What is the structure? What are the themes and literary units? Is the text part of the larger or is it an isolated literary unit? How are the units related? In the previous chapter I outlined the context of the book of Ezekiel. I identified the major structural components within Ezekiel 1 as the following: the superscription (1:1-3), the

¹⁰³ Stanley Porter, "Early Christian Interpretation of the Scriptures of Israel: Investigations and Proposals," *Journal for the study of the New Testament*, no. Supplement series 148 (1997): pp. 95-96.

¹⁰⁴ S. E. Gillingham, *One Bible, Many Voices: Different Approaches to Biblical Studies* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge (Great Britain), 1998), p.177.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, p.178.

vision (1:4-28), the living creatures (1:4-14), the wheels (1:15-21), the dome (1:22-25) and the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the Lord (1:26-28).

This thesis will examine the literary style and terminology used in the text. Are there any phrases, grammatical constructs or words in the text that make it unique? Are there any specific phrases or words that are repeated in the text? Are there any logical or thematic incompatibilities? Is there an abrupt change of style? All those questions will help to identify intended, implicit, indirect or hidden markers that suggest other texts or images.

Literary criticism is essential in discovering the “markers”: the words, phrases or images which simultaneously activate two or more texts or images in the minds of the audience. If literary criticism is not used in a systematic way there is a risk that some of the markers will be missed and intertextual connections will not be identified. It is crucial in establishing if the two texts share the same theologically significant words or phrases. It also identifies word clusters and frequency and distribution of the words or phrases and any possible modifications or incongruity. The significant phrases and words are very often implanted in literary devices such as repetition, parallelism, anthropomorphism, word play, motif, theme or irony.

Intertextuality can be seen as a bridge between two texts. This bridge can only be built by using the markers as building blocks. One would be unable to see the “big picture” and move back and forward between the two texts if the markers were not systematically identified and tested using literary criticism.

Literary criticism is an exegetical lens that allows one to systematically search and discover the markers in the text. The combination of intertextuality and literary criticism allows one to carry out detailed analysis of how the texts or images interact and how this interaction shapes the theology of the author. It is a prerequisite when intertextuality is to be employed. Literary criticism makes intertextuality a reliable exegetical tool which allows the reader to see how two or more texts or images interact and shape the theology of the author of the text.

Intertextuality

As mentioned above, I will examine the history of intertextuality, which initially was formed as a central idea in the works of the Russian literary critic Mikhail Bakhtin. I will also identify and

define a number of labels that are used by scholars to describe the relationships between texts. I will especially focus on “allusion” and “quotation”. The emphasis will be on identifying shared textual elements (words, phrases) in the two texts.

The more abstract elements, such as themes and motifs, that may be shared by two texts will be examined with the intention of showing that one author purposely used and developed the ideas of another author.

Lastly, I will form my own methodology based on the works of biblical scholars such as Hays, Lyons and Sanders whose methods I found most useful.

The key Bakhtinian terms that will be defined are utterance, dialogism, polyphony and heteroglossia.

“Utterance” or “word” is defined as the key unit of meaning and is formed through the speaker’s interaction with other people, words and expressions and is always embedded in a particular time and place. The communicative act of utterance only takes on its specific force and weight in particular situations or contexts.

Utterance must come out of one historically unique and particular place to another. The dialogue with another does not mean that one has to negate what historically separates one from another, but instead understand the other’s historical context as well as possible.¹⁰⁶

This can be illustrated with an example where two people are sitting in the same room and one of them states: ‘Well!’ The other person does not comment. Clearly one does not understand the meaning of the utterance and its force. Only when one is provided with the situational context, where one learns that it is winter and two people in the room are sick and they were looking through the window and noticed that it is starting to snow, only then one understands the full force of the utterance. Therefore “language always occurs in situations, so the force of an utterance can never be decided by a mere account of its formal meaning”.¹⁰⁷

The immediate social situation determines the structure of an utterance. If the speaker belongs to a certain class and is speaking to a listener of a lower class, the nature of the utterance will be

¹⁰⁶ S Dentith, *Bakhtinian Thought - an Introductory Reader* (London: Routledge, 1995), p.3.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, p.29.

affected by the socially different strata. If the speaker is the brother of the listener, who is his sister, the utterance will again be affected in a different way. For Bakhtin:

...any concrete utterance is a link in the chain of speech communication of a particular sphere. The very boundaries of the utterance are determined by a change of speech subjects, utterances are not indifferent to one another, and are not self-sufficient; they are aware of and mutually reflect one another...Every utterance must be regarded as primarily a response to preceding utterances of the given sphere (we understand the word 'response' here in the broadest sense). Each utterance refutes affirms, supplements, and relies upon the others, presupposes them to be known, and somehow takes them into account...Therefore, each kind of utterance is filled with various kinds of responsive reactions to other utterances of the given sphere of speech communication.¹⁰⁸

Bakhtin stated that when the author uses an utterance, he/she takes them from other utterances and "mainly from utterances that are kindred to ours in genre, that is, in theme, composition or style".¹⁰⁹ In the book of Ezekiel the author constantly alludes to text found in the books of Genesis and Exodus. The author is alluding to texts that are similar in genre, theme or style and reworks them to reflect his own situation.

Bakhtin also states:

a word (or in general any sign) is interindividual. Everything that is said, expressed, is located outside the soul of the speaker and does not belong only to him. The word cannot be assigned to a single speaker. The author (speaker) has his own inalienable right to the word, but the listener has his rights, and those whose voices are heard in the word before the author comes upon it also have their rights (after all, there are no words that belong to no one).¹¹⁰

This sounds very similar to Kristeva's notion of intertextuality. Kristeva stated that she based her notion of intertextuality on Bakhtin's concept of several voices inside an utterance. She stated

¹⁰⁸ Bakhtin, *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays*, p.91.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, p.87.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, pp.121-22.

that she modified this theory by replacing “the notion of several voices inside an utterance with the notion of several texts within a text”¹¹¹

According to Bakhtin, “literary structure does not simply exist but is generated in a dialogue with another text”.¹¹² According to Bakhtin, dialogism is an endless communication between meanings and each meaning has the potential to affect the other. The effect one meaning might have on the other depends on the moment and situation of the utterance. Bakhtin states that as a result “there can be no actual monologue”.¹¹³

Bakhtin develops this idea further and states:

There is neither a first nor a last word and there are no limits to the dialogic context (it extends into the boundless past and boundless future). Even past meanings, that is those born in the dialogue of past centuries, can never be stable (finalized, ended once and for all)—they will always change (be renewed) in the process of subsequent, future development of the dialogue. At any moment in the development of the dialogue there are immense, boundless masses of forgotten contextual meanings, but at certain moments of the dialogue’s subsequent development along the way they are recalled and invigorated in renewed form (in a new context).¹¹⁴

This definition describes what Kristeva is calling intertextualism. There are no limits to dialogic context. The forgotten contextual meanings which might be centuries old are rediscovered and redeveloped by the speaker and the listener. As mentioned above, if one sees the multiple voices within an utterance replaced with the multiple texts within a text one can clearly see intertextual connections between, for instance, the book of Ezekiel and the books of Genesis and Exodus.

One can also note how the author of the book of Ezekiel recalled ancient contexts and transformed them to address his own situation, developing the old tradition in the new context. One can also see how the new contexts developed by the author of the book of Ezekiel are further developed in the books of Daniel, Enoch and Revelation.

¹¹¹ J. Kristeva, ““Nous Deux” or a (Hi)Story of Intertextuality,” *The Romanic Review* 93, no. 1-2 (2002): p.8.

¹¹² Yohan Pyeon, *You Have Not Spoken What Is Right About Me: Intertextuality and the Book of Job*, vol. 45, *Studies in Biblical Literature* (New York: P. Lang, 2003), p.50.

¹¹³ Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination - Four Essays by M. M. Bakhtin*, p.426.

¹¹⁴ Bakhtin, *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays*, p.170.

For instance, in the first chapter of the book of Ezekiel the author alludes to Noah's story in Genesis 7:11. The author of the book of Ezekiel had several major theological issues to communicate and justify to his audience. The first one would be why YHWH would speak to the prophet Ezekiel in the exile at the heart of the Babylonian empire.

The second issue was the understanding that YHWH was a static God who resided within the walls of the temple and whose realm of power and authority was within the borders of Judah. With the fall of Judah and the destruction of the temple followed by the exodus, YHWH was seemingly defeated by Marduk.

The author of the book of Ezekiel is proposing a radical theology, according to which YHWH is far from defeated. YHWH is mobile, not bound by space or temple. YHWH also speaks to whomever he desires to speak and wherever he desires to do so. Using the process that has been defined above as dialogism, the author of the book of Ezekiel structures his message in such a way that it alludes to and interacts with Genesis 7:11.

The author starts interacting with a longstanding tradition according to which YHWH spoke to Noah before, during and after the flood. According to this tradition, God is not bound by the temple or the borders of Judah and therefore there is no reason why YHWH would not be able to come and speak to the prophet Ezekiel in Babylon. The language used and the focus on dates strongly suggest intertextual connections between the two texts. The author alluded to the ancient tradition and adapted it. This interaction between two texts, or dialogism between the two texts, will be examined in detail in Chapter Four of this thesis.

Bakhtin describes Dostoyevsky as the creator of the polyphonic novel.¹¹⁵ Polyphony can be defined as “a plurality of independent and unmerged voices and consciousnesses, a genuine polyphony of fully valid voices is in fact the chief characteristic of Dostoyevsky's novels”.¹¹⁶ Furthermore, Bakhtin notes that what emerges in Dostoyevsky's novels “is not a multitude of characters and fates in a single objective world, illuminated by a single authorial consciousness; rather *a plurality of consciousnesses, with equal rights and each with its own world*, combine but

¹¹⁵ Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoyevsky's Poetics*, p.7.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p.6.

are not merged in the unity of the event”.¹¹⁷ The voices in Dostoevsky’s novels coexist side by side and interact with each other, and should not be viewed as stages in the evolution, placed one after another.¹¹⁸

Heteroglossia is a situation, the situation of a subject surrounded by the myriad responses he or she might make at any particular point, but any one of which must be framed in a specific discourse selected from the teeming thousands available. Heteroglossia is a way of conceiving the world as made up of a roiling mass of languages, each of which has its own distinct formal markers.¹¹⁹

Furthermore, Bakhtin states:

Heteroglossia... is *another’s speech in another’s language*, serving to express authorial intentions but in a refracted way. Such speech constitutes a special type of *double-voiced discourse*. It serves two speakers at the same time and expresses simultaneously two different intentions: the direct intention of the character who is speaking, and the refracted intention of the author.¹²⁰

At the heart of Bakhtinian thought is the notion that the meaning is generated through dialogue and furthermore that dialogism can be understood to embrace interconnected dimensions of human discourse.¹²¹ Dialogic relationships are “permeating all human speech and all relationships and manifestations of human life—in general everything that has meaning and significance”.¹²²

Bakhtin argues that the manner of address, the speaker’s intonation and the message itself are affected by the audience whom the speaker is addressing. The message itself, which has already been affected by both speakers, determines the form of the succeeding message.¹²³ Bakhtin therefore introduces dynamic fluctuation between “the text of the sender, the text of addressee

¹¹⁷ Ibid., p. 6.

¹¹⁸ Ibid., p.31.

¹¹⁹ M Holquist, *Dialogism - Bakhtin and His World* (London: Routledge, 1990), p.69.

¹²⁰ Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination - Four Essays by M. M. Bakhtin*, p.324.

¹²¹ David K. Danow, *The Thought of Mikhail Bakhtin: From Word to Culture* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1991), pp.123-24.

¹²² Ibid., p.129.

¹²³ Ibid., p.125.

and the text of culture which previously has been unthinkable in mainstream formalism and structuralism".¹²⁴

Kristeva developed this process stating that "any text is constructed as a mosaic of quotations and any text is the absorption and transformation of another".¹²⁵ Miscall famously stated "No text is an island."¹²⁶ Drawing further from Bakhtin, Kristeva argues that "a text is an *intersection of textual surface* rather than a *point* (a fixed meaning), as a dialogue between a number of writings".¹²⁷

At this junction two or more texts intersect and neutralise each other. The notion of neutralisation is of paramount importance for Kristeva.¹²⁸ This intersection of textual surfaces "must be seen not just as a battleground of conflicting texts and authorial intentions but of competing semiotic systems and ideologies".¹²⁹

Even though credited with inventing the term "intertextualism", Kristeva states that mostly the term is understood "in the banal sense of 'study of sources'" and due to this misunderstanding she preferred the term "transposition".¹³⁰ However, as the term "intertextuality" is widely used in this thesis, I will continue using it rather than "transposition", which is relatively unknown. The idea was further developed by literary critics such as Roland Barthes, Jacques Derrida and Harold Bloom, according to whom it is no longer the writer who is determinative of the intertext but the reader.

The reader becomes at the same time the reader *in* and *of* the text. He/she is caught up within the drama *in* the text and is the reader *of* the text, since a text can only be read in association with another text.¹³¹ The reader and the text are not independent of each other, they are mutually

¹²⁴ Timothy K. Beal, "Ideology and Intertextuality," in *Reading between Texts : Intertextuality and the Hebrew Bible* ed. Danna Nolan Fewell, Literary Currents in Biblical Interpretation (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1992), p.29.

¹²⁵ Kristeva, *Desire in Language : A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art* p.66.

¹²⁶ Peter D. Miscall, "Isaiah: New Heavens, New Earth, New Book," in *Reading between Texts : Intertextuality and the Hebrew Bible* ed. Danna Nolan Fewell, Literary Currents in Biblical Interpretation (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1992), p.45.

¹²⁷ Kristeva, *Desire in Language : A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art* p.65.

¹²⁸ George Aichele and Gary A. Phillips, "Intertextuality and the Bible," *Semeia* 69/70 (1995): p.10.

¹²⁹ Ibid.

¹³⁰ Julia Kristeva and Toril Moi, *The Kristeva Reader* (Oxford Basil Blackwell, 1986), p.111.

¹³¹ Ilona N. Rashkow, "The Reader in/of Genesis 12 and 20," in *Reading between Texts: Intertextuality and the Hebrew Bible* ed. Danna Nolan Fewell, Literary Currents in Biblical Interpretation

dependent.¹³² This point of view is best described as a river, and elements from other texts are incorporated into a text like drops of water into a river. Elements of one text flow into another. Accordingly, everything is text and everything has become intertext, and for this reason only the reader can make the distinction and give meaning to the text.¹³³

The later text incorporates some elements of the previous one and disregards others. The former text can be added to, rearranged or subtracted with the intention of better articulating and highlighting the beliefs of the author of the later text.¹³⁴ In the relationship between two texts “acceptance and rejection, recognition and denial, understanding and misunderstanding and supporting and undermining” are all present.¹³⁵ This needs to be recognised for two texts to be related to each other. The previous text does not simply disappear.

Displacing, decentering or dispersing the former text has moved it from the position of authority within the textual field to another less influential position.¹³⁶ The two texts are in powerful confrontation with each other where the new text must aggressively and radically establish itself by displacing the authoritative text.¹³⁷ This exchange of information between texts occurs backward and forward in time, and the source text can also be affected by the successive text.¹³⁸

Intertextuality is especially evident in dialogism between Ezekiel 1:28 and Exodus 16:9-12; 24:9-11, 15-17, where one theme that the author of the book of Ezekiel develops further is the theme of the glory of the Lord.

There are some strong lexical connections between Ezekiel 1:28 and Exodus 16:9-12. Both texts mention **כְּבוֹד־יְהוָה** “the glory of the Lord” and the words **עָנָן** “cloud” and **מְרִאָה** “appearance” which serve as markers that activate both texts in the minds of the audience.

(Louisville, Ky.: Westminster/John Knox Press., 1992), p.60.

¹³² Ibid., p.62.

¹³³ Pyeon, *You Have Not Spoken What Is Right About Me: Intertextuality and the Book of Job*, p.50.

¹³⁴ Miscall, "Isaiah: New Heavens, New Earth, New Book," in *Reading between Texts : Intertextuality and the Hebrew Bible* p.41.

¹³⁵ Ibid., p.44.

¹³⁶ Ibid., p.45.

¹³⁷ Ibid., p.46.

¹³⁸ David Penchansky, "Staying the Night: Intertextuality in Genesis and Judges," in *Reading between Texts : Intertextuality and the Hebrew Bible*, ed. Danna Nolan Fewell, Literary Currents in Biblical Interpretation (Louisville, Ky: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1992), p.77.

By alluding to the Exodus text, the author of the book of Ezekiel radically challenges the well-known, authoritative tradition of YHWH being bound by the temple and the geographical borders of Judah. The radical theology states that the glory of the Lord can leave the tabernacle/temple and come back when circumstances are right.

The author rejects another well-known, longstanding tradition, according to which Moses and YHWH had a unique relationship and that since Moses, nobody else had had such a unique relationship with God. The author of the book of Ezekiel portrays the prophet Ezekiel as someone equal to Moses. Furthermore, in respect of how much he was allowed to see, the prophet Ezekiel is far superior to Moses.

The distance between the people and YHWH is constantly emphasised in the book of Exodus because of the importance of demarcation of the sacred and profane. However, in the book of Ezekiel, YHWH is dynamic and is invading the realm of Marduk. The Lord is not enshrouded in the clouds, obscuring himself with meteorological phenomena.

The glory of the Lord described in the book of Ezekiel is not a benevolent force. Instead, it represents power and majesty. YHWH is coming with his war machinery to the heart of Marduk's dominion.

By using the markers (words/phrases), the author activates the Exodus texts in the minds of his audience. The author and the audience start the process of dialogism, or more precisely intertextualism, where they incorporate some elements of the previous traditions and disregard others. The author adds to, reorganises and subtracts with the intention of better articulating the crucial theological points about the nature of God and the Lord's relationship with the people. Intertextual connections between the book of Exodus and Ezekiel 1:28 will be explored in more detail in Chapter Seven of this thesis.

Summary

The key Bakhtinian terms such as utterance, dialogism, polyphony and heteroglossia have been defined.

According to Bakhtin, the literary structure is generated in a dialogue between the two texts. Kristeva develops this notion, stating that when two texts intersect, one text displaces, decentres

or disperses the other text, assuming the authoritative position. The reader and the text are not independent of each other and it is the reader who gives meaning to the text.

While Bakhtin was exploring the concept of multiple voices inside an utterance, Kristeva applied this theory and developed the concept that a text might be an intersection of several texts. Intertextuality does not try to determine the source text but rather to identify the constant interaction between the texts.

Intertextuality as an exegetical tool will be used to determine if the author borrowed and transformed words, phrases, motifs, ideas from other biblical and extrabiblical texts to express his theology. The key in this process is to identify the “markers”, specific words, clusters of words or motifs which would most likely activate other texts in the minds of the author’s audience. These words are often “alluding” to other intersecting texts.

Allusion deserves more detailed analysis. A variety of labels is used to describe the textual relationships between the texts, for example, “deuterographs”, “parallel passages”, “repetition”, “direct borrowing”, “imitation”, “intertextuality”, “influence”, “allusion”, “echo”, “quotation” and “inner-biblical interpretation”.¹³⁹ Such a large number of terms can cause confusion, and if not defined properly can lead to the use of very different methodological approaches.

The term “influence” like “intertextuality” to describe allusion is too broad, since an author can be influenced by a prior text even if he/she is not using the words of the text, and because it implies a certain dependency where only the author of the original text has influenced the author of the latter text.¹⁴⁰

Allusion

Allusion can be defined as “mobilisation of unnamed sources and addressees” or more precisely as an intended implicit, indirect or hidden reference which suggests a larger literary field.¹⁴¹

Miner defines it more specifically as an author’s (poet’s) intentional incorporation of identifiable

¹³⁹ Richard L Schultz, *The Search for Quotation - Verbal Parallels in the Prophets, Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999), pp.216-17.

¹⁴⁰ Lyons, *From Law to Prophecy: Ezekiel's Use of the Holiness Code*, p.51.

¹⁴¹ Danna Nolan. Fewell, "Introduction: Writing, Reading, and Relating," in *Reading between Texts: Intertextuality and the Hebrew Bible*, ed. Danna Nolan Fewell, Literary Currents in Biblical Interpretation (Louisville, Ky: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1992), p.21.

elements from other preceding, contemporary, textual or extratextual sources.¹⁴² It differs from repetition because it recalls only a portion of the original text, and from parody and imitation because it is not as systematic as parody or imitation.¹⁴³ Furthermore, it differs from source borrowing because it requires the audience's knowledge of the original text, and from topoi, common places and proverbs in having a single identifiable source.¹⁴⁴ It also differs from intertextuality, which is to a degree involuntary, and plagiarism which is deliberate stealing and presenting the stolen words/text as original.¹⁴⁵

An allusion assumes:

1. Prior achievement or events as source of value
2. The audience sharing the knowledge with the author
3. Incorporation of sufficiently familiar yet distinctive elements
4. Fusion of incorporated and incorporating elements.¹⁴⁶

Ben-Porat identifies literary allusion as “a device for the simultaneous activation of two texts” where “activation is achieved through the manipulation of a special signal: a sign (simple or complex) in a given text characterised by an additional larger ‘referent’. This referent is always an independent text.”¹⁴⁷ Ben-Porat insists on calling the linguistic signal a “marker” instead of an “allusion”.¹⁴⁸

For instance, in the first chapter of the book of Ezekiel there are numerous markers which simultaneously activate two or more texts in the minds of the audience. The language used alludes to language found in the book of Genesis. The words “rainbow”, “firmament” and “mighty waters” used in very close proximity in Ezekiel 1:22-28 are the same words used in Genesis 1 to describe the firmament separating the waters above from the waters below, chaotic forces, and the sign of the covenant.

¹⁴² E. Miner, "Allusion," in *The New Princeton Handbook of Poetic Terms*, ed. T.V.F. Brogan (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), p.13.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*, pp.13-14.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p.14.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁷ Ziva Ben-Porat, "Forms of Intertextuality and the Reading of Poetry: Uri Zvi Greenberg's Basha'ar," *Prooftexts* 10, no. 2 (1990): p.258.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

The author and the audience valued the stories found in the book of Genesis. The stories describe the creation of the world and the most crucial events in the history of the world. The author and the audience shared the knowledge. The author incorporated familiar yet distinctive elements in his text, such as “rainbow”, “firmament” and “mighty waters”, to consciously allude to Genesis 1. By incorporating those elements, the author facilitates the dialogism of the two texts and in the process presents the new or modified theology.

Summary of allusion

I am defining “allusion” as a literary device intentionally incorporated by an author into a text, consisting of identifiable elements from other biblical or extrabiblical, textual or extratextual, preceding or contemporary, sources with the intention of modifying his theology. I will use the term “marker” rather than allusion when identifying the linguistic signals which the author is consciously placing in his/her text to activate other texts in the minds of his/her audience. I will define “markers” as allusions which have the function of activating two or more texts. They might be a specific phrase, word or image.

The author of the book of Ezekiel uses allusions throughout Ezekiel 1. It seems that the author is more comfortable with using allusion than quotation. The markers (words, phrases) give the author flexibility and safety in delivering his radical and subversive message. The markers are more subtle, and the audience, who had knowledge of the texts alluded to, would mostly understand the message, while ordinary Babylonians would not understand it.

This is especially evident and important when the author challenges the authority and supremacy of Marduk. The author of the book of Ezekiel cannot say this openly while living in the heart of the Babylonian empire. The author must be subversive and subtle in his message. Hence, the author of the book of Ezekiel takes time to describe the chariot pulled by four supernatural beings, but instead of Marduk the author states that it is the glory of YHWH sitting on the throne.

This also has far-reaching political consequences which cannot be proclaimed openly. The author reinstates the role of King Jehoiachin and states subtly that it is YHWH who is behind Nebuchadnezzar’s power and authority and the destruction of the temple and the exile. The message is as controversial for the exiles as the native Babylonian residents. The markers are much more helpful than direct quotations to the author of the book of Ezekiel.

Quotation

Quotation is often defined exclusively in terms of quality and quantity (how much material is quoted and how precisely) or exclusively in terms of attribution (naming of the source and the author). Some have tried to define quotations “in terms of quality and attribution”. All those definitions are unsatisfactory, since the author of Ezekiel never refers to his source and never acknowledges the source of a quotation in a modern sense (author/date).

It is also questionable how much material that the author of the book of Ezekiel had access to was “fixed” by being written down. It is also uncertain how much was still transmitted orally, which has an enormous implication on the quality of the quotation.

The most hopeful model for evaluating textual relationships is proposed by R. Schultz, who asks three essential questions: What constitutes a “quotation”? What is the nature of borrowing? and What is the direction of borrowing?

Schultz proposes three categories for the classification of relationships between texts. The first type is “verbal parallel” which is defined as “any verbal correspondence between two texts in which actual dependence is either impossible or unnecessary (for the sake of argument) to demonstrate”.¹⁴⁹

The second category is “verbal dependence” which is defined as:

“...any verbal parallel” in which, for the sake of argument, or, as a result of a careful examination of the data, it is concluded that one prophet is dependent on the words of another without stating anything about the nature or form of the “source” or suggesting any reason for the prophet’s drawing upon it.¹⁵⁰

The third group is “quotation” which is defined as:

¹⁴⁹ Schultz, *The Search for Quotation - Verbal Parallels in the Prophets*, p.217.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid.

...examples in which an exegetical purpose in reusing earlier material can be demonstrated or where an understanding of the earlier text and context is helpful, if not essential, for a proper interpretation of the new text.¹⁵¹

To make a distinction between “verbal parallel” and “quotation”, Schultz employs the two criteria “verbal and syntactical correspondence” and “contextual awareness, including interpretative use”. The first criterion suggests that it is more useful to look for verbal and syntactical correspondence—not just in words but phrases as well.¹⁵² “Contextual awareness, including interpretative use” is the second criterion which helps to differentiate a “quotation” from a verbal parallel.

Schultz argues that “a quotation is not intended to be self-contained or self-explanatory; rather a knowledge of the quoted context also is assumed by the speaker or author” and if the source of the quotation is not recognised there is an unfortunate semantic loss even if the passage itself is comprehensible.¹⁵³

The contextual awareness is indicated by the presence of markers that point to the source text (shift in person/number, sufficient repetition of key words and syntactical relationships, citation formulae), and by the evidence that the material has been modified to fit the new framework.¹⁵⁴

Even though there are not sufficient criteria to absolutely prove that the borrowing of the text has occurred in one direction rather than the other, there are “markers” within the text which could point in the direction of borrowing, thus identifying the source text. These are: modification, incongruity, conceptual dependence, interpretive expansion and other criteria.

The borrowed text is often characterised by modifications to the original text to suit the new context and theology. There is a clear conceptual adaptation from one context to another.¹⁵⁵ The shared material can also be only incorporated to some extent into the borrowing text and hence displays indications of its original context that are out of place in the new context.¹⁵⁶

¹⁵¹ Ibid., p.221.

¹⁵² Ibid., p.223.

¹⁵³ Ibid., pp.224-25.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid., p.211.

¹⁵⁵ Lyons, *From Law to Prophecy: Ezekiel's Use of the Holiness Code*, p.61.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid.

For instance, the author of the book of Ezekiel modifies the longstanding belief in “vertical retribution”, according to which children will be punished for the sins of their parents (Lev. 26:39). The author of the book modifies this belief, stating that all individuals are responsible for their own relationship with YHWH (Ezek.18:3; 20).¹⁵⁷

Incongruity or lack of harmony (changes in verb forms, vocabulary, pronouns, gender, number) in the text is another sign that the text is of a secondary nature.¹⁵⁸ For instance, changes in the text of Ezekiel 6:4-7 compared with Leviticus 26:30-31 indicate that the text in Ezekiel is secondary. Conceptual dependence is best illustrated by Ezekiel 7:12b-13a as dependent on Leviticus 25:25-28.

...let not the buyer rejoice, nor the seller mourn, for wrath is upon all their multitude. For the sellers shall not return to what has been sold as long as they remain alive.¹⁵⁹¹⁶⁰

What has been bought and sold is not explained in Ezekiel. Instead the explanation is found in Leviticus, where the land sold will be returned to the original owner at the year of Jubilee. The author of the book of Ezekiel presumes that the audience has pre-existing knowledge of the concept of buying and selling of the land and the year of Jubilee found in the Leviticus passage, signalling the conceptual dependence and direction of borrowing.¹⁶¹

Very often the authors or scribes expand the borrowed material from a source text. However, the expansion of the text does not automatically mean that the shorter text is the source text. Nevertheless, “if the non-parallel material in the longer text can be shown to be interpreting the parallel material, the shorter text is more likely to be the source”.¹⁶² The presence of conflation and the splitting and recombination of elements can also point to the direction of borrowing usually indicating the later text.¹⁶³

¹⁵⁷ Ibid., p.62.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid., p.63.

¹⁵⁹ All texts in this thesis are quoted from *The New Oxford Annotated Bible with the Apocryphal/Deuterocanonical Books-Third Edition-New Revised Standard Version 2001* apart from Ezekiel 1:1-28 which are my own translation

¹⁶⁰ Michael David Coogan et al., *The New Oxford Annotated Bible with the Apocryphal/Deuterocanonical Books: New Revised Standard Version*, 3rd ed. (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2001), p.1189.

¹⁶¹ Lyons, *From Law to Prophecy: Ezekiel's Use of the Holiness Code*, p.65.

¹⁶² Ibid., p.66.

¹⁶³ Ibid., pp.66-67.

A very important question is: how does the reader know whether the material shared by two texts is due to coincidence or to deliberate use? There are four criteria which can be used to determine if one text is deliberately using material from another text. These are: frequency and distribution, awareness of context, availability of options, and interaction with the source text.¹⁶⁴

Some words and phrases are very common in the Hebrew bible, for example, “Thus says the Lord”, and are distributed evenly throughout all the books of the Bible. Such words and phrases may be used coincidentally. Words such as “break”, “staff” and “bread” are also very frequent but the combination “break the staff of bread” is only found in Leviticus 26:26; Ezekiel 4:16, 5:16, 14:13; and Psalm 10:16.¹⁶⁵ The infrequency of this combination makes its occurrence more likely to be intentional.¹⁶⁶

If evidence of the author’s awareness of the context from which the locution is taken can be detected, then this would be the second indication that a text is used on purpose.¹⁶⁷ If the author combines multiple separate locutions from the original text and places them in close proximity, or if the author uses some kind of marker to point to the source text, it is highly likely that he/she is doing it on purpose. Awareness of the context by the author can also be indicated by the inversion of the order of the source locutions (so called “Seidel’s Law”).¹⁶⁸ When the reader or listener reads or hears the inverted traditional phrase, he/she becomes aware of the context. For instance: “And the land will give its produce, and the trees of the field will give their fruit” (Lev. 26:4b) and “And the trees of the field will give their fruit, and the land will give its produce” (Ezek. 34:27a).¹⁶⁹

The third indication of intentional use of the source text is the availability of options. If the author has a number of semantically equivalent locutions but chooses a particular one to express what he/she wants to convey, this choice of the particular locution over others indicates deliberate use of it and not just a usual way of expressing an idea.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid., p.68.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid., p.69.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid., p.71.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid.

For example, the author of Ezekiel employs the expression “break the staff of bread” to describe the threat of famine, even though the threat could be described by other expressions available to the author of Ezekiel, such as a variety of constructions which contain the word “famine” or expressions such as “cleanness of teeth” or “lack of bread”.¹⁷⁰ It appears that the author used the locution from Leviticus deliberately.

The fourth indication of deliberate use is interaction with the source text. If the author is displaying some creativity and is interpreting an earlier text, using it as a basis for an argument, refuting it or reusing the words for a new argument, then it would be plausible to say that the author is using the locutions deliberately.¹⁷¹ For instance, in Ezekiel 44:22 the author combines the prohibitions of Leviticus 21:7 and 21:14 into one prohibition where all the priests are forbidden to marry a widow (apart from a widow of a priest) or a divorced woman.¹⁷²

I will define “quotation” as a literary device which the author intentionally incorporates into his/her text to enhance his theology. As with allusion, quotation can only be “activated” and identified if the author’s audience has knowledge of the quoted text. The direction of the borrowing can be established by looking for and identifying modification, incongruity, conceptual dependence, and interpretative expansion in the text.

The first chapter of the book of Ezekiel does not contain any quotations as defined above. The author must be more careful when proclaiming his message. However, one can identify a large number of “verbal parallels” or, more precisely, markers.

Markers are more subtle and more effective than quotations. Quotations, due to their direct connection with the quoted text, can be limiting. Quotations can limit the author, the message and the audience’s response and receptiveness to the message.

In the case of the author of the book of Ezekiel, it would be also dangerous to quote directly from the books of Exodus and Genesis or to ironically use the image of Marduk’s supernatural beings pulling YHWH’s chariot to the heart of Babylonian empire.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid., p.72.

¹⁷¹ Ibid., p.73.

¹⁷² Ibid., p.74.

It is also debatable how much of the material that the author is alluding to was in written form, which would significantly impact a number of direct quotations. Quotations would be too limiting and too dangerous for the author of the book of Ezekiel. Due to the dangers and limitations of employing direct quotes, the author opts for deliberate implicit, indirect or hidden markers which suggest other texts or images.

Summary of quotation

For the purpose of this thesis, I will define “quotation” as a literary device which the author intentionally incorporates in his text to enhance his theology. As with allusion, quotation can only be “activated” and identified if the author’s audience has knowledge of the quoted text

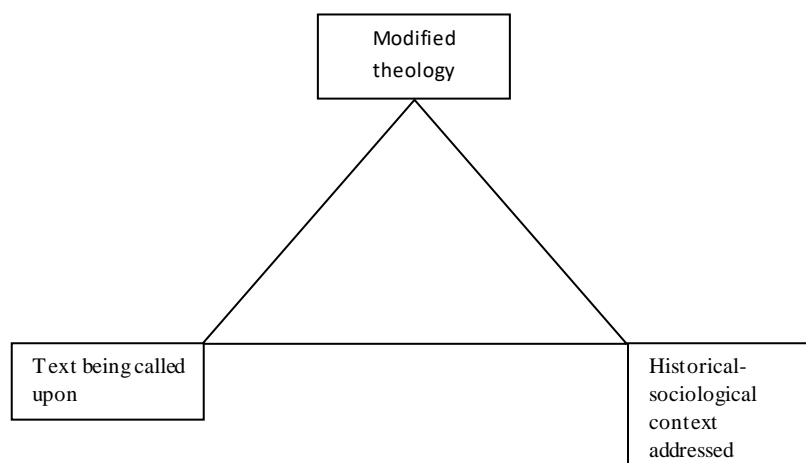
Outline of intertextual methodology

For the purpose of this thesis, I have developed my intertextual methodology and I will use the following steps:

1. IDENTIFICATION: Identify the texts that may share common concepts.
2. AVAILABILITY: Establish if the proposed source might have been available to the author and audience.
3. LEXICAL/SYNTACTICAL DEPENDENCE: Establish if the two texts explicitly share the same words or phrases.
 - Look for:
 - Unique phrases/words
 - Theologically significant phrases and words
 - Creation of word clusters, frequency and distribution of words or phrases
 - Modifications—has the text been modified?
 - Incongruity—does the author change the person/number/gender of verbs/pronouns to fit his message?
 - Determine deliberate use—coincidence or not?
4. CONCEPTUAL DEPENDENCE: Establish if the two texts share the same themes, motifs, phrases, etc.
 - Look for “markers” (implicit, indirect, hidden allusions)
 - If possible identify:

- prior achievement or events as source of value
- if the audience shares the knowledge with the author
- incorporation of sufficiently familiar yet distinctive elements
- fusion of incorporated and incorporating elements
- “markers” which simultaneously activate both texts.

5. THEMATIC DEVELOPMENT: Is the meaning of the older text in agreement/disagreement with the meaning of the new text? What are the differences? How is the older text used /modified to suit new situation? Why?¹⁷³
6. Apply Sanders’ hermeneutical triangle.¹⁷⁴



Sanders’ hermeneutical triangle

Depending on the passage examined, some steps might be omitted. After a detailed examination of the text by using intertextuality as a methodological approach, I will apply the Sanders’ hermeneutical triangle. By using this tool, one can clarify the needs of the community in the text who selected and transmitted the authoritative tradition in their historical setting.

The bottom left panel represents the old tradition/text being called upon. The bottom right angle of the triangle represents the historical and sociological context addressed. The top angle represents the hermeneutics by which the tradition functions in the past and present.¹⁷⁵

¹⁷³ Ibid., pp.59-75.

¹⁷⁴ James Sanders, *From Sacred Story to Sacred Text: Canon as Paradigm* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987), p.89.

¹⁷⁵ Pyeon, *You Have Not Spoken What Is Right About Me: Intertextuality and the Book of Job*, p.59.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have given a brief overview of the development of literary criticism and intertextuality. It has been demonstrated that the combination of literary criticism and intertextuality will allow the reader to systematically explore the text and identify the markers. These markers will then be explored in more detail using intertextual analysis of the two texts.

I will start with a semantic and linguistic reading of selected texts. The focus will be on exploring why certain terms were used in the text rather than others and what is the connection between the different terms within the text as a whole. Semantic and linguistic reading will help to identify certain allusions which I will refer to as “markers”.

This thesis investigates the use of radical and subversive messages in the first chapter of the book of Ezekiel. The study will focus on the identification of markers in Ezekiel 1 whose purpose is to “activate” one or more biblical or extrabiblical texts which the original audience would most likely recognise. Identification of the markers and recognition of deliberately employed references will enhance our knowledge of how the original audience might have understood the author’s intended message.

The markers could be misinterpreted or missed entirely by some members of the audience. Therefore, this study will be based on the possibility of detection rather than on the presumption that the audience would recognise every allusion employed by the author. The focus will be on discussion of the author’s intended message and his radical and subversive theology evoked by allusions, rather than on any presumed knowledge of his audience.¹⁷⁶

The emphasis will be on the book of Ezekiel rather than other biblical and extrabiblical texts. The benefit of this approach is in following the development of the new theological propositions of the author of the book of Ezekiel based on existing traditions rather than imposing those traditions on the book of Ezekiel.

The aim is not to expose biblical and extrabiblical texts which the audience might be able to detect in the present form of the book of Ezekiel. The aim of this study is to explore how and why the author of the book of Ezekiel used existing texts and how they shaped his theology. The

¹⁷⁶Porter, "Early Christian Interpretation of the Scriptures of Israel: Investigations and Proposals," pp.95-96.

aim is to identify the intended meaning of the text which is shaped by the author's conscious interplay of the different texts and traditions.

The analysis will be based on particular terminology—words, phrases, themes and motifs—found in the first chapter of the book of Ezekiel as it stands in its present, canonical form.

The methodology that I will use consists of the following steps: identification of the texts that may share common concepts; questioning the availability of the proposed text to the author and his audience; exploring the lexical and syntactic dependence of the texts; establishing if the two texts share the same themes and motifs; and exploring thematic developments in the text and showing how these affect and modify the theology.

The combination of literary criticism and intertextuality appears to be the most helpful in achieving the main purpose of this thesis, namely, to shed new light on the texts found in the first chapter of the book of Ezekiel and to identify and discuss the author's intended message and his radical and subversive theology.

Chapter Three

Exegesis of Ezekiel 1:1-3

In this chapter I will do an exegetical analysis of the first three verses of Ezekiel 1. The focus will be on the prominence of date references in the book of Ezekiel. It will be argued that the dating is deliberately quite meticulous and has a highly controversial and political/theological purpose.

All the dates in the book of Ezekiel are given according to the number of years after the deportation of King Jehoiachin. This thesis will argue that the repetition of the precise dates in the book of Ezekiel indicates that the author of the book wanted the audience to perceive the prophet as having a priestly background and that the reference to “the thirtieth year” refers to the prophet’s age.

By constantly counting the time from the deportation of King Jehoiachin, the author implicitly supports King Jehoiachin and thus gives him the authority. King Jehoiachin is seen as the only legitimate Davidic king. This will be explored in more detail in Chapter Four of this thesis.

The significance of geography and social context in the first three verses of Ezekiel 1 will be explored. I will argue that the author emphasises the fact that he is in Babylon, in an unclean country, in the valley of the river Kebar and among the exiles. This would be the most unlikely place and time to encounter YHWH, but that is exactly what is about to happen. YHWH is not static or bound by territorial borders.

I will examine the phrases “the heavens were opened” and “a divine vision”. The uniqueness of the former phrase will be highlighted. In Chapter Four of this thesis the intertextual connections between Ezekiel 1:1 and Genesis 7:11 will be studied in more detail.

In the first three verses of the book of Ezekiel, the author informs the audience of his background and purpose: the prophet Ezekiel, a priest, has received the word of God. I will argue that the author employs word play in the text by employing the names of Jehoiachin whose name means “God will establish” and Ezekiel whose name means “May God make strong”.

The young king who is supposed to re-establish and reassure them that faith in YHWH in exile is possible is unable to do so. However, the prophet Ezekiel, whom “God will make strong”, will have the power and strength to do so.

The expression “the hand of the Lord was on him” will be examined in more detail. It will be argued that the expression indicates to the author’s audience that the prophet went through a deeply personal, unique and profound experience which affected him socially, psychologically and physically, not just on one occasion but throughout his life. In the first three verses the author states:

1:1 And as it happened, in the thirtieth year, in the fourth month, of the fifth day of the month, as I was among the exiles by the river Kebar, the heavens were opened and I saw a divine vision. 1:2 on the fifth day of the month (it was the fifth year of deportation of the King Jehoiachin) 1:3 the word of the Lord came expressly to Ezekiel, son of Buzi, the priest by the river Kebar in the land of Chaldeans and, there, the hand of the Lord was upon him.¹⁷⁷

Verse 1

The first three verses of the book of Ezekiel serve a double purpose: they introduce the prophet and the following vision of God.¹⁷⁸ The first verse is written in the first person and is in agreement with the rest of the text (v.4-28). Verse 3 speaks about the prophet Ezekiel in the third person. The superscriptions are usually statements standing outside of the main body of the text and are not grammatically connected to it. Strictly speaking, Ezekiel 1:1-3 cannot be characterised as superscription as it is an integral part of what is portrayed as an autobiographical account which starts with “I”.¹⁷⁹ Verse 1 gives the reader the exact date when the first vision happened, the place where it happened and starts describing what has happened to the prophet.

¹⁷⁷ Ezekiel 1:1-28 is my own translation based on Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia text

¹⁷⁸ Walther Zimmerli, *Ezekiel: A Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Ezekiel*, 2 vols., *Hermeneia-a Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1979), p.100.

¹⁷⁹ K. Pfisterer Darr, *The Book of Ezekiel*, vol. Vol. 6. Introduction to prophetic literature; Isaiah; Jeremiah; Baruch; letter of Jeremiah; Lamentations; Ezekiel 12 vols., *The New Interpreter's Bible: General Articles & Introduction, Commentary, & Reflections for Each Book of the Bible, Including the Apocryphal/Deuterocanonical Books* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1994), p.1110.

Dates in the book of Ezekiel

In this section I will examine the increasing prominence and meticulousness of date referencing in the latter prophets. I will look at the date frame found in the book of Ezekiel. The fact that all the dates in the book of Ezekiel are given according to the number of years after the deportation of King Jehoiachin will be highlighted. It will be demonstrated that dating in such a way has a highly controversial and theological purpose. This will be followed by examination of the phrase used in Ezekiel 1:1: “in the thirtieth year, in the fourth month, of the fifth day of the month”.

A succession of dates forms a kind of a skeleton to the book of Ezekiel and deserves more detailed examination before we start examining the date phrase in verse 1.¹⁸⁰ Verses 1 and 2 contain the date of Ezekiel’s first vision, which most probably happened on 31/07/593 BCE.¹⁸¹ Twelve other dates mentioned are: Ezekiel 8:1; 20:1; 24:1; 26:1; 29:1, 17; 30:20; 31:1; 32:1, 17; 33:21; 40:1.

Earlier prophetic books such as Amos, Micah and Hosea contain only dates in headings which the editor placed to distinguish the period in which the prophet was active.¹⁸² In the book of Isaiah there are only two dates, both referring to kings’ deaths (Isa. 6:1; 14:28). In the book of Jeremiah the dating becomes more prominent. The references to the years can be found in Jeremiah 25:1; 26:1; 27:1; 32:1; 36:1; 45:1; 46:2; 49:34 as well as months in Jeremiah 28:1; 36:9; 41:1.¹⁸³

However, the dates in the book of Isaiah and Jeremiah are not used in a methodical way as they are in the book of Ezekiel.¹⁸⁴ The only two other prophetic books besides the book of Ezekiel which contain precise dates are Haggai (1:1, 15a, 15b; 2:10, 20) and Zechariah (1:1, 7; 7:1). One can clearly see increasing meticulousness in date referencing in the prophetic material.¹⁸⁵

As mentioned above, there are 14 dates in the book of Ezekiel. All the dates are given according to the number of years after the deportation of King Jehoiachin (597 BCE). The series follows:

¹⁸⁰ Henry McKeating, *Ezekiel, Old Testament Guides* (Sheffield, England: JSOT Press, 1993), p.60.

¹⁸¹ Odell, *Ezekiel*, p.15.

¹⁸² Zimmerli, *Ezekiel: A Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Ezekiel*, p.112.

¹⁸³ Ibid.

¹⁸⁴ McKeating, *Ezekiel*, p.63.

¹⁸⁵ Zimmerli, *Ezekiel: A Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Ezekiel*, p.112.

		Year	Month	Day
1.	Ezek. 1:1	5	4	5
2.	Ezek. 3:16	5	4	12
3.	Ezek. 8:1	6	6	5
4.	Ezek. 20:1	7	5	10
5.	Ezek. 24:1	9	10	10
6.	Ezek. 26:1	11	?	1
7.	Ezek. 29:1	10	10	12
8.	Ezek. 29:17	27	1	1
9.	Ezek. 30:20	11	1	7
10.	Ezek. 31:1	11	3	1
11.	Ezek. 32:1	12	12	1
12.	Ezek. 32:17	12	?	15
13.	Ezek. 33:21	12	10	5
14.	Ezek. 40:1	25	7(?)	10 ¹⁸⁶

After the first glance at the table above, a number of issues become evident. First, some of the dates appear incomplete. Second, some dates are placed out of chronological order. Third, it is not clear how much material that follows the date is in fact related to it.¹⁸⁷ The three defective dates are Ezekiel 26:1, 32:17 and 40:1, where in each case the month is omitted.

McKeating describes Ezekiel 26:1 as a scribal mistake.¹⁸⁸ In the case of Ezekiel 32:17, the LXX adds “in the first month” and corrects 32:1 to read “tenth/eleventh month” which still makes the sequence out of order. The only month possible for Ezekiel 32:17 to respect the chronology would be “the twelfth”.¹⁸⁹

¹⁸⁶ McKeating, *Ezekiel*, p.64.

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, pp.64-65.

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, p.66.

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, p.65.

The reason why some of the dates are not in chronological order (e.g. Ezek. 26:1 before 29:1) is that there are in fact two series of dates in the book of Ezekiel: the first series focuses on the prophet's activities and teachings relating to his own people and these dates are in chronological order (dates 1-5, 13,14), and the second series is concerned with foreign nations (dates 6-12) and the dates were imbedded in the text according to the subject not chronology.¹⁹⁰

In the majority of cases each date is followed by a block of material which relates to a specific event (oracle, vision, prophetic symbolic act). It is conceivable to say that some additional passages concerned with general teachings were added at the end of a "date-event" block of material.¹⁹¹

The phrase "on the fifth day of the month" is repeated twice in Ezekiel 1:1-2. Possible reasons why the author of the book was so chronologically precise are his own priestly background or the importance of depicting Ezekiel as having a priestly background.

As a priest, Ezekiel had to be meticulous and had to note everything chronologically in temple annals. The repetition of precise dates would allude to Ezekiel's priestly background. The other, less likely, possibility is that sometimes the prophet would receive an unintelligible oracle which was carefully written down and dated so it could be referred to at a later date (Isa.8:1; Hab.2:1-3).¹⁹²

However, the reference "the thirtieth year" in Ezekiel 1:1 poses a difficulty. The scholars are divided regarding what the number 30 refers to. There are a number of possibilities, such as the regnal period of Manasseh,¹⁹³ or dating from the conquest of Samaria (721).¹⁹⁴

Torrey considers the book a pseudigraph of the third century, and Smith's theory places the prophet's activity in the early seventh century.¹⁹⁵ These two proposals are unlikely to be correct as they have little relevance to the historical Ezekiel and the general consensus of the scholars which places Ezekiel's activity during the exile.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid., p.68.

¹⁹¹ Ibid., p.71.

¹⁹² Zimmerli, *Ezekiel: A Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Ezekiel*, p.113.

¹⁹³ Charles Cutler Torrey, *Pseudo-Ezekiel and the Original Prophecy: And Critical Articles, Library of Biblical Studies* (New York: KTAV, 1970), p.64.

¹⁹⁴ James Smith, *The Book of the Prophet Ezekiel: A New Interpretation* (1930), p.90.

¹⁹⁵ Charles Francis Whitley, "'Thirtieth' Year in Ezekiel 1:1," *Vetus Testamentum* 9, no. 3 (1959): p. 327.

Dating from the beginning of the reform of Josiah (621) is probably the oldest explanation.¹⁹⁶ As the vision happened in 593 BCE, it almost fits chronologically. Cooper states that this is the most likely possibility and fits the context the best.¹⁹⁷ However, it is unusual that Ezekiel does not refer to the reform at all.¹⁹⁸ Furthermore, no other book in the Hebrew bible counts time using Josiah's reform as the starting point.¹⁹⁹

Other possibilities are: the rabbinical interpretation where a year of Jubilee according to which the deportation of King Jehoiachin is seen as a half point (25 years) plus five years from the deportation when the prophet had the first vision in the 50-year circle.²⁰⁰ It could also refer to the number of years inserted by an editor to reconcile the number of years of exile according to the book of Jeremiah (70) and the number of years of exile according to the book of Ezekiel (40).

It is even proposed that "the thirtieth year" refers to the year of the first publication of the book of Ezekiel or its first editing by the author's followers.²⁰¹ However, this poses the question why the editing of past prophecies would be an occasion of a vision which is described in the first chapter of the book of Ezekiel.²⁰²

York proposes that Ezekiel's vision happened in the thirtieth year of the captivity in 567 BCE and that it marked the start of Ezekiel's prophecy of restoration. In the process of editing this restoration prophecy it was transposed to its present place (Ezek. 43), leaving the introduction and vision at the beginning of the book.²⁰³

A range of readings which amend MT "thirtieth year" were also proposed: "thirteenth" referring to thirteenth year of Nebuchadnezzar, "third" referring to third year of Zedekiah or Jehoiachin's captivity,²⁰⁴ "fifth" assuming that thirtieth was a later addition influenced by prohibition on

¹⁹⁶ William Hugh Brownlee, *Ezekiel 1-19, Word Biblical Commentary V. 28* (Waco, Tex.: Word Books, 1986), p.3.

¹⁹⁷ Lamar Eugene Cooper, *Ezekiel, The New American Commentary* (Nashville, Tenn.: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1994), p.59.

¹⁹⁸ Paul Joyce, *Ezekiel: A Commentary, Library of Hebrew Bible/Old Testament Studies 482* (New York: T&T Clark, 2007), p.65.

¹⁹⁹ Pfisterer Darr, *The Book of Ezekiel*, p.1110.

²⁰⁰ Leslie C. Allen, *Ezekiel 1-19, Word Biblical Commentary V. 28* (Dallas, Tex.: Word Books, 1994), p.21.

²⁰¹ Whitley, ""Thirtieth" Year in Ezekiel 1:1," pp.326-29.

²⁰² Ibid., p.327.

²⁰³ Anthony D. York, "Ezekiel I: Inaugural and Restoration Visions?," *Vetus Testamentum* 27, no. 1 Ja (1977): pp.97-98.

²⁰⁴ Whitley, ""Thirtieth" Year in Ezekiel 1:1," p.328.

reading Ezekiel 1 by anyone younger than 30 years old, or even by amending “in the thirtieth year” with “at the end of the year”.²⁰⁵

Origen was the first one to suggest that the number 30 refers to the age of the prophet, who according to Numbers 4:30, 23, 30 would be old enough to enter the priesthood.²⁰⁶ If the prophet was 30 years old at the time of his first vision, he would then be 50 years old at the time of his last vision (40:1), the age at which priests would retire.^{207 208} Even though the meaning of “in the thirtieth year” cannot be determined with absolute certainty, it is plausible to say that Origen’s proposition is most likely the correct one. Other propositions require the text to be amended or do not fit chronologically or conceptually.

One of the reasons why the author of the book of Ezekiel made sure that the book is so chronologically precise (besides making it more credible in the eyes of the audience) is because the author wanted the audience to perceive the prophet as having a priestly background.

The author of the book of Ezekiel also uses dates and calendars as tools to proclaim his message. Even though the prophet and his audience are in exile and are probably forced to use the Babylonian calendar in everyday life, the author of the book uses the date of deportation of King Jehoiachin as the starting point, highlighting his support for the Davidic monarchy. The use of the old calendar encourages the audience to remember pre-exile times, an appropriate way of worshipping YHWH, while encouraging them to support the Davidic dynasty and King Jehoiachin and to resist assimilation.

The social context and the significance of geography

Geography and the social context play a very important part in the book of Ezekiel and especially in the first verse. In the first verse the author sets the scene for the rest of the book.

The importance of the place is highlighted by the repetition of the phrases “among the exiles by the river Kebar” and “the land of the Chaldeans by the river Kebar” and the word “there”. The

²⁰⁵ Daniel Isaac Block, *The Book of Ezekiel: Chapters 1-24, The New International Commentary on the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: W.B. Eerdmans, 1997), p.81.

²⁰⁶ Odell, *Ezekiel*, p.16.

²⁰⁷ Ibid.

²⁰⁸ Corrine Patton, "Priest, Prophet and Exile: Ezekiel as a Literary Construct," in *Ezekiel's Hierarchical World: Wrestling with a Tiered Reality*, ed. Stephen L. Cook and Corrine Patton, Society of Biblical Literature Symposium Series (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2004), p.85.

river Kebar is mentioned repeatedly in Ezekiel 1:1, 3; 3:15, 23; 10:15, 22; 43:3 and always in the context of prophetic call.

Even though the text states that the prophet was “among the exiles” it is probably a general reference to the place since there are no references to possible eyewitnesses. This is confirmed by 3:15, which states that after the vision the prophet went “to the exiles in Tell Abib, where they dwelt”.²⁰⁹ The prophet is among those whom the inhabitants of Jerusalem see as rejected by YHWH (Ezek.11:15).²¹⁰

This is confirmed by Hummel’s statement that the word “exiles” גּוֹלֵי is the singular noun which in this case is an abstract noun best translated in English as abstract “exile” or “captivity” or to describe the individuals who are part of an exiled community.²¹¹

The banks of the river Kebar were most probably the place of communal worship. Since the exiles now lived in an unclean country it is likely that they would seek running water needed for ritual purification.²¹² The Kebar was most probably located in the area of the Babylonian city of Nippur. The city fell under Assyrian rule in the seventh century and remained loyal to Assyria during the rebellion of Babylonian King Nabopolassar.²¹³ It is plausible to say that the exiled Judeans were settled nearby in an attempt to repopulate the area.

By constantly referring to the geographical place, the author reminds the audience that the vision that the prophet experienced had happened in an unclean land, far away from the Jerusalem temple, among the exiles.

The dwelling place of YHWH in the book of Ezekiel is not static or confined to one geographical place. Ezekiel 1 is the only place in the book where YHWH clearly dwells in a heavenly realm. In the rest of the book, YHWH dwells in Jerusalem (Ezek. 8:1ff, 43:1ff, 48:35).²¹⁴ This dichotomy serves to preserve the freedom of YHWH’s mobility. YHWH reveals himself to the

²⁰⁹ Zimmerli, *Ezekiel: A Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Ezekiel*, p.115.

²¹⁰ Block, *The Book of Ezekiel: Chapters 1-24*, p.83.

²¹¹ Horace D. Hummel, *Ezekiel 1-20, Concordia Commentary* (Saint Louis: Concordia Pub. House, 2005), p.33.

²¹² Moshe Greenberg, *Ezekiel 1-20: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, 1st ed., *The Anchor Bible* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1983), p.40.

²¹³ Odell, *Ezekiel*, p.14.

²¹⁴ Zimmerli, *Ezekiel: A Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Ezekiel*, p.116.

prophet from the heavenly realm in a grandiose vision, as well as in the temple or more intimately in Ezekiel's own house in an unclean land.

“The heavens were opened”

The statement “the heavens were opened” נִפְתְּחוּ הַשָּׁמַיִם is only found in verse 1 and nowhere else in the Hebrew bible. The verb used is passive (Niphal) form, which emphasises that the one who is opening the heavens is YHWH. In other theophanies, such as Isaiah 64:1, the verb “tear” is used, or “stretched” in 2 Samuel 22:10 and Psalm 18:9.

The opening of the heavens in Ezekiel 1:1 is very similar to the opening of the windows of heaven in Genesis 7:11 for judgment, or in 2 Kings 7:2 and Malachi 3:10 for blessings.²¹⁵ The author is using this form of the verb to ensure the participation of his audience. The audience will continue to listen to or read the prophecy knowing that what Ezekiel, the character in the narrative, has experienced is something completely out of the ordinary, and wondering if this is a prophecy of judgment or a statement of blessing. The expression signals an approaching theophany, which for the audience was unheard of since they were in exile.

Ezekiel 1:1 significantly influenced later visionary/apocalyptic writings. For instance, in Daniel 10:4 the prophet Daniel, who was also in exile, receives a vision “by the great river Tigris”.²¹⁶ In fact, the entire vision of Daniel 8 has many similarities with the vision of the prophet Ezekiel. The prophet dates the vision, he receives the vision near a river, the prophet falls on the ground when hearing the voice of the Lord, he is touched and set on his feet, and after the vision the prophet is sick for several days.

“A divine vision”

In the book of Ezekiel the term אֱלֹהִים 'ēlohîm usually has the meaning of “divinity” rather than a proper noun such as “God”. If the author had meant “visions of God” as translated by NRSV, he would probably write mar'ôt 'ādōnāy 'ēlohîm.²¹⁷ Furthermore, what the prophet has seen so far is not a vision of God but rather a vision of celestial realities. This can be understood

²¹⁵ Hummel, *Ezekiel 1-20*, p.53.

²¹⁶ Greenberg, *Ezekiel 1-20: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, p.40.

²¹⁷ Block, *The Book of Ezekiel: Chapters 1-24*, p.85.

as a supernatural vision which can only be seen by the human eye with the help of YHWH.²¹⁸ The expression “a divine vision” serves as a marker in the rest of the book to signify the movement of the glory of the Lord (Ezek. 1:1, 8:3 and 40:2).

Verse 2

The dating in verse 2 is clear. It refers to the fifth day of the month of the fifth year of the exile of King Jehoiachin. The date is in agreement with other dates mentioned in the book of Ezekiel (8:1—the sixth year; 20:1—the seventh year; 24:1—the beginning of the siege of Jerusalem, the ninth year; 33:21—the fall of Jerusalem, the eleventh year after the king was deported).²¹⁹ Even all the other dates where the year is not specified point towards the date of the deportation of the king.

As mentioned above, the reason why the author of the book of Ezekiel keeps referring to the deportation of an insignificant king who reigned in Jerusalem only for three months and 10 days (2 Kgs 24:8; 2 Chr.36:9), and why all other dates mentioned in the book point towards it, is profoundly theological. The deportation of the king represented a critical point in the history of Israel.

Furthermore, by locating all the dates in the book to the deposed king, every time a date is mentioned, the author sends another profound, highly political message to his audience. By doing so the author asserts his loyalty to the last “constitutional” King Jehoiachin, not the Babylonian vassal Zedekiah. The author sends a message of hope that one day the true royal line will be restored.²²⁰ In addition, the dates in the book of Ezekiel would have made sense to the audience in the exile and would have added credibility and historicity to the prophecy.

Verse 3

Verse 3 is suddenly written in the third person, preceded by verse 2 which only contains a chronological reference.²²¹ In verse 3 the reader is given more information, such as the main purpose (receiving God’s word), the vocation and the name of the prophet, as well as his

²¹⁸ Greenberg, *Ezekiel 1-20: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, p.41.

²¹⁹ Zimmerli, *Ezekiel: A Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Ezekiel*, p.113.

²²⁰ McKeating, *Ezekiel*, p.72.

²²¹ Zimmerli, *Ezekiel: A Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Ezekiel*, p.100.

lineage—his father’s name. The geographical place is emphasised again, repeating a part of verse 1.

“The word of YHWH”

The prophet constantly states “the word of YHWH came to me” (Ezekiel 6:1; 7:1; 12:1,17; 13:1; 14:1, 12; 15:1; 16:1; 17:1,11; 18:1; 20:2; 21:6, 12, 21; 22:1, 17, 23; 23:1; 24:1, 20; 25:1; 27:1; 28:1,11; 29:17; 30:1; 32:1,17; 33:1,23; 34:1; 35:1; 36:16; 37:15; 38:1), emphasising an intimate and personalised style of communication between the prophet and YHWH. However, the phrase stops occurring after chapter 40, when the prophet reverts to being the priest. Verse 3a is similar to other book headings which have been added to individual prophetic writings such as Hosea1:1; Joel 1:1; Micah 1:1 and Zephaniah 1:1, and developed in Haggai 1:1 and Zechariah 1:1 into a smooth opening formula.²²²

The name “Ezekiel”

In verse 3 the author of the book deliberately employs a word play as a literary device to communicate his message to the audience. The name “Ezekiel” is only mentioned in Ezekiel 1:3 and Ezekiel 24:24. Elsewhere in the Hebrew bible, it is mentioned in 1 Chronicles 24:16. The meaning of the name is “may God make strong”.²²³

When the meaning of the name of King Jehoiachin is understood as “God will establish” the audience can detect subtle word play interwoven with irony. The king who is supposed to be the crucial part of the establishment—the king with all the power and glory—is in fact powerless and a captive in Babylon.

The king who is supposed to reassure people about faith in YHWH in exile is unable to do so. However, Ezekiel, the priest whom “God will make strong”, will have the power and the strength to do exactly what the young king failed to do. He will renew faith in YHWH in exile, in an unclean country.

²²² Ibid., p.101.

²²³ Ibid., p.111.

“The priest”

In verse 3 the author of the book of Ezekiel ambiguously suggests that Ezekiel was a priest. Throughout the rest of the book, the author clearly depicts the prophet Ezekiel in such a way that the audience could perceive him as a priest exiled in Babylon, or if not a priest then at least someone who had an intimate knowledge of priestly traditions.

The word **כֹּהֵן** “the priest” can be applied to either Ezekiel or his father. It is found three times in Ezekiel 1-39 (1:3; 7:26; 22:26) and 22 times in Ezekiel 40-48. In Ezekiel 7:26 and 22:26 the author accuses the prophets, the priests, the government officials and all the people of not doing their job correctly and therefore pronounces them guilty of causing the exile.²²⁴ In Ezekiel 40-48 the priests and Levites play a central role in the new temple. Ezekiel, like Moses, instigates postexilic sacrifice in the temple and he, like Moses, repairs the relationship between YHWH and the people.²²⁵

It is important to note that the word **כֹּהֵן** refers to Ezekiel.²²⁶ No other prophet demonstrates such awareness and interest in priestly domains (sacrifices, purity, the cult, the temple, meticulous dating and descriptions) as Ezekiel does.²²⁷ A more detailed examination of the text seems to confirm that either Ezekiel was indeed a priest or the author of the book wanted the audience to perceive him as having priestly background.

If the role of the priesthood in pre-exilic times is examined (Deut. 33:8-10), the priesthood is an exclusive group of people who share the same ancestor—Levi. Their duty was to consult God by using Urim and Thummim, to teach YHWH’s laws and ordinances and to minister at the altar, offering incense and burnt offerings separating sacred from profane.²²⁸

²²⁴ F. Fechter, "Priesthood in Exile According to the Book of Ezekiel," in *Ezekiel's Hierarchical World: Wrestling with a Tiered Reality*, ed. Stephen L. Cook and Corrine Patton, Society of Biblical Literature Symposium Series (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2004), p.28.

²²⁵ Ibid., p.34.

²²⁶ Ibid.

²²⁷ Block, *The Book of Ezekiel: Chapters 1-24*, p.88.

²²⁸ Iain M. Duguid, "Putting Priests in Their Places: Ezekiel's Contribution to the History of the Old Testament Priesthood," in *Ezekiel's Hierarchical World: Wrestling with a Tiered Reality*, ed. Stephen L. Cook and Corrine Patton, Society of Biblical Literature (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2004), p.44.

The priests also functioned from time to time as royal advisors, tax collectors, bankers or judges.²²⁹ Even though the priesthood class was an important part of the society, it was dependent on the will of the king in pre-exilic times. There is also evidence of infighting between different priestly families, such as the house of Zadok and the house of Eli.²³⁰

After Nebuchadnezzar destroyed the city and the temple he also exiled the *crème de la crème* of the society, among whom were the priests. Without the temple and in a foreign country, the priestly class had to modify its role. The announcement of YHWH's will, which in pre-exilic times was the responsibility of the prophets, became the priestly role again in exile. In the absence of the temple, the teaching of God's laws and ordinances and the separation of clean from unclean became one of the most important roles of the priesthood in exile.²³¹ Ezekiel does act as a priest, distinguishing between righteous and wicked (Ezek.3:16-21) and drawing the line between sacred and profane (Ezek.4:14; 40-48). He is also assigned as a judge in Ezekiel 20:4; 22:2; 23:36.

As mentioned above, the strongest argument in favour of Ezekiel being a priest can be found in Ezekiel 40-42, when in the temple he enters the inner court where only the priests were allowed to be and where the new altar will be consecrated in Ezekiel 43:18-27.²³² His familiarity with sacred architecture, knowledge of rituals, bearing of the punishment of the people (4:4-8), praying (9:8), lamenting (2:10; 19:1,14; 21:6-7; 27:1, 28:11; 32:2, 18) and writing down of instructions (24:2; 37:16, 20; 43:11-12) confirm that Ezekiel was a priest.²³³

Schwartz states that Ezekiel's priestly birth, background and heritage is not in question. He states that even if we did not have the explicit information that he was a priest we would still know that he was a priest because everything that the prophet says is determined by his priestly background.²³⁴

²²⁹ Ibid., p.46.

²³⁰ Ibid.

²³¹ Ibid., p.48.

²³² Ibid., p.56.

²³³ Patton, "Priest, Prophet and Exile: Ezekiel as a Literary Construct," in *Ezekiel's Hierarchical World : Wrestling with a Tiered Reality*, p.85.

²³⁴ B. J. Schwartz, "A Priest out of Place: Reconsidering Ezekiel's Role in the History of the Israelite Priesthood," in *Ezekiel's Hierarchical World: Wrestling with a Tiered Reality*, ed. Stephen L. Cook and Corrine Patton, Society of Biblical Literature Symposium Series (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2004), pp.61-62.

This short survey of the book of Ezekiel strongly suggests that the author of the book wanted the audience to perceive Ezekiel as a priest who was exiled in Babylon. Due to the exile, his role as a priest had to be transformed and modified to a degree. He becomes a priest-prophet and is focused on the Torah and keeping the sacred apart from the profane. Syncretism was one of the reasons that the Israelites had found themselves without the temple and in exile.

“The hand of the Lord was on him”

יָדַיְהוָה is found in introductions to the visions in the book of Ezekiel (1:3; 8:1; 37:1; 40:1).

Hals identifies the expression as “hand of YHWH revelatory formula” and defines it as a formula which “serves to identify the experience of the ecstatic reception of revelation, most frequently in vision report”.²³⁵ For Ezekiel, being under the hand of YHWH meant being under almost forceful submission while receiving the message, which could result in seven days of dumbness.²³⁶ In the book of Ezekiel the expression denotes a unique experience of YHWH’s power which the prophet is vividly experiencing and is very similar to the experience of אֱלֹהִים by some of the judges.²³⁷

The hand of YHWH has a profound influence on the whole being of the prophet, his social, psychological and physiological components, and in the case of Ezekiel not just on one occasion but throughout his life.²³⁸ It is also unusual that in chapter one the prophet first sees visions of God then is seized by the hand of YHWH. This might be a literary device, the intention of which is to add to the suspense. Also, since it is the first vision and since the author sees the vision in the Babylonian context, the visual has primacy over the auditory revelation. In Ezekiel 8:1, 37:1 and 40:1 the prophet is firstly seized by YHWH’s hand, which is followed by the vision.²³⁹

The author of the book of Ezekiel uses the expression יָדַיְהוָה to indicate to his audience that Ezekiel went through a deeply personal, unique and profound experience which affected the prophet socially, psychologically and physically. It was the “hand of YHWH” that seized the

²³⁵ Ronald M. Hals, *Ezekiel, Forms of the Old Testament Literature V. 19* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1989), p.360.

²³⁶ Zimmerli, *Ezekiel: A Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Ezekiel*, p.118.

²³⁷ Willem. VanGemeren, *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology & Exegesis* vol. 2 (Grand Rapids, Mich. : Zondervan Pub. House, 1997), p.403.

²³⁸ Ibid., p.404.

²³⁹ Zimmerli, *Ezekiel: A Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Ezekiel*, p.118.

prophet forcefully, firmly but yet gently, thus preparing him for his future mission, as well as leading him and protecting him. By employing this expression, the author signalled to his audience that Ezekiel stands in line with other prophets, and gives him authority. At the same time the power of YHWH is also asserted.

Conclusion

The following conclusions can be drawn from the present study: the dating of the historical events in the book of Ezekiel is methodical, meticulous, controversial and highly political and theological.

All the dates in the book of Ezekiel are given according to the number of years after the deportation of King Jehoiachin. In the next chapter of this thesis, I will explore in more detail why the mention of an insignificant young king in exile is so important to the author of the book of Ezekiel.

In the first three verses the author of the book of Ezekiel masterfully challenges the state in which the exiles and the prophet find themselves. To the prophet's audience it looked like the covenant with David was void. The king was not actually the king. He did not have a country or power and his people were exiled. There was no temple and there were no priests to help the people re-establish their relationship with YHWH. The God of Israel appeared to be defeated by Marduk and due to being God of Israel, YHWH has no influence in Babylon, the land under Marduk's control.

According to the author, three out of the four pillars of what Block calls "Israel's house of Pride" are destroyed and there is a question mark over the fourth. The four pillars on which the orthodox faith of ancient Israel stood for centuries were: YHWH's covenant with David, YHWH's residence in Jerusalem, YHWH's ownership of the land and YHWH's covenant with Israel.²⁴⁰

In the first few verses, the author of the book of Ezekiel destroys some longstanding theological presumptions. The mention of young King Jehoiachin and the decision to clarify the date of the

²⁴⁰ Block, *The Book of Ezekiel: Chapters 1-24*, p.8.

prophecy by using his name signal more than anything else that the Davidic line was not cut off. King Jehoiachin is the only legitimate king and through him the Davidic line will continue.

Furthermore, in the very first verse the author destroys another longstanding notion and makes a most radical theological point. According to the author of the book of Ezekiel, the belief in the geographical localisation of the patron God and in the influence of the deity only within the designated area, as well as that a person could have access to his/her God only within the borders, more specifically in the temple, is completely overturned. YHWH is not bound by borders. YHWH can appear wherever and whenever YHWH chooses to.²⁴¹

The author of Ezekiel focuses on presenting the prophet Ezekiel as someone of priestly background. The focus on the dates strengthens this notion and contributes to the sense of historicity and reality of the events described in the book of Ezekiel. The focus on dates and places signals to the audience that the events described did happen at a particular time and place. Even though there is no strong evidence, it is likely that the reference to “the thirtieth year” refers to the age of Ezekiel the priest.

As mentioned above, the author challenges the notion that one could encounter YHWH only within the borders of Judah and more specifically in the temple. This notion was problematic for the exiles as they were in a foreign country with no access to the temple. They almost certainly would have felt deserted by YHWH and that those who were left in Jerusalem were the faithful remnant.

The author of the book of Ezekiel challenges this notion by describing the vision and YHWH coming to the heart of Marduk’s realm. The priest Ezekiel receives the vision of YHWH not on a mountain like Moses but in the valley next to the river Kebar. By receiving the word of YHWH, the priest Ezekiel receives authority and becomes a prophet to the exiles. YHWH is not static. God does not wait for Ezekiel to come to him as Moses always went to see YHWH; here, the God of Israel is coming to Babylon.

This encounter is best described as completely transparent, a highly unexpected opening of the heavens. The prophet is able to have an unprecedented look at the heavenly realm. This

²⁴¹ Ibid., p.84.

statement would have caught the audience's attention and they would have eagerly listened to what was about to happen.

The prophet Ezekiel has authority from YHWH to speak on his behalf. The author even uses a word play where King Jehoiachin's name can be translated as "God will establish", ironically pointing out the contrary, that the king is powerless. At the same time, Ezekiel's name means "God will make strong", giving hope to the exiles that the prophet Ezekiel is there to help them re-establish their relationship with God.

The relationship between YHWH and Ezekiel is unique, and as the chapter progresses the audience gets the sense that the relationship between YHWH and Ezekiel is, in some aspects, even more intimate than the one between Moses and YHWH. I will explore this in more detail in the following chapters. However, the relationship between the prophet Ezekiel and YHWH is somewhat forceful. The prophet does not have a choice, and once the hand of the Lord is on him he is affected on multiple levels socially, psychologically and physically, not just on isolated occasions but throughout his life.

Chapter Four

Intertextuality Ezekiel 1:1-3

In this chapter I will examine four phrases found in Ezekiel 1:1-3: “the heavens were opened”, “a divine vision”, “King Jehoiachin” and “the hand of the Lord”. Intertextuality as a tool is used to identify shared textual elements (words, phrases) as well as concepts/motifs between the two texts. Once the shared concepts and words are identified I will examine how the author of the book of Ezekiel developed the theme to present his theology.

This thesis will demonstrate that the author alluded to Genesis 7:11 when he used the unique phrase “the heavens were opened” in Ezekiel 1:1 and that the knowledge of the flood narrative greatly enhances the theology of Ezekiel 1:1. I will argue that by consciously alluding to Genesis 7:11, the author of the book of Ezekiel compares his situation and the situation in which his audience finds itself with the situation in which Noah and his family found themselves.

The author of the book of Ezekiel is alluding to a familiar story to proclaim his controversial message. YHWH is coming to judge his people. Even though the punishment will be severe, it will not be catastrophic as in the story of Noah. YHWH has spoken to Noah, in an unclean land (in fact there was no “land of Israel” when YHWH spoke to him), highlighting God’s mobility and omnipresence. The God of Ezekiel is not bound by space, stating that it is possible to see God and divine realities in an unclean land.

The expression “a divine vision” will be examined, and I will argue that the author of the book of Ezekiel is using the expression to inform his audience of the reality of his vision. The vision that he is describing did happen on a particular date, month and year to highlight the supernatural uniqueness of the prophet’s experience.

This thesis will examine lexical and conceptual links between Ezekiel 1:1 and Numbers 12:5-8 and Genesis 46:2-4. It will be argued that the author is deliberately alluding to Numbers 12:5-8 with the intention of depicting the prophet Ezekiel as someone who had a unique relationship with YHWH, someone who is in many regards equal to Moses, and someone who is able to lead his people.

The author of the book of Ezekiel proclaims that it is possible for a prophet to have a unique relationship with YHWH, in fact, as unique as the one between Moses and YHWH. The author boldly proclaims that it is possible to see the glory of the Lord and still be left alive and to see it in an unclean land, far away from the temple in Jerusalem.

This thesis will argue that the author of the book of Ezekiel by alluding to Genesis 46:2-4 gives a subtle hope to his audience that one day they might return to Jerusalem. The author is also suggesting that as in the case of Jacob (Gen. 46:4), where YHWH was with Jacob when he went to Egypt and on the way back, YHWH was with his audience when they were still living in Jerusalem, YHWH was with them when they were on their way to Babylon and YHWH is with them in the exile. By alluding to these two passages, the author of the book of Ezekiel asserts the prophet Ezekiel's authority and highlights and develops the themes of the mobility of YHWH and the vision of God.

The author of the book of Ezekiel uses a unique phrase "King Jehoiachin" in verse 2. I will argue that the mention of an insignificant king is part of Ezekiel's overall radical and subversive theology. I will explore how both kings are depicted in the book of Jeremiah. I will point out contradictory statements made about Zedekiah and Jehoiachin. Contrary to the author of the book of Jeremiah, the author of the book of Ezekiel clearly depicts Jehoiachin as the only true king on whom the hopes of the nation lie, while the misguided, untrustworthy leader Zedekiah is not even mentioned by his name.

Finally, I will explore the phrase "the hand of the Lord was upon him" found in Ezekiel 1:1-3. This phrase is far from being unique to the book of Ezekiel. However, it is used in the book more than in any other, which highlights its importance.

"The heavens were opened"

The similarities between Genesis 7:11 and Ezekiel 1:1 will be explored and this thesis will argue that the author of the book of Ezekiel alludes to Genesis 7:11 when proclaiming his message to his audience. Genesis 7:11 and Ezekiel 1:1 share some common concepts, such as precise dating, body of water, heavens being opened and one main character (Noah/Ezekiel) who in the midst of chaos among the exiles personifies the new creation.

I will argue that it is likely that Genesis 7:11 was available to the author of the Book of Ezekiel and his audience. The author of Ezekiel is consciously employing themes, concepts and motifs which his audience would recognise, further developing those concepts to suit his theology. Furthermore, this thesis will argue that there are some lexical similarities and thematic developments.

Identification

The language of Genesis 7:11 and Ezekiel 1:1 is strikingly similar:

בשנת שש-מאות שנה לחיי-נח בחדש השני בשבעה-עשר
יום לחדש ביום הזה נבקעו כל-מעינת תתום רבה וארבת השמים נפתחו:

In the six hundredth year of Noah's life, in the second month, on the seventeenth day of the month, on that day all the fountains of the great deep burst forth, and the windows of the heavens were opened.

ויהיו בשלשים שנה ברביעי בחמשה
לחדש ואני בתוך-הגולה על-נהר-כבר נפתחו השמים ואראה מראות אלהים:

1:1 And as it happened, in the thirtieth year, in the fourth month, of the fifth day of the month, as I was among the exiles by the river Kebar, the heavens were opened and I saw a divine vision.

These two verses share some common concepts. One can identify very precise dating (year, month, day), mention of a body of water (fountains of the great deep/river Kebar) and that the heavens were opened (נפתחו השמים / השמים נפתחו). One can also identify similarities between the characters of Noah and Ezekiel, both of whom were a part of isolated communities, both of whom personify new creation and hope among the utter chaos, and both of whom are witnesses to God's judgment.

These concepts are not as overtly presented in the text as the textual similarities mentioned above, but are important to notice. Connections between two texts are easy to identify if they

share the same textual elements. Intertextuality is highlighted further if the more abstract concepts are shared. If both are present within the text it is highly likely that the author made a conscious decision to allude to that specific text.

In this case, the story of Noah relates to the story of the prophet Ezekiel and his audience. Besides the textual similarities there are clear similarities between Noah and the prophet Ezekiel, their missions, roles, relationship with God and the people. These similarities are more subtle and abstract but nevertheless worthy of mention.

Availability

The language used in Genesis 7:11 is very similar to that of Ezekiel 1:1-3 and therefore it is plausible that the author of Ezekiel and his audience had access to the flood narrative.

It is essential to notice that in intertextuality chronology is not that important. Establishing the time line is something that source criticism focuses on. Intertextuality examines the dialogue between two or more texts and focuses on displacing, decentering or dispersing of the texts and concepts.

As noted in methodology, “this exchange of information between texts occurs backward and forward in time and the source text can also be affected by the successive text”.²⁴² The focus of intertextuality lies in the intersection and neutralisation of both texts, and it is the reader or audience who makes sense of the text.

The author of the book of Genesis, for whom the dating was obviously very important, has given a sort of dating skeleton to the book of Genesis by placing the creation in a seven-day framework and the birth of the sons in Genesis 5.

In Genesis 7:6 one identifies for the first time the dating of an event—the beginning of the flood.²⁴³ The author of the book of Genesis is quite remarkable in his elaborate and precise

²⁴² Penchansky, "Staying the Night: Intertextuality in Genesis and Judges," in *Reading between Texts : Intertextuality and the Hebrew Bible*, p.77.

²⁴³ Claus Westermann, *Genesis 1-11: A Continental Commentary*, 1st Fortress Press ed. (Minneapolis, Minn.: Fortress Press, 1994), p.430.

dating of the flood (Gen. 7:6, 11, 12, 17, 24; 8:3, 4, 5, 6, 10, 12, 13, 14). Only the author of the book of Ezekiel is equally precise and elaborate with regard to dating prophecies or events.²⁴⁴

Conceptual dependence

Once the possibility that the author of the book of Ezekiel and his audience were aware of the flood narrative is established one can see how the author could use it to capture his audience's attention and deliver his message.

When dating his prophecy, the author of Ezekiel uses the same style employed in Genesis 7:17, starting with the age of the main protagonist, followed by the month and the day. The dates might have been mentioned simply to emphasise the importance of the flood/prophecy and therefore assure the audience that the event did happen. They might also have symbolic numerological meaning, since ancient peoples believed that numbers held the key to the mysteries of the cosmos.²⁴⁵

Whatever the purpose of chronological dating in the books of Genesis and Ezekiel might be, the systematic use of dates gives the text a tone of order, fixedness and legality as opposed to the socio-economic and religious chaos and uncertainty in which the audience found themselves.²⁴⁶ This could be the first marker that would catch the attention of Ezekiel's audience.

The situations in which the author of the book of Genesis and the author of the book of Ezekiel and their audiences found themselves are very similar. They have both experienced the collapse of the known world. The author of the book of Genesis addresses the theological needs of the time. Noah is the symbol of all the exiles; just like them, he has lost his country, city, place of worship and entire social structure, and is facing the reversal of creation. The prophet Ezekiel is depicted facing similar difficulties.

The author of the book of Ezekiel states in Ezekiel 14:12-20 that apostasy and indifference to God is such that even the most righteous characters, such as Noah, Job and Daniel, would not be

²⁴⁴ Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 1-15, Word Biblical Commentary V. 1* (Waco, Tex.: Word Books, 1987), p.179.

²⁴⁵ Ibid.

²⁴⁶ Sean E. McEvenue, *The Narrative Style of the Priestly Writer, Analecta Biblica 50* (Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1971), p.59.

able to stop God's impending judgment, clearly linking the book to the flood narrative. The author of the book of Ezekiel was, therefore, most probably aware of the flood narrative.²⁴⁷

The mention of the river Kebar would invoke the memory of the bursting fountains of the great deep of the flood narrative. This could be seen as the second marker since the word "Kebar" is mentioned in close proximity to phrases such as "the heavens were opened", "stormy wind", "cloud".

The audience would now surely remember Noah and his family, who were the epitome of the exiles and expect that the author of the book of Ezekiel would state that the windows of the heavens were opened. However, the author omits the phrase "the windows" and mentions only that "the heavens were opened", securing the attention of the audience.

Thematic development

At this point the markers in the text evoke the sense of absolute chaos and desperation. The audience recalls the cataclysmic events described in the flood narrative and identify that their own situation is very similar to Noah's situation.

Just like Noah, they have lost their land, city, place of worship and their whole socio-economic structure. The author of Ezekiel then skilfully changes the language of the flood narrative, opening not only the "windows of heaven" but the heavens themselves. The audience is in awe, awaiting the next utterance. The author of Ezekiel then states the most radical message: "and I saw a divine vision."

Noah did not have such a privilege, nor did any other righteous person apart from Moses. The prophet Ezekiel belongs to an exclusive group of people who have seen God in a foreign land. Moses saw God in the wilderness. It is unclear whether Job saw God in the Uz region east of Palestine (Job 38:1). It seems that Job's experience was more auditory than visual.

The distinctive expression "the heavens were opened" is found only in Ezekiel 1:1 and Genesis 7:11 and nowhere else in the Hebrew bible. Its close proximity to the very precise dating found in the same verses strongly suggests that the author of the book of Ezekiel purposefully borrowed the expression from the flood narrative, showing his awareness of the context.

²⁴⁷ Zimmerli, *Ezekiel: A Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Ezekiel*, p.314.

The only other similar expressions are found in 2 Samuel 22:10 וַיִּטּוּ שָׁמַיִם (he bowed the heavens) and Isaiah 63:19 לֹא־קָרַעְתָּ שָׁמַיִם (oh that you would tear the heavens). However, the verbs used are very different.

By using the same expression and method of dating, the author of the book of Ezekiel utterly rejects the longstanding idea of a geographically limited, static God. By alluding to the flood narrative, the writer shows that YHWH is not limited by a territory, as he talks to Noah on Ararat. The author of the book of Ezekiel reminds his audience that if YHWH chooses to intervene, YHWH can do it even in an unclean land, bringing hope to the remnant. Just as God was not limited by a lack of land mass in the story of Noah, God is not limited by the unclean land of Babylon.

Summary

The author of the book of Ezekiel finds himself in a very difficult situation. He and his audience have lost their country, city, place of worship and entire social structure and found themselves in an unclean country, presumably at risk of losing their faith and identity by assimilating quickly.

The author of the book of Ezekiel has a very controversial message to proclaim to his audience. The message is so contentious that it requires another familiar story (the flood narrative) to convey it, to confront his audience and accepted norms and to offer hope. By tying his message to Noah's story, the author of the book of Ezekiel prepares his audience for the paradigm shift that is about to occur.

The author of the book of Ezekiel by alluding to Genesis 7:11 compares the situation in which Noah and his family found themselves to the situation he and his audience find themselves in. Just like Noah, he is the leader of the remnant and YHWH will judge them, but after this cataclysmic judgment YHWH through Ezekiel the prophet signals the creation of a new world (Ezek. 40-48).

The expression "the heavens were opened" strongly suggests that the encounter between the prophet and the divine is unique. YHWH opened the heavens directly, revealing God's majesty

to Ezekiel, a mortal. Ezekiel has an unique, almost direct gaze at the glory of God; only Moses had the same privilege.²⁴⁸

Perhaps the most striking fact for the audience is that the heavens opened to an exile and in an unclean land.²⁴⁹ Ironically, the prophet is “among the exiles”, among those whom the residents in Jerusalem at that time regarded as rejected by YHWH (11:15), and YHWH is about to show God’s glory to him.²⁵⁰

The author of the book of Ezekiel is clearly indicating that even though YHWH is about to judge his people, the severity of the punishment is not going to be as catastrophic as in the case of Noah. The rain is not pouring out of the opened heavens and the river Kebar is calm. They are not facing the reversal of the creation. The author of the book is clearly stating to his audience that there is hope.

YHWH is about to show himself in his full glory to his desperate, scared, confused people. Ironically, in alluding to the flood narrative, the author of the book of Ezekiel states that if God has spoken to Noah there is no reason why YHWH would not speak to the prophet Ezekiel. The communication between YHWH and his people is established again through the prophet Ezekiel.

It is my opinion that two out of four criteria (modification and incongruity) for determining directionality can be identified. Two other criteria (conceptual dependence and interpretive expansion) are also present. The author of Ezekiel is most surely familiar with the flood narrative and even mentions the main protagonist (Noah) in Ezekiel 14:12:20.

The author is familiar with the language and is employing similar ideas and phrases. However, he modifies the longstanding idea of YHWH as a territorial and static God and portrays YHWH as distinctively different. YHWH, according to the author of Ezekiel, is a dynamic God who is not bound by space.

The text in Genesis 7:11 is only partly integrated into the new text. The images of the bursting fountains of the great deep and the windows of heaven toning down the universal cataclysm depicted in Genesis are omitted. However, the author keeps the image of the heavens being

²⁴⁸ Odell, *Ezekiel*, p.15.

²⁴⁹ Block, *The Book of Ezekiel: Chapters 1-24*, pp82-83.

²⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p.83.

opened, connecting it to the incongruous image of seeing a vision of God outside of Israel, Jerusalem and the temple.

Ezekiel 1:1 is conceptually dependent on Genesis 7:11, as the reader is forced to supply the information to be able to understand the text of Ezekiel 1:1. The knowledge of the context certainly enhances the theology. The expansion of the text is the most provocative message “and I saw a divine vision”.

“A divine vision”

The statement that the prophet saw “a divine vision” **מְרֵאוֹת אֱלֹהִים** deserves detailed analysis. I will examine the differences between **חֲזוֹן** and **מְרֵאוֹת** and argue that the expression **מְרֵאוֹת** is used to describe a prophet having a vision in the present and the visions characterised as **מְרֵאוֹת** are pinpointed in time by the exact date.

There are similarities between Numbers 12:5-8, Genesis 46:2 and Ezekiel 1:1, and I argue that the author of the book of Ezekiel alludes to both the other passages when prophesying to his audience.

In the book of Ezekiel, the word “vision” appears only in its feminine form, only in the plural and in the combination **מְרֵאוֹת אֱלֹהִים**.²⁵¹ In other prophetic superscriptions the term **חֲזוֹן** *hāzōn* is used more often than **מְרֵאוֹת אֱלֹהִים** (Isa.1:1; Obad.1; Nah. 1:1; 2 Chron. 9:29, 32:33; Hab. 2:2; Isa. 29:11).²⁵²

מְרֵאוֹת אֱלֹהִים occurs three times in the book of Ezekiel: 1:1, 8:3 and 40:2. In all three cases the expression is followed by a detailed account of what the prophet actually sees. It is important to understand that what Ezekiel sees is happening in his time; it is happening in his present world, on a specific day, month and year.²⁵³ Even though both Hebrew words **מְרֵאוֹת** and **חֲזוֹן** are translated into English as “visions” they contain different information.

²⁵¹ Zimmerli, *Ezekiel: A Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Ezekiel*, p.116.

²⁵² Odell, *Ezekiel*, p.17.

²⁵³ Edgar W. Conrad, *Reading the Latter Prophets: Toward a New Canonical Criticism, Journal for the Study of the Old Testament. Supplement Series 376* (London: T & T Clark International, 2003), p.71.

Unlike **מִרְאֵי** of Ezekiel, **חֲזוֹן** of Isaiah are concerned with a future time, and it is not just a matter of seeing but also of writing down for future time what has been seen in **חֲזוֹן** of Isaiah.²⁵⁴

In 1 Samuel 3, the author tells the story of Samuel who receives **חֲזוֹן** when he is just a boy serving with Eli in the temple of Shiloh. The author informs us that the “word of God” was “rare” in those times and visions **חֲזוֹן** did not occur very often. The boy, Samuel, receives a **חֲזוֹן** in the temple.

This is significant since Ezekiel does not receive **חֲזוֹן** because he is in exile and Jeremiah does not receive **חֲזוֹן** because he is banned from the temple. YHWH calls Samuel’s name but Samuel, being just an inexperienced young boy, does not recognise that it is the voice of YHWH who is calling him. Instead he goes to Eli.

After following Eli’s instructions, Samuel answers YHWH in an appropriate way and YHWH reveals to him in a **חֲזוֹן** that he is about to do a thing **דָּבָר** that will happen in the future (the house of Eli will be destroyed).²⁵⁵ At the end of the narrative the author states that Samuel is afraid to tell **אֶת-הַמִּזְמוֹנָה** “the vision” to Eli. Another possible explanation is that perhaps because of Samuel’s inexperience as a prophet he is excited *to tell* Eli about **אֶת-הַמִּזְמוֹנָה** “the vision” before realising that he is supposed *to write* it down as **חֲזוֹן**.²⁵⁶

Other prophetic books, such as Obadiah, Nahum, Habakkuk and Isaiah, support the notion that **חֲזוֹן** is a vision about something **דָּבָר** that is about to happen in the future and that is written down. For instance, Obadiah’s **חֲזוֹן** is about Edom’s future destruction and the rescue of the exiles. However, there is no mention that it is written down. Nahum’s **חֲזוֹן** is an oracle/book regarding the future of Nineveh. In Habakkuk 2:2-3, YHWH says to Habakkuk to “write the **חֲזוֹן** make it plain on tablets so that a runner may read it. For there is still a **חֲזוֹן** for the

²⁵⁴ Ibid.

²⁵⁵ Ibid., pp.72-73.

²⁵⁶ Ibid., p.73.

appointed time.” This notion of waiting supports the argument that **חֲזוֹן** is something for the future rather than a vision about something that is happening in the present.²⁵⁷

As mentioned above, the **חֲזוֹן** of Isaiah is about a “thing” **דָּבָר** of YHWH which is not concerned about Judah and Jerusalem in the days of the kings of Judah but about the future of Judah and Jerusalem (Isa.6:9-13).²⁵⁸ Furthermore, the prophet states that he will “wait” (Isa. 8:16-17) just like Habakkuk. Isaiah, like Samuel, has his vision in the temple (Jerusalem). YHWH asks him a question and he, like Samuel, answers “Here I am” and says “Send me.” His vision is a written document (Isa. 29:11-12). The author of Isaiah 30:8-11 also uses similar vocabulary to that in Habakkuk 2:2-3.²⁵⁹

The feminine noun **מְרֵאָה** (plural **מְרֵאוֹת**) is found 11 times in the Hebrew bible: Genesis 46:2; Numbers 12:6; 1 Samuel 3:15; Ezekiel 1:1, 8:3, 40:2, 43:3; and Daniel 10:7, 8, 16. The expression **מְרֵאוֹת אֱלֹהִים** appears only in the book of Ezekiel. Zimmerli believes that the phrase is “a technical expression of an old school of seers”.²⁶⁰

The author of the book of Ezekiel uses the term **מְרֵאוֹת אֱלֹהִים** to emphasise the uniqueness of the prophet’s experience. The expression highlights that what the prophet is about to see is real, and is happening at a specific point of time in history, and that what he is about to see and experience is unique. The prophet will see divine realities and will see God.

Identification

Numbers 12 has some lexical and conceptual similarities with Ezekiel 1:1.²⁶¹

וַיֵּרֶד יְהוָה בְּעַמֻּד עָנָן וַיַּעֲמֵד בְּתַח הָאֹהֶל וַיִּקְרָא אֶתֶרְן וּמִרְיָם וַיֵּצְאוּ שְׁנֵיהֶם: Nu 12:5

וַיֹּאמֶר שְׁמַעוּנָא דְבָרֵי אִם־יִהְיֶה נְבִיאֵכֶם יְהוָה בְּמֵרְאָה אֱלֹהֵי אֶתְנִדֵּעַ Nu 12:6

בְּחֵלוֹם אֶדְבַר־בוֹ:

לֹא־כֵן עֲבַדְתִּי מִשָּׁה בְּכָל־בֵּיתִי נֶאֱמַן הוּא: Nu 12:7

²⁵⁷ Ibid., p. 75.

²⁵⁸ Ibid., p.76.

²⁵⁹ Ibid., p.77.

²⁶⁰ Zimmerli, *Ezekiel: A Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Ezekiel*, p.117.

²⁶¹ Due to formatting, in some instances, the verses in Hebrew might be written in smaller font

וַיֵּרָד אֱלֹהִים-אֶל-פָּה אֲדָמָה-בּוֹ וַיִּמְרָאֵהוּ וְלֹא בְחַיִּלֹת וְתִמְנַת יְהוָה יִבִּיט וּמִדּוּעַ לֹא

וַיִּרְאוּם לְדָבָר בְּעַבְדֵי בְמִשָּׁה:

Then the LORD came down in a pillar of cloud, and stood at the entrance of the tent, and called Aaron and Miriam; and they both came forward. ⁶ And he said, "Hear my words: When there are prophets among you, I the LORD make myself known to them in visions; I speak to them in dreams. Not so with my servant Moses; he is entrusted with all my house. With him I speak face to face—clearly, not in riddles; and he beholds the form of the LORD.

All three passages (Num. 12:5-8; Gen. 46:2-4 and Ezek. 1:1) share some lexical similarities: mention of “vision” *בְּמִרְאָה* - *וַיִּמְרָאֵהוּ* (Num. 12: 6;8) *בְּמִרְאוֹת* (Ezek. 1:1); mention of the concept of “the form of YHWH” *וְתִמְנַת יְהוָה* in Numbers 12:8 while the author of the book of Ezekiel uses a similar expression *תִּבְנִית* in Ezekiel 8:3; 8:10; 10:8; 43:11; and mention of “cloud” *עֶנָן* on several occasions in the first chapter of the book Ezekiel and Numbers 12:5.

All three passages share some common thematic concepts: the concept of the mobility of YHWH; the concept of YHWH appearing to his servants in a vision bringing judgment; and the concept of YHWH leading his people into and out of an unclean land (Gen. 46:2-4).

Furthermore, one can identify the tendency of the author of the book of Ezekiel to depict the character of Ezekiel to be more than just a prophet with whom YHWH communicates through dreams. The writer is describing the prophet Ezekiel as equal to Moses who enjoyed a unique, exclusive relationship with YHWH.

The mobility of God is highlighted through the employment of the verbs “came down” *וַיֵּרָד* “stood” *וַיַּעֲמֵד*. As in the book of Ezekiel, the concept of YHWH appearing to his servants in a vision bringing judgment is present also in Numbers 12.

Genesis 46:2-4 is especially interesting:

וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים לְיִשְׂרָאֵל בְּמִרְאֵת הַלַּיְלָה וַיֹּאמֶר יַעֲקֹב וַיֹּאמֶר הִנְנִי:

וַיֹּאמֶר אֲנֹכִי הָאֵל אֱלֹהֵי אָבִיךָ אֶל־תִּירָא מִרְרָה מִצְרַיִם כִּי־לִגְוֵי נִדְוָל^{Ge 46:3}

אֲשִׁימָךְ שָׁם:

אֲנֹכִי אֶרְדָּ אִתְּךָ מִצְרַיִם וְאֲנֹכִי אֶעֱלֶךָ גַם־עִלָּה וַיֹּסֶף יִשְׂרָאֵל עַל־עֵינָיו:^{Ge 46:4}

God spoke to Israel in visions of the night, and said, “Jacob, Jacob.” And he said, “Here I am.”³ Then he said, “I am God, the God of your father; do not be afraid to go down to Egypt, for I will make of you a great nation there.⁴ I myself will go down with you to Egypt, and I will also bring you up again; and Joseph's own hand shall close your eyes.”

Besides Numbers 12:5-8, it is likely that the author of the book of Ezekiel alludes to Genesis 46:2-4, which would have been brought to mind by the audience when the marker word “vision” was announced. The word “vision” is the marker which could simultaneously open the two texts.

In Genesis 46:2-4, God speaks to Jacob/Israel in “visions of the night” בְּמִרְאֵת הַלַּיְלָה. This method of communication is clearly inferior to the face-to-face communication between Moses and YHWH. It is important to mention that Jacob’s “vision of the night” is the last time God is recorded as speaking to the patriarchs.²⁶²

The next recorded revelation occurs in the time of Moses. The rarity of the vision adds to the importance of the message. The fact that two names, Jacob and Moses, would spring to the minds of the audience reinforces the prophet Ezekiel’s authority.

However, in this case the author of the book of Ezekiel does not want his audience to focus on the vision alone. He wants them to remember the words of hope which God spoke to Jacob: “I myself will go down with you to Egypt, and I will also bring you up again,” the words of hope that his audience so desperately wants to hear. The expression also highlights the mobility of YHWH by employing the verbs “go down” אֶרְדָּ and “bring you up” אֶעֱלֶךָ.

²⁶² Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 16-50, Word Biblical Commentary V. 2* (Dallas, Tex.: Word, 1994), p.440.

Availability

As discussed above, it is plausible to say that the author of the book of Ezekiel and his audience were familiar with Genesis traditions: the story of the flood and the stories about forefathers such as Jacob and Moses. It is also highly likely that the author of the book of Ezekiel and his audience were familiar with the book of Numbers.

Conceptual dependence

The sole theme of Numbers 12:5-8 is the uniqueness of Moses. Moses is proclaimed as the prophet par excellence.²⁶³ In the book of Numbers, the author describes a number of rebellions started by the people. However, for the first time in Numbers 12 the rebellion is caused by the inner leadership elite—Miriam and Aaron, who question Moses' unique status and authority. The main issue is the nature of the reception of the divine word.²⁶⁴

In Numbers 11:26-30, the author tells a story of Eldad and Medad who prophesied in the camp independently of Moses, who surprisingly approves of them as genuine mediators of YHWH's word. In Numbers 12, Miriam and Aaron seize the opportunity to test the limits. Both Miriam and Aaron are attested to as prophetic figures. Miriam was called a prophet (Exod. 15:20) and Aaron's role as a high priest was to consult Urim and Thummim, and he was also spokesperson to Moses (Exod. 4:16).

Nevertheless, YHWH, who is clearly mobile and in an unclean land, comes to his people and addresses them, confirming Moses as the unique and supreme channel of divine revelation.²⁶⁵ God does speak through other prophets through visions and dreams. However, only with Moses does YHWH speak clearly face to face (literally "mouth to mouth") and not in riddles. And only Moses is allowed to behold the form of the Lord.

The author of the book of Ezekiel skilfully catches the audience's attention by employing the phrase "a divine vision". The audience, which was shocked by the prophet's statement that YHWH appeared to him by the river Kebar in Babylon, now remembers the story of Moses,

²⁶³ Jacob Milgrom, *Numbers = [Ba-Midbar] : The Traditional Hebrew Text with the New Jps Translation, The Jps Torah Commentary* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1990), p.93.

²⁶⁴ Martin Noth, *Numbers: A Commentary, Old Testament Library* (London: SCM, 1968), p.92.

²⁶⁵ Dennis T. Olson, *Numbers, 1st ed., Interpretation, a Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching* (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 1996), p.71.

Miriam and Aaron. The author of Ezekiel claims that YHWH appeared to him as he did to Moses, Miriam and Aaron: the Lord was mobile, in an unclean land, far away from Jerusalem.

By alluding to the story of Moses, the author of Ezekiel pre-empts any kind of rebellion and reinforces his role as prophet. As in the case of Moses, Miriam and Aaron, one can speculate that the prophet Ezekiel could have faced challenges from his inner circle and his wider audience, who would certainly question his visions.

Unbeknown to his audience, the author of the book of Ezekiel is about to equate Moses with Ezekiel in terms of their unique relationship with YHWH. The parallels between Moses and Ezekiel will be explored in more detail in Chapter Seven of this thesis.

By employing the same word “vision” *בְּרָאָה* as the marker, the author of the book of Ezekiel deliberately alludes to Genesis 46:2-4. At first the audience remembers the famous last revelatory vision to the patriarch Jacob. But then the audience remembers the words of hope. The author of the book of Ezekiel uses the word “vision” to give his audience much needed hope. The audience would understand the hidden allusion only if they shared the knowledge of Jacob’s vision with the author.

Thematic development

After the initial shock to his audience (the mobility of YHWH, the heavens being opened and the divine vision, the authority of the prophet and his relationship with YHWH), the author of the book of Ezekiel continues to shock his audience, which is listening in awe, by developing the themes known to his audience and pushing the concepts and imagery to a completely new level to support his theology.

What is a somewhat vague concept in the book of Exodus and Numbers, in which YHWH is described as mobile pillar of cloud or fire (if visual aspects are described at all), in the book of Ezekiel becomes an elaborate vision of a mobile God who is coming in all his splendour from the heavenly realm to an unclean land, who leaves Jerusalem and later returns to it.

The author of the book of Ezekiel develops the theme, focusing on the description of the chariot: the living beings, the wheels and the nature of the movement of the living beings, focusing more on the visual than on the auditory phenomena.

The movement and mobility of the glory of the Lord are essential to the theology of the author of the book of Ezekiel, since they give hope to his audience and reassert the notion that YHWH is omnipotent and omnipresent.

The movement of the pillar of cloud in the book of Exodus to and from the tent is the archetype which in the book of Ezekiel becomes an elaborate, wonderful and terrifying movement of the glory of the Lord from and to the temple (Ezekiel 11; 43).

By alluding to Numbers 12:5-8, the author of the book of Ezekiel portrays the prophet Ezekiel as someone who had a unique relationship with YHWH equal to that of Moses and YHWH, but stops just short of declaring it.

Numbers 12 states that YHWH spoke to Moses not in visions and dream—which are clearly declared to be inferior ways of communicating God’s revelation—and not in riddles, but plainly and face to face, to the point that Moses beheld the form of God. To some prophets, dreams which required interpretation were seen as inferior to prophecy (Jer. 23:28). Due to this unique relationship, Moses was able to behold the form of God (Num. 12:8) and see YHWH’s back (Exod. 33:23).

Similarly, the communication between YHWH and the prophet Ezekiel is described as unique. Perhaps this is why the author of the book of Ezekiel uses the unique phrase “the heavens were opened”. The author develops the theme by stating that the prophet Ezekiel had the privilege of gazing directly at heavenly realities.

As well as Moses, the author sees the form of God. However, Ezekiel’s vision is unique in the sense that the prophet is described as having the privilege of seeing the movement of the living creatures, the wheels, the throne and the appearance of the likeness of the glory of YHWH.

A careful reading of Ezekiel 1:27 indicates that the prophet has seen YHWH face to face. The comments about the loins suggest that the author is describing YHWH sitting on the throne facing the prophet. The prophet had a clear view of the upper and the lower part of what appears to be a human form. If the prophet was seeing the back of YHWH sitting on the throne it is likely that he would not have had such a clear vision.

Up to this point in time in Hebrew tradition, no other author had dared to challenge or even come close to equating Ezekiel's vision and the nature of his relationship with God to that of YHWH and Moses. Before Ezekiel's vision, only Moses had beheld the form of God, and in something of an anti-climax for the audience he sees and describes only the back of YHWH.

The author of the book of Ezekiel not only develops the theme but states that Ezekiel saw the glory of YHWH and describes it in detail, stopping short of blasphemously depicting God *per se*. By depicting the unique relationship between the prophet Ezekiel and YHWH, the author of the book of Ezekiel reinforces the prophet's authority.

The author is implying that just as Moses was once entrusted with "the house" (YHWH's people who were in the wilderness, lost and scared, and questioning their relationship with YHWH) so is the prophet Ezekiel now entrusted with taking care of and leading his people back to YHWH. By depicting him as like Moses, the author of the book assures his audience that Ezekiel can do this, since like Moses' authority, his authority comes directly from YHWH.

By alluding to Numbers 12:5-8, the author of the book of Ezekiel transforms some longstanding concepts and motifs to support his theology. Facing the biggest crisis that his people have faced (the exile) since the wilderness experience, the author of the book of Ezekiel modifies and builds on existing traditions of the mobility of God, YHWH being in absolute control of all historical events, and choosing one special person who has a unique relationship with and authority from YHWH and who would lead his people back to God and perhaps (back) to Jerusalem.

This is where the hidden allusion to Genesis 46:2-4 comes into play. Ezekiel—the character in the story—is perceived as the prophet who has a unique relationship with YHWH and who is also the leader of his people. The author of the book of Ezekiel wants to give the audience a subtle hope that one day they might return to Jerusalem.

Nevertheless, an important message that the author of the book of Ezekiel wants to give to his audience is that as God was with Jacob during his trip to Egypt and back, so is God present among the exiles in Babylon, in one particular moment in history—"in the thirtieth year, in the fourth month, of the fifth day of the month"—and during the rest of his ministry.

If some members of his audience are thinking that everything is lost and that YHWH is no more than a figment of their past memories, the author of the book of Ezekiel proclaims, using the well-known and attested tradition, that YHWH was with them at the start of the exile, is with them in Babylon and will be with them on the way back to Jerusalem.

The author of the book and his audience are faced with the pantheon of Babylonian and other ancient gods who were tangible, able to be described and therefore in the minds of most of the people more real.

After the loss of Jerusalem and what Ezekiel's audience perceived as the win of Marduk over YHWH, the author decided to do something scandalous—to equate the prophet Ezekiel with Moses and to give a detailed description of YHWH which is far more elaborate than Moses' description. In the mind of the author of the book of Ezekiel, the risk is justifiable.

This elaborate, awe-inspiring depiction of YHWH coming to Babylon in all his splendour will catch the attention of his people, reminding them that YHWH is in control of all events, that YHWH is not limited by a region and that he is truly the God of all nations, and giving them the hope that one day they might return to Jerusalem. The elaborate description of YHWH makes YHWH more real in the background of the Babylonian pantheon and ANE religious concepts.

The author of the book of Ezekiel expects opposition from the people as well as his inner circle, just as Moses was opposed by the people and his inner circle. By alluding to Numbers 12:5-8, he pre-empts rebellion. All the questions that his audience might have in regard to his authority and his role as a prophet are already answered. The audience will recognise themselves in Miriam and Aaron, and in the prophet Ezekiel a figure equal to Moses.

Summary

As discussed above, the difference between *בְּרֵאִוִּת* and *וַיְהִי* is that *בְּרֵאִוִּת* is a vision in which the prophet looks and sees, and the things that he sees are taking place in the present and the visions are pinpointed in time by the exact date. *וַיְהִי* on the other hand is concerned with future time and not the prophet's present world as in the case of Ezekiel. *וַיְהִי* never occurs in its plural form because the emphasis is on the reception of “the word of YHWH” rather the multiplicity of the visions.

In the book of Ezekiel, the emphasis is on the multiplicity of the vision and the fact that the **מִרְאֵי אֱלֹהִים** have been witnessed in an unclean land, challenging the conventional understanding that the prophet receives **הַזִּוּן** in the temple. Ezekiel's message is clear: YHWH has left the temple in Jerusalem just as he left Shiloh in Jeremiah 7:12; 26:9. YHWH has appeared to the prophet Ezekiel on a specific day in Babylon. The author uses the term **מִרְאֵי אֱלֹהִים** to highlight the uniqueness of the prophet's experience and his relationship with YHWH.

Numbers 12:5-8, Genesis 46:2-4 and Ezekiel 1:1 share some striking lexical and thematic concepts, and it is plausible to say that the author deliberately alluded to those two passages with the intention of depicting the prophet Ezekiel as equal to Moses and certainly someone who had a unique relationship to YHWH, someone who was able, just like Moses, to lead his people back to God. The prophet Ezekiel is described as someone who sees God face to face and sees far more than Moses saw. The prophet Ezekiel sees the magnificent awe-inspiring movement of the living creatures, wheels within wheels, the throne and the glory of the Lord.

The author of the book of Ezekiel dares to equate the quality and the nature of the relationship between the prophet Ezekiel and YHWH to that between Moses and YHWH. Once again this reinforces the prophet's authority and highlights the importance of the message. The intricate vision also confirms the reality of YHWH in overtly iconic Babylon.

By alluding to Numbers 12, the author of the book of Ezekiel pre-empts any kind of rebellion and reinforces his authority as the prophet in exile.

The author also was alluding to the story of Jacob with the intention of giving hope to the remnant that one day they might return to Jerusalem, but even more so to remind them that YHWH was and is with them throughout their journey. The author of the book of Ezekiel is willing to go into the dangerous, almost blasphemous, territory of nearly describing YHWH per se, to indicate to his audience immersed in the polytheistic world of Babylon that YHWH is far from being defeated by Marduk. Instead, YHWH is described as more real and present at this particular point in time in Babylon among the remnant than any of the Babylonian gods.

The author of the book of Ezekiel describes YHWH as a clearly mobile God. The mobility of God was a vague concept in the book of Numbers, where God is described as a pillar of cloud or fire in close proximity to the people. In the book of Ezekiel, the mobility is clearly emphasised and elaborately described. The glory of the Lord comes to Babylon, leaves the temple and returns to the new temple. God in the book of Ezekiel is omnipotent and omnipresent.

“King Jehoiachin”

Identification/Availability

Perhaps one of the most intriguing aspects of the opening chapter of the book of Ezekiel is the author mentioning “King Jehoiachin”. The king is mentioned by name only here in the second verse of the first chapter and nowhere else. The name of the king is attached to the date and serves partly to establish chronological order as well as the historicity of what is about to happen. That precise moment of the first and subsequent visions is connected to the exile of the King Jehoiachin.

King Jehoiachin ruled only for a short period of time and it seems that mentioning his name is almost irrelevant unless there is a deeper, more profound meaning behind it. The first three verses are packed with controversial and provocative messages and it is not an accident that the king’s name is mentioned in the second verse and only once.

The mention of the name of the young, insignificant king has enormous political and theological implications. The writer of the book of Ezekiel is signalling to his audience that Jehoiachin is the rightful king with whom the future of the nation and the continuation of the Davidic dynasty rest.

Zedekiah and Jehoiachin in the book of Jeremiah

Conceptual dependence

As mentioned above, Jeremiah was a contemporary of Ezekiel. Jeremiah prophesied from Jerusalem and later on was exiled to Egypt, while Ezekiel was exiled to and prophesied in Babylon. It is likely that the author of the book of Ezekiel and his audience were aware of Jeremiah’s stance on both Jehoiachin and Zedekiah and the political intrigues of the time. Jeremiah wrote a letter to the exiles (Jer. 29) encouraging them to obey Nebuchadnezzar and

start their lives in Babylon, warning them against false prophets who prophesied a prompt return to Jerusalem. Jeremiah warns the exiles that they will continue to be in exile for at least 70 years.

The author of the book of Jeremiah describes a very complex picture of Zedekiah and Jehoiachin. In some places the author clearly paints a very negative picture of Jehoiachin (Jer. 22:24-30), where he is called a “broken pot, a vessel no-one wants” a “childless” man “for none of his offspring shall succeed in sitting on the throne of David and ruling again in Judah.”

In other places it appears that the author speaks of Jehoiachin in a favourable light (Jer. 24 and 29). The exiles in Babylon are described as “good figs” who will be blessed by the Lord. The prophet Jeremiah controversially encourages them to settle in Babylon to “build houses”, “plant gardens”, “take wives” and “have sons and daughters”.

The text mentions the letter to “the remaining elders among the exiles, and to the priests, the prophets, and all the people, whom Nebuchadnezzar had taken into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon.” King Jeconiah (Jehoiachin) is only mentioned as the time reference: “this was after King Jeconiah and queen mother...had departed from Jerusalem.”

It is interesting that the prophet Jeremiah sent the letter to the people and the leaders of the people rather than directly to King Jehoiachin. As mentioned above, in Jeremiah 22 the author curses King Jehoiachin, announcing that no descendant of his will rule Judah. The author of the book of Jeremiah focuses on the people rather than on political figures such as Zedekiah and Jehoiachin.

Zedekiah is depicted in a very negative light—as being cursed and killed in Babylon (Jer. 29:21-23). However, in other places (Jer. 34:5) the author implies that Zedekiah is a legitimate king who represents the royal line and who will die peacefully and have a proper burial.²⁶⁶

Stipp describes a gradual darkening of the image of Zedekiah throughout the book of Jeremiah.²⁶⁷ Zedekiah is portrayed most favourably in Jeremiah 37-38. Zedekiah initiates several oracles (Jer. 37:7-10, 17-21; 38:14-27). He never assaults the prophet and unlike the upper

²⁶⁶ Juha Pakkala, "Zedekiah's Fate and the Dynastic Succession," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 125, no. 3 (2006): p.447.

²⁶⁷ Hermann-Josef Stipp, "Zedekiah in the Book of Jeremiah: On the Formation of a Biblical Character," *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 58, no. 4 (1996): p.628.

echelons of the aristocracy, he never criticises the prophet but instead encourages him to deliver his message in its entirety (Jer. 38:14). Zedekiah offers Jeremiah protection (Jer. 38:16) and acknowledges Jeremiah's authenticity.²⁶⁸

Zedekiah saves the prophet's life on several occasions: he grants the prophet's plea not to return to the "house of Jonathan" where he was previously arrested and feared that he could be killed (Jer. 37:20-21); the prophet is granted special provisions (Jer. 37:21); he grants the request to lift the prophet from the cistern and saves him from starvation (Jer. 38:9-10); and he advises the prophet how to avoid the princes' revenge (Jer. 38:24-27).²⁶⁹

In this section, Zedekiah is never openly and personally reproached. It is not Zedekiah's fault that he failed to capitulate to Babylon. It is in fact the princes' fault, the people around Zedekiah, the upper echelons of Judean aristocracy. According to Stipp, Zedekiah's fault was to be weak, not wicked, and to be unable to resist the pressure from people around him.²⁷⁰

Politically, Jeremiah is pro-Babylonian, urging the king to accept Babylonian rule and not to disobey or fight against Babylon. Theologically, Jeremiah sees Babylon as YHWH's instrument whose purpose is to punish the people for their sins. It seems that Judean aristocracy still supported some form of resistance against Babylon.

Although the relationship between the author of the book of Jeremiah and the way he describes Zedekiah and Jehoiachin is very complex, one can see how gradually Zedekiah has become a king who "did what was evil in the sight of the Lord" (2 Chr. 36:12-13).

To the author of the book of Jeremiah, neither Jehoiachin nor Zedekiah are as important as the people themselves. The message is aimed at the people not at the leaders per se. The writer simultaneously refers to both men as kings on numerous occasions. In Jeremiah 22, the author denounces three kings—Jehoahaz, Jehoiakim and Jehoiachin. Later on, the prophet denounces King Zedekiah too. The prophet speaks to the people rather than to the kings.

In Jeremiah 23:5-6 the prophet states:

²⁶⁸ Ibid., p. 631.

²⁶⁹ Ibid., p.631.

²⁷⁰ Ibid., p.632.

“The days are surely coming,” says the Lord, “when I will raise up for David a righteous Branch, and he shall reign as king and deal wisely, and shall execute justice and righteousness in the land. In his days Judah will be saved and Israel will live in safety. And this is the name by which he shall be called: ‘The Lord is our righteousness’.”

The writer of the book of Jeremiah communicates to the people: the exiles and the remnant in Jerusalem. Both Zedekiah and Jehoiachin are cursed, and the only way to continue the Davidic royal line according to the author of the book of Jeremiah is for God to raise the messianic king. In the absence of proper leadership, Jeremiah focuses on speaking to the people and advising them how to survive the turbulent times. YHWH, through the prophet, speaks to the people, denouncing the political figures. The word “king” is attributed to both Zedekiah and Jehoiachin in the book of Jeremiah. In the book of Ezekiel only Jehoiachin is referred to as the king.

The author of the book of Ezekiel transforms this theology. Due to living in Babylon and among the exiles, the prophet cannot allow ambiguity. The exiles must have some sense of continuity. They have already lost their country, their temple, their language and their God. Holding on to the king is the first step to restoration.

The book of Ezekiel decidedly deals with the ambiguity in regard to the identity of the king. The author clearly names Jehoiachin as “King Jehoiachin”. The author of the book of Ezekiel signals to his audience that it is Zedekiah who is insignificant and cannot help the exiles.

Zedekiah and Jehoiachin in the book of Ezekiel

Thematic development

It is highly likely that the author of the book of Ezekiel and his audience were aware of this tradition and of attempts to discredit Jehoiachin’s royal line. The author uses the expression “King Jehoiachin” as a marker to make his audience think about what is coming next and to signal his political and religious orientation.

By using the expression, the author activates the text found in Jeremiah 22. The text speaks of the death of Jehoiachin, who remained childless in Babylon. However, the author of the book of Ezekiel remains silent, adding to the anticipation.

Only in Ezekiel 17 does the author continue the story and masterfully uses the same argument that the author of the book of Jeremiah used against Jehoiachin, namely that of the royal offspring. Zedekiah has broken an oath with the Babylonian king and YHWH, and as a consequence Zedekiah will die in Babylon and when he dies the Davidic line will be continued through Jehoiachin.

Another important lexical feature is that when the author of Ezekiel speaks about Zedekiah he is called *בְּזֶרַע הַמְּלוּכָה* “of the royal seed”, recognising his royal background but clearly not calling him the king. In the book of Ezekiel, the term *הַנְּשִׁי* occurs 36 times—Contemporary: 15x, Zedekiah: 3x (12:10, 12; 21:25); Israelite: 4x (7:27; 19:1; 21:12; 22:6); Non-Israelite: 8x (26:16; 27:21; 30:13; 32:29; 38:2, 3; 39:1, 18); Future: 21x (34:24; 37:25; 44:3; 45:7, 8, 9, 16, 17, 22; 46:2, 4, 8, 10, 12, 16, 17, 18; 48:21, 21, 22, 23).²⁷¹

Zedekiah is often designated as *הַנְּשִׂי* prince/leader” (Ezek. 12:10, 21:25), “unhallowed among the wicked” (21:30); the “strong stem”, “withered and consumed” (19:12); “royal seed” not to be trusted (17:13); a fickle “seed of the land” to be contrasted to Jerusalem’s exiled king (17:12); he is blinded (12:13); brought to Babylon for YHWH’s judgment (12:13) and dies in Babylon (12:13).²⁷²

The term *הַמֶּלֶךְ* occurs 33 times in the book of Ezekiel—Contemporary: 28x; Jehoiachin: 2x (1:2; 17:12); General (Israelite): 1x (7:27); General (non-Israelite): 4x (27:33, 35; 28:17; 32:10); Nebuchadnezzar: 13x (17:12, 16; 19:9; 21:19, 21; 24:2; 26:7; 29:18, 19; 30:10, 24, 25; 32:11); Pharaoh: 6x (29:2, 3; 30:21, 22; 31:2; 32:2); Tyre: 1x (28:12); Edom: 1x (32:29); Other: 3x (43:7, 9); Future: 2x “David” (37:22, 24).²⁷³

It is clear that the author of the book of Ezekiel uses the term *הַמֶּלֶךְ* only for Nebuchadnezzar, Pharaoh, the kings of the smaller nations and Jehoiachin, who is the only legitimate king in the author’s eyes.

²⁷¹ C. R. Seitz, *Theology in Conflict - Reactions to the Exile in the Book of Jeremiah* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1989), p.122.

²⁷² Ibid.

²⁷³ Ibid., pp.125-26.

It appears that the author sees the Babylonian exile as something that resembles Israel's years in the wilderness. There is a king of the kings (Nebuchadnezzar in the author's case and Pharaoh in the period of wilderness) and numerous minor kings and princes found in both periods. The territory of Judah is greatly reduced and therefore the leader can only be called a **נְשִׂיָּא** not a **מֶלֶךְ**.

According to the author, there is no king in Israel, but the contentious message to his audience is that there is a king in exile. Faced with plurality of leadership in the capital (Josiah followed by Jehoiakim, Jehoahaz, Zedekiah and Jehoiachin), compounded by the fact that the principle of primogeniture was set aside in the case of Jehoahaz and the fact that foreign nations such as Egypt and Babylon are determining the kings,²⁷⁴ the author is making a statement that Jehoiachin is the only legitimate king.

The author's intention is to make Zedekiah insignificant. Another tool that the author uses to make this point is not mentioning Zedekiah's name at all. Passages such as Ezekiel 12:12; 17:5, 13, 20; 19:12-13; 21:25 speak about Zedekiah but at the same time carefully avoid mentioning his name. By mentioning Jehoiachin's name once at the beginning of the book and by not mentioning Zedekiah's name at all thereafter, the author makes his point loud and clear: Zedekiah does not even deserve to be mentioned. One could say that every reference in the book of Ezekiel which is about Zedekiah is one of "sure and final judgment".²⁷⁵

One could say that both Jeremiah and Ezekiel are politically pro-Babylonian. Both prophets speak against any type of uprising or disobedience to the Babylonian regime (Jer. 27). The author of the book of Ezekiel, by mentioning King Jehoiachin, signals to his audience that the hope of the nation does not lie with the remnant in Jerusalem but with the exiles and the exiled king.²⁷⁶

This message must have been highly controversial, as it is likely that there were elements within Ezekiel's own community who supported Zedekiah's open revolt against Babylon and his strategic political manoeuvring with neighbouring countries Edom, Moab, Ammon and Tyre.

²⁷⁴ Ibid., p.130.

²⁷⁵ Ibid., p. 122.

²⁷⁶ Block, *The Book of Ezekiel: Chapters 1-24*, p.539.

According to the book of Jeremiah, the exiles were encouraged by false prophets such as Hananiah to rebel and return to Jerusalem (Jer. 28).

It is plausible to say that the audience was aware of Zedekiah's political machinations since he visited Babylon presumably to explain his action of sending emissaries to the neighbouring countries (Jer. 51:59). Even Jeremiah speaks against this political move, denouncing Zedekiah in Jeremiah 27.

It is also likely that a new pharaoh, Psammetichus II (594-589), encouraged Zedekiah to rebel, promising him military help. However, when help was needed, Hophar (589-570), who succeeded Psammetichus II, refused it.²⁷⁷ The author of the book of Ezekiel openly proclaims that Zedekiah's political intrigues are destined to fail.

The author states that breaking the oath to the king of Babylon and YHWH is the reason why YHWH will punish Zedekiah. He disobeyed his overlord and God by swearing by YHWH's name. Zedekiah violated the covenant. According to 2 Chronicles 36:13, Nebuchadnezzar forced Zedekiah to swear his allegiance to him by swearing by YHWH. Therefore, YHWH became divine guarantor to the treaty. Zedekiah broke the treaty and therefore challenged YHWH.²⁷⁸

The author of the book of Ezekiel proceeds by saying that YHWH will "bring low the high tree, I make high the low tree" (Ezek. 17:24). The "low tree" must be seen as Jehoiachin. The author does not mention the name; perhaps the message is too provocative and he must use a metaphor to convey the message more subtly.

The young insignificant king who is in captivity will be the one who will continue the Davidic line, not the experienced king in Jerusalem who is versed in political games and is even trying to organise an army. The oracle is not so much about the re-enthronement per se as much as the statement that Jehoiachin is the only legitimate king.²⁷⁹

The anti-Zedekiah stance in the book of Ezekiel is evident. The author disagrees with Zedekiah politically and even more so theologically. Zedekiah represented an offshoot of the Davidic royal line, which was a result of political decisions by the Babylonian king. The author of the book of

²⁷⁷ Hummel, *Ezekiel 1-20*, p.514.

²⁷⁸ Block, *The Book of Ezekiel: Chapters 1-24*, p.547.

²⁷⁹ Seitz, *Theology in Conflict - Reactions to the Exile in the Book of Jeremiah*, p. 150.

Ezekiel depicts the remnant in Jerusalem as an unfaithful, idolatrous group of people (Ezek. 5-9) and their leader (not a king) Zedekiah as untrustworthy, preoccupied with politics and with a misplaced desire for the liberation of his land.

Zedekiah is a leader who defies Babylon and therefore YHWH, while Jehoiachin is the king who accepts Babylonian rule and obeys YHWH's will. It seems that in the book of Ezekiel Zedekiah's punishment is absolutely necessary due to his political unworthiness (Ezek. 17) and violation in the moral realm (Ezek. 19), both of which were an insult to YHWH's holiness.²⁸⁰

Summary

The book of Jeremiah is very ambiguous in terms of describing Zedekiah and Jehoiachin. The writer depicts King Zedekiah sometimes in a favourable light, while King Jehoiachin is portrayed extremely negatively, to the point that the prophet states that he will die cursed and childless in Babylon, thus ending Jehoiachin's royal blood line.

On the other hand, there are instances when King Jehoiachin is portrayed in a favourable light while Zedekiah is portrayed extremely negatively, stating that he (Zedekiah) will watch his children die and that he will also be exiled and die cursed in Babylon.

According to the author of the book of Jeremiah, the past four kings, including Zedekiah, were bad kings, and Jeremiah is prophesying about the Davidic king par excellence whom YHWH will raise and who will restore the nation and the country.

The author of the book of Jeremiah, like the author of the book of Ezekiel, is pro-Babylonian, if not politically then theologically, and both are against any kind of revolt against Babylon. The Babylonian king and his rule were seen by both prophets as the instruments by which YHWH punished his people for their sins.

The author of the book of Ezekiel states unequivocally that the only true Davidic king is King Jehoiachin. The true king is in Babylon among the exiles. Zedekiah is not worthy of mention. The writer cannot afford the confusion and ambiguity. His allegiance lies with King Jehoiachin.

According to the author of the book of Ezekiel, Zedekiah is guilty of two things:

²⁸⁰ Ibid., p.122.

- failing to understand that the only reason he is a leader is because YHWH through Nebuchadnezzar made him a leader in a binding covenant between the king and the vassal—not because Zedekiah had a dynastic right as his predecessor
- because of his political unworthiness avoiding the submission to Babylon and looking for support from Egypt.

As a result, Zedekiah, due to his political aspirations, broke the covenant with his overlord and therefore with YHWH.

Faced with the news about Zedekiah's political machination and misguided desire to free his land and his people from Babylonian rule, Ezekiel gives a most controversial message in the second verse of the first chapter. He mentions Jehoiachin and calls him "the King".

"The hand of YHWH was on him"

The expression "the hand of YHWH" is mentioned in the book of Ezekiel more times than in any other prophetic material. I will demonstrate how the expressions "strong hand and outstretched arm" were used in Egyptian royal attributes. The pharaohs were often described as conquerors whose names and royal titles contained references to a conquering arm or "strong/mighty arm". The origins of the expression "the hand of YHWH" lie in the Egyptian concept of pharaohs as divine warriors.

I will show how the Exodus tradition used and modified this expression in the way that the expression asserts YHWH's supremacy over the pharaoh, or Egyptian or any other gods because the pharaoh and other gods were presented as rivals to YHWH. In the Exodus tradition, YHWH is portrayed as the divine warrior and YHWH's strong hand or outstretched arm liberated the people of Israel and led them to the promised land.

In the book of Ezekiel the understanding of the expression is modified. In the book of Exodus "outstretched arm" and "strong hand" have strong militaristic connotations. However, a careful examination reveals that the expressions are also associated with the manifestation of divine power through disaster such as illness and plague.

In the book of Ezekiel a favourite expression is "the hand of YHWH was upon me/him". The expression implies a deeply personal experience. The author of the book of Ezekiel alludes to

four different texts—1 Kings 18:46; 2 Kings 3:15; Isaiah 8:11; Jeremiah 15:15—and uses the expression to proclaim his radical theology.

The statement **יְהוָה עָלָיו שָׁם יַד-יְהוָה** “the hand of YHWH was on him” also deserves a detailed analysis. There are approximately 200 references to “the hand of YHWH” in the Hebrew bible. I will explore the use of the term “the hand of the Lord” in extrabiblical and biblical material before I turn to examination of the expression in the book of Ezekiel, outlining the differences and similarities. I will argue that the expression serves as a marker to the audience, purpose of which is to signal the transformation, submission, authority and empowerment of the prophet by YHWH.

“Strong hand/outstretched arm”

Throughout Egyptian history, pharaohs were described as conquerors whose names and royal titles contained references to a conquering arm or “strong and mighty arm”. For example, one First Dynasty king is known as “Horus the fighter”,²⁸¹ the Hyksos king Apophis bears the title “Re is Lord or Possessor of a Strong Arm”,²⁸² Thutmose IV is called “Mighty Arm Who Subdues the Nine Bows”,²⁸³ and Amenhotep III is described as “Great of Arm, Smiter of Asiatics”.²⁸⁴

Seti I’s Two Ladies name is “Repenting of Births, Powerful of Arm Who Subdues the Nine Bows”,²⁸⁵ as well as “Great Arm”.²⁸⁶ Seti II omits part of Seti I’s title, retaining the title “Powerful of Arm Who Subdues the Nine Bows”.²⁸⁷ Ramses III bears the title “Lord of Powerful Arm Who Smites Asiatics”.²⁸⁸

²⁸¹ Henri Gauthier, *Le Livre Des Rois D'egypte. Recueil De Titres Et Protocoles Royaux, Suivi D'un Index Alphabetique*, vol. I-V (Cairo: Imprimerie de l'Institut Français d'Archéologie Orientale, 1917), Vol. I p.29.

²⁸² Ibid., Vol. II p.144.

²⁸³ Ibid., Vol. II p.295.

²⁸⁴ Ibid., Vol. II pp.307-08.

²⁸⁵ Ibid., Vol. III pp.13-14.

²⁸⁶ Ibid., Vol. III p.19.

²⁸⁷ Ibid., Vol. III p.135.

²⁸⁸ Ibid., Vol. III p.169.

From the Third Intermediate Period there is a decline in the frequency of the terminology relating to the king's conquering arm.²⁸⁹ For instance, Psammetichus I's Two Ladies name was *nb*, while Psammetichus II was also known as *wrs* "Strong Arm".²⁹⁰ Apries included *nb hpš* in both his Two Ladies name and Golden Horus name.²⁹¹ It is plausible to say that the author of Ezekiel was familiar with these titles, which he mocks in a word play on the Two Ladies Name of Apries.²⁹²

Sumerian, Babylonian and Assyrian royal titles only occasionally contain reference to the hand of the king seizing or conquering, and do not play a central role. The royal names and epithets do not incorporate these expressions.²⁹³

The hand or arm of God plays an important role in the Exodus material, in which the outstretched hands of YHWH or Moses are emphasised (Deut. 4:34; 5:15; 7:19; 11:2; 26:8).²⁹⁴ The Exodus tradition continually emphasises that Israel attained her freedom from Egypt by YHWH's action symbolised by God's victorious or conquering arm.²⁹⁵ The two most frequently occurring expressions in the books of Exodus and Deuteronomy are **בְּיַד הַזְּקָה** "strong hand" found in Exodus 3:19; 13:3, 14,16; 32:11; Deuteronomy 3:24; 6:21; 9:26 and **בְּזַרְעוֹ נְטוּיָהּ** "outstretched arm" found in Exodus 6:6 and Deuteronomy 9:29; 26:8. In Deuteronomy 4:34, 5:15 and 7:19 both expressions are found as parallelisms.

Besides these references, a number of variations can be found in poetic literature such as Exodus 15:6, 12, 16. Outside these references, when the word **זְרֹעַ** "arm" is mentioned it is usually applied to a warrior: Genesis 49:24; 2 Sam 1:10; 22:35; Judges 15:14; Ezekiel 30:21. The word

²⁸⁹ James K. Hoffmeier, "The Arm of God Versus the Arm of Pharaoh in the Exodus Narratives," *Biblica* 67, no. 3 (1986): p.383.

²⁹⁰ Gauthier, *Le Livre Des Rois D'egypte. Recueil De Titres Et Protocoles Royaux, Suivi D'un Index Alphabetique*, Vol. IV pp. 68, 77, 95, 99.

²⁹¹ *Ibid.*, Vol. IV pp.111, 04-05.

²⁹² Hoffmeier, "The Arm of God Versus the Arm of Pharaoh in the Exodus Narratives," p.384.

²⁹³ *Ibid.*, p.385.

²⁹⁴ Keith W. Carley, *Ezekiel among the Prophets: A Study of Ezekiel's Place in Prophetic Tradition*, *Studies in Biblical Theology 2nd Ser.*, 31 (London: SCM Press, 1975), p.13.

²⁹⁵ Hoffmeier, "The Arm of God Versus the Arm of Pharaoh in the Exodus Narratives," p.378.

כַּף “hand” is used in its military context: Exodus 6:1; Ezekiel 30:22; Judges 3:8; 6:1-2; 1 Samuel 12:9.²⁹⁶

Metaphorically, both words denote power or strength. In the book of Exodus, YHWH is seen as the divine warrior. The origins of this motif may lie in the Egyptian concept of pharaohs as divine warriors. It appears that this tradition was familiar to and was used by the authors of the book of Exodus and modified to suit their theology.²⁹⁷

It is plausible to say that the authors of the book of Exodus were familiar with such descriptions and used the well-known expressions to assert the supremacy of YHWH over the pharaoh and other gods.²⁹⁸

In Exodus 18:10-11 Jethro states:

...blessed be the Lord who has delivered you from the hand of Egypt, and from the hand of Pharaoh; who has delivered the people from under the hand of Egypt. Now I know that the Lord is greater than all the gods; truly, in any way in which they were proved against them.

The author of the book of Exodus is using and adapting the well-established Egyptian tradition in which the supremacy of the pharaoh is emphasised by the use of the words “strong arm/hand” in his royal title to suit his theology. Throughout the book of Exodus, expressions such as “strong hand” and “outstretched arm” are used almost ironically to emphasise the supremacy of YHWH over other gods.

It appears that the author of the book of Ezekiel was aware of the Exodus tradition and used this tradition to express his theology. In Ezekiel 20:33-34 the author states:

As I live, says the Lord GOD, surely with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, and with wrath poured out, I will be king over you. ³⁴ I will bring you out from the peoples and gather you out of the countries where you are scattered, with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, and with wrath poured out;

²⁹⁶ Ibid., p.379.

²⁹⁷ Ibid., p.385.

²⁹⁸ Ibid., p.387.

In this passage the author of the book of Ezekiel uses a traditional phrase (“wrath poured out”) and develops the theme by adding an unexpected twist: “in the new Exodus the ferocity that tradition asserted was unleashed upon Egypt in the old one will be turned against rebellious Israel in order to force it finally to accept what it never had before—God’s kingship over it in the land he chose for it.”²⁹⁹

In Ezekiel 30:20ff the author states:

In the eleventh year, in the first month, on the seventh day of the month, the word of the LORD came to me: ²¹ Mortal, I have broken the arm of Pharaoh king of Egypt; it has not been bound up for healing or wrapped with a bandage, so that it may become strong to wield the sword. ²² Therefore thus says the Lord GOD: I am against Pharaoh king of Egypt, and will break his arms, both the strong arm and the one that was broken; and I will make the sword fall from his hand. ²³ I will scatter the Egyptians among the nations, and disperse them throughout the lands. ²⁴ I will strengthen the arms of the king of Babylon, and put my sword in his hand; but I will break the arms of Pharaoh, and he will groan before him with the groans of one mortally wounded. ²⁵ I will strengthen the arms of the king of Babylon, but the arms of Pharaoh shall fall. And they shall know that I am the LORD, when I put my sword into the hand of the king of Babylon. He shall stretch it out against the land of Egypt, ²⁶ and I will scatter the Egyptians among the nations and disperse them throughout the countries. Then they shall know that I am the LORD.

According to this passage, it is YHWH the supreme God who broke both of Pharaoh’s hands and empowered the arm of the king of Babylon. YHWH is in absolute control of the historical events.

יְהוָה sometimes symbolises the power of YHWH in punishment (Exod. 3:20; Isa. 5:25ff; Ezek. 6:14), in deliverance (Exod. 13:3; Deut. 7:8; Psalm 109:27), in creation (Job 10:8; Psalms 8:6, 95:4f), in providence (Job 12:9; Psalms 95:7, 104:28) and in care and protection (2 Sam. 24:14; Psalms 31:5, 73:23).³⁰⁰ It emphasises and demonstrates the power of YHWH’s promises in history (1 Kgs 8:15, 24; 2 Chr. 6:4, 15), and acts in history where YHWH’s hand “strikes”

²⁹⁹ Greenberg, *Ezekiel 1-20: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, p.372.

³⁰⁰ Harry Mowley, *Guide to Old Testament Prophecy* (Guildford: Lutterworth Press, 1979), pp.23-24.

(1 Sam. 6:9), “takes” (Amos 9:2) or comes against people and individuals (Ruth 1:13; Exod. 9:3; Deut. 2:15).³⁰¹ The hand of YHWH is placed heavily upon people (1 Sam. 5:6). It can also describe divine anger or judgment (Isa. 5:25; 10:4).³⁰² YHWH lays his hand on Egypt (Exod.7:4), stretches out his hand (Ezek. 6:14), turns his hand against Jerusalem (Isa. 1:25) and waves his hand (Isa. 11:15).³⁰³

There are some positive references, for example, the hand of YHWH protects (Isa. 49:2; 51:16), or when upon a person it signifies faithfulness, influence and success (Ezra 7:6, 9; Neh. 2:8,18).³⁰⁴ יְהוָה יִרְדָּף is actively present in creation: it stretches out the heavens (Isa. 45:12), establishes the foundations of the earth (48:13) and pierces the serpent (Job 26:13, Isa. 51:9).³⁰⁵

“The hand of the Lord was upon him”

Besides the common expressions mentioned above, one can identify a more specific prophetic form of speech in which the expression “hand of YHWH” is used to demonstrate transformation, submission, authority and empowerment of the prophet by YHWH. The phrase is not unique to the book of Ezekiel since it occurs throughout the Hebrew bible. The expression “the hand of the Lord was upon me/him” implies a deeply personal experience of the prophet who is almost forcefully seized by the hand of YHWH.³⁰⁶

The expression occurs seven times in the book of Ezekiel (Ezek. 1:3; 3:14, 22; 8:1; 33:22; 37:1; 40:1) and highlights the physical aspect of Ezekiel’s prophetic role. “The hand of YHWH” emphasises absolute mastery over Ezekiel’s movements (Ezek. 3:22; 33:22) and transports him back and forth to remote places (Ezek. 8:1; 37:1; 40:1).³⁰⁷ Block states that “Ezekiel is a man seized by God” and that this “extraordinary divine physical control over the prophet distinguishes him from his professional colleagues more than any other quality”.³⁰⁸

³⁰¹ Zimmerli, *Ezekiel: A Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Ezekiel*, p.117.

³⁰² Carley, *Ezekiel among the Prophets: A Study of Ezekiel's Place in Prophetic Tradition*, p.14.

³⁰³ Zimmerli, *Ezekiel: A Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Ezekiel*, p.117.

³⁰⁴ Ibid.

³⁰⁵ Ibid.

³⁰⁶ Ibid.

³⁰⁷ Block, *The Book of Ezekiel: Chapters 1-24*, p.36.

³⁰⁸ Ibid.

The expression “embodies divine urgency, pressure or compulsion upon the prophet to do something”.³⁰⁹ The urgency, suddenness and overpowering nature of the vision are most evident in Ezekiel 8:1, where one finds the variation to the standard formula, “the hand of the Lord YHWH fell upon me”. This is the only passage where “hand” is the subject of the verb “to fall”. The expression also highlights another aspect, and that is the empowering of the prophet by YHWH.³¹⁰

The image of the hand plays an important role in the book of Ezekiel. The hand of YHWH is referred to seven times and the hands of the living creatures are mentioned several times as well as the hand of the divine man in Ezekiel 8:3, where Ezekiel calls it “the form of a hand”. “The hand of YHWH” is one of the major anthropomorphisms.³¹¹

The word “YHWH” is almost always used in the expression “the hand of X” and rarely with **אלהים** which may imply that the expression is a genuine Israelite formulation originating in the Exodus tradition.³¹² The only examples of **יד** *yād* being combined with **אל** or **אלהים** are: 1 Samuel 4:8; 5:11; (or in later passages: 2 Chron. 30:12; Ezra 7:9; 8:18, 22, 31; Neh. 2:8, 18; Job 19:21; 27:11; Psalm 10:12; Eccl. 2:24; 9:1).³¹³

However, Roberts challenges Zimmerli’s argument that **יד יהוה** is a genuine Israelite formulation which originated in the Exodus tradition, citing a number of non-biblical usages of the expression.³¹⁴ The interesting point is that in both Akkadian and Ugaritic sources “the hand of god(s)” is associated with the manifestation of divine power through a disaster such as illness or plague, which is, according to Roberts, the primary meaning of the expression.³¹⁵ YHWH (as well as Canaanite and Akkadian gods) manifests divine power through the employment of the expression “hand of X” and is associated with plague/sickness (Exod. 9:3).³¹⁶

³⁰⁹ Hummel, *Ezekiel 1-20*, p.56.

³¹⁰ Zimmerli, *Ezekiel: A Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Ezekiel*, p.117.

³¹¹ Hummel, *Ezekiel 1-20*, p.56.

³¹² Zimmerli, *Ezekiel: A Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Ezekiel*, p.117.

³¹³ VanGemeren, "New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology & Exegesis " p.403.

³¹⁴ J. J. M. Roberts, "The Hand of Yahweh," *Vetus Testamentum* 21, no. 2 (1971): p.245.

³¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p.249.

³¹⁶ *Ibid.*

Martens argues that the referent to the expression “with a strong hand and an outstretched arm” is YHWH’s power to cause plagues and disease. She meticulously examines all the passages in the books of Deuteronomy and Exodus, as well as all other references to the expression and its variants in the Hebrew bible, and concludes that the overall evidence of the entire biblical material strongly suggests that most of the passages involving the expression refer to YHWH causing plagues and diseases and primarily employing those as the means of bringing about the Exodus from Egypt.³¹⁷

Roberts argues that the expression “the hand of God” was not created by the Exodus tradition, but instead the use of this expression within prophetic tradition is a secondary development.³¹⁸ Once the relationship between the expression “hand of YHWH” and sickness is established, it is not surprising that the Hebrew (**הַתְּנוּבָה**) and Akkadian (*namhû*) verbs which are used to describe the behaviour of a mentally disturbed person and the behaviour of a prophet are identical.³¹⁹

Therefore, it is plausible to say that the expression **יָד־יְהוָה** was applied to the prophets exactly because of their unusual outward and ecstatic behaviour.

Summary

The earliest statements about a “strong or mighty” arm are found as epithets in Egyptian royal titles. The pharaohs had titles such as “Possessor of Strong Arm”, “Mighty Arm Who Subdues the Nine Bows” or “Great Arm”. Sumerian, Babylonian and Assyrian royal titles only occasionally contain the reference “conquering arm”.

In the Exodus material the expressions “strong hand” and “outstretched arms” are present and are used in connection with YHWH and Moses. In the Exodus material, YHWH is a divine warrior who asserts his supremacy over the pharaoh or other gods. Clearly, the motif of conquering arm and militaristic notions are borrowed from the Egyptian concept of pharaohs as divine warriors. The author of the book of Exodus ironically states that it is YHWH who is the divine warrior and the king, not the pharaoh.

³¹⁷ Karen Martens, “with a Strong Hand and an Outstretched Arm: The Meaning of the Expression *Byd Hzqh Wbzw Ntwyh*,” *Scandinavian Journal of the Old Testament*, no. 15 (2001): p.141.

³¹⁸ Roberts, “The Hand of Yahweh,” p.249.

³¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p.250.

The expression “the hand of YHWH” is mentioned in the book of Ezekiel more times than in any other prophetic material. In the book of Ezekiel the supremacy of YHWH is best demonstrated in 30:20ff, where YHWH breaks both of pharaoh’s arms and will strengthen the arms of the king of Babylon. As a twist, the prophet’s own people will feel the might of YHWH’s hand in 20:33-34, where YHWH will use his mighty hand to assert his kingship over his people. Once again the author of the book of Ezekiel explicitly states that the king of Babylon is an instrument of YHWH and the power that he has comes from YHWH not Marduk.

The expression “the hand of YHWH was upon him” implies a deeply personal, urgent, sudden experience. In the book of Ezekiel, YHWH has absolute control over the prophet’s movements. YHWH seizes the prophet, who has no choice but to proclaim his message to the rebellious house.

There are strong indications that the expression “the hand of X” did not originate in the Exodus tradition. The expression is associated with the manifestation of divine power through illness or plague. This is especially evident in Akkadian and Canaanite texts that the Exodus tradition follows closely. Almost all the passages in the book of Exodus involving the expression refer to God causing plagues and diseases.

Intertextual connections between 1 Kings 18:46; 2 Kings 3:15; Isaiah 8:11; Jeremiah 15:17 and Ezekiel 1:3

I will now examine intertextual connections between the four passages: 1 Kings 18:46; 2 Kings 3:15; Isaiah 8:11; Jeremiah 15:17 and Ezekiel 1:3 which contain the same expression “the hand of YHWH was upon X”. I will identify them and show how the author of the book of Ezekiel used and developed well-established traditions to present his situation and theology.

Identification

All the passages that will be examined below (1 Kgs 18:46; 2 Kgs 3:15; Isa. 8:11; Jer. 15:17 and Ezek. 1:3) share some common words or phrases, such as יְהוָה יָדוֹ. The texts also share some common concepts, such as the concept of correlation between “the hand of YHWH” and the movement of the prophet, the concept of “the hand of YHWH” being associated with a brief,

extremely intense, revelatory experience, and the concept of “the hand of YHWH” influencing the entire life of the prophet and his ministry.

There is one important difference. Unlike Elisha, the author depicts the prophet Ezekiel as someone who does not induce his revelatory experiences by some external means. The theology of the author of the book of Ezekiel is clear: only YHWH can induce a revelation.

Availability

It is plausible that the author of the book of Ezekiel and his audience were familiar with the expression used in the passages mentioned above. The expression itself is not unique to the book of Ezekiel. It is present throughout the Hebrew bible. However, the author of Ezekiel uses it more often than other prophets, highlighting the importance of it to him and his audience.

Lexical/conceptual dependence

1 Kings 18:46 states:

But the hand of the LORD was on Elijah; he girded up his loins and ran in front of Ahab to the entrance of Jezreel.

וַיֵּרֶד יְהוָה הַיָּתֵת אֶל-אֵלֶיָּהוּ וַיִּשְׁנֶס מִתַּנְיִו וַיֵּרֵץ לְפָנַי אַחָב עַד-בְּאֵכָה^{1Ki 18:46}
וַיֵּרַע אֱלֹהֵי:

The expression “the hand of YHWH was upon Elijah” is almost identical to those found in the book Ezekiel, apart from the use of the third person style and minor spelling differences.

1 Kings 18:46 is a part of the larger unit, 1 Kings 18:1-46. The chapter can be divided into three parts: 18:1-19, which deals with the preliminary meeting between Elijah and king Ahab; 18:20-40, which describes the contest between Elijah and the prophets of Baal and Asherah; and 18:41-46, which describes the end of drought and the return of rain.³²⁰

³²⁰ Walter Brueggemann, *1 & 2 Kings, Smyth & Helwys Bible Commentary* (Macon, Ga.: Smyth & Helwys, 2000), p.219.

Fretheim calls the story “a dramatized form of the First Commandment with special attention to the risk that the prophet plays on its behalf in the face of royal opposition and apostasy.”³²¹

Essentially, the prophet Elijah is fighting against idolatry on all socio-economic, political and religious levels. He enters the very centre of the domain of Baal (a god of rain, thunder, fertility and agriculture) and “with YHWH on his side goes for the jugular”.³²²

It is a fight between two systems of religion and two different world views. Brueggemann states “it is rather a deep and costly conflict between two contrasting perspectives on reality that are deeply rooted theologically and highly visible in the life and social practice of the community.”³²³ It appears that religious syncretism was so embedded in the society that after Elijah asks the audience to choose between YHWH and Baal they are silent, suggesting “a failure to understand the legitimacy of the question”.³²⁴

The language is surprisingly similar to the language and concepts found in Ezekiel 1. For instance, 1 Kings 18:41-46 speaks of: כִּי־קוֹל הַמָּוֶן —“for the abundance of sound of rain”, וַיִּגְהַר אֶרֶצָה —“and he stretched out on the earth,” פָּנָיו —“his face,” וְהַשָּׁמַיִם —“that the heavens,” מִתְּתִירוֹ —“great/heavy rain.” וְנֶשֶׁם גָּדוֹל —“dark/thick clouds and wind,” עֲבָיִם וְרוּחַ —“his loins”.

In Ezekiel 1, one finds the following language: כְּקוֹל מַיִם רַבִּים —“like the sound of great waters”, v.24, הָאָרֶץ —“the earth”, v.19, נִטְוִי —“stretched out”, v.22, פָּנָי —“the face of”, v.10, הַשָּׁמַיִם —“the heavens”, v.1, בְּעָנָן —“cloud”, v.28, הָרוּחַ —“the spirit”, v.20, מִתְּתִירוֹ —“his loins”, v.27.

The story of the contest between Elijah and the prophets of Baal is a story about YHWH as the Living God, God Creator. In the story, Elijah was facing apostasy and idolatry at all levels of his

³²¹ Terence E. Fretheim, *First and Second Kings*, 1st ed., *Westminster Bible Companion* (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox Press, 1999), p.102.

³²² Ibid.

³²³ Brueggemann, *1 & 2 Kings*, p. 219.

³²⁴ Gina Hens-Piazza, *1-2 Kings, Abingdon Old Testament Commentaries* (Nashville, Tenn. Edinburgh: Abingdon; Alban, 2006), p.182.

society, from the king himself to ordinary people. The situation that the author of the book of Ezekiel found himself in is very similar.

Idolatry in Jerusalem as well as around his audience in Babylon was ingrained in the fabric of the society. Similarly to Elijah, the prophet Ezekiel is fighting against idolatry at all levels of his society from the 70 elders of the house of Israel and Jaazaniah son of Shaphan, to the women weeping for Tammuz, to 25 men worshipping the Sun.

It is plausible to say that the author of the book of Ezekiel is using the phrase “the hand of the Lord was upon me” as a marker that would activate the text about the contest between Elijah and the prophets of Baal. In this way, the author is preparing his audience for what is about to come: an even worse case of idolatry than the one witnessed by Elijah.

The audience will hear about abominations in the temple itself—the heart of the society. The audience’s immediate reaction would be to think that YHWH would prevail. What the audience still does not know is that the apostasy is so great that it will drive YHWH’s presence away from the temple. The unthinkable will take place.

Throughout the first chapter of Ezekiel, the author is using the same or similar words as those found in 1 Kings 18:41- 46. In Ezekiel 1, YHWH is on the move. The language used reminds the audience of the creation, with the clear purpose of depicting YHWH as God the Creator (the sound of rushing waters, clouds, wind and heavy rain). This paragraph also can be seen as an introduction to the theophany depicted in 1 Kings 19.

Thematic development

The main difference between the story in 1 Kings 18 and Ezekiel 1 is that the author of the book of Ezekiel modifies the expression found in 1 Kings 18:45 “the heavens grew black with clouds and wind” to the remarkable statement “the heavens were opened”. Furthermore, the mostly auditory perception of theophany in 1 Kings 19 is replaced by a detailed, mostly visual theophany in Ezekiel 1.

The author of the book of 1 Kings is following well-established tradition in depicting YHWH. Theophany, as in Moses’ case, is happening on a mountain, followed by atmospheric phenomena

(clouds, fire, rain) where YHWH is “passing through.” The visual elements of the theophany are secondary while the auditory perception is emphasised.

The author of Ezekiel develops this tradition, giving more prominence to the visual elements. He is doing this to point out the urgency of the message, the uniqueness of the vision and the unique cultural and religious setting of Babylon.

The most effective way to depict this is by focusing on the glory of the Lord and its visual elements. Only when the audience hears that the prophet has seen the glory of the Lord leaving the temple will they realise the seriousness of their situation.

YHWH in the book of Ezekiel is vividly revealed but not seen. YHWH opens the heavens and lets the prophet see celestial realities. YHWH stops short of allowing the prophet to see God *per se*, but allows him to see far more than any other prophet. Ezekiel does not have to climb a mountain to see God in “passing”. YHWH comes to the prophet in the valley of the river Kebar.

The author of the book of Ezekiel is using the tradition found in 1 Kings, according to which YHWH’s hand is associated with total mastery of the prophet’s movements and the total dependence of the prophet, and symbolically through him the total dependence of the nation on YHWH.

The emphasis should not be on whether “the hand of YHWH” somehow infused extraordinary strength into Elijah but instead on the association of the hand and movement from one place to another.³²⁵ It appears that in the process of transmission of the text an unexciting journey of the prophet from Carmel to Jezreel came to be understood as being achieved with YHWH’s active assistance, imparting to the prophet superhuman power and stamina.³²⁶

In the book of Ezekiel the hand of the Lord controls the prophet’s movements. The hand of the Lord transports the prophet from one place to another, or as another development prevents the prophet from moving. The prophet cannot prophesy, move, speak or do anything else as a prophet without the hand of the Lord being first laid on him. Furthermore, the hand of the Lord is mentioned every time the prophet is about to receive a revelation from YHWH.

³²⁵ Carley, *Ezekiel among the Prophets: A Study of Ezekiel's Place in Prophetic Tradition*, p.15.

³²⁶ *Ibid.*, p.16.

Lexical/conceptual dependence

2 Kings 3:15 is part of a larger unit, 2 Kings 3:1-27, which can be divided into three main sections: 2 Kings 3:1-3 which is a typical chronological introduction; verses 4-25 which depict the united Israelite, Judean and Edomite attack against the Moabites; and verses 26-27 which describe the unexpected retreat of the allies to their homeland.³²⁷

2 Kings 3:15 states:

“...But get me a musician.” And then, while the musician was playing, the power (the hand) of the LORD came on him.

וְעָתָה קְחוּ-לִי מִנְגֵן וְהָיָה כִּנְנוֹן הַמְּנַנֵּן וַתְּהִי עָלָיו יַד-יְהוָה: ^{2Ki 3:15}

2 Kings 3:15 describes how “the hand of YHWH” came on Elisha with the help of a musician, causing him to experience a revelation. Carley argues that the word וְהָיָה implies a continuous action in the past or an action that was repeated in the past which would imply that this was not an isolated event but a regular one.³²⁸

There are other passages in the Hebrew bible in which music is associated with revelation and is used to obtain it, for example, 1 Samuel 10:5-7. Even though in this example it is “the spirit of YHWH” who causes that person to become transformed, it was the music that was used to “condition” the prophet’s mind for the coming revelation.³²⁹ The passage also implies that Elisha could therefore arrange the revelation and that the prophet was in a state of trance intruded upon by the hand of YHWH or the spirit of YHWH. The prophet becomes “an access point through which the intention of God may be operative in real life”.³³⁰

As in passages mentioned above, a body of water is referred to (v.16). The water does not come by natural means. YHWH, not Baal, is the one who causes it to come. YHWH once again is

³²⁷ T. R. Hobbs, *2 Kings, Word Biblical Commentary V. 13* (Waco, Tex.: Word Books, 1985), p.31.

³²⁸ Carley, *Ezekiel among the Prophets: A Study of Ezekiel's Place in Prophetic Tradition*, p.17.

³²⁹ Ibid., p.19.

³³⁰ Brueggemann, *1 & 2 Kings*, p.309.

clearly depicted as the God of Creation. The same God creator will later on act in the historical world in the battle between the coalition and the kingdom of Moab.³³¹

The phrase “the hand of the Lord” is identical to the one found in Ezekiel 1:3. The phrase clearly marks Elisha as the prophet of YHWH and gives him the necessary authority.

Nevertheless, if the audience of the author of the book of Ezekiel perceives the phrase as a marker which activates the entire story of Elisha, Jehoram and Jehoshaphat, not just verse 15, the phrase does much more than giving to the prophet Ezekiel the same authority and respect that Elisha enjoyed. The story is about the two kings, one good and one evil, and the parallels between this story and the story of Zedekiah and Jehoiachin become evident.

In 2 Kings 3:4-25, and especially verses 13-19, Elisha makes his opposition against King Jehoram very clear, and his support and respect for King Jehoshaphat of Judah even clearer. King Jehoram never embraced YHWH wholeheartedly despite some minor reforms.

Throughout this section, King Jehoram blames YHWH for the situation he finds himself in, interprets divine motives as deceitful, and leads his people into a battle and behaviour which was specifically prohibited by Deuteronomistic Code, inciting his enemy to commit a great abomination (sacrificing an innocent child).³³²

Elisha could not be more direct in expressing his opposition to the king of Israel and charging him with idolatry than he is in verses 13 and 14:

Elisha said to the king of Israel, “What have I to do with you? Go to your father's prophets or to your mother's.” But the king of Israel said to him, “No; it is the LORD who has summoned us, three kings, only to be handed over to Moab.”¹⁴ Elisha said, “As the LORD of hosts lives, whom I serve, were it not that I have regard for King Jehoshaphat of Judah, I would give you neither a look nor a glance.”

At the same time, Elisha shows the utmost respect for and supports the Davidic king, Jehoshaphat. Elisha considers Jehoram's request only because Jehoshaphat is present with him,

³³¹ Marvin A. Sweeney, *1 & 2 Kings: A Commentary, The Old Testament Library* (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox Press, 2007), p.283.

³³² Hens-Piazza, *1-2 Kings*, pp.247-48.

which is consistent with the generally high regard for Judean kings in the Hebrew bible (1 Kgs 22:41-46).³³³

It is plausible to say that by mentioning the phrase “the hand of the Lord” the author of the book of Ezekiel was alluding more to the story of the two kings, one evil king who was practising idolatry and leading his people into a total demise, and the king of the Davidic line who was good in the sight of God and had the support of the prophet and the people.

In Ezekiel 1:2 the author unmistakably declares his support for the exiled King Jehoiachin when he mentions him at the beginning of the chapter and the book. As the author of the book continues the story of the prophet Ezekiel, one can clearly detect the author’s opposition to the vassal king Zedekiah. When the prophet is transported in the vision to Jerusalem he can see all the abominations and idolatry penetrating all levels of the society and implicitly blames the vassal king for it.

Once again the author is reminding his audience using a well-established tradition (the story of the three kings and Elisha) that Jehoiachin is the only legitimate king of the Davidic line, that Zedekiah, back in Jerusalem, is leading his people to total annihilation and away from God, that the prophet Ezekiel is an authentic mediator between YHWH and his people, that YHWH never stopped supporting his people, that YHWH is God Creator who is involved also in historical acts, including the exile.

Furthermore, the author reminds his audience that God in his infinite wisdom can sometimes allow something unthinkable or unexpected to happen. For instance, in the story of Elisha and the three kings, even though it was prophesied that the coalition would win at the end, due to Jehoram’s unfaithfulness the environment was destroyed, an innocent child was sacrificed and the alliance went back without actually conquering Moab.

Similarly, in the case of Ezekiel’s audience the unthinkable happened. Jerusalem fell, the temple was desecrated, idolatry was penetrating every level of the society and the people found themselves in a foreign land due to their own unfaithfulness and the unfaithfulness of their

³³³ Sweeney, *I & II Kings : A Commentary*, p.283.

leaders. The author of the book of Ezekiel assures his audience that what has happened to them and the situation they find themselves in is a part of God's plan.

Thematic development

Perhaps the most intriguing thematic development is the fact that the author of the book of Ezekiel departs from well-known tradition found in the early prophetic material that prophets used music to make themselves accessible to God's revelation. Music seems to be a common means of evoking ecstasy among early prophets, such as the band of prophets in Gibeah whom Saul met (1 Sam. 10:5) and Elisha (2 Kgs 3:15).³³⁴

The author of the book of Ezekiel departs from this tradition. It seems that one of the author's concerns was the fact that the early prophets needed an external stimulus to be able to receive the message. However, this implies that a prophet—a mortal—has some control over when and how he receives the revelation from YHWH, which in turn implies that the prophet is in control of the revelation, not YHWH.

The author of the book wants to make sure that his audience understands that the prophet Ezekiel has no choice but to proclaim the message from God to his audience, that he cannot control it or manipulate it by any means. The message the author is conveying is that it is YHWH who seizes the prophet by placing his hand on him and that it is YHWH who is in control of the prophet physically and otherwise.

The prophet Ezekiel is not a mere instrument in proclaiming God's will. He is fully conscious and he even complains to God during the revelation, but at the same time he does not have any control over the revelation itself. It is YHWH who is in absolute control. YHWH can choose to make a revelation to the prophet at any time and any place (for example, next to the river Kebar or in Ezekiel's house).

Isaiah 8:11 is the start of a new section, 8:11-23, which is imbedded in a larger section, Isaiah 7:1-39:8, and it deals with the basic question: whom shall we trust—YHWH or earthly powers, namely Assyria? It appears that the prophet Isaiah is addressing his inner circle. YHWH urges him and his inner circle not to follow "this people". Most probably the expression refers to the

³³⁴ Johannes Lindblom, *Prophecy in Ancient Israel* (Oxford, Oxfordshire: Blackwell, 1962), p.59.

kingdom of Israel and warns them of consequences if they join the rebellion against Assyria. The prophet Isaiah proclaims that it is YHWH who brought Assyria to power and to go against Assyria is to go against YHWH.³³⁵

Lexical/conceptual dependence

Isaiah 8:11 states:

For the LORD spoke thus to me while his hand was strong upon me, and warned me not to walk in the way of this people, saying...

כִּי כֹה אָמַר יְהוָה אֵלַי פְּחֹזְקֵת הַיָּד וַיִּסְרְנֵי מִלְכַּת בְּרַרְךָ הָעַם־הַזֶּה לְאָמַר: ^{Isa 8:11}

The author states in Isaiah 8:11 that YHWH spoke to the prophet with a strong hand upon him, which is indicative of a brief and intense spiritual experience.³³⁶ Carley agrees and states that it appears that in Isaiah's case the hand of the Lord is associated with a brief, extremely intense, revelatory experience.³³⁷ The author of the book of Isaiah uses a well-known tradition of the "hand of the Lord" seizing the prophet and describing the prophetic experience. However, the author does not mention the expression itself and does not say that the seizing caught hold of him.³³⁸

The closest parallel is to be found in Ezekiel 3:14 ("the hand of the Lord being strong upon me"). Wildberger does not doubt that this was an ecstatic experience and states that because Isaiah is so ambiguous (not mentioning explicitly that the hand of YHWH seized him) "his listeners are brought into the arena of that which is full of mystery, that which takes place which cannot be analysed rationally; one cannot miss seeing that he is hesitant when it comes to articulating what one cannot put in words."³³⁹

³³⁵ John D. W. Watts, *Isaiah 1-33, Word Biblical Commentary V. 24* (Waco, Tex.: Word Books, 1985), p.120.

³³⁶ John Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah - Chapters 1-39, The New International Commentary on the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1986), p.232.

³³⁷ Carley, *Ezekiel among the Prophets: A Study of Ezekiel's Place in Prophetic Tradition*, p.22.

³³⁸ Watts, *Isaiah 1-33*, p.357.

³³⁹ Hans Wildberger, *Isaiah: A Continental Commentary, Continental Commentaries* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991), p.357.

There is no similarity between this account and previous prophetic accounts described above (1 Kgs 18:46; 2 Kgs 3:15). Isaiah cannot help inducing a revelation by human means; he is not transported from place to place; his understanding of *יְהוָה יְהוָה* is different from that of Jeremiah, where the hand of the Lord was responsible for his isolation and hardship.

Thematic development

The author of the book of Ezekiel is influenced by the book of Isaiah. The author does not develop Isaiah's tradition as much as he draws upon it. The visionary experience of Isaiah clearly departs from the visionary experiences of the early prophets. Isaiah does not need external stimuli to receive a revelation. The vision of YHWH in Isaiah is also a detailed visual experience. The author of the book of Ezekiel follows these two traditions.

If the phrase "while his hand was strong upon me" is understood as a marker then it can be perceived as marker which activates the story of the prophet Isaiah and his audience. Like the audience of the prophet Ezekiel, Isaiah's audience was asking questions: Whom do we trust? YHWH or Assyria? Why is YHWH not leading his people into the battle against his enemies? Why is the Davidic king not doing the same?

Ezekiel's audience has the same questions: Whom do we trust? YHWH or Babylon? Why are YHWH and the Davidic king not leading their people against the enemy? Is assimilation the best answer? Is the resistance futile?

The audience is drawing upon the tradition that they know. However, even in the case of Isaiah, the prophet is developing the old tradition and is stating that these are not usual times and that YHWH was doing something different.³⁴⁰ The unusual times require an unusual approach of YHWH to his people. The visions of Isaiah and Ezekiel are atypical. In Isaiah's case he is declaring to his audience that if they want to question someone then that someone is YHWH, not Assyria, which is a mere instrument of God's will.

Similarly, the author of the book of Ezekiel declares to his audience that the situation is almost incomprehensible and hard to accept. However, it is the will of YHWH that the people are exiled, that Babylon rise as the regional power and that the temple is desecrated. The author is

³⁴⁰ Watts, *Isaiah 1-33*, p.121.

clearly stating that it is due to his audience's unfaithfulness that they are in the situation that they now find themselves. YHWH had no choice but to repeatedly warn his people through Babylonian oppression, and when even that failed to change the hearts of his people to finally depart in his holiness.

Any resistance or opposition to Babylon is futile, since that would be resistance and opposition to YHWH, who placed Babylon in a position of power. Instead of attempting to change the world around themselves, Ezekiel's audience is urged to accept the situation and to try to change themselves so that they can reconnect with their God. Once again the author reminds his audience, drawing upon Isaiah's tradition, that YHWH is in absolute control of historical events. Ezekiel and his audience must trust only in YHWH.

Lexical/conceptual dependence

Jeremiah 15:17 states:

I did not sit in the company of merrymakers, nor did I rejoice; under the weight of your hand I sat alone, for you had filled me with indignation

לֹא־יִשְׁבְּתִי בְּסוּד־מְשַׁחֲקִים וְאֶעֱלֶז מִפְּנֵי יָדְךָ בְּדָרַךְ יִשְׁבְּתִי כִּי־זַעַם מְלֵאֲתָנִי: ^{Jer 15:17}

This verse is a part of a large section spanning two chapters, Jeremiah 14:1-16:21, which can be divided into three subsections: Jeremiah 14:1-15:9, which deals with drought and destruction proclaiming YHWH's judgment; 15:10-21, describing the social isolation Jeremiah experienced; and 16:1-21, a section which describes Jeremiah's life (refraining from marriage and attending social events).³⁴¹

Jeremiah was Ezekiel's contemporary, therefore it is likely that the author of Ezekiel was aware of Jeremiah's prophecies and the language/tradition that he used. This is the only passage in the book of Jeremiah where the hand of YHWH is used in connection with prophetic experience.³⁴²

³⁴¹ Peter C. Craigie, Page H. Kelley, and Joel F. Drinkard, *Jeremiah 1-25, Word Biblical Commentary V. 26* (Dallas, Tex.: Word Books, 1991), p.194.

³⁴² William L. Holladay and Paul D. Hanson, *Jeremiah 1: A Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Jeremiah, Chapters 1-25, Hermeneia - a Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986), p.459.

In Jeremiah 15:17 the prophet states that the hand of the Lord was responsible for his isolation and hardship. The hand of YHWH in this context is not associated with moving from place to place, or with a special moment when revelation occurs, or with an altered state of mind. Rather it signifies the whole life of the prophet and the responsibilities bestowed on him by YHWH.³⁴³

Zimmerli stresses that the notion of “the hand of the Lord” in Jeremiah’s case is used to describe the physical pain of social ostracism. Because of the fact that the prophet is proclaiming the message of judgment, the hand of YHWH prohibits any spontaneous conversation.³⁴⁴ Prophet Jeremiah’s entire life is in the grip of the hand of the Lord.

This grip gives the prophet power and authority, but at the same time it prevents the prophet from partaking in normal everyday social events.³⁴⁵ Perhaps, unknown to his audience, the lifelong grip of the hand of the Lord changes the prophet’s behaviour, which as a result appears to his audience as bizarre and eccentric.

Thematic development

The author of the book of Ezekiel builds on this tradition. He clearly describes the prophet Ezekiel feeling the grip of the hand of YHWH and describes the physical consequences and the eccentric behaviour. The prophet Ezekiel is to speak words of judgment to his people despite their opposition. He is stunned after the vision for seven days, he is unable to talk unless instructed by God, he goes through a series of bizarre symbolic actions, his behaviour is questioned and misunderstood by his audience and he becomes isolated from his community.

The author of the book of Ezekiel builds on some of Jeremiah’s traditions. For instance, in Jeremiah 15:16 the author writes: “Your words were found, and I ate them, and your words became to me a joy and the delight of my heart; for I am called by your name, O LORD, God of hosts.”

In Ezekiel 2:8-3:3 the eating of the words becomes more elaborate: the eating of the words is described as a literal eating of the scroll, which is written on both sides. The scroll was given to the prophet by YHWH and the words were clearly the words of lamentation and mourning and

³⁴³ Carley, *Ezekiel among the Prophets: A Study of Ezekiel's Place in Prophetic Tradition*, p.20.

³⁴⁴ Zimmerli, *Ezekiel: A Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Ezekiel*, pp.117-18.

³⁴⁵ Holladay and Hanson, *Jeremiah 1: A Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Jeremiah, Chapters 1-25*, p.460.

woe. The author states that the words are the words of judgment and that nevertheless they were sweet as honey.

The twist is that when Jeremiah tasted the words of YHWH at the beginning of his ministry they tasted like honey. However, he is now fearing for his life and complaining that the hand of YHWH, which is leading him through life, is a burden.

On the contrary, the author of Ezekiel uses the same tradition but states that Ezekiel is aware that he is to proclaim the words of judgment to his people who will not be receptive to it and who will rise against him. Nevertheless, the prophet consciously accepts the burden of the hand of the Lord, accepting everything that comes with it. Only on one occasion did the prophet complain to YHWH, when YHWH asked him to cook his meal using human excrement (Ezek.4:14).

In the majority of the cases the hand of the Lord is the symbol of divine inspiration. However, in the case of Jeremiah, and under his influence Ezekiel, it is also a symbol of burden.

The hand of the Lord could be seen as the marker which will activate the story of Jeremiah. The story will explain some of Ezekiel's bizarre behaviour, giving him the power and authority of YHWH, and also it will remind Ezekiel's audience of Jeremiah 15:13-14:

Your wealth and your treasures I will give as plunder, without price, for all your sins, throughout all your territory. ¹⁴ I will make you serve your enemies in a land that you do not know, for in my anger a fire is kindled that shall burn forever.

This will remind Ezekiel's audience that it is because of their sins that they have been punished. Jerusalem and the temple have been destroyed and desecrated and they have been exiled to a foreign land. By alluding to this passage the author of the book of Ezekiel is preparing his audience for even worse news. Because of their sins and widespread apostasy, the glory of the Lord is about to leave the temple and Jerusalem.

There are a number of important similarities between the four passages discussed above and the book of Ezekiel in terms of how the motif יְהוָה בְּיָדוֹ is used. For instance, the phrase used in the book of Ezekiel is almost identical to the phrases used in the narratives of the book of Kings. In Ezekiel the motif of יְהוָה בְּיָדוֹ differentiates the major parts of the prophet's ministry and comes

at particular times, signifying a prophet's lifelong responsibility before God as in the book of Jeremiah. Like Elisha, but without use of external stimuli, Ezekiel experiences an altered state of mind to a degree when receiving the visions. Like Elijah, Ezekiel is transported from place to place.

Conclusion

In this chapter I examined four phrases: "the heavens were opened", "a divine vision", "the King Jehoiachin", and "the hand of the Lord". I have demonstrated that the author of the book of Ezekiel alluded to the flood narrative found in Genesis 7:1.

The intertextual connections between the two texts were identified and examined. Both texts (Ezek. 1:1-3 and Gen. 7:11) share common concepts, motifs and lexical similarities such as precise dating, a body of water, the heavens being opened, a leader (Noah/Ezekiel) in the midst of chaos and God's judgment, and an isolated community. The author of the book of Ezekiel uses the expression "the heavens were opened", a hapax legomenon which serves as a "marker" to activate both texts in the minds of the audience.

The author of Ezekiel is proclaiming a message to his audience. This message was so controversial that the author had to use the familiar story of Noah and the flood to convey it. The author compares his situation and the situation his audience find themselves in to the situation in which Noah and his family found themselves. Both leaders and their communities lost their country, city, place of worship, and entire social structure while being exiled and losing their faith. Both communities have been judged, and both communities are described as a faithful remnant. The author is stating that after the major cataclysm of the exile there is hope that a new world/social structure will be created (Ezek. 40-48).

The expression, "the heavens were opened" strongly suggests that the encounter between the prophet Ezekiel and YHWH is very different from the encounters between God and other prophets. The prophet Ezekiel is equal to Moses in the sense that he gazed at YHWH almost directly and that he saw YHWH in an unclean land. The communication between YHWH and his people is established again through the prophet Ezekiel. The author proclaims that God is not bound by geographical borders. YHWH is described as living, dynamic, mobile and not bound by space.

The author reminds his audience that if YHWH could communicate with Noah when there was no land mass in the midst of a cataclysmic event then YHWH is certainly not bound by the temple walls and is communicating to his people through the prophet Ezekiel. In the flood narrative only the “windows of heaven” were opened. In the book of Ezekiel the heavens were opened, leaving the audience in anticipation.

This research has examined the differences between *חֲזוֹן* and *מְרִאֵת* both translated in English as “vision” and shown that both expressions contain different information. The findings suggest that the expression *מְרִאֵת* is used to describe a prophet having a vision in the present, pinpointed in time by the exact date. *מְרִאֵת אֱלֹהִים* occurs three times in the book of Ezekiel—1:1, 8:3 and 40:2—at the crucial points in the book. The expression only appears in the book of Ezekiel to highlight the uniqueness of the prophet’s experience and the vision.

Intertextual connections between Numbers 12:5-8, Genesis 46:2-4 and Ezekiel 1:1 have been examined. The results of this study indicate that the texts share common lexical and thematic concepts, such as mention of “vision” *בְּמִרְאָה* - *וּמִרְאָה* (Num.12:6,8) *מְרִאֵת* (Ezek.1:1) and mention of the concept of “the form of YHWH” *וְתִבְנֵיתָ יְהוָה* in Numbers 12:8.

The author of the book of Ezekiel uses a similar expression *תִּבְנֵיתָ* in Ezekiel 8:3; 8:10; 10:8; 43:11, mention of “cloud” *עֲנָן* on several occasions in the first chapter of the book of Ezekiel and Numbers 12:5, the concept of mobility of YHWH, the concept of YHWH appearing to his servants in a vision bringing judgment, and the concept of YHWH leading his people into and out of an unclean land (Gen.46:2-4).

The word “vision” is the marker which activates both of the texts in the minds of Ezekiel’s audience. The word “vision” would bring to mind Jacob and Moses and this would reinforce Ezekiel’s authority as the prophet and the leader.

The author of the book of Ezekiel uses the story of Aaron, Miriam and Moses to reaffirm the special status that Moses had as the only person with whom YHWH spoke face to face. This study shows that the author equates the prophet Ezekiel with Moses and pre-empts any kind of rebellion by alluding to the story of Aaron and Miriam. By alluding to the story of Jacob the

author offers hope to the exiles, reminding them that as YHWH was with Jacob throughout his journey, YHWH is with the exiles throughout their journey.

After subtly proclaiming the fact that the vision the prophet received was unique and that the prophet has directly gazed at the glory of YHWH and the heavenly realm, the author continues to push the imagery to a new level. The mobility of YHWH, which is a vague concept in the books of Exodus and Numbers, becomes a crucial theme in the book of Ezekiel.

The movement of the glory of the Lord becomes an essential part of Ezekiel's theology. The author radically declares that YHWH is far from defeated by Marduk. YHWH has come in all his splendour to Babylon. YHWH is alive, present and communicating with his people through the prophet Ezekiel, giving them unprecedented access to divine realities, which has not been seen since the time of Moses. The prophet Ezekiel is described as someone who is equal to Moses in terms of his relationship with YHWH and who can lead his people back to God.

In addition, this research has shown that the author of the book of Ezekiel contentiously challenged the negative picture of Jehoiachin found in the book of Jeremiah. The author is subversively stating to his audience by using the term "King Jehoiachin" that the exiled king is the only rightful king with whom the continuation of the Davidic dynasty rests.

The expression is a marker which brings Jeremiah's tradition about Jehoiachin to the minds of the audience. The audience could have been aware of the two parallel Davidic royal lines. After initially declaring his allegiance to the exiled king, the author continues to elaborate his theology in Ezekiel 17. The author states that Zedekiah has broken an oath with Nebuchadnezzar and therefore with YHWH. As a consequence of being driven by politics and not being faithful and trustworthy, the author of the book proclaims that the Davidic royal line will continue with King Jehoiachin.

Initially, the author of Ezekiel discredits politically the leadership in Jerusalem by mentioning "King Jehoiachin". In the following chapters the author will discredit the remnant in Jerusalem on religious grounds, accusing them of idolatry. The author makes the clear statement that the hope and true leadership lies with Jehoiachin and the exiles in Babylon.

The earliest instances of the expression “the hand of the X” can be found in Egyptian royal attributes. The Exodus tradition modifies the expression and uses it to demonstrate YHWH’s supremacy over the pharaoh. The expression is used frequently in connection with plagues and disasters. In the book of Ezekiel the expression implies a deeply personal experience. The experience is never caused by some external means. The author is declaring that it is YHWH who initiates the revelation.

Intertextual connections between Ezekiel 1:3 and the phrase “the hand of the Lord”, and 1 Kings 18:46; 2 Kings 3:15; Isaiah 8:11 and Jeremiah 15:17 have been identified. The author is using the expression to simultaneously activate the story of Elijah in 1 Kings 18:46. By doing so the author is bringing to the minds of his audience one of the worst cases of apostasy. What the audience still does not know is that the idolatry in Jerusalem is far worse than the idolatry described in 1 Kings 18:46.

The glory of the Lord will eventually leave the temple. The expression is still used to depict YHWH’s total mastery of the prophet’s movement and the total dependence of the prophet, and through him the nation, on YHWH. Every time the prophet is about to receive the revelation the expression is used to highlight it.

In 2 Kings 3:15 Elisha uses external means to induce revelation. The author of Ezekiel modifies this tradition, clearly stating that the revelation can be initiated only by YHWH. The prophet cannot manipulate the message in any way. Furthermore, the expression is a marker which activates the text of 2 Kings 3:4-25. Elisha declares his opposition to King Jehoram and his support for the Davidic King Jehoshaphat. As mentioned above, the author of the book of Ezekiel declares his support of the exiled King Jehoiachin and his opposition to Zedekiah. The author subtly alludes to 2 Kings 3:4-25 to strengthen his argument.

In Isaiah 8:11 the expression “with a strong hand” is used to depict a brief, extremely intense spiritual experience. The author of the book of Ezekiel follows detailed visions found in the book of Isaiah where the prophet also does not need external stimuli to receive a revelation. The expression is a marker which activates Isaiah 8:11. The audience can draw a parallel between their experience and Isaiah’s situation described.

The author of the book of Isaiah states that his audience should not trust Assyria or rebel against it. The author of the book of Ezekiel draws on this tradition, proclaiming that YHWH only is to be trusted, and warns against rebelling against Babylon. Resistance to Assyria or Babylon is resistance to YHWH.

In the book of Jeremiah, the author talks about the weight of YHWH's hand. The grip of YHWH's hand is an intense and a lifelong experience, and leads the prophet into series of bizarre and eccentric behaviours. The author of the book of Ezekiel builds on this tradition. The prophet Ezekiel describes in detail the physical consequences and depicts a series of bizarre and eccentric behaviours. As with Jeremiah, the hand of the Lord forces him to be isolated from community, sometimes for a prolonged period of time.

The author of the book of Ezekiel develops the tradition of "eating" YHWH's words. In Ezekiel 2:8-3:3 this tradition is modified and elaborated. The prophet Ezekiel eats the words of YHWH and they taste like honey. Unlike Jeremiah, Ezekiel does not complain to YHWH about proclaiming the words of judgment. Ezekiel is fully aware that his audience is not receptive to his message. The prophet accepts the burden and every challenge that comes with it.

In the books of Jeremiah and Ezekiel the hand of the Lord is a symbol of divine inspiration. It gives the prophet the authority to speak on behalf of YHWH. In fact it is YHWH who is speaking through the prophet. YHWH is in control of historical events. The author of the book of Ezekiel and his audience find themselves in a very difficult situation which is almost incomprehensible. However, due to God being in control and the prophet Ezekiel being the mediator, there is hope that the situation will get better. This situation requires the author to draw on several traditions and to transform them to show his audience that even though they find themselves in a precarious situation, similar situations have occurred throughout history.

Chapter Five

Literary Criticism of Ezekiel 1:4-27

In this chapter I will examine Ezekiel 1:4-27 using literary criticism. The section will be divided into the following parts: Ezekiel 1:4-14 which deals with the living creatures; Ezekiel 1:15-21 which focuses on the wheels; Ezekiel 1:22-25 which describes the dome; and Ezekiel 1:26-27 describing the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the Lord. Ezekiel 1:28 will be examined separately in Chapter Seven of this thesis.

As mentioned in the methodology chapter of this thesis, literary criticism is vital in discerning the markers: the words, phrases or images which simultaneously activate two or more texts or images in the minds of the audience. If literary criticism is not used in a methodical way there is a risk that some of the markers will be overlooked and intertextual connections will not be acknowledged.

Literary criticism is critical in establishing if the two texts share the same, unique, theologically significant words or phrases. It also identifies word clusters, the frequency and dissemination of the words or phrases and any possible modifications or incongruity. Markers such as: דְמוּת “likeness,” רָקִיעַ “firmament,” נִטְוִי “stretched,” מַיִם רַבִּים “mighty waters,” שְׂרֵי “almighty,” סַפִּיר “sapphire,” and קְרָח “crystal” are used repeatedly in Ezekiel 1:22-28 and allude to the books of Genesis and Exodus.

In Ezekiel 1:4-27 the author of the book of Ezekiel continues to describe the throne–chariot vision in which YHWH is depicted as the king of the universe.³⁴⁶ As the vision comes closer, the author starts to describe the living creatures. He begins to explain the atmospheric phenomena coming from the north and describes the living creatures in minute detail.

The author of the book of Ezekiel uses language well attested in earlier biblical traditions that he would be familiar with—namely a storm theophany. Storm theophanies are common in biblical tradition, and imagery such as clouds, fire, lightning and brilliance would have been familiar to

³⁴⁶ Odell, *Ezekiel*, p.16.

the author and his audience (Psalm 18, Exodus 24:10-18).³⁴⁷ This vision is also often compared with throne theophanies like those found in Isaiah 6 and 1 Kings 22:19-23.

The mobility of YHWH is often cited as one of the reasons for this elaborate vision. However, if this were the only or dominant reason, such a detailed vision would seem excessive. The main reason for such a detailed vision is to depict YHWH as the supreme God, in all divine splendour, God of not only the Judean exiles but of the surrounding nations and the cosmos itself.³⁴⁸

The author of the book of Ezekiel continues to struggle with the language and how to describe the heavenly realities. The confusing language and difficult phrases and words in this section will be explored. I will propose that the confusion in characterising the living creatures as sometimes male and sometimes female is intentional in order to point out their supernatural nature. Their supernatural character is also highlighted by the difficulty that the author has in describing them as having a human form but with clear zoomorphic characteristics.

The complexity of what is described is emphasised by using words such as “their appearance” **מְרֹאָה** and **דְּמֹוֹת** “the likeness/form”. I will explore both expressions in more detail, concluding that both expressions are employed with the intention of depicting the uniqueness of the prophet’s vision to the audience.

The purpose of this chapter is to show that the author of the book of Ezekiel never identified the living creatures with the cherubim in Ezekiel 1. This only occurs in Ezekiel 10. Furthermore, the author clearly highlights that the living creatures are not autonomous beings and are unable to move, and that it is “the spirit” that makes them mobile and alive. The living creatures, as well as the wheels, are completely dependent on the spirit of YHWH.

In Ezekiel 1:15:21 the author focuses on the description of the wheels. The wheels are clearly the last barrier between the sacred and profane and between the earth and the heavenly realm. The author struggles with the words, trying to describe what he sees by once again using the words “appearance” **מְרֹאָה** and **דְּמֹוֹת** “likeness”. The emphasis is on the mobility of the wheels and the living creatures. In addition I will explore the fact that while “the spirit” is the animating

³⁴⁷ Ibid., p.18.

³⁴⁸ Ibid.

force which proceeds from YHWH. However, “spirit” is associated with the living creatures, giving them limited autonomy or rather the possibility of it.

The purpose of this chapter is to show that the living creatures, combined with the wheels, in Ezekiel 1 allude to Marduk’s war chariot described in Table IV 39-53. In Chapter Six of this thesis it will be argued that the living creatures are supernatural beings which were originally malevolent and a part of Marduk’s war machinery. However, YHWH has subdued them and they cannot even move without YHWH’s permission, while they still keep their menacing character. The supernatural beings are rendered powerless. YHWH is able to control the forces of chaos and re-establishes order.

Ezekiel 1:22-25 describes the dome. The verses clearly contain creation language; phrases such as “likeness,” “firmament” and “stretched” are used. The language alludes to the book of Genesis, order, and YHWH as the king of the universe. This is highlighted by the use of the phrase “the sound of mighty waters”. “The sound of commotion like the sound of army” adds to the menacing character of the living beings and YHWH coming to the heart of Marduk’s realm as God the Warrior and as God who will judge God’s people.

In one of the most controversial statements in Ezekiel 1:26-27 the author describes the divine character sitting on the throne as someone who appeared to have a human form. This will be explored in Chapter Six of this thesis, and intertextual connections with Genesis 1:26-27 will be highlighted.

The uniqueness and subversive nature of Ezekiel’s vision lies in the fact that the author of the book incorporates Ancient Near Eastern (ANE) iconography into the account. The author of the book of Ezekiel deliberately uses symbolism from the dominant religions of his time, radically transforming them (not simply imitating them) to develop a startling new claim that despite the reality of the exile, YHWH is the supreme being of the whole universe and YHWH is always in absolute control.³⁴⁹

³⁴⁹ Ibid., p.19.

The religious symbolism of the dominant empires (four-winged humanoid figures with heads of a lion, a bull, an eagle) and its adaptation by the author of the book of Ezekiel will be explored in detail in Chapter Six of this thesis.

The living creatures (1:4-14)

Verse 4

And I looked and behold a stormy wind came out of the north, a great cloud with brightness around it and fire flashing forth continually and in the middle of the fire, something like gleaming amber.

וְאָרָא וְהִנֵּה רוּחַ סְעָרָה בָּאָה מִן־הַצָּפוֹן עָנָן גָּדוֹל וְאֵשׁ
מִתְלַקְחַת וְנִגְהָ לּוֹ סָבִיב וּמִתּוֹכָהּ כְּעֵיִן הַחֲשֵׁמֶל מִתּוֹךְ הָאֵשׁ:

Storms were essential in Canaanite agricultural society. They could be both destructive and beneficial. They both terrified and inspired the people. Storms were naturally occurring phenomena. A northwesterly wind called *shamal* is known to bring storms over Iraq (Nippur lies half way between Baghdad and the Gulf).³⁵⁰

Nevertheless, the author of the book of Ezekiel transforms a completely natural phenomenon into something extraordinary. The biblical tradition describes prophetic visions as sometimes starting from an everyday occurrence which is suddenly transformed by the divine will into something extra ordinary (the burning bush—Exod. 3; the boiling pot—Jer. 1).³⁵¹

The motif of manifestation of YHWH as storm is ancient.³⁵² In storm theophanies, earthquakes, lightning, thunder, clouds, brightness, wind and fire all signify YHWH's appearance. The storm elements are sometimes anthropomorphised: for example, the storm becomes the divine warrior

³⁵⁰ Greenberg, *Ezekiel 1-20: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, p.42.

³⁵¹ Ibid.

³⁵² Zimmerli, *Ezekiel: A Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Ezekiel*, p.119.

(Judg.5:4); the thunder becomes YHWH's voice, the lightning his arrows and the brightness his clothes.³⁵³ Psalm 18 and Habakkuk 3:3-15 contain most of the natural elements.

In Psalm 18:10 the clouds are personified as cherubs: "He rode on a cherub, and flew; he came swiftly upon the wings of the wind." The "living creatures" in verse 5 are identified in chapter 10 as cherubim. However it is important to bear in mind the fact that the author does not identify the living beings with cherubim in Ezekiel 1.

Storm theophanies appear in a variety of contexts, from victory hymns (Judg. 5), songs of praise (Psalms 29, 97, 104), and as a part of larger context in which YHWH defeats the powers of chaos (Exod. 19-24), to being associated with YHWH's judgment (Nah.1).³⁵⁴ In Chapter Seven of this thesis I will argue that the author of the book of Ezekiel is alluding to and adapting the tradition found in Exodus 19-24.

The author of the book of Ezekiel continues to make intertextual connections with an ancient tradition, using the well-known language of Exodus and Deuteronomy with the intention of securing his audience's attention and proposing a new theology. Before the exile the author's audience believed that YHWH had established his presence permanently in the temple. However, the temple was now desecrated.

To explain this oxymoron, which posed serious theological questions, the author reverts back to an ancient tradition in which the Israelites witnessed YHWH coming to rescue his people while riding upon the storm clouds of heaven surrounded by lightning, fire and other audio-visual phenomena.

During the forty years of exile the Hebrews were led by a pillar of fire and a pillar of cloud (Exod. 13:17-22). YHWH came down on Mt Sinai surrounded by lightning, smoke and fire (Exod. 19:16-18). God is characterised as a consuming fire (Deut. 4:24).

The unusual storm was a sign to the audience that YHWH was approaching Babylon. This unusual storm was made even more unique by the fact that it was coming from the north. According to Ugaritic mythology, the god Baal and his consort Anat dwell on Mt Zaphon located

³⁵³ Odell, *Ezekiel*, p.19.

³⁵⁴ Ibid.

in northern Syria.³⁵⁵ The word *sapon* became the word for “north” in Hebrew, carrying over some mythological connotations.

The Israelites believed that the divine was situated in, and would come from, the north (Isa. 14:13).³⁵⁶ It is also possible that the author is alluding to Jeremiah 1:14: “Then the LORD said to me: Out of the north disaster shall break out on all the inhabitants of the land.”

The author uses the reference to the “north” as a literary device to catch the attention of the audience. After hearing the words “a stormy wind came out of the north” the audience is wondering: Is YHWH coming to Babylon? Is YHWH coming to judge or offer the hope? How is that possible? The imagery used is deliberately elusive and mysterious, the mystical invoking at the same time excitement and danger.³⁵⁷ Nevertheless, the author is clear that the heavens were opened and the divine throne is coming from above, from YHWH’s abode.³⁵⁸ Intertextual connections will be explored in Chapter Six of this thesis.

The author is starting to describe the vision in more detail as it comes closer from the north. The audience would be anticipating who is coming and why from the north. At this stage what the prophet sees is purely a visual phenomenon:

a great cloud with brightness around it and fire flashing forth continually, and in the middle of the fire, something like gleaming amber

The language that is used is strikingly similar to the language used in Exodus 19:16-19 and 24:10-18. The author of the book of Ezekiel at first (verse 4) uses words such as “cloud” and “fire”, but then proceeds to include words such as “thunder”, “lightning”, “smoke”, “sapphire”, “the appearance of the glory of the Lord” and references to loud noise in the following verses.

The phrase **אֵשׁ מִתְּלַחֲתָהּ** —fire flashing forth continually as translated by NRSV recurs only once more in Exodus 9:24. In both cases the fire is of supernatural origin and perhaps is better

³⁵⁵ Joyce, *Ezekiel: A Commentary*, p.68.

³⁵⁶ Greenberg, *Ezekiel 1-20: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, p.42.

³⁵⁷ Joyce, *Ezekiel: A Commentary*, p.69.

³⁵⁸ Zimmerli, *Ezekiel: A Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Ezekiel*, p.120.

translated as “fire caught on itself” as in not having an object onto which it has caught but instead denoting a fiery mass burning by itself in the air.³⁵⁹

The phenomenon of the fiery mass burning on itself continuously created intense radiance around the cloud which looked like the brightness of molten metal. The phrase **וְנִגְהָ לוֹ סָבִיב** —brightness around it or radiance is often associated with fire (Ezekiel 1:13;27) and is present in other theophanies (2 Sam. 22:13, Isa. 4:5).

The word **הַהַשְׁמָל** which is often translated as “amber” is only used by the author of the book of Ezekiel. It is repeated in Ezekiel 1:27, forming an *inclusio* which highlights its importance, and for the last time in Ezekiel 8:2. The word is used as simile with intention of describing something that is almost indescribable and of supernatural character. What the author sees belongs to heavenly realm and from this verse on he struggles to depict it to his audience. The word could have originated from Akkadian *elmēšu*, meaning a brilliant quasi-mythical precious stone. This precious stone was used for adoring divine statues intended for worship.

If this is correct, then it is possible that the author is using the word to describe not YHWH but a representation of YHWH.³⁶⁰ However, it is more likely that the quasi-mythical stone would indicate to the audience that the living creatures might be supernatural beings of the Babylonian pantheon. Even the ancient translators were unclear about the meaning of the word. The Syriac consistently avoids rendering the word.³⁶¹

The Greek translates it as *ēlectron* and the Latin as *electrum*. Electrum is a naturally occurring alloy of gold and silver which is found in Turkey and elsewhere and which can be an excellent conductor of electricity. The same word is used for a fossil resin amber which is also a good conductor of electricity.³⁶²

The word **הַהַשְׁמָל** plays an important part in the Jewish mystical Merkabah tradition. According to this tradition, the meditation upon Ezekiel 1 led to mystical ecstasy or even death for the

³⁵⁹ Greenberg, *Ezekiel 1-20: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, p.43.

³⁶⁰ Odell, *Ezekiel*, p.25.

³⁶¹ Joyce, *Ezekiel: A Commentary*, p.69.

³⁶² *Ibid.*, p.68.

unprepared. The Babylonian Talmud tells a story of a young boy who apprehended the meaning of the word **הַתְּשַׁמֵּל** after which the fire came out of **הַתְּשַׁמֵּל** and consumed him.³⁶³

The author is starting to struggle with language in his attempt to describe what he sees. The fire is clearly of supernatural character as it is catching and burning by itself. The word **הַתְּשַׁמֵּל** is untranslatable but clearly adds to the supernatural sense and uniqueness of what has been witnessed by the prophet.

Verse 5

In the midst of it was something like four living creatures. This was their appearance: they were of human form.

וּבְתוֹכָהּ דְּמִוֵּת אַרְבַּע חַיֹּת נֹהֵג מִרְאִיָּהֶן דְּמִוֵּת אָדָם לְהִנָּה

Verse 5 starts with the words “in the middle of”, which are also found in the concluding part of the previous verse, forming conduplication—the repetition of a word from the preceding sentence at the beginning of the new sentence. The expression is followed by another repetition of the word **דְּמִוֵּת**—pattern, form, shape, image. This representation is repeated twice in the same sentence.

The author continues to describe what he can see as the storm is approaching him. At this stage the focus is on the visual elements of the vision. The author is very careful in explaining what the prophet sees. Since he is dealing with heavenly realities, he struggles to find the words to describe what is in front of him. Nevertheless, he states clearly that what he sees are four living creatures—**חַיֹּת** which is the central motif—a recurrent image of this section of the text.

However, at this stage the author is not identifying the living creatures **חַיֹּת** as the cherubim **לְכַרְבִּיִּים**. As mentioned above, this will only happen in Ezekiel 10. It is interesting that the description of the verbal and pronominal references to the living creatures fluctuates significantly. Out of 45, 12 are the grammatically proper feminine plural; the others are

³⁶³ Ibid., p.69.

masculine plural, which highlights the fact that the living creatures are supernatural beings and hence androgynous.³⁶⁴ The fluctuation is especially evident in Ezekiel 1: 9-11 and 1:23-25.

Cherubim would be familiar to the exiles through their own tradition as well as through Mesopotamian traditions describing cherubim as supernatural beings. Cherubim were positioned at the entrance of the Garden of Eden after the fall of Adam and Eve to guard against the possibility of sinful humans entering the presence of God (Gen. 3:22-24). Cherubim likenesses were embroidered on the tabernacle curtains to guard the holy of holies against unauthorised entry (Exod. 26:31). Their likeness was also placed on the top of the ark bearing the covenant tablets affirming God's presence (Exod. 25:18-22).

It is highly likely that the exiles and the author of the book of Ezekiel were familiar with these stories and that they would perceive the main role of the cherubim as that of a guard. However, none of the accounts of the appearance of the glory of the Lord in the desert era mention the presence of the living creatures or cherubim (Exod. 16:7, 10; 24:16f; 33:22; 40:34f; Lev. 9:6, 23; Num. 14:10; 16:19; 20:6).³⁶⁵

It is an extraordinary fact that the author of the book of Ezekiel does not identify the living creatures with the cherubim in Ezekiel 1. I will argue in Chapter Six of this thesis that the living creatures were never meant to be identified with the cherubim. Instead they were supernatural beings found in Babylonian mythology.

The number four plays a significant role in the book of Ezekiel. It is mentioned 12 times in Ezekiel 1:5-21. Four is the number of totality. It appears in Ezekiel 8 as four acts of sin, in Ezekiel 14:12ff as four plagues, in Ezekiel 47:1ff as a fourfold measurement, and in Ezekiel 37:9 as four sides of the world by which the breath of YHWH's power comes to restore the dead to life. Finally there are the four living creatures who carry YHWH's throne, which symbolises the omnipotence and mobility of YHWH.³⁶⁶

There are also some intertextual connections between the use of the number four in Ezekiel 1 and the Enuma Elish account and the description of Marduk, which will be briefly explored below.

³⁶⁴ Greenberg, *Ezekiel 1-20: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, p.44.

³⁶⁵ Zimmerli, *Ezekiel: A Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Ezekiel*, p.120.

³⁶⁶ Ibid.

As mentioned above, a curious fact is that the author introduces the living beings but never calls them cherubim. There is no reason to doubt the high likelihood that the author and the audience were aware of what cherubim were, what they looked like and what was their role. The intertextual connections with Enuma Elish are starting to be evident.

“Their appearance”

מְרִאֲיָהוּן

The word מְרִאֲיָהוּן —(their) sight, appearance, supernatural vision—is the nominative of the root רָאָה—to see, have a vision, see!, look at, choose, and select.³⁶⁷ The root is attested in South Semitic languages such as Ethiopian, Arabic, Moabite, Ugarit and Aramaic. In all these languages the root constitutes “the semic basis for sensory perception: ‘see’ with one’s eyes”.³⁶⁸

In the Hebrew bible the verb has a number of different meanings. In everyday use it can denote: the physical sense of seeing, perceiving, watching, looking with one’s own eyes; the sense of seeing a vision or receiving a revelation; being mentally aware, realising, taking note of; the sense of experiencing an activity or state; the act of inquiring into, inspecting, taking care, looking after; the act of visiting; to select.³⁶⁹ It appears 1303 times: of those, 1129 times are in its basic form, 133 times in the form of מְרִאֲיָהוּן (36 times in the book of Ezekiel) and 12 times in the form of מְרִאֲיָהוּן (plural מְרִאֲיָהוּן), which is used four times at the most crucial points in the book of Ezekiel (Ezek. 1:1, 8:3, 40:2, 43:3).³⁷⁰

Both nouns denote a “vision” and within the visionary experience generally describe the object seen in the vision: something resembling, an appearance of (Ezek. 1:5, 13, 27, 28; 8:2, 4; 10:1, 9,

³⁶⁷ Jackie Naude, *New International Dictionary of Old Testament & Exegesis*, vol. 3 (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House 1997), p.1007.

³⁶⁸ Fuhs, *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, vol. 13 (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2004), p. 210.

³⁶⁹ Naude, *New International Dictionary of Old Testament & Exegesis*, pp.1007-09.

³⁷⁰ D. Vetter, *Theological Lexicon of the Old Testament*, vol. 3 (Peabody, Mass: Hendrickson Publishers, 1997), p.1177.

10, 22; 11:24; 40:3). The ambiguity of the description is emphasised by the use of כּ or reduplication of מַרְאֵהוּ כְּמַרְאֵהוּ in Ezekiel 40:3; 41:21; 43:3.³⁷¹

The use of מַרְאֵה is prominent in the book of Ezekiel. It starts with Ezekiel 1:1, connects to Ezekiel 1:15, highlights what the prophet sees in Ezekiel 1:1, 15, 27, 28; 10:1, 8, 9 and when cross-referencing the visions it uses the expression “that I had seen by the river Chebar” as a link in Ezekiel 3:23; 8:4; 10:15, 20, 22; 11:24; 43:3 three times.³⁷²

The word has a more theological meaning when it is used to describe people seeing God (Gen. 32:31, Exod. 33:20), God seeing people (Exod. 3:7), a person seeing God’s activity (Exod. 34:10), a visionary seeing (Num. 24:2, Josh. 5:13, 2 Kgs 2:10,12; 6:17, Isa. 21:3, 6f., Ezek. 8:13,15 etc.), as a term for revelation and in description of blessing (Gen. 39:6; 1 Sam. 16:12).³⁷³

The word “appearance” clearly highlights the author’s difficulty in explaining and describing what he sees. Once again, this highlights the supernatural character of the vision and what has been seen. The form of מַרְאֵה (plural מַרְאֵהוּ) is used four times at the most critical points in the book of Ezekiel (Ezek. 1:1, 8:3, 40:2, 43:3) to highlight the extraordinary nature of the vision.

“The likeness/form”

דְּמוּת

The word דְּמוּת can mean pattern, form, shape, image or representation, and is the nominative of the root דָּמָה —be like, become like, compare, ponder, imagine. Outside the Hebrew language, דָּמָה is only found in Aramaic, with the meaning of “equality” or “be similar”.³⁷⁴

In the Hebrew bible, the verb דָּמָה is found 13 times (Song of Songs 2:9,17; 7:8; 8:14; Psalm 102:6; 144:4; Isa.1:9) in the sense of observing a likeness or comparing. In approximately a third of the occurrences, the word is used to describe the incomparability of God or the foolishness of

³⁷¹ Fuhs, *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, p.240.

³⁷² Ibid., p. 238.

³⁷³ Vetter, *Theological Lexicon of the Old Testament*, p.1179.

³⁷⁴ VanGemeren, "New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology & Exegesis " p.967.

human kings attempting to compare themselves with YHWH (Psalm 40:6, 89:6; Isa. 40:12-26; 46:5; Ezek. 31:2, 8, 18).³⁷⁵ In each of these cases YHWH's incomparability and uniqueness are highlighted.³⁷⁶

The nominative **דְּמִנּוּת** is found 25 times (Gen. 1:26; 5:1,3; 2 Kgs16:10; Isa. 40:18; Ezek. 1:5 (2x), 10, 16, 22, 26 (3x), 28; 8:2; 10:1, 10, 21, 22; 23:15; Psalm 58:5 Dan.10:16; 2 Chron.4:3) indicating a simple comparison, or it can have a more specialised meaning such as indicating an image or a shape (2 Kgs 16:10; 2 Chron. 4:3; 1 Kgs 7:24).³⁷⁷ 2 Kings 16:10 is probably the earliest example in which the word still has its basic meaning "image" or "copy/reproduction".³⁷⁸

In the book of Ezekiel the author uses the word in a distinctive manner while describing the divine chariot. In the first chapter of Ezekiel the word is used 10 times to provide a comprehensible analogy to the "living beings" and the chariot. The word is found four times in Ezekiel 10, where a being who had a form as the appearance of a man catches Ezekiel and lifts him up and takes him to Jerusalem.

Often the comparative particle **כְּ** is added "to limit the comparison to a most general sense".³⁷⁹ **דְּמִנּוּת** can denote "the full range of similarities, from actual likeness to a weakened resemblance...and the type of likeness can only be established by a full consideration of the concepts involved."³⁸⁰

In Ezekiel 1:5 the word **דְּמִנּוּת** appears twice and is used to describe the form/likeness of four living creatures, and their appearance was "of the form of a man".

The author once again struggles to describe the divine realities that he sees. The word "likeness/form" is often connected to the word "appearance" in the book of Ezekiel. Together, the phrases are used to push the limits of the language to describe the indescribable.

³⁷⁵ Ibid.

³⁷⁶ Jenni and Westermann, "Theological Lexicon of the Old Testament " p.341.

³⁷⁷ VanGemeren, "New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology & Exegesis " p.968.

³⁷⁸ G. Johannes Botterweck and Helmer Ringgren, *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1978), p.257.

³⁷⁹ VanGemeren, "New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology & Exegesis " p.969.

³⁸⁰ Ibid.

“They were of human form.”

דְּמוּת אָדָם לְהֵנָּה

The verse finishes with an anthropomorphism in which the author attributes human form to the living creatures. The author carefully lists 10 characteristics (human form, four faces, straight legs, human hands, moving straight, four wings, spirit, radiant appearance, quick movements, wings making awesome sound) of אֱלֹהִים in which every aspect of their appearance represents some characteristic related to the performance of those tasks assigned to them.³⁸¹

The first of the 10 characteristics is that the living beings had generally human appearance with some unique non-human features. The living creatures were standing upright and were shaped like humans. Despite the abnormal features, the supporters of the divine throne were essentially of human form.³⁸² Perhaps this was a gentle reminder to the exiles that humans are the central focus and pinnacle of God’s creation (Gen. 1:26-28; 2:8-25). References to the human form or human aspects of the appearance of the living creatures recur throughout the book of Ezekiel: “human form” (Ezek. 1:5); “human hands” (Ezek. 1:8, 10:8, 21); “the face of a human being” (Ezek. 1:10; 10:14; 41:19) followed by a description of animalistic aspects such as wings, feet like calf’s feet, faces of a lion, an ox, and an eagle.

The human aspects are emphasised and culminate with the appearance of the glory of the Lord in human form in verses 27 and 28.³⁸³ Nevertheless, it appears that the author is struggling to depict supernatural beings, and while they are depicted as having many humanoid features the living creatures are still composite beings and clearly not human.

Brownlee proposes an interesting rendition of the word אָדָם (man). He translates it as “carnelian”, as “reddish in colour”.³⁸⁴ He argues that the translation is similar to other references, for instance, “the gleaming of beryl”, (Ezek. 1:16); “sapphire stone” (Ezek. 1:26); “the gleaming of amber” (Ezek. 1:4, 27); “sparkled like burnished bronze” (Ezek.1:7); and the glory of the Lord being surrounded by colours or a rainbow (Ezek.1:27-28) which highlights the uniqueness of

³⁸¹ Cooper, *Ezekiel*, p.65.

³⁸² Solomon Fisch, *Ezekiel, Hebrew Text and English Translation with an Introduction and Commentary*, Soncino Books of the Bible (London,; Soncino Press, 1972), p.3.

³⁸³ Joyce, *Ezekiel: A Commentary*, p.70.

³⁸⁴ Brownlee, *Ezekiel 1-19*, p.11.

Ezekiel's vision.³⁸⁵ Even though this proposition is intriguing, a better translation of the word is still “man” since the phrases “according to our likeness” and “man” have strong theological connotations.

As mentioned above, the same phrases occur at the beginning of the book of Genesis, where God created humans in his likeness (Gen. 1:26). What the author is communicating to his audience is the supernatural character of the beings, but with the strong emphasis that the living beings are not divine but creatures more similar to humans. Genesis 1:26 states that humans were made in the image and likeness of God, giving humans preferential status over the rest of creation.

The author of the book of Ezekiel wants to evoke this passage in the minds of his audience to highlight the fact that the living creatures in Ezekiel 1:5 had the likeness of man and therefore were not created in the image and likeness of God. Humans are clearly divided into two categories, male and female, while the gender of the living creatures is neither male nor female, or perhaps both at the same time. The gender of the living creatures is in constant flux in Ezekiel 1. As such, the living creatures fall into the category of supernatural beings with whom the author's audience was familiar.

The living creatures were not created in the likeness of God. They were created in the likeness of humans. Hence, the author focuses on the description of the human-like parts of the living creatures' bodies. They are definitely creatures and are not divine. Even though the living beings are creatures, they are supernatural creatures, which is highlighted by the constant changes in terms of their apparent gender.

The author will surprise his audience when he deviates from the usual distinction of human and divine when in the Ezekiel 1:26 he describes the glory of the Lord as having human form. I will explore this contentious notion in much more detail in Chapter Six of this thesis.

Verse 6

Each had four faces, and each of them had four wings.

וְאַרְבַּעַה פָּנִים לְאַחַת וְאַרְבַּע כַּנְּפִים לְאַחַת לָהֶם

³⁸⁵ Ibid.

The author of the book of Ezekiel does not allude to Isaiah 6:2 or Exodus 25:18-22. Apart from superficial similarities, the living beings do not bear any resemblance to seraphim or cherubim. The author does not use the old Israelite traditions of seraphim and cherubim that would be familiar to him and his audience. Instead, the author uses and modifies Egyptian and Mesopotamian traditions which were also familiar to him and his audience.³⁸⁶ The fact that the living creatures have four faces each is very rare. In this respect the prophet's vision is unique in the Hebrew bible.

As mentioned above, the author of the book of Ezekiel continues to emphasise the number four. The four living creatures have four faces and four wings each. The faces or the wings are not described at this point, adding to the audience's anticipation.

The number four is emphasised in Enuma Elish's description of Marduk:

Tablet I:

- 93. Artfully arranged beyond comprehension were his members,
- 94. Not fit for (human) understanding, hard to look upon.
- 95. four were his eyes, four were his ears.
- 96. When his lips moved, fire blazed forth.
- 97. Each of (his) four ears grew large
- 98. And likewise (his) eyes, to see everything
- 99. He was exalted among the gods, surpassing was [his] form
- 100. His members were gigantic, he was surpassing in height
- ...
- 104. The te[rror-inspiring ma]jesty with its consuming brightness(?) rested upon him.³⁸⁷

The author of the book of Ezekiel once again evokes the well-known image of Marduk. The Babylonian god is absent in this case. However, Marduk is symbolically represented by what is left of his chariot (supernatural beings), while YHWH is described in all his glory. As mentioned above, I will discuss this in more detail, pointing to intertextual connections between Enuma Elish and Ezekiel 1, in Chapter Six of this thesis.

³⁸⁶ Zimmerli, *Ezekiel: A Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Ezekiel*, p.121.

³⁸⁷ A. Heidel, *Babylonian Genesis: The Story of the Creation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press., 1951), p.22.

Even if the audience thought that the author was alluding to seraphim and cherubim they would be puzzled by the four faces and four wings of the living creatures. This also adds to the audience's anticipation of what is coming next.

Verse 7

Their legs were straight, and the soles of their feet were like the sole of a calf's foot; and they sparkled like burnished bronze.

וּרְגְלֵיהֶם רְגֵל יִשְׂרָאֵל וְכַף רְגְלֵיהֶם כְּכַף רְגֵל עֹגֵל וְנֹצְצִים כְּעֵיִן נְחֹשֶׁת קָלֵל:

The notion that the legs were straight was often interpreted as “unjointed”. The image of unjointed legs reinforces the image of the living creatures moving by flying, not by walking.³⁸⁸ As supernatural beings they cannot be in contact with the earthly realm, but somewhere in between the two realms, earthly which belongs to humans and heavenly which is reserved for YHWH alone. The same word יִשְׂרָאֵל appears in Ezekiel 1:23 meaning straight or, more precisely, extended.³⁸⁹

The feet were like the hoof of the calf—rounded, perhaps for easy turning. The rounded shape also suggests the stability of the creatures in performing the task of carrying YHWH's throne.³⁹⁰

It is possible that the brightness suggests the close proximity of the living creatures to YHWH. Just as the skin of Moses' face emanated light after being in close proximity to YHWH (Exod. 34:29-35) so does the skin of the living creatures.³⁹¹

The author continues to describe the legs as a whole. Bronze, נְחֹשֶׁת is the common alloy of copper. Joyce proposes that the word nḥōšet might be an allusion to the word for serpent (nāhās) or even the mysterious bronze serpent (nḥuštān) referred to in 2 Kgs 18:4.³⁹² This proposition certainly emphasises the fact that the living beings are creatures and not divine.

Words such as “bronze” and “calf's foot” would remind the audience of the golden calf story, subtly emphasising the supernatural character of the living beings. The living beings, which are

³⁸⁸ Greenberg, *Ezekiel 1-20: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, p.44.

³⁸⁹ Ibid.

³⁹⁰ Cooper, *Ezekiel*, p.66.

³⁹¹ Ibid., p.67.

³⁹² Joyce, *Ezekiel: A Commentary*, p.70.

terrifying and awe inspiring, should not be worshipped as the golden calf should not have been worshipped. The living beings are idols in the eyes of the author of the book of Ezekiel.

Verse 8

And under their wings on their four sides they had human hands. And the four had their faces and their wings

וַיְדֻּ וַיְדִי אָדָם מִתַּחַת כַּנְּפֵיהֶם עַל אַרְבַּעַת רַבְעֵיהֶם וּפְנֵיהֶם וְכַנְּפֵיהֶם לְאַרְבַּעֵתָם:

“On their four sides” has the meaning of “on the four sides of the square/four sided figure”.

Taking into consideration that there were four living creatures, each having one wheel, it seems that there was one pair of hands per creature, which is contrary to some early exegetes who believed that each living creature had four pairs of hands—one for each face.³⁹³

The author informs his audience in verse 5 that the living creatures “were of human form”. This is highlighted in verse 8 by depicting the living creatures as having human hands under their wings. The wings and faces continued to be mentioned together. The Targum states that the faces and the wings of the four creatures were alike.³⁹⁴

The living creatures are clearly composite beings very similar to Egyptian and Babylonian supernatural beings.

Verse 9

their wings were joining one another; each of them moved straight ahead, without turning as they moved.

חִבְרַת אִשָּׁה אֶל-אֲחֹתָהּ כַּנְּפֵיהֶם לֹא-יִסְבּוּ בְּלִכְתָּן אִישׁ אֶל-עֵבֶר פָּנָיו יֵלְכוּ:

“One another” literally means “a woman to her sister”.³⁹⁵ The author is alluding to the androgenic nature of the living creatures. The word חַיָּוִת (living thing, beast, animal) is a feminine word. The author describes how the each wing of each living creature touched the wing

³⁹³ Greenberg, *Ezekiel 1-20: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, p.44.

³⁹⁴ Fisch, *Ezekiel, Hebrew Text and English Translation with an Introduction and Commentary*, p.4.

³⁹⁵ Joyce, *Ezekiel: A Commentary*, p.70.

of another living creature. The language and what is described bear a striking similarity to 1 Kings 6:27:

He put the cherubim in the innermost part of the house; the wings of the cherubim were spread out so that a wing of one was touching the one wall, and a wing of the other cherub was touching the other wall; their other wings toward the center of the house were touching wing to wing.

The wings of the living creatures could have been actually joined, firmly linked to one another, implying that the living creatures moved in unison.³⁹⁶ The expression “straight ahead” in Hebrew literary means “to the region—opposite his face”. It seems that the living creatures did not need to turn around or to wheel the throne in any direction, since in whichever direction YHWH wanted to go at least one of the living creatures and one of its faces were facing in that direction. What the author is emphasising is the omnipotence of YHWH and his throne.³⁹⁷

The major difference from the account of the cherubim in the holy of the holies is that the living creature and the entire throne are alive; they are not simply iconic representations of the cherubim with the mercy seat fashioned out of wood, stone, and metal by humans and covered in gold. The throne that the prophet Ezekiel sees is alive. The living beings are alive and threatening but subdued by YHWH. This will become clearer as the vision progresses. Apart from superficial similarities, the living creatures are completely different from seraphim or cherubim.

Verse 10

As for the appearance of their faces: the four had the face of a human being, the face of a lion on the right side, the face of an ox on the left side, and the face of an eagle.

וּדְמוּת פְּנֵיהֶם פְּנֵי אָדָם וּפְנֵי אַרְיֵה אֶל־תְּיָמִין לְאַרְבַּעַתָּם וּפְנֵי־שׁוֹר מִהַשְּׂמֹאל
לְאַרְבַּעַתָּן וּפְנֵי־נֶשֶׁר לְאַרְבַּעַתָּן:

³⁹⁶ Greenberg, *Ezekiel 1-20: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, p.45.

³⁹⁷ Ibid.

The author turns his attention back to a detailed description of the faces of the supernatural beings. The human aspect is emphasised again. One of the faces, the one looking straight ahead, is the face of a human being, adding to the human aspect of the living creature. Besides the human form and human hands, the most personal of all human features—a human face—is added to the living creatures.³⁹⁸

Block summarises the main biblical association of each face: “the strength and majesty of the lion, the swiftness and mobility of the eagle, the procreative power of the bull and the wisdom and reason of humankind.”³⁹⁹

The human face always looked south, the eagle’s face north, the lion’s face west and the bull’s face east, confirming YHWH’s dominance over the whole world.⁴⁰⁰

The living creatures were representatives of the whole creation, that is, they were partly angelic, partly human, and partly animal.⁴⁰¹ YHWH is the Lord of the whole creation and what is even more important to the author’s audience is the sense that YHWH was still on his throne in the unclean land of Babylon among the exiles.

The significance of theriomorphic supernatural beings in Mesopotamian/Egyptian religion will be discussed in more detail in the next chapter of this thesis. At this stage it is important to acknowledge that the author of the book of Ezekiel uses Ancient Near Eastern (ANE) symbols which were familiar to him and his audience, and modifies them to present his controversial theology.

At this point in time the audience would realise that what the prophet is describing is something new and totally unlike seraphim or cherubim. It is also interesting that once the author identifies the living creatures with cherubim in Ezekiel 10, the face of the bull is replaced with the face of a cherub itself.

³⁹⁸ Joyce, *Ezekiel: A Commentary*, p.70.

³⁹⁹ Block, *The Book of Ezekiel: Chapters 1-24*, p. 96.

⁴⁰⁰ Brownlee, *Ezekiel 1-19*, p.12.

⁴⁰¹ Cooper, *Ezekiel*, p.67.

Verse 11

And such were their faces. Their wings were stretched upward, each creature had two wings, each of which joined the wing of another and two covered their bodies.

וּבְנֵיהֶם וְכַנְפֵיהֶם פְּרֻדוֹת מִלְמַעְלָה לְאִישׁ שְׁתֵּי חֲבֵרוֹת אִישׁ וּשְׁתֵּי
מְכַסּוֹת אֵת גּוֹיֵיהֶנָּה:

This verse reiterates the notion that the upper wings of the individual living creatures were joined and perhaps covering their faces while supporting the throne, and at the same time the two lower wings were covering their bodies as a sign of humility and modesty.⁴⁰² This can be seen as an allusion to Isaiah's vision.⁴⁰³

The author is also making superficial reference to the posture of the cherubim which were placed above the ark. The cherubim in the ark were touching each other's wings, providing a podium for the invisible throne of God (Exod. 25:18-22; 1 Sam. 4:4; 2 Sam. 6:2; 2 Kgs 19:15; Psalm 80:1, 99:1).⁴⁰⁴

It appears that the author is superficially alluding to well-known traditions but those traditions are developed and overlapped with Babylonian traditions. The audience is almost led into the belief that the living creatures are angelic beings similar to seraphim or cherubim. It appears that the author himself is not sure what he sees. As mentioned above, the major difference between those traditions and what the prophet sees is the fact that the entire throne is alive and mobile.

The covering of the bodies definitely indicates that the living beings are creatures. The seraphim cover their faces and bodies because they are standing close to YHWH. The demarcation of the sacred and the profane is clear.

Verse 12

Each moved straight ahead; wherever the spirit would go, they went, without turning as they went.

וְאִישׁ אֶל-עֵבֶר פָּנָיו יֵלְכוּ אֶל אֲשֶׁר יִהְיֶה-שָׁמָּה הָרוּחַ לְלֶכֶת יֵלְכוּ לֹא יִסְבּוּ בְּלִכְתָּן:

⁴⁰² Ibid., p.66.

⁴⁰³ Fisch, *Ezekiel, Hebrew Text and English Translation with an Introduction and Commentary*, p.4.

⁴⁰⁴ Block, *The Book of Ezekiel: Chapters 1-24*, p.97.

Even though the author's focus was on the faces and the wings of the living creatures, in verse 12 the author informs his audience that the living creatures did not use their wings to fly or move. They were used to cover their bodies and support the throne of YHWH. The animating force was identified in this verse as רִיחַ (the spirit).

The spirit is mentioned three times in this chapter (Ezek. 1:12, 20, 21). The term can have different meanings, such as wind, direction, side, agency of conveyance, agency of animation, agency of inspiration, mind, or sign of divine ownership.⁴⁰⁵ This is not רִיחַ סְעָרָה—a stormy wind found in Ezekiel 1:4, but the spirit in a more unique sense.

In the book of Ezekiel the term רִיחַ mostly has the meaning of an agency of animation (17 out of 52 times—eight times in Ezekiel 1-3; once in Ezekiel 10, and eight times in Ezekiel 37).⁴⁰⁶ In this case, due to the otherwise uncharacteristic use of the article הַ, the spirit refers to “the vitalising principle of life that comes from God himself”.⁴⁰⁷

The living beings were not autonomous. They had no power on their own. The living creatures were completely dependent on the spirit of YHWH.

The frequency of the usage of the word “spirit” in the sense of animating force suggests that this role of the spirit was very important to the author of the book of Ezekiel. It is important to notice that the author is a master of using ambiguity and suspense as literary tools.

It is clear that the “spirit” is coming from YHWH and is responsible for the animation of the living creatures and the wheels. The prophet himself is filled with the spirit in Ezekiel 2, where once YHWH speaks to him he falls on the ground and is automatically filled with the spirit, which makes him get up. The same spirit is then responsible for the revitalisation of the entire nation in chapter thirty-37.⁴⁰⁸

⁴⁰⁵ Daniel Block, "The Prophet of the Spirit: The Use of Rwh in the Book of Ezekiel," *Journal of The Evangelical Theology Society* 32, no. 1 (1989): p.28.

⁴⁰⁶ Ibid., p.31.

⁴⁰⁷ Ibid., pp.34-36.

⁴⁰⁸ Ibid., p.39.

Besides having the meaning of an agent of animation, “spirit” in the book of Ezekiel can be an agent of conveyance, of inspiration, of mind and be a sign of divine ownership.⁴⁰⁹ It is interesting that the author also mentions “spirit” in chapters 1-24 and 33-48, but does not mention “spirit” at all in chapters 25-32, the part of the book that deals with the oracles against nations, perhaps due to the notion of “spirit being incomprehensible to foreigners or their understanding of it”.⁴¹⁰

For the first time the author states that the living beings, who look terrifying, monstrous and awe-inspiring, are totally subdued by the spirit. As the vision progresses, the audience will realise that the source of the spirit is YHWH. The monstrous living beings cannot even move without YHWH’s command.

Verse 13

And the likeness of the living creatures there was something that looked like burning coals of fire, like torches moving to and fro among the living creatures; the fire was bright, and lightning issued from the fire.

וּרְמוֹת הַחַיּוֹת מֵרְאִיתָם כְּנֹחַלֵי־אֵשׁ בְּעֵרוֹת כְּמֵרְאָה הַלְּפָרִים הִיא מִתְהַלֶּכֶת
בֵּין הַחַיּוֹת וְנִגְהָ לְאֵשׁ וּמִן־הָאֵשׁ יוֹצֵא בָרָק:

Verse 13 is an elaboration on verse 4. The author now describes in more detail what he has seen in verse 4 from a distance. The centre of the lightning phenomena was amidst the four living creatures.

The visual elements such as fire, lightning and burning coals are reminiscent of Isaiah 6, Exodus 19 and Psalm 18. The verse is also an elaboration of verse 7, where the creatures’ legs were described as sparkling like burnished bronze. The author now emphasises that “the whole apparition glowed with a stunning brilliance”.⁴¹¹

⁴⁰⁹ Ibid., p.29.

⁴¹⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹¹ Block, *The Book of Ezekiel: Chapters 1-24*, p.98.

Stunned by its otherness and the supernatural nature of the phenomena, the author employs a number of expressions to try to describe what he sees—“burning coals of fire”, “torches”, “lightning”—but none of these are adequate.⁴¹²

These terms and terms such as fire and lightning are employed by the author to highlight the threatening character of the living beings. In Ezekiel 10:2, the burning coals are scattered over the city, after which the glory of the Lord would leave the temple and Jerusalem.

He said to the man clothed in linen, “Go within the wheelwork underneath the cherubim; fill your hands with burning coals from among the cherubim, and scatter them over the city.”

This verse will confirm the dangerous nature of the burning coals and the cherubim in Ezekiel 10. However, YHWH is the one who gives directions. The living creatures are helpless on their own.

Verse 14

The living creatures darted to and fro, like an appearance of lightning.

וְהַחַיִּים רָצְוּא נָשׁוּב כְּמִרְאָה הַבְּזָק:

The author focuses now on the quick movement (“like a flash of lightning”) of the living creatures. “This concept suggests instantaneous action that resulted in immediate implementation of the will of God activated by the power of the ‘spirit.’”⁴¹³

The focus is clearly on the mobility of the creatures and therefore of YHWH. The speed is emphasised. The author is stating that the exiles should not be worried about the distance and time. YHWH is coming to Babylon and the divine chariot is fast approaching. As the vision moves towards the prophet he is able to see more details.

Summary

In Ezekiel 1:4-14, the author continues to describe the vision that is coming closer to him. As the vision gets closer the author is able to share more details. The vision is coming from the north

⁴¹² Ibid.

⁴¹³ Cooper, *Ezekiel*, p.67.

followed by the atmospheric phenomena which are consistent with the phenomena accompanying theophanies. The author starts to describe the living beings but he does not identify them as cherubim. Only in Ezekiel 10 are the living creatures identified with the more familiar cherubim.

The author describes monstrous looking beings with four faces and four wings. They bear little resemblance to seraphim or cherubim. The author is struggling with the language as he tries to depict the heavenly realities. The language is almost inadequate to describe what the author sees. The author repeatedly uses words such as “appearance” and “likeness” to describe what he sees.

The living beings are clearly composite supernatural beings and the entire vision has a supernatural character. The word “amber” could have originated from an Akkadian word *elmešu* denoting a brilliant quasi-mythical stone which was used to adorn divine statues.⁴¹⁴ The references to the bronze legs and calves' feet would activate in the minds of the audience the story about the golden calf idol.

In both cases the author is alluding to the fact that the living creatures are supernatural beings who should not be worshipped. Another sign that the living beings are of supernatural character is the inconsistency in their gender. The emphasis on the number four alludes to the Enuma Elish account.

The focus is also on the mobility of the chariot. The mobility of the living beings is emphasised. The author states that the spirit from YHWH is a life-giving force which animates the living beings. It also appears that the spirit of the living beings controls the wheels.

The living beings clearly cannot move unless YHWH orders them to, but at the same time it appears that they have a degree of autonomy. The living beings look nothing like familiar cherubim and seraphim. They are supernatural, monstrous, dangerous beings who are completely subdued by YHWH.

⁴¹⁴ Allen, *Ezekiel 1-19*, p.26.

The wheels (1:15-21)

Verse 15

And as I looked at the living creatures and behold, a wheel on the earth besides the living creatures, one for each of the four of them.

וַאֲרָא תַחֲזִית וְהִנֵּה אֹפֶן אֶחָד בְּאָרֶץ אַצֵּל תַּחֲזִית לְאַרְבַּעַת פָּנָיו:

The author now turns his attention to a new feature of the vision- **הָאוֹפָנִים** (the wheels). The author gives a very detailed description of the wheels. At this point the author states that each living being had one wheel which stood in close proximity to it. The author states an important detail—each wheel was touching the ground. The wheels are clearly the last barrier between sacred and profane, clean and unclean, this world and heavenly world.

It appears that the living creatures are suspended in the air while the wheels clearly touch the earth. The wheels appear to be an independent feature of the vision, clearly distinguishable from the living creatures.

Verse 16-17

As for the appearance of the wheels and their construction: their likeness was like the colour of beryl; and the four had the same appearance, their construction being something like a wheel in the centre of the wheel.

מִרְאֵה הָאוֹפָנִים וּמַעֲשֵׂיהֶם כְּעֵין תְּרִשִׁישׁ וּדְמוּת אֶחָד לְאַרְבַּעַתָּן וּמִרְאֵיהֶם

וּמַעֲשֵׂיהֶם כְּאִשֶּׁר יְהִיָּה הָאוֹפֵן בְּתוֹךְ הָאוֹפֵן:

When they moved, they moved in any of the four directions without veering as they moved.

עַל-אַרְבַּעַת רְבַעֵיהֶן בְּלִכְתָּם יִלְכוּ לֹא יִסְבוּ בְּלִכְתָּן:

The author once again struggles to explain what he is seeing. The struggle is highlighted by the frequent use of words such as “appearance” and “likeness”. As in the case of living beings, gender inconsistencies are evident in this verse too. **וְיָמֵינֶיהָ** is feminine while **וְיָמֵינֶיהָ** is masculine.⁴¹⁵

The wheels have the colour of polished gemstone—possibly beryl. However, the meaning of **וְיָמֵינֶיהָ** is uncertain. LXX translates it as “chrysolite”, a bright yellow stone or as “anthrax”, a dark red stone.

The phrase “wheel in the centre of the wheel” is open to different interpretations, such as a gyroscope, swivelling casters, a solid disc within a disk, or inner and outer wheels moving at right angles to one another.⁴¹⁶ It appears that the mobility of the wheels is what the author is trying to describe.

The wheels can go in any direction: left, right, forwards or backwards. The best way to describe the wheel in the centre of the wheel is to imagine two wheels standing at right angles, going through each other and forming a gyroscope or globe-like structure.⁴¹⁷

The wheels could serve as another marker which would simultaneously open two texts in the minds of the audience. In this case it is plausible that by mentioning the wheels and the living beings the author is consciously alluding to 1 Kings 7:27-37. The text describes in detail the cultic stands in the Jerusalem temple, made by Hiram, which had four brass wheels on the bottom of the stand and were decorated with carvings of oxen, lions and cherubs.⁴¹⁸

In this passage the wheels and the stand are the colour of burnished bronze and are clearly inanimate objects. They are impressive as far as the craftsmanship is concerned. However, the author of the book of Ezekiel, who at the beginning of the vision saw the living beings as alive, terrifying, potentially dangerous and destructive—not just objects—now sees the wheels as also alive, awe-inspiring, and potentially dangerous.

⁴¹⁵ Hummel, *Ezekiel 1-20*, p.44.

⁴¹⁶ Block, *The Book of Ezekiel: Chapters 1-24*, p.100.

⁴¹⁷ Allen, *Ezekiel 1-19*, p. 34.

⁴¹⁸ Odell, *Ezekiel*, p.28.

Verse 18

Their rims were tall and dreadful, for the rims of all four were full of eyes all around.

וְנִבְיָהֶן וְנִגְבְּהָ לָהֶם וַיִּרְאֶה לָהֶם וְנִבְתָּהֶם מִלֵּאת עֵינִים סָבִיב לְאַרְבַּעַתָּן:

This sentence is very difficult. Gender inconsistency continues: וְנִבְיָהֶן is masculine with a third person feminine plural suffix while later in the same verse וְנִבְתָּהֶם is a feminine plural with a third person masculine plural suffix.⁴¹⁹ The word עֵינִים (eyes) was used previously in Ezekiel 1:4,16 to denote “sparkle”, “colour” or “gleam”. Block prefers the interpretation of the eyes as being eye-shaped sparkling beryl pebbles, which are an integral part of the rims and the wheels, over the traditional interpretation of the eyes being a symbol of an all-seeing, all-knowing God.⁴²⁰ Odell agrees with this interpretation.⁴²¹

Since the word was translated in previous verses in the sense of colour of radiation/brilliance it seems more natural that the word keeps the same sense rather than becoming all-seeing “eyes”. The wheels are tall and dreadful, adding to the potentially menacing, powerful look of the living beings and the wheels.

The wheels are often described as malevolent objects. For instance, the deafening sound of chariot wheels in Isaiah 5:28 and Jeremiah 47:3 foreshadow God’s judgment. The author is alluding to this even though at this stage he only sees what he describes. In Ezekiel 1:24, the author will describe the deafening noise of the living creatures and the wheels and connect it to military imagery. The wheels are also associated with the process of executing justice (Prov. 20:26).⁴²²

The height of the rims ensures that the boundary between the sacred and profane, divine and earthly is maintained. The eyes should be understood as eye-shaped sparkling beryl pebbles inside of the wheels rather than another monstrous being. The vision is in the movement. The audience must be wondering who is coming to Babylon. Is it Marduk on his war chariot after he won over YHWH and after the destruction of the temple and the exile?

⁴¹⁹ Hummel, *Ezekiel 1-20*, p.45.

⁴²⁰ Block, *The Book of Ezekiel: Chapters 1-24*, p.101.

⁴²¹ Odell, *Ezekiel*, p.28.

⁴²² Ibid., p.29.

Verses 19-21

When the living creatures moved the wheels moved beside them; and when the living creatures rose from the earth, the wheels rose.

וּבְלָכְתָּהּ הַחַיּוֹת יִלְכוּ הָאוֹפָנִים אַחֲרָם וּבַהֲנִשָּׂא הַחַיּוֹת מֵעַל הָאָרֶץ יִנָּשְׂאוּ הָאוֹפָנִים:

Wherever the spirit would go, they went, and the wheels rose along with them, for spirit of the living creature was in the wheels.

עַל אֲשֶׁר יִהְיֶה-שֵׁם הַרוּחַ לְלָכְתָּהּ יִלְכוּ שָׁמָּה הַרוּחַ לְלָכְתָּהּ וְהָאוֹפָנִים

יִנָּשְׂאוּ לְעִמְתָּם כִּי רוּחַ הַחַיָּה בָּאוֹפָנִים:

When they moved, the others moved; when they were standing still, the others stood still; and when they rose from the earth, the wheels rose along with them; for spirit of the living creature was in the wheels.

בְּלָכְתָּם יִלְכוּ וּבְעִמְדָם יַעֲמֻדוּ וּבַהֲנִשָּׂא מֵעַל הָאָרֶץ יִנָּשְׂאוּ

הָאוֹפָנִים לְעִמְתָּם כִּי רוּחַ הַחַיָּה בָּאוֹפָנִים:

The verses focus again on the mobility of the wheels and the living beings and the synchronicity of the movement. There are lots of repetitions: the rising up of the wheels is mentioned three times, the phrase “spirit of the living creature” twice. The wheels are not attached to the living creatures but stand independently in close proximity to the living creatures.

However, the wheels are controlled by the “spirit” of the living creature. To further highlight the fact that the mobility of the living creatures and the wheels are controlled by the same force, the phrase “spirit of the living creature” is used in verses 20, 21, and 22, in which the creature is singular.⁴²³ The repetition of the phrase in vv. 20-21 highlights the unity of the movement. The author is using the rhetoric-literary practice of resumptive exposition.⁴²⁴

⁴²³ Moshe Greenberg, *Ezekiel 1-20*, 1st ed., *The Anchor Bible* (Garden City, N.Y. : Doubleday: Doubleday & Company Inc 1983), p.48.

⁴²⁴ Block, *The Book of Ezekiel: Chapters 1-24*, p.101.

The subject of “spirit” was mentioned in verse 12 and its role is now expanded in verses 19-21. Block translates the phrase as “spirit of life” instead of “spirit of the living creature”, giving a more abstract almost metaphysical notion.

Given the context and repeated mention of the living creatures, it seems that the better translation is “spirit of the living creatures” which if understood correctly as an animating force can be understood as life-giving force which connects the living creature and the wheels and penetrates the entire assembly.

The author is purposely using the singular “creature” to point out that the spirit of each living creature animates usually inanimate wheels. “The spirit” in verse 12 is responsible for the movement of the living creatures, while the “spirit” of the living creature is responsible for the movement of each wheel.

“The spirit” described in Ezekiel 1:12 could be seen as the spirit of YHWH, “the mysterious underlying power which permeates the whole phenomenon, and which cannot be understood apart from the will of the One who is enthroned above the creatures.”⁴²⁵ As the prophet gazes down from the creatures to the wheels which are touching earth, the spirit becomes the spirit of the living creature.

By employing the word “spirit” without the definite article and connecting it to a singular living creature, the author is trying to safeguard the distinction between sacred and profane, clean and unclean, earthly and heavenly. While the spirit ultimately proceeds from YHWH, its nature and role changes as it gets closer to the earthly realm.

While YHWH is ultimately responsible for all movements through the spirit, it is also interesting that the living creatures are not mere puppets but that instead they control the wheels through their own spirit, making them more active and perhaps dangerous.

This is in agreement with my proposition in which the living creatures are in fact malevolent supernatural beings who have a potential to be destructive and dangerous. I will discuss this in more detail in Chapter Six of this thesis.

⁴²⁵ Zimmerli, *Ezekiel: A Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Ezekiel*, p.130.

Summary

The author turns his attention to the wheels. The wheels are described as wheels within the wheels. It is important to notice that they are touching the ground and act as the barrier between the earthly and divine realm. The wheels are independent of the living creatures. The word “eyes” should be translated as eye-shaped semi-precious stones which were an integral part of the rim rather than as all-seeing eyes.

Even though there are some allusions to biblical texts and superficial similarities between 1 Kings 7:27-37 and the wheels described in Ezekiel 1, the author is actually alluding to Marduk’s war chariot described in Table IV 39-53. The audience is puzzled as they are waiting for the vision to unfold. In the minds of the audience, it is Marduk who is coming to taunt them and punish them again.

The living creatures are seen as semi-independent. The spirit—the animating force—is coming from YHWH. The “spirit” is coming from the living beings and this “spirit” in turn animates the wheels. Once again, the focus is on synchronicity and mobility. The living beings are keeping their malevolent nature, which is controlled and subdued by YHWH.

The dome (1:22-25)

Verses 22-23

Over the heads of the living creature there was likeness of a firmament shining like an awesome crystal, stretched out above their heads.

וְדַמּוֹת עַל-רֵאשֵׁי הַחַיִּים רְקִיעַ כְּעֵין הַקַּרְחַת הַנּוֹרָא רְקִיעַ עַל-רֵאשֵׁיהֶם מְלֻמָּעָה:

Under the firmament their wings were stretched out straight, one toward another; and each of the creatures had two wings covering its body.

וַתַּחַת הָרְקִיעַ כַּנְּפֵיהֶם יְשָׁרוֹת אִשָּׁה אֶל-אַחֻתָּהּ לְאִישׁ שְׁתֵּימֵם מְכַסּוֹת

לְהִנָּה וּלְאִישׁ שְׁתֵּימֵם מְכַסּוֹת לְהִנָּה אֵת נְוִיתֵיהֶם:

The author's attention now switches away from the wheels and back to the living creatures and what is above them. The verse contains Creation language. Phrases such as "likeness", "firmament" and "stretched" are used repeatedly in the next four verses. The author uses the singular "living creature" to highlight the unity of the four and the harmony of the movement.

"Firmament" is found in Genesis 1-8, 14-15, 7, 20 and usually describes a convex barrier between the Earth and the heavens. In Genesis it serves to create order, to divide the waters above and waters below and as the setting for heavenly bodies: stars, moon and sun.

What the prophet sees is "a model or representation of reality and not a direct vision of enthroned Yahweh,"⁴²⁶ and in this case the word "firmament" fits the context and there is no need to change it with another word. The author is describing a perfect world.

The act of Creation is the act of separation. YHWH is separated from the living beings, who are separated from the earthly realm by the wheels. Harmony of movement and the symmetry of the living beings is constantly emphasised, pointing out that YHWH is in control. Everything is in order, which must be seen as words of hope for the audience who found themselves in total disarray.

The word **קַרְנֵי** (crystal) usually means ice or frost (Job 6:16; 37:10; Jer. 36:30). In Exodus 24:10, the word **סַפִּיר** (sapphire) is mentioned to describe the pavement under YHWH's feet:

Under his feet there was something like a pavement of sapphire stone, like the very heaven of clearness.

The word "crystal", as well as "awesome" **הַנּוֹרָא**, is used with the definite article, possibly alluding to the well-known crystalline pavement mentioned in the Exodus account of the sealing of the old covenant.⁴²⁷

The holiness of YHWH is highlighted by the fact that the living creatures are covering themselves with two wings, highlighting their status of creatures. The author states that two of

⁴²⁶ Odell, *Ezekiel*, p.29.

⁴²⁷ Hummel, *Ezekiel 1-20*, p.46.

the wings were stretched towards each other, without explaining why. This will become clearer in the following verses.

Verses 24-25

When they moved, I heard the sound of their wings like the sound of mighty waters, like the voice of the Almighty, a sound of commotion like the sound of an army; when they were standing still, they let down their wings.

וַאֲשַׁמְעֵ אֶת-קוֹל כְּנֹפֵיהֶם כְּקוֹל מַיִם רַבִּים כְּקוֹל-שָׂדֵי בְּלִכְתָּם

קוֹל הַמַּלְאָה כְּקוֹל מַחְנֵה בְּעִמָּרָם תִּרְפִּינָה כְּנֹפֵיהֶן:

And there came a voice from above the firmament over their heads; when they were standing still they let down their wings.

וַיְהִי-קוֹל מֵעַל לָרָקִיעַ אֲשֶׁר עַל-רֹאשָׁם בְּעִמָּרָם תִּרְפִּינָה כְּנֹפֵיהֶן:

For the first time, the author mentions an auditory dimension of the vision. So far, the author has been overwhelmed by the visual aspects. Now he is having difficulty describing what he is hearing. The word קוֹל (the voice) is repeated five times in Ezekiel 1:24.

The sound of the living creatures is described as “the sound of mighty waters”, “the voice of the Almighty”, and “a sound of commotion like the sound of an army”. All three similes are threatening in their nature and recall the sounds of chaos, which is also in agreement with the notion that the living creatures are potentially destructive and dangerous supernatural beings.

“Mighty/many waters” are described as potentially dangerous to humans (Psalm 18:16; 32:6; 144:7) and as a threat to divine sovereignty (Psalm 29:3; 93:4).⁴²⁸ The phrase is repeated in Ezekiel 43:2 when the glory of the Lord returns to the temple. The sound of an army in commotion is also threatening. The phrase occurs only in Jeremiah 11:16.

However, YHWH is the one who controls the movement, the visual aspect as well as auditory phenomena. “In this respect, the vision captures one of the central tenets of the old chaos

⁴²⁸ Odell, *Ezekiel*, p.30.

tradition—that Yahweh’s command transcends and controls the tendency of the natural world to disintegrate into chaos.”⁴²⁹ The phrase “when they were standing still, they let down their wings” is repeated twice and emphasises YHWH’s control over the living creatures.

It is also interesting that LXX omits the second and third simile. The sound of the voice of the Almighty is repeated in Ezekiel 10:5, where it is used only as a simile to describe the sound.

The passages mentioning יְהוָה (the Almighty) seem to highlight YHWH’s power and potential judgment.⁴³⁰ The word is an abbreviation of El Šadday, an ancient name for God. In Exodus 6:2-3 the author states: “God spoke to Moses and said to him ‘I am the Lord. I appeared to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob as El Šadday, but my name is YHWH...’”

The use of El Šadday is prevalent in the book of Job. The etymology of the word is not clear and it possibly comes from the Ugaritic word *tdw/y* (mountain), meaning “one of the mountain”.⁴³¹ Perhaps the reference is to YHWH as God of Mt Sinai.⁴³² Ezekiel’s entire vision bears strong similarities with Exodus 24:9-18 where “the appearance of the glory of the Lord” is mentioned. The author of the book of Ezekiel uses יְהוָה as a marker which would allude to the Exodus text and the episode of Moses, Aaron, 70 elders and YHWH on the top of Mt Sinai. The intertextual connections will be explored in Chapter Seven of this thesis.

The glory of YHWH is mentioned in the initial theophany (Exod. 24:15-18), in the divine commandments regarding the cult (Exod. 29), after the construction of tabernacle (Exod. 40) and in the first public worship service (Lev. 9).⁴³³ The glory of YHWH moves from Mt Sinai through to the tabernacle to being present among the people and then even further to be present among the people in the foreign land.

The author masterfully uses the phrase “And there came a voice from above the firmament over their heads”, bringing the vision almost to a climax. However, the audience will be captivated by anticipation until Ezekiel 2 when they will hear what the voice is saying.

⁴²⁹ Ibid.

⁴³⁰ Hummel, *Ezekiel 1-20*, p.47.

⁴³¹ Block, *The Book of Ezekiel: Chapters 1-24*, p.103.

⁴³² Hummel, *Ezekiel 1-20*, p.47.

⁴³³ T. B. Dozeman, *God on the Mountain - a Study of Reduction, Theology and Canon in Exodus 19-24*, vol. 37, *The Society of Biblical Literature - Monography Series* (Atlanta, Georgia: Scholars Press, 1989), p.132.

Summary

In this part of the text the author is starting to use more Creation language. Phrases such as “likeness”, “firmament” and “stretched” are used. The author is moving from describing what is happening below to the description of what he can see above the living creatures.

The use of the word “firmament” indicates to the audience that the area above the firmament is a sacred area. This is highlighted by the fact that the living creatures cover themselves with their wings when they are not flying. The author focuses on harmony and symmetry and therefore alludes to order versus the chaotic world they find themselves in.

The war chariot is moving with military precision and the language used has strong militaristic overtones. The movement and commotion are threatening. For the first time the prophet can hear as well as see. The vision is now so close to him that he can see what is above the firmament and he can hear the voice of El Šadday.

The audience must be in total shock. It is not Marduk who is coming but the Almighty. While the audience is trying to process this provocative and controversial notion the author continues to describe in even more detail what he sees above the firmament.

The appearance of the likeness of the glory of the Lord (1:26-27)

Verse 26

And above the firmament over their heads there was likeness of a throne, in appearance like sapphire; and seated above the likeness of a throne was a likeness human in appearance.

וּמִמֶּעַל לְרִקִיעַ אֲשֶׁר עַל־רֹאשָׁם כְּמִרְאֵה אֶבֶן־סַפִּיר דְּמוּת כִּסֵּא וְעַל־
דְּמוּת הַכִּסֵּא דְּמוּת כְּמִרְאֵה אָדָם עָלָיו מִלְּקַעֲלָה:

The author has difficulty explaining what he sees, and in this verse he reverts back to using the words “likeness”—three times—and “appearance”—twice. The word סַפִּיר, although etymologically close to the English word sapphire, probably means lapis lazuli, which was prized in ancient times, unlike sapphire, which was almost unknown. The very same word is

mentioned in Exodus 24:10 when the pavement below YHWH is described as “a pavement of sapphire stone”.⁴³⁴

This is another case of a marker consciously chosen by the author which simultaneously activates both texts in the minds of his audience. In the book of Ezekiel, not the only pavement but the entire throne is made of the light blue stone. LXX is closer to the Exodus text and states that the throne was upon something that looked like a sapphire pavement. Throughout the vision the prophet combines elements of throne and storm theophany.

The vision reaches its climax in Ezekiel 1:26-28. The author sees a magnificent throne made of one of the most precious stones. While his audience is imagining this throne, the author of the book of Ezekiel makes a most radical statement: seated on the throne is the brilliant kingly figure who has a form of אָדָם (human being) but is not an ordinary human being.

In verse 28 the author will state that this figure is of divine origin and hence turning the Genesis concept of humans being made in the likeness and image of God on its head. In the book of Ezekiel the author states that the divine figure had the form of אָדָם. During the vision the author has described the supernatural living beings as “of human form”.

The figure on the throne is described as “something that seemed like a human form” (NRSV). As the author moves from the earthly domain to the heavenly realm closer to God, the human form becomes more and more inadequate as a comparison. Even though the author was well aware that it would be considered to be a blasphemy to compare Creator with creature he carefully and controversially does exactly that.

Verse 27

Upward from what appeared like the loins I saw something like colour of amber, what appeared like fire enclosed all around; and downward from what appeared like the loins I saw something what appeared like fire and there was brightness all around.

וַאֲרָאוּ כְּעֵינַי חֹשֶׁמֶל כְּמִרְאֵת-אֵשׁ בַּיַּת-לֵהָ סָבִיב מִמִּרְאֵת מִתְּנַיִר

⁴³⁴ Hummel, *Ezekiel 1-20*, p.48.

וְלִמְעָלָה וּמִמְרָאָה מִתְנַיֵּי וְלִמְטָה רְאִיתִי כְּמִרְאֵה-אֵשׁ וְנִגְהָ לִּי סָבִיב:

The author continues to describe a humanoid form seated on the throne. What the prophet saw at the beginning of the vision הַחֲשֵׁמֶל (amber, v.4) from far away he now sees up close. The seated figure radiates brilliance—a fiery glow.

It seems that the upper part of the divine figure, the most holy part, was like electrum engulfed in fire while the lower part was like fire only. LXX speaks only of electrum above the figure's waist and fire below the waist. The next time amber is mentioned, in Ezekiel 8:2, it follows the LXX description, with brilliance above and fire below the waist.⁴³⁵ The brilliance has the same effect as YHWH's hand covering Moses' eyes in Exodus so he cannot see the glory of YHWH.

What the author is describing in verse 27 has to be understood against ANE imagery. For instance, coloured ceramics of the god Asshur from Qal'at Šerqāt (890-884 BCE) depict the winged god Asshur emerging from the flaming disc of the sun. While his upper body is clearly that of a human, his lower body is covered with flames.⁴³⁶

Surrounding the god Asshur is an aura of sun rays. The main two differences between YHWH and Asshur are: the aura around the god Asshur resembles the rays of the sun, not a rainbow, and while the god Asshur is going into a battle and potentially losing it, El Šadday is seated and is in absolute control of the past, present and future and forces of the universe.⁴³⁷

Summary

The author makes a very controversial statement, almost blasphemous. Above the firmament he can see a throne and a humanoid form sitting at the throne. This must be El Šadday, introduced in the previous verse. The God of Israel is in Babylon and it appears that he has a human form. The prophet scandalously compares the Creator with a creature. The audience for the first time realises that it is not Marduk who is on the chariot but YHWH. The author is alluding to Enuma

⁴³⁵ Ibid.

⁴³⁶ Zimmerli, *Ezekiel: A Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Ezekiel*, p.122.

⁴³⁷ Odell, *Ezekiel*, p.31.

Elish and other ANE texts when describing YHWH and his war machinery. In the following chapter of this thesis I will explore intertextual connections between ANE texts and Ezekiel 1.

Conclusion

In Ezekiel 1:4-27 the author of the book continues to focus on the description of the vision. As the vision comes closer, the author describes the living creatures, the wheels, the firmament and what he sees above the firmament.

This study has shown that the author is consciously using specific words as “markers”, such as: דְמוּת “likeness,” רָקִיעַ “firmament,” נִטְוִי “stretched,” מַיִם רַבִּים “mighty waters,” שְׂדֵי “almighty,” סַפִּיר “sapphire,” and קְרָח “crystal” to allude to the book of Genesis and Exodus. The author is also using theologically significant words such as “likeness”, “appearance” and “spirit” to describe what he sees. All three expressions strongly point to Creation language.

The audience is puzzled and intrigued. The author is describing a war chariot coming to Babylon. Naturally, the expectation would be that the chariot belongs to Marduk. The author describes the living creatures as monstrous, awe-inspiring composite beings. They have human characteristics but also have four faces, four wings, and other animalistic characteristics.

One of the more significant findings of this thesis is that in the first chapter of Ezekiel they are never called cherubim. Only in Ezekiel 10 are the living creatures identified as cherubim, and the author makes a conscious effort to equate the living beings with cherubim. The living creatures do not resemble the cherubim traditionally depicted in the Hebrew bible.

The living beings described in Ezekiel 1 are supernatural beings found in Babylonian mythology. They have much more in common with the supernatural beings which pull Marduk’s war chariot than with cherubim or seraphim. However, those dangerous, malevolent beings are portrayed as totally subdued by YHWH in the first chapter of the book of Ezekiel.

As the vision comes closer, the author is able to see a firmament and what is above the firmament. The language recalls the primordial, chaotic events as well as highlighting militaristic aspects of the vision.

Until Ezekiel 1:24, the audience was expecting the prophet to announce that it is Marduk who is riding his war chariot, but then the author makes the first of two controversial statements: it is El Šadday, God of Israel who is coming to Babylon and, even more contentiously, the glory of the Lord has a human form.

YHWH is far from being defeated by Marduk. YHWH is coming in all his splendour to the heart of Marduk's realm. The author describes YHWH's war machinery and its movements with military precision, highlighting the fact that YHWH has always been in control of all historical events.

The detailed exegetical analysis strongly suggests that the living beings were not intended originally to resemble cherubim or seraphim. In the next chapter of this thesis I will argue that the living beings are supernatural beings and I will explore intertextual connections between archaeological evidence, ANE texts, more specifically Enuma Elish and "A Vision of the Nether World".

I will argue that the author of the book of Ezekiel is modelling his living creatures on the amalgam of Mesopotamian malevolent supernatural beings by using the process of "elite emulation". In the next chapter I will also explore one of the most controversial statements found in the Hebrew bible, that the glory of the Lord appeared to have a human form.

Chapter Six

Intertextuality Ezekiel 1:4-27

In this chapter I will examine the relationship between the four living creatures חַיִּוֹת mentioned in Ezekiel 1:5 and the cherubim לְכַרְבִּיִּים with whom the living creatures identified in Ezekiel 10.

The identification of the living creatures with the cherubim is a result of later harmonisation by the editor, who saw the living creatures as a threat to orthodoxy. I will argue that the living creatures are not supposed to be viewed as cherubim but instead as supernatural creatures of Ancient Near Eastern (ANE) pantheons, whom the author of the book of Ezekiel clearly portrays as alive, threatening and monstrous but totally submissive and inferior to YHWH.

Ancient Near Eastern archaeological evidence which points to the fact that the winged creatures often represent ANE gods instead of cherubim-like beings will be examined. I will focus on archaeological evidence where supernatural winged beings appear in pairs, in close proximity to sacred trees with one or two pairs of wings. The archaeological material which will be studied dates from the tenth to the fourth century BCE and has been found in Israel, Judah, Samaria, Phoenicia and Babylon. The four different quadruped composite beings who are represented in the iconography of Israel and Judah—the ram-headed winged lion, the human-headed winged bull, the human-headed lion and the aquiline-headed winged lion—will be surveyed.

Intertextual parallels between Ezekiel 1, Enuma Elish⁴³⁸ and “A Vision of the Nether World”⁴³⁹ texts will be explored. It will be argued these texts support the notion that the living beings described in Ezekiel 1 are not cherubim but instead supernatural beings of the Babylonian pantheon. The supernatural beings—the Destructive, the Pitiless, the Trampler and the Flier—are mentioned in Enuma Elish as four beings which pulled Marduk’s war chariot. The author of the book of Ezekiel used the amalgam of four Mesopotamian demons: a winged human figure (*umu-apkallu*), a bull-man (*kusarikku*) with the legs of a bull and a human face and torso, a lion-demon

⁴³⁸ Heidel, *Babylonian Genesis: The Story of the Creation*, p.26.

⁴³⁹ James B. Pritchard, *Ancient near Eastern Texts : Relating to the Old Testament*, 3rd ed. (Princeton,N.J. : Princeton University Press 1969), p.109.

(*ugallu*) with a human body and a lion's head, and a griffin-demon (*apkallu*-bird) with a human body and the head of a bird.⁴⁴⁰ According to Babylonian theology, monstrous and evil creations after the defeat become beneficent and protective spirits.

The author of the book of Ezekiel and his audience were familiar with the Enuma Elish text and the Akita festivities surrounding it, and it will be argued that the author emulated the elite tradition of Mesopotamia in order to enhance and preserve his audience's understanding of their identity and to enhance their understanding of who YHWH is, what is YHWH's role and why they found themselves in exile.

The text "A Vision of the Nether World" describes underworld gods who are remarkably similar to the living beings described by the author of the book of Ezekiel.⁴⁴¹

In my opinion, the author employed the mysteriously terrifying image of the living creatures as part of his radically subversive theology. The living creatures represented supernatural beings, a part of Marduk's divine war machinery, which some of the exiles would perceive as victorious and more powerful than YHWH. However, the author of Ezekiel is stating that those supernatural beings are actually creatures which cannot even move without YHWH's command and are therefore clearly submissive to YHWH.

If the living creatures are perceived as foreign supernatural beings under the control of YHWH, the author achieves several things. First, YHWH is a universal God. Second, the author of the book of Ezekiel is proclaiming to his audience that Marduk should be perceived as unable to act independently of YHWH. The living creatures are supernatural beings, but only YHWH is divine and worthy of worship. YHWH is depicted as victoriously coming to Babylon carried by Marduk's subdued monsters. Third, YHWH is and always has been in absolute control of historical events.

This image is so radical and subversive that it could be considered to be a direct insult of the highest level to the Babylonian established religion. For this reason, the author had to enshroud the imagery in a complex symbolism perhaps understood only by his audience.

⁴⁴⁰ Odell, *Ezekiel*, p.27.

⁴⁴¹ Pritchard, *Ancient near Eastern Texts : Relating to the Old Testament*, p.109.

In this chapter, intertextual parallels between Ezekiel 1 and Jeremiah 10:11-16 will be examined. I will argue that the author of the book of Ezekiel was aware of Jeremiah 10:11-16 in which the futility of the idols is mentioned and that he consciously used terms such as “stretched out”, “voice”, “a tumult of waters in the heavens” and “lightning for the rain” with the intention of activating both texts. For Ezekiel, idolatry is the main reason why the temple was destroyed and why they are exiled. Unlike Jeremiah, the author of Ezekiel cannot openly prophesy about the fall of Babylon, but instead when he alludes to Jeremiah 10 the audience would recall Jeremiah 51:36-37, which is almost a verbatim repetition of Jeremiah 10. In the prophet’s vision, YHWH is coming from the north to Babylon, and he declares that the “destroyer “ (Jer. 51:48) is in fact YHWH.

Intertextual parallels between Ezekiel 1 and Genesis 1:26-27 will be investigated. It will be argued that the two texts have many common concepts, such as the relationship between the divine and the human, common terminology such as אָדָם בְּצִלְמֵנוּ כְּדְמוּתֵנוּ, human form being the highest form and only form to represent the divine, mention of the rest of creation, and the place of humans within God’s creation. The word “image” will be examined.

It will be argued that the author of the book of Ezekiel never uses the word צֶלֶם image in connection with God. Instead the word is used exclusively in relation to idols in a negative context. The author of the book of Ezekiel avoids using the expression because he does not want to give any power or legitimacy to the idols. The author of the book of Genesis could easily use the expression because YHWH is described as the one and only God Creator. On the other hand, the author of the book of Ezekiel is immersed in Babylonian religion and society and the risk is too high.

Instead, it will be argued that according to the author of the book of Ezekiel, the image of YHWH can only be represented by humans. The divine body in ANE and biblical texts will be explored. The similarities between Marduk’s and YHWH’s body will be pointed out clearly, suggesting that the description of YHWH in anthropomorphic terms is based on ANE descriptions of gods.

This thesis will argue that the author, who finds himself in overtly iconic and cultic surroundings, uses the process of elite emulation. The author of the book of Ezekiel amplifies the

anthropomorphism of YHWH and makes him superior in every sense. The arrival of YHWH is loud, spectacular, dazzling, luminescent, threatening, and awe-inspiring. Furthermore, it appears that the glory of the Lord has a human form. The author of the book finds himself in a foreign country where the relationship between Marduk—the supreme god—and his earthly representative, King Nebuchadnezzar, is crucial and very strong. The author of the book of Ezekiel reinterprets current political theology, distancing YHWH from a reciprocal relationship with King Jehoiachin. Instead, YHWH is the true king.

The archaeological evidence

The word cherubim **כְּרֻבִים** is mentioned 91 times in the Hebrew bible. In 56 out of 91 times, the word refers to a cultic object or an ornament rather than a celestial being.⁴⁴² ANE iconography contains an overabundance of composite creatures, which often represented a visible manifestation/embodiment of a particular deity/king or functioned as an attribute creature to the deity (for instance Ishtar and the lion).

Alice Wood warns against equating those images with biblical cherubim, as the ANE winged creatures might signify other supernatural beings altogether.⁴⁴³ Nevertheless, it is unlikely that the images of the living creatures were formed in the mind of the author *ex nihilo*. Instead, the images of the living creatures were most likely influenced by established ANE iconography.

As mentioned in Chapter One of this thesis a number of scholars such as: Keel, Allen and Odell have made a number of intertextual parallels between the living creatures, wheels and ANE iconography.

Keel systematically examined ANE and Anatolian royal and religious iconography and produced an extensive study of the parallels between throne imagery and Ezekiel 1.⁴⁴⁴ He explored the similarities between the living creatures and their resemblance to throne bearers and sky bearers found in ANE iconography and illustrated his findings with numerous drawings of ANE thrones, statuettes and seals.

⁴⁴² Alice Wood, *Of Wings and Wheels: A Synthetic Study of the Biblical Cherubim*, *Beihefte Zur Zeitschrift Fur Die Alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* (de Gruyter, 2008), p.157.

⁴⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴⁴ Othmar Keel, *Jahwe-Visionen Und Siegelkunst: Eine Neue Deutung Der Majestatsschilderungen in Jes 6, Ez 1 Und 10 Und Sach 4*, vol. 84-85, *Sbs* (Stuttgart: Verlag Katholisches Bibelwerk, 1977), pp.125-273.

Keel indicated that the multiplicity of the faces signifies the omnipresence of the god or in the case of skybearers unceasing vigilance with the aim to protect the heavenly realm from violation.⁴⁴⁵

In regards to the wheels depicted in Ezekiel 1, he also gives an example of representation of Mithras from eastern Asia Minor or northern Syria where the winged god with lion's head and stands on the globe that consists of two intersecting wheels.⁴⁴⁶

Keel clearly indicates that the living creatures depicted in the first chapter of Ezekiel do not resemble cherubim as they are traditionally portrayed in the Hebrew bible. He makes the clear parallel between the living creatures and supernatural beings depicted in ANE iconography.

Allen also describes in detail the parallels between ANE iconography and the living creatures. He states that the vision of the living creatures holding the throne of YHWH is a combination of two distinct traditions.⁴⁴⁷ The first tradition is of two lions, bulls or cherubim supporting a dome above which the throne was situated. The second tradition is of two or four winged genii who support with their upper wings the sun or sky.

Furthermore, Allen states that the four faces described in the first chapter of the book of Ezekiel are very similar to the representation of gods or genii where they are depicted with the same four human or animal faces.⁴⁴⁸

Allen following Zimmerli and Greenberg, compares the vision of the humanoid figure sitting on the throne to the depiction of the god Ashur.⁴⁴⁹

Odell clearly outlines the parallels between the vision and the ANE iconography. She highlights that the author of the book of Ezekiel does not simply borrow or imitate ANE symbolism and tradition but that the author consciously expands and adapts it.⁴⁵⁰

Furthermore, she specifically identifies the living beings with demons of the Mesopotamian tradition such as *umu-apkallu*, *kusarikku*, *ugallu* and *apkallu*.⁴⁵¹ She states that the in ANE texts and iconography "these demons were regarded as supernatural powers but not as gods."⁴⁵² Odell

⁴⁴⁵ Ibid., p.230.

⁴⁴⁶ Ibid., pp.264-65.

⁴⁴⁷ Allen, *Ezekiel 1-19*, pp.27-28.

⁴⁴⁸ Ibid., p.29.

⁴⁴⁹ Ibid., p.36.

⁴⁵⁰ Odell, *Ezekiel*, p.19.

⁴⁵¹ Ibid., p.27.

⁴⁵² Ibid.

explores in detail the similarities between what the prophet sees and the layout and decoration of Assyrian throne room.⁴⁵³

Keel, Allen and Odell have made some clear parallels with ANE iconography. All three scholars have identified the living creatures with the supernatural beings found in ANE iconography.

Odell makes the most specific parallel between the Mesopotamian demons and the living creatures.

The uniqueness of this thesis is in the fact that the vision found in the first chapter of the book of Ezekiel depicts the YHWH riding on Marduk's war chariot pulled by four supernatural beings: the Destructive, the Pitiless, the Trampler, and the Flier.

The author uses Enuma Elish but radically transforms the narrative. The audience expected to see Marduk coming to Babylon in the vision depicted in Ezekiel 1. However, it is YHWH who is riding on Marduk's chariot. The terrifying living beings which pull the chariot are controlled by YHWH. The message to the audience is that YHWH never lost the battle with Marduk.

Identification/Availability

To determine appropriate archaeological material, Wood establishes a typological profile of the biblical cherubim as well as spatial and temporal parameters within which the evidence can be discussed. The typological profile consists of "the typical physical characteristics of the cherubim and, second, the typical cultic context in which they are said to appear".⁴⁵⁴

The Hebrew bible tells us very little about representative physical characteristics of cherubim. They were winged supernatural beings with heads, hands and feet, possibly bipedal or quadrupedal. Ezekiel's depiction of the living creatures is especially complex and is not an archetypal depiction of the cherubim as depicted in 1 Kings or Exodus, but instead the living creatures are described as having four wings, four faces, human hands and calves' feet.

Cherubim perform a number of functions, such as guarding and protecting the divine realm or transporting the deity from the celestial sphere to the human sphere. They often appear in pairs

⁴⁵³ Ibid., p.22.

⁴⁵⁴ Wood, *Of Wings and Wheels: A Synthetic Study of the Biblical Cherubim*, p.161.

as sentinels in close proximity to the sacred trees and open flowers and at the threshold of divine space.⁴⁵⁵

Therefore, what we should look for are supernatural winged beings who often appear in pairs in close proximity to sacred trees, flowers, lions and oxen. Those beings could have two or four wings, one or more heads, and a pair of hands, and a main purpose of the transportation of deity.⁴⁵⁶

Wood warns about the artificiality of demarcation of geographical and temporal boundaries within which one can find comparative material to the biblical cherubim while highlighting the necessity of it. She turns to dating of the biblical passages which contain cherubim material and dates Psalm 18 and 2 Samuel 22 to the tenth to early ninth century BCE as being the earliest of cherubim material, and 1 and 2 Chronicles as being the latest texts dealing with cherubim, dating from the fourth century BCE.⁴⁵⁷ Therefore, comparative archaeological material must come from a similar period (tenth to fourth centuries BCE).

The safest geographical boundaries within which one can look for comparative archaeological material are those of ancient Israel and Judah. However, due to Phoenician and Babylonian contributions and influences (design and construction of the temple and destruction of it, and the exodus), it will be appropriate “to look for comparative material to the biblical cherubim in Phoenician and Babylonian iconography”.⁴⁵⁸ A remarkable collection of ivories from Samaria depicting cherub-like figures from the same period will be examined too.

The Megiddo Ivories

Conceptual dependence

The Megiddo Ivories date from a much earlier time than the earliest biblical text that mentions cherubim, circa 1250-1150 BCE. The supernatural beings depicted on ivory plaques, throne models and boxes display many features which are later found in the depiction of biblical cherubim.

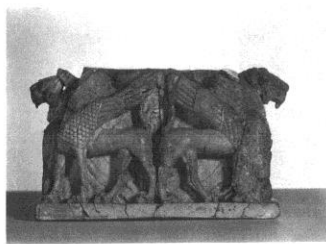
⁴⁵⁵ Ibid., p.162.

⁴⁵⁶ Ibid., pp.162-63.

⁴⁵⁷ Ibid., p.163.

⁴⁵⁸ Ibid., p.164.

The first archaeological piece that will be examined is an ivory box (ill. 1). The box has four sides which are decorated with two-winged, hybrid quadrupeds and lions.⁴⁵⁹



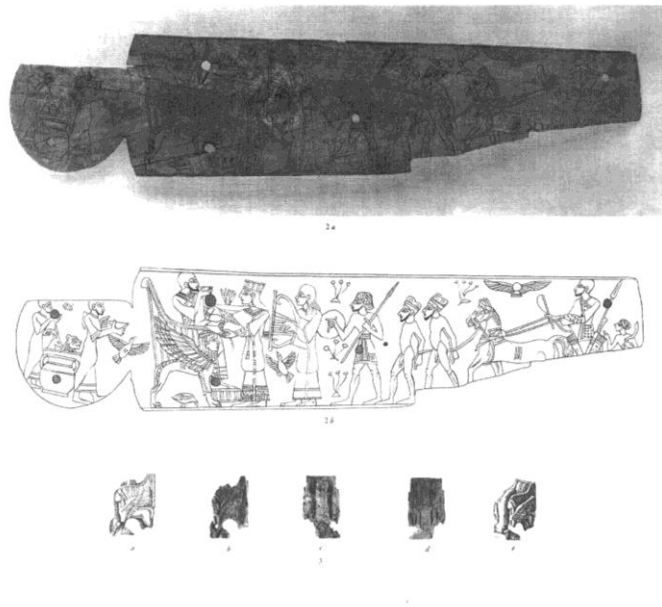
ill.1

The composite beings are depicted in pairs with their leonine bodies facing opposite directions and human faces turned outwards.

One ivory plaque depicts a prince seated on a throne flanked by two-winged composite quadrupeds with leonine bodies and anthropoid crowned heads (ill. 2). Even though this is a two-dimensional drawing, we can safely assume that these are two-winged creatures, because a three-dimensional model of a throne has been discovered which depicts two-winged composite creatures on each side of the throne.⁴⁶⁰

⁴⁵⁹ Gordon Loud, *The Megiddo Ivories*, vol. 52, *The University of Chicago Oriental Institute Publications* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1939), p.13 plates 1-3.

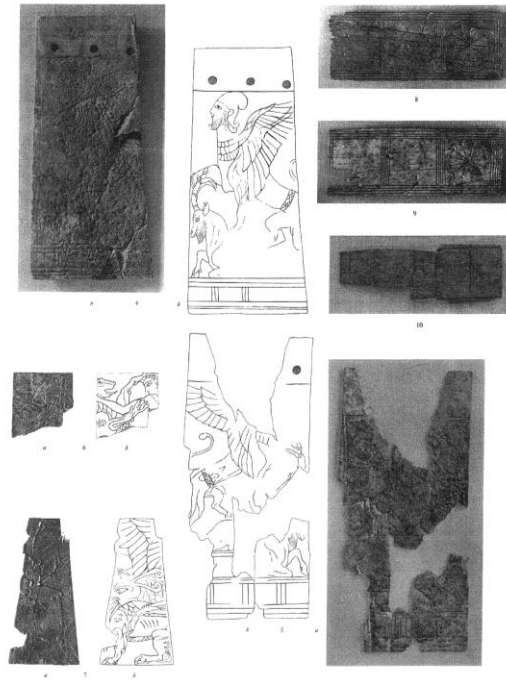
⁴⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p.13 plate 4.



ill. 2

Similar creatures with wings, anthropoid heads and leonine bodies are depicted on fragments of two ivories (ill. 3). The creatures are portrayed as predatory, riding on caprids.⁴⁶¹

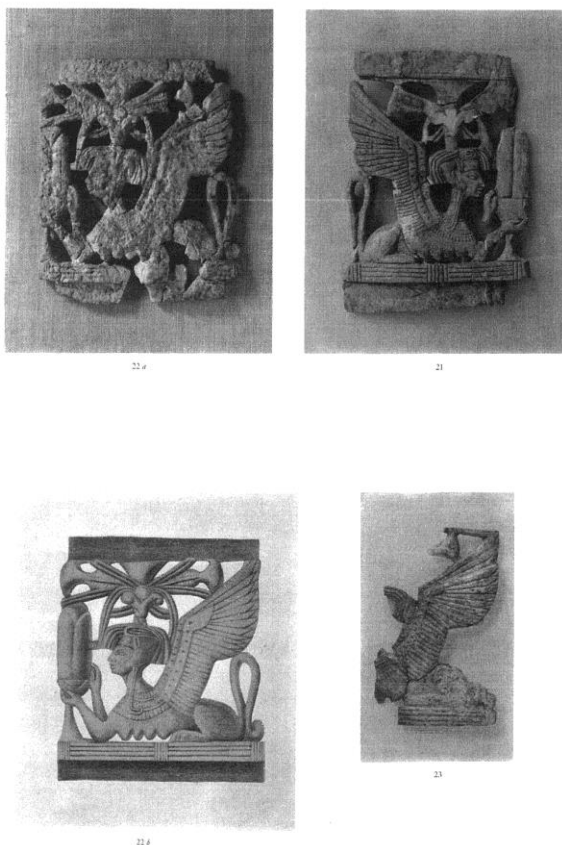
⁴⁶¹ Ibid., p.13 plate 5.



ill. 3

Another group of plaques dating approximately 100 years prior to the Megiddo Ivories depict seated winged beings with leonine bodies and human heads (ill. 4). However, unlike the other four-winged beings, these extend human hands which hold a votive cup.⁴⁶²

⁴⁶² Ibid., p.13 plate 7.

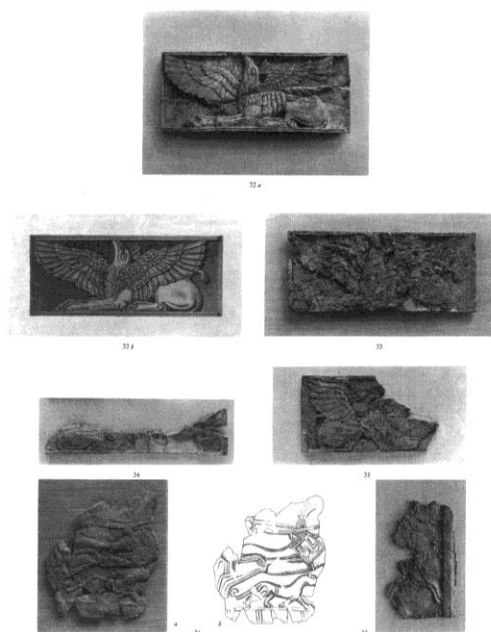


ill. 4

Similar depiction is found on the throne of Queen Mutnodjme, wife of Pharaoh Horemheb. The interesting feature is that the winged quadrupeds display several female characteristics (a beardless face, feminine features which are atypical for a male, the crown for a female person and a distinctly female leonine body).⁴⁶³ Among the Megiddo plaques there is a group of plaques which depict composite beings consisting of leonine and aquiline (bird-like) features where the human head is replaced by the head of an eagle with the wings outstretched above (ill. 5).⁴⁶⁴

⁴⁶³ Wood, *Of Wings and Wheels: A Synthetic Study of the Biblical Cherubim*, p.167.

⁴⁶⁴ Loud, *The Megiddo Ivories*, p.14 plate 9.



ill. 5

The Megiddo composite beings are all depicted in pairs: two-winged, hybrid quadrupeds combining human, leonine and aquiline features in sitting or standing positions with outstretched wings. They can also appear as male or female.⁴⁶⁵ The fluctuation of the genders is especially evident in Ezekiel 1, where the creatures as well as the wheels in verses 16 and 18 are referred to as both masculine and feminine.⁴⁶⁶ Fluctuation of the genders is especially prominent in Ezekiel 1:9-11 and 23-25. This could be the author's way of illustrating the monstrosity of the living creatures being both masculine and feminine or perhaps neither.⁴⁶⁷

Many Megiddo plaques depict sacred vegetation and were probably used as inlay on furniture. The function of those beings is clearly that of a guardian of the king or deity's throne, protecting and demarcating the presence of the king or deity.⁴⁶⁸

⁴⁶⁵ Wood, *Of Wings and Wheels: A Synthetic Study of the Biblical Cherubim*, p.169.

⁴⁶⁶ Greenberg, *Ezekiel 1-20: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, p.44.

⁴⁶⁷ Kirsten Nielsen, "Ezekiel's Visionary Call as Prologue: From Complexity and Changeability to Order and Stability?," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 33, no. 1 (2008): p. 101.

⁴⁶⁸ Wood, *Of Wings and Wheels: A Synthetic Study of the Biblical Cherubim*, p.172.

Israel and Judah (tenth to fourth century BCE)

Anthropomorphic imagery, especially of the goddess, had been in decline since the Iron I period in Israel and Judah and this continued in the Iron IIA period.⁴⁶⁹ The gods and goddesses are more often represented by their symbols or attributes of animals. Both Judah and Israel were influenced by Egyptian royal and solar symbolism. With the rise of Assyria in the Iron IIC period, Egyptian elements diminished and with the rise of Babylon and Persia in the Iron III period, those elements became more prominent in the iconography of Judah and Israel.⁴⁷⁰ The conceptual dependence of the iconography of Israel and Judah on the iconography of the dominant neighbouring kingdoms is evident.

The images found on stamps and cylinder seals are important sources of the iconography of Israel and Judah. Furthermore, the Taanach cult stand (Iron IIA period), the Samarian ivories (circa eighth century BCE), objects from Hazor (ninth to eighth century BCE) and rock drawings from Jerusalem provide a very good insight into the iconography of Israel and Judah.⁴⁷¹

The Taanach cult stand consists of four registers, and the second from the bottom depicts two winged quadrupeds with human hands and leonine bodies standing beside an empty space (ill. 6). This register symbolises the entrance to the shrine of the goddess Astarte. The third register depicts caprids feeding from the sacred tree (asherah) guarded by lions. The fourth register depicts a quadruped animal, the symbol of the goddess, below a winged solar circle which symbolises the heavens.⁴⁷²

⁴⁶⁹ Othmar Keel and Christoph Uehlinger, *Gods, Goddesses, and Images of God in Ancient Israel*, *Arbeitsgemeinschaft Der Deutschsprachigen Katholischen Alttestamentler Und Alttestamentlerinnen*, (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1996), p.173.

⁴⁷⁰ Wood, *Of Wings and Wheels: A Synthetic Study of the Biblical Cherubim*, p.173.

⁴⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p.174.

⁴⁷² Keel and Uehlinger, *Gods, Goddesses, and Images of God in Ancient Israel*, p.154.



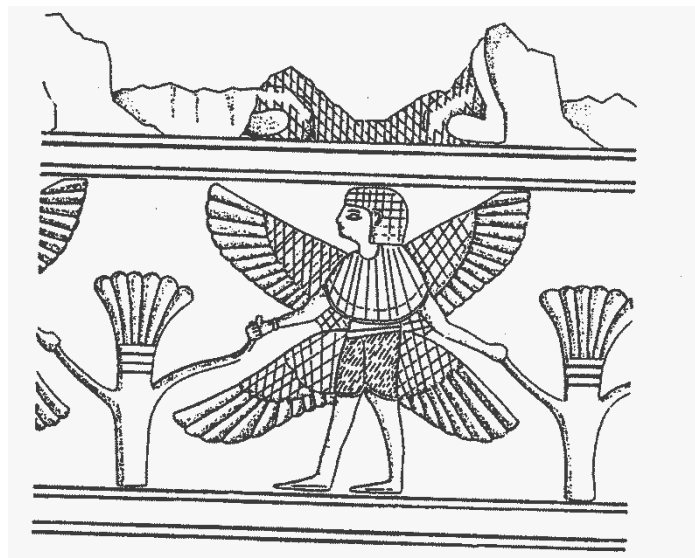
ill. 6

Once again, the winged quadrupeds correspond to the typological profile of the biblical cherubim. They occur in pairs, have four wings, guard the entrance to the temple, and are positioned in close proximity to lions and sacred vegetation. The Taanach stand can be compared to the ten bronze stands described in 1 Kings 7:27-39.⁴⁷³ It is important to notice that the combination of winged creatures, lions and sacred vegetation was used in the separation of the sacred space in the cult stand of Astarte, and that the same elements plus the image of oxen were used in the demarcation of the sacred space in 1 Kings 7. It is also important to notice that the goddess herself is depicted as a quadruped animal.

The only cherub-like image from Judah is found in a cave drawing from Jerusalem. The drawing is dated circa eighth to sixth century, due to similarities to Mesopotamian hybrids. During the Iron IIB period, winged beings became more prominent in the iconography of Israel and Judah, especially one recurring motif: a four-winged boy. See illustration number 7. According to Keel and Uehlinger, the four-winged boy represents a solar deity or possibly a mediating being such as Baal.⁴⁷⁴

⁴⁷³ Wood, *Of Wings and Wheels: A Synthetic Study of the Biblical Cherubim*, p.176.

⁴⁷⁴ Keel and Uehlinger, *Gods, Goddesses, and Images of God in Ancient Israel*, p.195.



ill. 7

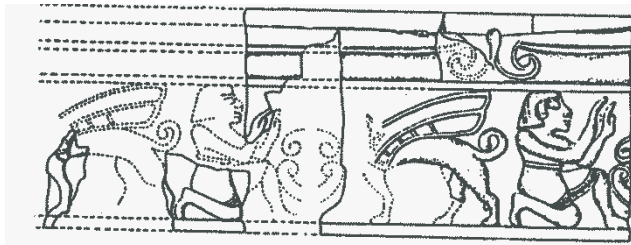
A bone carving discovered at Hazor depicts the four-winged boy holding a branch of a small tree in each hand. Similar figures were found at Gezer, Dan and elsewhere in the Northern Kingdom.

In this case, the four-winged boy corresponds to the typological profile of the biblical cherubim. The boy has four wings and is in close proximity to the sacred vegetation. However, the being does not display any leonine characteristics, and apart from the wings is depicted as fully human. Keel and Uehlinger suggest that the four wings symbolise the deity's celestial and omnipresent nature.⁴⁷⁵ The motif is sometimes flanked by two worshippers, suggesting that this is a god, not a supernatural guardian being.

An ivory pyxis dated to circa eighth century BCE depicts a male worshipper in front of plants, while on the other side a winged, leonine, quadruped faces the plants and the man (ill. 8).⁴⁷⁶

⁴⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁷⁶ Ibid., p.236.



ill. 8

In this case the winged being also displays similarities to biblical cherubim. The winged being probably functions like a sentinel, making sure that the male worshipper remains appropriate and respectful and that the sacred space is protected. The cherub from Genesis 3:24 has the same function. Therefore, the winged creature fits the physical and contextual profile of the biblical cherubim.⁴⁷⁷

The Samarian ivories, even though extremely fragmented and hard to date, comprise the most important collection of pre-exilic material. The style exhibits strong Egyptian influences, even though the designs are not strictly speaking Egyptian. Therefore, it is possible that the ivories were either carved either or imported from Tyre, Sidon or Damascus.⁴⁷⁸ In a scene spread over two plaques, two humanoid winged beings wearing shoulder necklaces are squatting facing each other holding a lotus blossom in each hand. The *djed* symbol of Osiris is placed between the figurines. The scene is certainly Egyptian in origin, and the winged creatures are almost certainly representations of the goddesses Isis and Nephthys, the sisters of Osiris (ill. 9).⁴⁷⁹

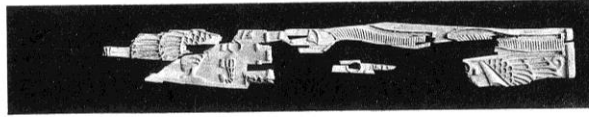
⁴⁷⁷ Wood, *Of Wings and Wheels: A Synthetic Study of the Biblical Cherubim*, p.179.

⁴⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, p.180.

⁴⁷⁹ J.W. Crowfoot and G.M. Crowfoot, *Early Ivories from Samaria* (London: Palestine Exploration Fund, 1938), p.16 plate 3.



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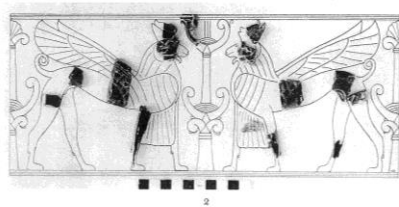
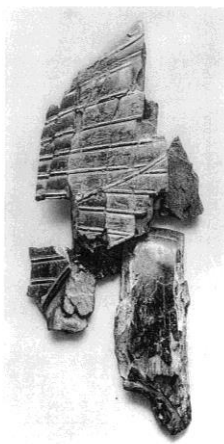
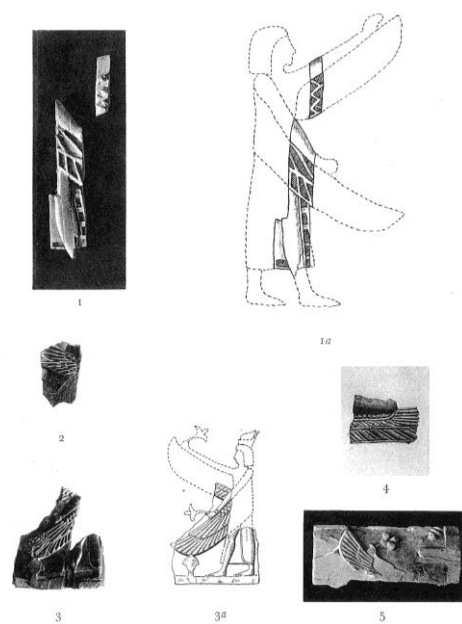


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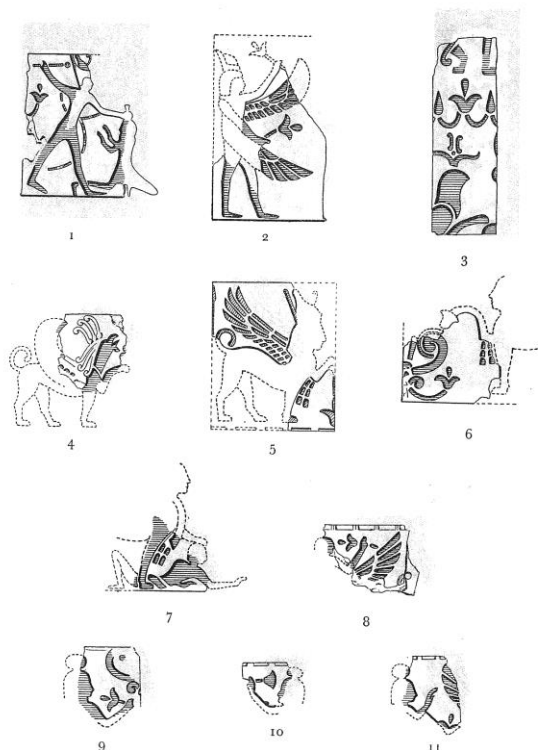
ill. 9

More winged humanoid figures are found on fragmented Samarian ivories (ill. 10). The winged beings are depicted standing and in pairs, holding a lotus, facing possibly a sacred tree.⁴⁸⁰

⁴⁸⁰ Ibid., p.17 plates 4,6,14.



ill. 10



ill. 11

The Samarian ivories also depict a variety of winged quadrupeds, with leonine bodies, crowned human heads and aquiline wings (ill. 11). Some of them have aquiline heads (extremely fragmented) or depict ram-headed quadrupeds facing each other in close proximity to a sacred tree.⁴⁸¹ On some fragments the human-headed winged beings are battling with animals, often lions, and are in closer proximity to sacred vegetation than the Megiddo and Taanach examples.⁴⁸²

The Glyptic

Cherubim-like figures feature on cylinder and stamp seals found in Israel and Judah. The beings, similar to the four/two-winged boy from Hazor/Samaria, is found often on Israelite seals dating from the Iron II period. On one seal from Tell el-Far'ah a falcon-headed four-winged being with a solar disc above its head is depicted.⁴⁸³ It is likely that this being is a god (possibly Baal) rather

⁴⁸¹ Wood, *Of Wings and Wheels: A Synthetic Study of the Biblical Cherubim*, p.181.

⁴⁸² *Ibid.*, p.183.

⁴⁸³ Keel and Uehlinger, *Gods, Goddesses, and Images of God in Ancient Israel*, p.198.

than a sentinel being. On another seal the same figure is found holding a lotus blossom in each hand, and it seems that this being is a god who ‘‘became associated with the Egyptian solar deity’’.⁴⁸⁴

The winged quadrupeds with leonine bodies and aquiline heads, sometimes with crowns, are very common on seals from Judah and Israel during the Iron II period.⁴⁸⁵ The same type of creature is present in Megiddo ivory and Samaria ivory collections. On two eighth century BCE seals from Megiddo, two such quadrupeds are depicted facing a sacred tree, which is in agreement with biblical cherubim typology.⁴⁸⁶ On some seals, when depicted on its own the eagle-headed winged quadruped wears the crown, while when depicted in pairs it never wears the crown.

On one seal, a human-headed winged lion stands in front of an ankh symbol. The posture is similar to the posture of the eagle-headed beings. Both types are depicted with a crown or sun disk (ill. 12). However, Keel and Uehlinger argue that those beings are not gods or kings but protective beings who served the deity.⁴⁸⁷

⁴⁸⁴ Wood, *Of Wings and Wheels: A Synthetic Study of the Biblical Cherubim*, p.185.

⁴⁸⁵ A. Lemaire, "Cinq Nouveaux Sceaux Inscrits Ouest-Sémitiques," *Studi Epigrafici e Linguistici sul Vicino Oriente Antico* 7 (1990): pp.98-99.

⁴⁸⁶ Wood, *Of Wings and Wheels: A Synthetic Study of the Biblical Cherubim*, p.185.

⁴⁸⁷ Keel and Uehlinger, *Gods, Goddesses, and Images of God in Ancient Israel*, p.198.



ill. 12

From the brief survey of the iconography depicted on ivories and seals one can conclude that human-headed winged lions are predominantly found on the ivories and eagle-headed winged lions on the seals. Wood argues that “the eagle-headed and human-headed winged lions were essentially the same type of creature”.⁴⁸⁸ The eagle head was an Egyptian solar symbol and would serve to link the creature with the deity.

With the rise of Assyria, the stamp seals were replaced by cylinder seals, which were mostly imported. The Assyrian cherub-like beings were often depicted on those seals. Those beings would be identified by local Israelites as cherubs. One seal found in Megiddo depicts two hybrid beings with eagle heads attacking a human figure surrounded by astral symbols. The scene can be interpreted as a triumph of cosmos over chaos. This negative depiction of the winged creatures is subdued in the Hebrew bible, where cherubim are depicted as threatening and dangerous (Gen 3:24; Psalm 18:11) but not disrupting the divine order.⁴⁸⁹ A leonine or aquiline

⁴⁸⁸ Wood, *Of Wings and Wheels: A Synthetic Study of the Biblical Cherubim*, p.189.

⁴⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 191.

composite being can sometimes be seen as a representation of the Anzu dragon symbol of chaos which must be disrupted by a king or deity.⁴⁹⁰

A seal of unknown provenance, dating from circa the end of the eighth or beginning of the seventh century, among other figures depicts a winged quadruped, positioned below the male deity, similar to the ones from Megiddo, the Taanach and Hazor but with one distinctive feature—the composite being has a bovine body which Ezekiel incorporates in his vision of the living creatures. This is the only example of such a being found in Israel and Judah, while winged bulls are a common feature in Mesopotamian art (the gateway guardians of Assyrian palaces).

During the Babylonian period (Iron III), cylinder seals were replaced by conoid stamp seals. The creatures depicted are often winged bulls or caprids. The winged bulls are held up by kings, above whom a winged solar disc is depicted, highlighting the celestial power of the king.⁴⁹¹ The Wadi Daliyeh (Samaria) collection depicts numerous human-headed leonine composite creatures which were clearly influenced by Mesopotamian art.

Summary

The Megiddo composite beings are all depicted in pairs, both male and female, two-winged hybrid quadrupeds combining human, leonine and aquiline features in sitting or standing positions with outstretched wings. Many Megiddo plaques depict sacred vegetation. The function of the composite beings is clearly that of protectors of the king or deity's throne.

With the rise of Babylon and Persia those elements become more prominent in the iconography of Judah and Israel. The Taanach cult stand depicts the winged quadrupeds which correspond to the typological profile of the biblical cherubim.

During the Iron IIB period, winged beings became more prominent in the iconography of Israel, especially one recurring motif: a four-winged boy which corresponds to the typological profile of the biblical cherubim.

⁴⁹⁰ Ibid., p.191.

⁴⁹¹ Ibid., p.198.

The Samarian ivories show a variety of winged quadrupeds, with leonine bodies, crowned human heads and aquiline wings. Some of them have aquiline heads or depict ram-headed quadrupeds facing each other in close proximity to a sacred tree.

The winged quadrupeds with leonine bodies and aquiline heads sometimes with crowns are very common on seals from Judah and Israel during Iron II period.⁴⁹² The same type of creature is present in Megiddo ivory and Samaria ivory collections. On two eighth century BCE seals from Megiddo two such quadrupeds are depicted facing a sacred tree which is in agreement with biblical cherubim typology.

During the Babylonian period (Iron III) the creatures depicted are often winged bulls or caprids. The winged bulls are held up by kings above whom winged solar disc is depicted highlighting the celestial power of the king.

According to Wood's survey "winged human figures tend to depict deities rather than subsidiary tutelary beings."⁴⁹³

There are four different quadruped composite beings represented in the iconography of Israel and Judah: a ram-headed winged lion, a human-headed winged bull, a human-headed lion and an aquiline-headed winged lion.

The ram-headed winged lion is not a prominent figure in the iconography of Israel and Judah. Strong Egyptian influences are notable and ovine features are never attributed to biblical cherubim. The human-headed winged bull is common in Assyrian iconography and is found on a seal that was probably Assyrian in origin. The human-headed winged lion is typologically the most similar to the biblical cherubim. It is always depicted in male clothes, in close proximity to sacred vegetation and acts as a guardian or protector of the sacred area.

Aquiline-headed winged lions are common in Assyrian iconography, and due to the Assyrian influence common in the iconography of Samaria. Human-headed winged lions and eagle-headed winged lions might represent the same type of being. For instance, in Egyptian solar

⁴⁹² Lemaire, "Cinq Nouveaux Sceaux Inscrits Ouest-Sémitiques," pp.98-99.

⁴⁹³ Wood, *Of Wings and Wheels: A Synthetic Study of the Biblical Cherubim*, p.200.

symbolism, eagle and human heads were interchangeable on deities and the interchangeability could therefore be applicable to supernatural beings.⁴⁹⁴

The winged quadrupeds with leonine bodies and human or aquiline heads were most likely iconographic influences on biblical authors, who modelled the biblical cherubim upon them.

However, Ezekiel's vision of multi-faced living beings/cherubim has no parallel in the extant iconography. "Multi-faced creatures are entirely absent and four-winged creatures are usually to be identified as deities."⁴⁹⁵

Parallels between Ezekiel 1, Mesopotamian demons, Enuma Elish and "A Vision of the Nether World"

The living creatures described in Ezekiel 1 and the cherubim traditionally depicted in 1 Kings and Exodus are so dissimilar that it is impossible to equate them. For instance, D. Halperin states "whatever the *hayyot* were originally supposed to be, I do not think they were the cherubim familiar from Israelite tradition and cult."⁴⁹⁶ Odell states that the "...living beings should be more closely identified with demons of the Mesopotamian traditions (as the term is used here, 'demon' signifies a supernatural but not divine being...)"⁴⁹⁷

One plausible hypothesis is that the author of the book of Ezekiel when he envisaged the living creatures actually did not imagine them as cherubim. This is consistent with the fact that he does not call them cherubim and that he almost certainly knew what cherubim looked like in Solomon's temple due his priestly background.

The author of the book of Ezekiel used the Mesopotamian iconography which was familiar to him and his audience; more precisely, the author used the amalgam of four Mesopotamian demons:

⁴⁹⁴ Ibid., p.202.

⁴⁹⁵ Ibid., p.203.

⁴⁹⁶ David J. Halperin, *The Faces of the Chariot: Early Jewish Responses to Ezekiel's Vision*, vol. 16 *Texte Und Studien Zum Antiken Judentum - Texts and Studies in Ancient Judaism*; (Tubingen J.C.B. Mohr 1988), p.43.

⁴⁹⁷ Odell, *Ezekiel*, p.27.

winged human figure (*umu-apkallu*)⁴⁹⁸



a bull-man (*kusarikku*), with the legs of a bull and a human face and torso,⁴⁹⁹



⁴⁹⁸ Anthony Green, "Beneficent Spirits and Malevolent Demons: The Iconography of Good and Evil in Ancient Assyria and Babylonia," *Visible Religion* 3 (1984): p.101.

⁴⁹⁹ J. Black and A. Green, *God's Demons and Symbolism of Ancient Mesopotamia - an Illustrated Dictionary* (British Museum Press: London, 1992), p.65.

a lion-demon (*ugallu*) with a human body and a lion's head ⁵⁰⁰



and a griffin-demon (*apkallu*-bird) ⁵⁰¹ with a human body and the head of a bird. ⁵⁰²



⁵⁰⁰ Ibid., p.120.

⁵⁰¹ Ibid., p.100.

⁵⁰² Odell, *Ezekiel*, p.27.

The bull-man (*kusarikku*) is an ancient type appearing in early Old Babylonian art forms. The Assyrian style griffin-headed creature first appears in the Middle Assyrian period, while the lion-headed being probably dates back to late Sumerian times.⁵⁰³

Ugallu and *kusarikku* are mentioned in *Enuma Elish* as creations of Tiamat who was fighting against Marduk. Apart from lion-demon and bull-demon there are other supernatural beings such as a horned-snake, a snake-headed dragon, a long-haired bearded man, a lion-headed ass-eared bird-footed human-bodied creature, an upright figure with human arms, a torso and heads with leonine back legs and hindquarters, a scorpion man and a fish man.⁵⁰⁴

Enuma Elish

Tablet II of *Enuma Elish* states:

11. 'My father, Ti'amat, our bearer, hate us.
12. She held a meeting and raged furiously.
13. All the gods went over to her;
14. Even those whom ye have created marched at he side.
15. They separated themselves (?) and went over to the side of Ti'amat;
16. They were angry, they plotted, not resting day or night;
17. They took up the fight, fuming and raging;
18. They held a meeting and planned the conflict.
19. Mother Hubur, who fashioned all things,
20. Added (thereto) irresistible weapons, bearing monster serpents
21. Sharp of tooth and not sparing the fang (?)
22. With poison instead of blood she filled their bodies.
23. Ferocious dragons she clothed with terror
24. She crowned them with fear-inspiring glory (and) made them like gods,
25. So that he who would look upon them should perish from terror,
26. So that their bodies might leap forward and not turn back their breasts.
27. She set up the viper, the dragon, and the lahamu,

⁵⁰³ Green, "Beneficiant Spirits and Malevolent Demons: The Iconography of Good and Evil in Ancient Assyria and Babylonia," p.85.

⁵⁰⁴ Ibid., p.83.

28. The great lion, the mad dog, and the scorpion-man,
29. Driving storm demons, the dragonfly, and the bison,
30. Bearing unsparing weapons, unafraid of battle.
31. Powerful are her decrees, irresistible are they.
32. Altogether (?) eleven (kinds of monsters) of this sort she brought into being.⁵⁰⁵

The same text appears in Tablets I, III x2, and IV.

After Marduk defeated Tiamat he set up statues of those eleven monsters in front of his temple gate as a memorial of the event.

73. [And] her eleven creatures, whom Tiamat had created and...
74. Whose weapon(s) were broken and whom he had fettered to his foot,
75. their images he fashioned and placed at the Gate of Apsu,
- 76.(Saying), "this shall be a token that shall never be forgotten!"⁵⁰⁶

In the literature *kusarikku* is the representative of the mountains while *ugallu* accompanies war and foreign invasions.⁵⁰⁷ However, very little is known about their personality or the personality of other monsters apart from them as servants. Their main role is to stand, watch, and enforce the rule of their masters or as defeated enemies to scare off other evil.⁵⁰⁸

According to Assyro-Babylonian theology, monstrous and evil creations after the defeat become beneficent and protective spirits—even more effective due to their malevolent background.⁵⁰⁹ Green also states that "...the beneficence or malevolence of individual spirits depended more upon their works at any given time than upon their essential nature."⁵¹⁰

The author of the book of Ezekiel is employing well-known traditions of Mesopotamian demons and of Enuma Elish. The author meticulously describes the living beings in far more detail than they are depicted in Enuma Elish but guided by the Enuma Elish notion that the beings are

⁵⁰⁵ Heidel, *Babylonian Genesis: The Story of the Creation*, p.26.

⁵⁰⁶ B. Landsberger, "The Fifth Tablet of Enuma Eliš," *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* Vol.20(3) (1961): pp.161-63.

⁵⁰⁷ F.A.M. Wiggermann, *Mesopotamian Protective Spirits - the Ritual Texts*, vol. 1, *Cuneiform Monographs* (Groningen: STYX & PP, 1992), p.153.

⁵⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, p.157.

⁵⁰⁹ Green, "Beneficent Spirits and Malevolent Demons: The Iconography of Good and Evil in Ancient Assyria and Babylonia," p.86.

⁵¹⁰ *Ibid.*

terrifying. Tiamat created her monsters in such a way that “She crowned them with fear-inspiring glory (and) made them like gods, So that he who would look upon them should perish from terror.”

The author of the book of Ezekiel paints a picture of even more terrifying creatures with humanoid form and multiple faces. However, in his account, glory is reserved for YHWH only. As Marduk won the battle over Tiamat and subdued those malevolent supernatural creatures, it is plausible to say that the author of the book of Ezekiel use this tradition to portray the supremacy of YHWH over any god, especially Marduk. YHWH defeated Marduk and subdued his supernatural beings and is, ironically, almost flaunting the spoils of war.

Another part of the Enuma Elish text is very interesting and has obvious parallels with Ezekiel 1. In Table IV the text reads:

39. The lightning he set before him
40. With a blazing flame he filled his body
41. He made a net to inclose Ti'amat within (it),
42. (and) had four winds take hold that nothing of her might escape;
43. The south wind, the north wind, the east wind, (and) the west wind,
44. The gift of his (grand)father, Anu, he caused top draw nigh to the border(s) of the net.
45. He crated the inhullu: the evil wind, the whirlwind, the wind incomparable.
46. The fourfold wind, the sevenfold wind, the whirlwind incomparable
47. He sent forth the winds which he had created, the seven of them;
48. To trouble Ti'amat within, they arose behind him.
49. The lord raised the rain flood, his mighty weapon.
50. He mounted (his) irresistible, terrible storm chariot;
51. He harnessed for it a team of four and yoked (them) to it,
52. The Destructive, The Pitiless, The Trampler, The Flier.
53. They were sharp of tooth, bearing poison.⁵¹¹

In Tablet I, Marduk is depicted as:

⁵¹¹ Heidel, *Babylonian Genesis: The Story of the Creation*, p.38.

93. Artfully arranged beyond comprehension were his members,
 94. Not fit for (human) understanding, hard to look upon.
 95. Four were his eyes, four were his ears.
 96. When his lips moved, fire blazed forth.
 97. Each of (his) four ears grew large,
 98. And likewise (his) eyes, to see everything...
 ...104. The te[rror-inspiring ma]jesty with its consuming brightness (?) rested upon
 him.⁵¹²

According to Enuma Elish, Marduk created the universe by defeating the primeval goddess Tiamat personified as a dragon. Marduk split her body and formed the watery heavens and earth. Marduk also created a human being out of the rebellious demon god Kingu whom he defeated in a cosmic battle. The scholars suspected for a long time that this story influenced the author of the book of Genesis. The Assyrians also adapted Enuma Elish, replacing Marduk with their national god, Asshur. Nevertheless the theological differences between the creation account in the book of Genesis and Enuma Elish are more profound.

Enuma Elish was recited annually by Mesopotamian priests during the Akitu festival on the fourth day of the festival. The purpose of the festival was to celebrate Marduk's win over Tiamat. It is plausible to say that Ezekiel's audience was familiar with the "Chaoskampf" motif (the divine being sets the boundaries against the elements of chaos) within their own tradition as well as Babylonian tradition. In Mesopotamian texts Marduk fights the primeval chaotic forces of Tiamat. In Genesis, God divides the heavens and the earth, darkness from light, water from land. In the book of Job, God plays with Leviathan who epitomises the forces of chaos. The author of the book of Ezekiel is using the well-known story to subversively point out that the annual celebration of kingship of Marduk should be in fact a celebration of the kingship of YHWH.⁵¹³

Crouch continues to strengthen the argument by showing how the author used cosmological mythology motifs in his oracles against nations. Egypt and Tyre can be perceived as chaotic

⁵¹² Ibid., pp.21-22.

⁵¹³ C. L. Crouch, "Ezekiel's Oracles against the Nations in Light of a Royal Ideology of Warfare," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 130, no. 3 (2011): p.473.

forces which were defeated by YHWH with the purpose of affirming the power of YHWH as divine king and creator.⁵¹⁴ Sparks confirms the theory that the Jewish diaspora was familiar with Enuma Elish.⁵¹⁵

The oppressed social group of the Jewish diaspora is in constant flux, alternating between imitation of and differentiation from the larger group. Sparks is stating that important aspects of the narrative in the book of Ezekiel and some rituals were designed to mimic traditions from Mesopotamia, especially Akitu and Enuma Elish.⁵¹⁶ For instance, there are parallels between Enuma Elish and Genesis 1, Leviticus 16, Exodus 1-24, and the tabernacle narrative in Exodus 25:40. Sparks states that the writer was an avid student of ancient texts and that his writings were shaped according to Mesopotamian patterns, and that this intentional “mimicking of foreign tradition” was a strategic part of the writer’s agenda.⁵¹⁷

If one accepts the view that the author of the book of Ezekiel and his audience were familiar with the Enuma Elish text and the festivities surrounding it, then it is likely that the author emulated the elite tradition of Mesopotamia in order to enhance and preserve his audience’s understanding of their identity and to enhance their understanding of who YHWH is, what is YHWH’s role and why they found themselves in exile.

In my opinion, the author employed the mysteriously terrifying image of the living creatures as part of his radically subversive theology. It is possible that the living creatures represented supernatural beings, a part of divine war machinery, whom some of the exiles would perceive as victorious and more powerful than YHWH.

What the author of Ezekiel is radically and subversively stating is that those deities or supernatural beings are actually creatures who cannot even move without YHWH’s command and are therefore clearly subservient to YHWH, and that their purpose is to literally bring YHWH closer to his people. In verse 4 the author states that the living creatures who were holding YHWH were coming from the north, not from the west, as would have happened if the

⁵¹⁴ Ibid., p.478.

⁵¹⁵ Sparks, ""Enuma Elish" and Priestly Mimesis: Elite Emulation in Nascent Judaism," p.647.

⁵¹⁶ Ibid., p.626.

⁵¹⁷ Ibid., p.642.

cherubim and YHWH on his throne were coming from Jerusalem. The chariot was coming from Mt Zaphon, the divine abode of foreign gods.

If the living creatures are perceived as supernatural or divine beings rather than cherubim, their menacing nature is even more highlighted. This is consistent with ANE mythology, according to which if not subdued, the supernatural beings could turn against their master, humanity, and therefore risk the collapse of cosmic order.

According to some of Ezekiel's audience, the cosmic collapse did occur when Marduk won and YHWH lost, when the temple was desecrated and destroyed. The author of the book of Ezekiel highlights one fact constantly, namely the humanoid form of the living creatures. They did not have zoomorphic bodies. Apart from feet, wings and some faces, the creatures had anthropomorphic form. Therefore, the living creatures described in Ezekiel 1 should not be compared to sphinx-like or cherubim-like creatures.

Instead, the closest parallel to the living creatures are representations of a youthful four-winged god. Four wings clearly indicate the celestial nature of this being. Sometimes these gods were depicted with aquiline heads, above which the solar circle is depicted, again symbolising the divine nature of the being. In all cases, the gods depicted had clearly visible two pairs of wings and a pair of human hands.

The legs, however, appear to be human. The reference to the calves' feet could be seen as an allusion to the episode of the golden calf, which would be familiar to the exiles. The moral of the story of the golden calf is the worship of YHWH only, and the reference could be a warning sign to Ezekiel's audience not to start worshipping the living creatures even though they could be interpreted as foreign gods.

Furthermore, the dome described in verses 22-26 could be perceived as a solar disc, which is often depicted above the deity, symbolising the divine nature of the character. The author of the book of Ezekiel once again radically declares that YHWH stands above foreign deities and even above the solar disc itself. YHWH is above all known gods, hierarchies and pantheons.

If the living creatures are perceived as foreign supernatural beings under the control of YHWH, the author achieves several things. First, YHWH is the universal God; this theme features prominently in the rest of the book.

Second, Marduk may have appeared to be “stronger” than YHWH after the destruction of the temple and the exile, but it was only with permission of YHWH that the destruction of the temple and the exile occurred, due to the sinful state of Judah. The author of the book of Ezekiel is radically and subversively proclaiming to his audience, in the heart of the Babylonian empire, that Marduk should be perceived as being unable to act independently of YHWH, while his menacing character is preserved, just like that of the living creatures in Ezekiel 1. The living creatures are supernatural beings, but only YHWH is divine and worthy of worship. YHWH is depicted as triumphantly coming to Babylon, carried by subdued Marduk’s monsters.

Third, if the author’s message is perceived in such a way then YHWH is and always has been in absolute control of historical events.

Due to such an unorthodox, radical, subversive and easily misinterpreted use of images in Ezekiel 10, the living creatures have been harmonised and identified with the better known cherubim.

“A Vision of the Nether World”

The argument that the living creatures in the book of Ezekiel represent supernatural beings is strengthened by the description of 15 gods in the text “A Vision of the Nether World”. While the setting is different (Sheol vs Babylon), the text is very similar to the vision of the prophet Ezekiel. The account has a long history and can even be found in the library of Ashurbanipal (668-627 BCE) only 30 or so years removed from Ezekiel’s time.⁵¹⁸ The text describes the night vision of a man called Kumma (possibly a pseudonym of an Assyrian prince) in the following way:

1. [Kum] ma lay down and beheld a night vision in his dream:

”...I held and I saw his awe-inspiring splendor...

⁵¹⁸ Brian N. Peterson, *Ezekiel in Context-Ezekiel's Message Understood in Its Historical Setting of Covenant Curses and Ancient Near Eastern Mythological Motifs* (Oregon: Pickwick Publications, 2012), p.104.

4b. Alluhappu (had) the head (of) s lion, four human hands (and) feet

The upholders of evil (had) the head of a bird; his wings were open as he flew to and fro, (his) hands (and) feet were human

‘Remove Hastily,’ the boatman of the nether world,

(had) the head (of the) Zu-bird; his four hands (and) feet

5. ... (had) the head (of) and ox, four human hands (and) feet (of) the Zu-bird.

Shulak wa a normal lion stand[ing] on his hind legs.

6. [Ma] mitu (had) the head (of) a goat, human hands (and) feet,

Nedu, the gatekeeper of the netherworld, (had) the head (of) a lion, human hands, feet (of a bird)

‘All that is Evil (had) two heads; one head was (that of) a lion , the other head [...]

7. ... (had) three feet; the two in the front were (those of) a bird, the hind one was (that of) an ox; he was possessed of awesome brilliance.

Two gods-I know not their names-one (had) the head, hands (and) feet (of) the Zu-bird; in his left...;

8. The other was provided with a human head; the headgear was a crown; in his right he carried a Mace; in his left... In all fifteen gods were present. When I saw them I prayed [to them].⁵¹⁹

The account is even more remarkable when one reads line 13: “the nether world was filled with terror; before the prince lay utter st[ill]ness...took me by the lock of my forehead and dre[w me] before him.”⁵²⁰

The same concept is found in Ezekiel 8:3, where the author states:

It stretched out the form of a hand, and took me by a lock of my head; and the spirit lifted me up between earth and heaven, and brought me in visions of God to Jerusalem, to the entrance of the gateway of the inner court that faces north, to the seat of the image of jealousy, which provokes to jealousy.

The author of the book of Ezekiel once again uses a well-known foreign tradition and incorporates it into his message to the exiles. The living beings are the supernatural beings who

⁵¹⁹ Pritchard, *Ancient Near Eastern Texts : Relating to the Old Testament*, p.109.

⁵²⁰ *Ibid.*, p.110.

are now subdued by YHWH. According to the author of the book of Ezekiel, idolatry is the reason per se why the temple has been destroyed and the people are in exile.

The author uses the concept of being pulled by a lock of hair as a marker to allude to the text which describes the underworld full of terror. The prophet is taken by a lock of his hair to the world between heaven and earth to see Jerusalem, which due to the level of idolatry might be described as being as terrible as the underworld.

Thematic development

In Ezekiel 1, the author develops a well-established Ancient Near Eastern notion of supernatural humanoid or zoomorphic beings to a new level. Those supernatural beings become “living beings”. These are not to be confused with cherubim. The detailed description of the living beings found in Ezekiel 1 is in conflict with other, more accepted, descriptions of cherubim found throughout the Hebrew bible (Psalm 18:11; 2 Sam 22:11; Exod. 25:18-22; 37:7-9; 1 Kgs 6:23-28).

The second thematic development occurs when an unorthodox description of the living beings in chapter 1 is harmonised with better known cherubim. The differences between the living beings and the cherubim described in chapter 10 are striking: emphasis on wheels, hands, different faces. Indeed one cannot find a description of the cherubim as detailed as the description of the living creatures.

The living beings are more similar to seraphim in Isaiah 6 than to cherubim. Both appear in a throne theophany, both have multiple wings and there are some semantic connections such as: seraphim literally means “the burning ones”, while the burning coal is emphasised when the living beings are described. Both seraphim and the living creatures are part of the divine council. In the case of the seraphim they appear in the temple and commission the prophet. The author of the book of Ezekiel radically changes this notion by employing the living beings imagery in a foreign land with the same purpose of commissioning the prophet.

The thematic development from the supernatural or monstrous beings from ANE folklore, which are depicted throughout history, to the living creatures described in Ezekiel 1 is fascinating. If one accepts the notion that the author of the book and his audience were aware of the

iconography of composite supernatural beings as well as Enuma Elish texts, due to being immersed in Babylonian culture, it is possible to see how the author used those images as markers to unlock both texts.

When the author is describing the living creatures in chapter 1, the four-winged, four-faced living creatures would remind his audience of four monstrous, dangerous creatures: the Destructive, the Pitiless, the Trampler, and the Flier who were yoked by Marduk in his chariot.

This image serves as a marker and activates both texts. It could also remind them of four Mesopotamian demons: a winged human figure (*umu-apkallu*); a bull-man (*kusarikku*), with the legs of a bull and a human face and torso; a lion-demon (*ugallu*) with a human body and a lion's head; and a griffin-demon (*apkallu-bird*) with a human body and the head of a bird.

These monstrous creatures were essential for Marduk's win over Tiamat and his mobility. They are the forces which defeated primeval chaos (Tiamat), but the forces who could if unchecked revert to being forces of chaos. The monstrous creatures and the chariot significantly contributed to the glory of Marduk. The incomprehensibility of Marduk's glory is emphasised, as well as the number four and strong winds.

The author of the book of Ezekiel employs sufficiently familiar yet distinctive elements, activating both texts at the same time. However, the author radically develops these elements and modifies them to suit his situation.

According to the author of the book of Ezekiel, the living creatures and the chariot contribute to the splendour of YHWH. Perhaps this is one of the reasons why the author gives a detailed description of the living beings. The audience is puzzled by the image. It should have been Marduk in the chariot with his four monstrous creatures. However, the author speaks of YHWH coming to the foreign land on the chariot carried by four slightly different but more terrifying monstrous beings. The humanoid aspects of the living creatures are highlighted, suggesting divine status.

The audience could perceive this image as the ultimate win of YHWH over Marduk. Besides the fact that YHWH is at the heart of Marduk's dominion, he is coming by using something that can

be perceived as Marduk's own chariot. YHWH comes in all his splendour, as the supreme God, using Marduk's own war machinery.

The author struggles to describe what he is seeing and employs irony as a tool to make his point. Besides the fact that YHWH is at the centre of Marduk's dominion and that he is riding on Marduk's chariot, unlike Marduk YHWH is coming unarmed. YHWH does not carry a bow as Marduk does in Enuma Elish. YHWH does not need weapons since he is the supreme God. Ironically, to highlight YHWH's supremacy the author does change the nature of the monstrous creatures from supernatural to the even more dangerous divine status. They appear monstrous and terrifying. They provoke fear and awe. They could be Marduk's own creatures who now became domesticated, obedient creatures controlled by YHWH.

As discussed above, the progression of malevolent supernatural beings who have been defeated into benevolent supernatural beings is well established. The archaeological findings discussed above suggest that the humanoid winged creatures mostly depict deities rather than subsidiary tutelary beings.

This image is so radical and subversive that it could be considered to be a direct insult of the highest level to Babylonian established religion. For this reason the author had to enclose the imagery in complex symbolism perhaps understood only by his audience.

Summary

The author of the book of Ezekiel found himself in a very difficult situation. Far away from the temple, which had been destroyed, far away from his land, culture and tradition, and faced with what appeared to be the defeat of YHWH by Marduk, the author, who has been immersed in Babylonian culture for some time, decides to use it to convey his message.

The Jewish diaspora, to which the author and the audience belong, is in constant flux, alternating between imitation of and differentiation from the larger group, the Babylonians. This is more than evident in Ezekiel 1, and one of the main reasons why exegesis of Ezekiel 1 is so difficult.

While the author imitates traditions found in Babylonian culture, he also develops them and therefore differentiates them from traditions found in Enuma Elish. There are some striking

similarities between parts of Enuma Elish and Ezekiel 1, such as the description of Marduk and YHWH as incomprehensible, and the description of the four beings.

The conscious incorporation of sufficiently familiar yet distinctive elements, indirect allusions, and mention of the same themes, concepts and motifs strongly suggest that the author of the book of Ezekiel purposely used certain ANE concepts to simultaneously unlock both texts, which would help his audience to better understand his highly subversive and radical message.

In Enuma Elish, Marduk wins over Tiamat, and in the process he sets up his chariot pulled by four terrifying beings. The prophet's audience believed that YHWH lost and that Marduk was once again victorious. The author uses the narrative but radically transforms the story. The audience was expecting to see Marduk coming to Babylon in the prophet's vision, but instead it is YHWH who is riding on Marduk's chariot. The living beings which pull the chariot are still terrifying, but are completely controlled by YHWH.

The message to the audience is that YHWH is the supreme God who is in absolute control of all historical events. YHWH never lost the battle and is now victoriously coming to the heart of Marduk's realm with the spoils of war. As per Babylonian theology, the dangerous and terrifying living beings which were once the forces of chaos are now completely subdued by YHWH.

Parallels between Jeremiah 10:11-16 and Ezekiel 1:4-27

Identification

The language of Jeremiah 10:11-16 and Ezekiel 1:14-27 is strikingly similar: Jeremiah 10:11-16 states:

Thus shall you say to them: The gods who did not make the heavens and the earth shall perish from the earth and from under the heavens.^{10:12} It is he who made the earth by his power, who established the world by his wisdom, and by his understanding stretched out the heavens.¹³ When he utters his voice, there is a tumult of waters in the heavens, and he makes the mist rise from the ends of the earth. He makes lightnings for the rain, and he brings out the wind from his storehouses.¹⁴ Everyone is stupid and without knowledge; goldsmiths are all put to shame by their idols; for their images are false, and there is no breath in them.¹⁵ They are worthless, a work of delusion; at the time of their punishment

they shall perish. ¹⁶ Not like these is the LORD, the portion of Jacob, for he is the one who formed all things, and Israel is the tribe of his inheritance; the LORD of hosts is his name.

Availability

Jeremiah and Ezekiel prophesied at approximately the same time, and it is likely that the author of Ezekiel was aware of the Jeremiah material.

Lexical dependence

Both texts share some common concepts. One can identify the phrase נָטַח “stretched out”. The object in this case is רָקִיעַ the firmament. Ezekiel’s contemporary Jeremiah describes YHWH as “stretching out the heavens”. One can also see a plethora of other phrases which are used by the author of the book of Ezekiel, such as “voice”, “a tumult of waters in the heavens” and “lightnings for the rain”. Most importantly, he talks about the fact that Israel’s idolatry is responsible for her demise. This section is followed by Jeremiah’s prophecy about impending exile.

Even though the term “stretched out” is common, the phrase “stretching out the heavens” appears only 17 times in the Hebrew bible (2 Sam. 22:10 verb translated as “bowed”; Job 9:8, 26:7, 37:18; Psalm 18:9 verb translated as “bowed”, 104:2, 144:5; Isa. 40:22, 42:5, 44:24, 45:12, 48:13, 51:13; Jer. 10:12; 51:15; Ezek. 1:22; Zech. 12:1). The phrase combined with a cluster of other words, such as voice/noise, a tumult of waters, lightning and rain, and overarching motif of idolatry and impending exile suggests that the author of Ezekiel used the term as a marker to activate Jeremiah’s prophecy in the minds of his audience.

Jeremiah 10:22 is also interesting because it mentions the word “noise”. The same word קוֹל is mentioned in Ezekiel 1 numerous times. It is likely that the author of the book of Ezekiel and his audience were aware of Jeremiah’s prophecies.

In Jeremiah 51:15ff, in his judgment against Babylon, the author repeats what he stated in 10:11-16 almost verbatim.

Conceptual dependence

Once the probability that the author of the book of Ezekiel and his audience were aware of Jeremiah's prophecy is established, one can see how the author could use it to capture his audience and convey the message covertly.

It is likely that the author of the book of Ezekiel is purposely using the expression "stretched out" to allude subversively to Jeremiah's prophecy of the fall of Babylon.

Being in the heart of Babylon, the author of Ezekiel could not proclaim the prophecy openly. What he did was subversively allude to it by mentioning a phrase which would activate the text in the minds of his audience.

The phrase "stretched out" combined with words such as voice/ noise, tumult, waters and lightning suggests that the use of the same or similar words in the book of Ezekiel is not coincidental, but that there is a conscious choice of words and a purpose behind it.

Whether the two prophets knew each other, or whether the lexical similarities are due to later editorial work is beyond the scope of this thesis. Even though the two contemporary prophets never mentioned each other, the text as it stands today suggests that the author of the book of Ezekiel is echoing themes, concepts and motifs found in the book of Jeremiah. Zimmerli states that "...Jeremiah's preaching was known to Ezekiel".⁵²¹

As stated above, the two texts share common themes and motifs. Both texts speak of the firmament or heavens being stretched out, both texts speak of noise/voice, both texts make reference to tumults of water and lightning and rain. The two main overarching themes are the idolatry of Israel and the exile.

The author of the book of Ezekiel is using Jeremiah's words and concepts to subversively remind his audience that the reason he is speaking to them in Babylon is because they have forsaken YHWH and started worshipping other gods. The author is covertly stating to his audience that this is the reason why they found themselves in Babylon and why they have been exiled. The motif of idolatry will be picked up again in Ezekiel 8.

⁵²¹ Zimmerli, *Ezekiel: A Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Ezekiel*, p.45.

Besides reminding his audience that they are in Babylon because of idolatry, the author is also giving them a sign of hope. By remembering Jeremiah's prophecy, the audience would surely remember his prophecy of the demise of Babylon. The author is saying to his audience that Babylon has been the instrument of YHWH's punishment but that very soon Babylon itself will be punished. The author is using sufficiently familiar yet distinctive elements to proclaim this message.

Thematic development

Jeremiah's text speaks of the heavens being stretched out. The author of the book of Ezekiel develops this theme and states that the firmament was stretched out. This is possibly because in verse 1, the author states that the heavens were opened and what he can see is the glory of YHWH. YHWH is the one who stretches the heavens out and is also the one who tears them apart.

The author of the book of Ezekiel discusses idolatry in more detail in Ezekiel 8. This thesis will not discuss idolatry in Ezekiel 8 due to limited space. However, what the author is doing at this stage is capturing the audience's attention. The author is subversively warning his audience not to assimilate into Babylonian society to the point of starting to worship idols.

In chapter 1, the author of Ezekiel describes the living beings as having a spirit and being controlled by the spirit. This differs from the author of Jeremiah who proclaims that:

Everyone is stupid and without knowledge; goldsmiths are all put to shame by their idols; for their images are false, and there is no breath in them. (Jer. 10:14)

The author of the book of Ezekiel portrays the idols of Babylon as breathing, flying, living creatures. As discussed above, for the author of Ezekiel the idols are much more than useless molten images. Because they had been immersed in Babylonian culture for years, Ezekiel's audience perceived the idols as real and threatening. Nevertheless, the living, breathing idols are under the control of YHWH, who is the only one worthy of worship according to the tradition of Jeremiah.

On the other hand, the author of the book of Jeremiah boldly proclaims the destruction of Babylon in Jeremiah 51:36-37:

Therefore thus says the LORD: I am going to defend your cause and take vengeance for you. I will dry up her sea and make her fountain dry;
and Babylon shall become a heap of ruins, a den of jackals, an object of horror and of hissing, without inhabitant.

The author of the book of Ezekiel is much more subversive and does not speak openly about it. It seems that the author of Ezekiel follows Jeremiah's words (Jer. 51:50-51):

You survivors of the sword, go, do not linger! Remember the LORD in a distant land, and let Jerusalem come into your mind: We are put to shame, for we have heard insults; dishonor has covered our face, for aliens have come into the holy places of the LORD's house.

The author first speaks of the Lord in a distant land and later on when the prophet is transported to Jerusalem he evokes memories of Jerusalem and the desecrated temple. It is also interesting that the author of the book of Jeremiah states:

Then the heavens and the earth, and all that is in them, shall shout for joy over Babylon; for the destroyers shall come against them out of the north, says the LORD. (Jer. 51:48)

In the book of Ezekiel the "destroyer" is, radically, none other than YHWH personally.

Summary

In the book of Jeremiah, the prophet instructs Seraiah to take a scroll to Babylon and boldly proclaim its destruction. It is likely that the author of the book of Ezekiel and his audience were familiar with those words. It is evident that the author of the book of Ezekiel used the concepts discussed in the book of Jeremiah and modifies them to proclaim his message to his audience.

The idolatry of Israel and her unfaithfulness to the Lord is the reason they are in exile. YHWH personally is coming from the north to destroy Babylon. The idols are not just breathless molten images. They are living creatures, terrifying but under the absolute control of YHWH. This is where the author of Ezekiel fundamentally diverges from the well-known tradition of Jeremiah.

For Ezekiel's audience, who have been in the heart of Babylon for a number of years, the official religions and their deities seem real and threatening. Because he lives in Babylon, the author of

Ezekiel cannot openly advocate for the destruction of Babylon. The author will do this by mentioning words such as נָטַי "stretched out," קוֹל "voice," קוֹל "noise", תְּמֻלָּה "tumult", בְּרָק "lightning," and יָשַׁם "rain" which would serve as markers to in turn activate the text of Jeremiah in the minds of his audience. According to the author of the book of Ezekiel, the destroyer of Babylon is none other than YHWH personally.

Ezekiel 1:26 "Something that seemed like human form"

דְמוּת כְּמַרְאֵה אָדָם

Identification

This part of the chapter examines intertextual connections between Ezekiel 1:26, Genesis 1:26-27 and Ancient Near Eastern texts. I will argue that the author of the book of Ezekiel alludes to Genesis 1:26-27 when proclaiming his message to his audience. Genesis 1:26-27 and Ezekiel 1:26 share common concepts such as the relationship between the divine and the human, terminology such as אָדָם בְּצַלְמֵנוּ כְּדְמוּתֵנוּ, human form being the highest and only form to represent the divine, mention of the rest of creation and the place of humans within God's creation. It will be argued that the author of the book of Ezekiel and his audience had knowledge of the story of Genesis 1:26-27.

The author of Ezekiel is consciously employing certain expressions while avoiding others, and his audience would recognise the prominence and absence of those terms. The author further develops those concepts to proclaim his theology.

The focus will be on understanding the word בְּצַלְמָם "image" and what it meant in an ANE setting, what it meant for the author of Genesis and why the author of the book of Ezekiel never uses it in association with God but uses it in connection with idols. The author of Ezekiel deliberately never uses the common word for gods אֱלֹהִים for divine images or foreign gods.

The ANE understanding of the divine body will be explored. I will briefly examine Enuma Elish and the Hymn of Ninurta. I will argue that the author of Ezekiel, faced with the question of how to represent YHWH within an overtly iconic and cultic Babylonian society, responds by elusively describing the glory of YHWH to be shaped in human form. According to the author of

the book of Ezekiel, only humans can represent YHWH. Furthermore, the author moves from a reciprocal relationship between YHWH and his earthly king. Instead, the author proclaims YHWH as the true king.

Availability

It is likely that the author of the book of Ezekiel and his audience were familiar with the Creation stories described in Genesis 1.

Lexical dependence

Before Genesis 1:26-27, God either simply spoke things into existence (“let it be...”), ordered the rearrangement of something (“let the waters...be gathered...”) or called upon the elements of creation to bring forth secondary creation (“let the earth put forth vegetation...”).⁵²²

In the book of Genesis, the creation of humans is presented as the pinnacle of creation.⁵²³ God intimately participates in the act and the word **אֱלֹהִים** is used three times in Genesis 1:27 to highlight that the entire creation account was leading to this point—the creation of humans.⁵²⁴

There are three different explanations for the plural “us”. It has been described as referring to the heavenly court, the plural being used to avoid the idea of any direct resemblance to the Lord and as a plural of deliberation (royal “we”).⁵²⁵ The author of the book of Genesis uses “the extraordinary plural “let us” to prevent one from associating the “image” too closely with God the Lord.⁵²⁶ The Hebrew bible speaks of YHWH being surrounded by other heavenly beings (1 Kgs 22:19f, Job 1, Isa. 6). Multiple depictions of YHWH in the Hebrew bible describe YHWH as being surrounded by heavenly beings. This supports the explanation which states that “we” refers to the heavenly court.

The language of Genesis 1:26-27 and Ezekiel 1:26 is very similar.

Then God said, “Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the

⁵²² T. B. Arnold, *Genesis* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), p.44.

⁵²³ Wenham, *Genesis 1-15*, p.27.

⁵²⁴ Gerhard von Rad, *Genesis - a Commentary* (London: SCM Press Ltd, 1972), p. 57.

⁵²⁵ C. Westermann, *Genesis 1-11: A Commentary* (London: SPCK 1984), pp. 144-45.

⁵²⁶ von Rad, *Genesis - a Commentary*, p.59.

cattle, and over all the wild animals of the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth.”

וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים נַעֲשֶׂה אָדָם בְּצַלְמֵנוּ כְּדְמוּתֵנוּ^{Ge 1:26}

וַיִּרְדּוּ בְרִגְתַּת הַיָּם וּבְעוֹרַף הַשָּׁמַיִם וּבְבִהְמָה וּבְכָל־הָאָרֶץ וּבְכָל־הַרְמֵשׁ הַרְמֵשׁ עַל־הָאָרֶץ:

So God created humankind in his image,
in the image of God he created them;
male and female he created them.

וַיִּבְרָא אֱלֹהִים אֶת־הָאָדָם בְּצַלְמוֹ בְּצַלְמֵ אֱלֹהִים בָּרָא אֹתוֹ זָכָר וּנְקֵבָה בָּרָא אֹתָם:^{Ge 1:27}

And above the dome over their heads there was something like a throne, in appearance like sapphire; and seated above the likeness of a throne was something that seemed like a human form.

וּמִמֶּעַל לָרָקִיעַ אֲשֶׁר עַל־רֹאשָׁם^{Eze 1:26}

כְּמִרְאֵה אֲבֹן־סַפִּיר דְּמֹות כֶּסֶף וְעַל דְּמֹות כֶּסֶף דְּמֹות כְּמִרְאֵה אָדָם עָלָיו מִלְמַעְלָה:

Both sections share some lexical similarities and differences. In both sections the words אָדָם, בְּצַלְמֵ, and דְּמֹות are used. However, the author of the book of Ezekiel never uses the word בְּצַלְמֵ image in connection with God. Instead the word is used exclusively in relation to idols.⁵²⁷ The author of the book of Ezekiel uses the word כְּמִרְאֵה something like.

In both sections the relationship between the divine and the human is highlighted. In the first chapter of the book of Genesis, God creates the humans in his image, while in the first chapter of

⁵²⁷ J. M. Miller, "In the "Image" and "Likeness" of God," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 91, no. 3 (1972): p.299.

the book of Ezekiel the glory of the Lord is described as something that seemed like the human form.

In the book of Genesis, the humans are the pinnacle of God's creation and are placed above all other creation (fish, birds, cattle, wild animals, and every creeping thing). In the book of Ezekiel, the living creatures described in Ezekiel 1:4-27 have four faces encompassing the majority creation (faces of an eagle, an ox, a lion, and a human). Even the word לְרִקְיַע "dome/firmament" is highly suggestive of creation narrative of Genesis 1.

The vision reaches its climax in Ezekiel 1:26-28. The author sees a magnificent throne made of sapphire stone. As mentioned in the previous chapter of this thesis, the author has difficulty explaining what he sees, and in this verse he reverts to using the words דְּבִמְנֹתָי "likeness" (three times) and מְרִאֵהוּ "appearance" (twice).

The author of the book of Ezekiel then makes a most radical statement: seated on the throne is the brilliant figure who has the form of a אָדָם (human being) but was not an ordinary human being. In verse 28 the author will state that this figure is of divine origin and hence alludes to and develops the Genesis concept of humans being made in the likeness and image of God.

The author is avoiding the use of word "image" צֶלֶם since the only time it is used is in association with idols (Ezek. 7:20, 16:17, 23:14). I have examined the words "likeness" and "appearance" in Chapter Five of this thesis. I will briefly examine the word "image".

The word צֶלֶם "image" is mostly used as a word which describes plastic or three-dimensional objects, a copy or sometimes an idol (1 Sam. 6:5; Num. 33:52; 2 Kgs 11:18 Ezek. 23:14), while דְּבִמְנֹתָי "likeness" is used to describe something more abstract, such as "appearance", "similarity" or "analogy" (Ezek. 1:5, 10, 26, 28).⁵²⁸

⁵²⁸ von Rad, *Genesis - a Commentary*, pp.57-8.

The word **צֶלֶם** “image” possibly comes from the Arabic root meaning “to cut” or “to hew,” or from the Akkadian and Arabic “to become dark”.⁵²⁹ The majority of the 25 occurrences of the word **דְּמֻת** “likeness” are found in the book of Ezekiel. Both terms are found in a ninth century old Aramaic inscription from Tell Fakhariyeh which describes the statue of King Haddu-yisi and where the two terms are used simultaneously: “likeness” in lines 1 and 15 and “image” in line 12 of the text.⁵³⁰

The word **צֶלֶם** appears in both biblical Aramaic and biblical Hebrew, and is more widely distributed than the word “likeness”. The majority of instances are found in Genesis 1:26-27, 5:3, 6:6, Numbers 33:53 and Ezekiel 7:20, 16:17 and 23:14. The “image” can refer to “a three-dimensional object in the round (“image”, “idol/statue”, “model”), a two-dimensional yet physical object (“sketch”, “drawing”), or a nonphysical, non-dimensional and metaphorical nonentity.”⁵³¹ “Image” denotes a “representation, copy or facsimile”.⁵³²

In the biblical literature the referent of “image” can be human (Ezek. 23:14-15), royal (1 Sam. 6:5-11), or divine /cultic (Num. 33:52, Amos 5:26). Therefore “image” in the Hebrew bible represents a man, a god or a cultic object, and the word in the majority of cases has negative connotations and is often “mocked, vilified, denounced or rejected”.⁵³³ The most positive connotation of the image can be found in Genesis 1:26-27, where the author describes humans being created in the image of God.⁵³⁴

In the Ancient Near East “image” can be defined by the verbs that it is associated with and it can also represent three-dimensional objects, freestanding objects, two-dimensional drawings or relief. The referent can be astral, priestly, a private individual or a mythological creature, and in the majority of cases royal or divine.⁵³⁵

⁵²⁹ Wenham, *Genesis 1-15*, p.29.

⁵³⁰ J.C. Collins, *Genesis 1-4, a Linguistic, Literary, and Theological Commentary* (Phillipsburg: P&R Publishing 2006), p.65.

⁵³¹ R.W. Carr, *In His Own Image and Likeness - Humanity, Divinity, and Monotheism* (Leiden: Brill, 2003), p. 134.

⁵³² *Ibid.*, p.134.

⁵³³ *Ibid.*, p.135.

⁵³⁴ *Ibid.*, p.136.

⁵³⁵ *Ibid.*, pp.138-39.

In the book of Genesis, “image” is associated with and restricted to the primeval period, and the idea that the image of God is not associated with a person but instead with humanity as a whole is an exception.⁵³⁶

On the other hand, “image” in non-biblical texts is also associated with “verbs of creation, procreation or production”.⁵³⁷ The “image” of a human being is corporeal, viable, anthropomorphic, born, visible, living and can be male or female.⁵³⁸

The biblical “image” is compatible with its parallels elsewhere in the Ancient Near East.

The realistic, concrete meaning which first offers itself in our biblical expression...certainly is not to be denied. To a limited degree the anthropomorphic human race shares in the anthropomorphism of God and the gods, In addition the human race intimately represents performative aspects of God and the gods in the world: viz., divine power, dominion and justice. The human race then is comparable to a statue which a king puts... in a conquered land to signify his real, though not his physical presence there. For in the Bible, the image of God reflected in human persons is after the manner of a king who establishes statues of himself to assert his sovereign rule in which the king himself cannot be present.⁵³⁹

Kutsko argues that **צֶלֶם** in the book of Ezekiel is only associated with idols (Ezek. 7:20, 16:17, 23:14) and furthermore that the author of the book of Ezekiel purposely avoided using the term **צֶלֶם** due to its association with the gods.⁵⁴⁰ The author never uses the phrase “image of God” for a human.

Instead of using the word **צֶלֶם** “image” the author uses words such as “idols” **גְּלִילִי**, “abominations” **תּוֹעֲבוֹתֵיהֶם**, “detestable things” **שְׂקִינֵי**, “image” **סִמָּל**, “harlotry” **זוֹנָה**. The

⁵³⁶ Ibid., p.152.

⁵³⁷ Ibid., p.153.

⁵³⁸ Ibid., p.153-54.

⁵³⁹ Ibid., p.163.

⁵⁴⁰ J.E. Kutsko, *Between Heaven and Earth - Divine Presence and Absence in the Book of Ezekiel* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2000), p.69.

word **גְּלִילִי**, “idols” is used in the book of Ezekiel approximately 39 times, out of a total of 48 instances found in the Hebrew bible.⁵⁴¹

Furthermore, the author of Ezekiel deliberately never uses the common word for “gods” **אֱלֹהִים** for divine images or foreign gods.⁵⁴² The term can be confusing, as in Leviticus 19:4, where both idols and YHWH are called **אֱלֹהִים** “gods”. It appears that the author of the book of Ezekiel believed that by using the same expression for both gods and YHWH the audience might give some power and legitimacy to the idols.

For the audience of the prophet Ezekiel in Babylon this might pose a theological problem. The author decided to avoid the term and hence avoid confusion, and in the process de-powered the term “gods” when referring to idols by using the derogatory term **גְּלִילִי**.⁵⁴³

In Mesopotamian texts, the expression *šalmu* is most commonly used to describe divine cult statues. The expression denotes the physical image of a god or the sculptured statue of a god. The same expression can apply to kings or priests. “It also appears that Ezekiel exploits the Mesopotamian concept of *šalam ili/ilani* in a more complex fashion than either Deutero-Isaiah or P, employing it both positively to describe the God-human relationship and negatively to denounce idolatry.”⁵⁴⁴

Kutsko argues that the P writer purposely uses the expression **בְּצַלְמֵם** to challenge Mesopotamian ideology. The expression is used in a context where YHWH is God Creator, where there are no other contesting gods and where human beings are the only image of God.⁵⁴⁵ The author of the book of Ezekiel avoided the term because it could easily be misunderstood by his audience in Babylon and lead to legitimisation of other gods. For the author of Ezekiel the image of YHWH can only be represented by humans.

⁵⁴¹ J.F. Kutsko, "Ezekiel's Anthropology and Its Ethical Implications," in *The Book of Ezekiel - Theological and Anthropological Perspectives*, ed. M.S. Odell and J.T. Strong (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2000), p.120.

⁵⁴² Ibid., p.122.

⁵⁴³ Ibid., p.123.

⁵⁴⁴ Ibid., pp.130-31.

⁵⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 132.

Idols are a misinterpretation of God's presence. And by asserting that the image of God is humanity, Ezekiel offered the exiles a theologoumenon in which they, the people of Israel, were indispensable. The destruction of that image would be as sacrilegious as defiling a cult statue was for the Mesopotamian cult.⁵⁴⁶

In the book of Genesis there is "a deliberate demotion of gods associated with nature and cosmos and an elevation of mankind...humanity is given the place primarily occupied by the statues of the gods in the Ancient Near East and secondarily by kings and other temple officials."⁵⁴⁷

The divine body in Ancient Near Eastern material

Conceptual dependence

In ANE and Mediterranean tradition the divine body was described as "so sublime that it bordered on the non-body".⁵⁴⁸ One of the main characteristics of the divine body is that it is glowing or radiant and dangerously fiery. In Akkadian this luminosity is labelled *pulhu melammu* "fear/glorious". *Pulhu* means a supernatural garment of fire and flame, "a dazzling aureole or nimbus which surrounds the divinity" while *melammu* denotes some sort of supernatural head gear, "peculiarly shaped sparkling and crown like head wear".⁵⁴⁹

Since the king was perceived as a representative and a likeness of the gods, he also had similar aura bestowed upon him by the gods. Like the gods, the king was clothed in a *pulhu*—a garment—and was wearing head gear—*melammu*.⁵⁵⁰

In the majority of cases for Mesopotamian religious texts, gods are depicted in anthropomorphic terms (sometimes zoomorphic). One exception is the description of Marduk's body in the Enuma Elish I, 93-100:

- 93. Artfully arranged beyond comprehension were his members
- 94. not fit for (human) understanding, hard to look upon.

⁵⁴⁶ Ibid., p.134.

⁵⁴⁷ S.L. Herring, *Divine Substitution - Humanity as the Manifestation of Deity in the Hebrew Bible and the Ancient Near East* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2013), p.124.

⁵⁴⁸ W. Williams, "A Body Unlike Bodies: Transcendent Anthropomorphism in Ancient Semitic Tradition and Early Islam," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 129, no. 1 (2009): p.23.

⁵⁴⁹ A. L. Oppenheim, "Akkadian Pul(U)H(T)U and Melammu," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 63, no. 1 (1943): p.31.

⁵⁵⁰ Ibid., p.32.

95. four were his eyes, four were his ears
 96. when his lips moved, fire blazed forth
 97. each of (his) four ears grew large
 98. and likewise (his) eyes, to see everything
 99. he was exalted among the gods, surprisingly was (his) form
 100. his members were gigantic, he was surpassing in height⁵⁵¹

Besides the point that Marduk is depicted as impossible to understand in Enuma Elish VI. 37, the author states that Marduk's creation is "not suited to (human) understanding".⁵⁵² Marduk is not only clearly superior to humans, but he is also superior to other gods. His body transcends the anthropomorphism of other gods.⁵⁵³

In the "Hymn of Ninurta"⁵⁵⁴ the body of the god Ninurta is described as the sum of other gods. For instance, Ninurta's eyes are Enlin and Ninlin, his lips An and Antu, his head Adad, his neck Marduk and so forth. The body of Ninurta is inconceivable, his authority all encompassing, and his body is transcendent and anthropomorphic.⁵⁵⁵ From the first millennium BCE, anthropomorphic images are replaced by cultic emblems.⁵⁵⁶

The terror inspiring luminosity could overwhelm the enemies of the battlefield and even lesser deities would seek shelter in the presence of higher or greater gods.⁵⁵⁷ To see a deity could result in death for the human spectator. Hence, if a deity wants to be seen its divine body must be concealed by shrouding in a mist, cloud or fog, or in some cases by metamorphosis where the divine takes on the appearance of a human.⁵⁵⁸

One can clearly see how the biblical writers were dependent conceptually on the ANE understanding of the divine body. The author of the book of Ezekiel was immersed in

⁵⁵¹ Heidel, *Babylonian Genesis: The Story of the Creation*, pp.21-22.

⁵⁵² *Ibid.*, p.47.

⁵⁵³ R.S. Hendel, "Aniconism and Anthropomorphism in Ancient Israel," in *The Image and the Book - Iconic Cults, Aniconism and the Rise of Book Religion in Israel and the Ancient Near East*, ed. Karel van der Toorn (1997), p.207.

⁵⁵⁴ B. R. Foster, *Before the Muses: An Anthology of Akkadian Literature* (Bethesda: CDL Press, 1993), p.632-33.

⁵⁵⁵ Hendel, "Aniconism and Anthropomorphism in Ancient Israel," in *The Image and the Book - Iconic Cults, Aniconism and the Rise of Book Religion in Israel and the Ancient Near East*, p. 208.

⁵⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p.210.

⁵⁵⁷ Williams, "A Body Unlike Bodies: Transcendent Anthropomorphism in Ancient Semitic Tradition and Early Islam," p.24.

⁵⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

Babylonian society, religion and politics. The parallels between the description of Marduk and the description of YHWH in the first chapter of Ezekiel are striking. The author is using the account of the description of Marduk to describe the majesty of YHWH, who is depicted as even more impressive.

The author of the book of Ezekiel is alluding to Genesis 1:26-27. The author incorporates sufficiently familiar yet distinctive elements such as the use of the words אָדָם “human/humankind” and דְּמוּת “likeness” the intentional omission of the word צֶלֶם “image” in connection with God, and its use exclusively in relation to idols. The author of the book of Ezekiel also uses the word כְּמִוְדָּה “something like” instead of צֶלֶם “image”. The words serve as markers to activate both texts.

The body of YHWH in the Hebrew bible

Thematic development

No other prophet describes God in such corporeal terms as the author of the book of Ezekiel does.⁵⁵⁹ Ezekiel 1:1-3:15 and 8:12-11:25 contain “the most graphic portrayals of the divine presence in the Hebrew Bible”.⁵⁶⁰ Theophany was very important in biblical prophetic material, and anthropomorphism was of vital importance in describing the image of God. The author of the book of Ezekiel in fact amplifies the anthropomorphism of the Lord.⁵⁶¹

In the first chapter of the book of Ezekiel, the author describes the glory of YHWH having human form. In Ezekiel 2:8-9 the author describes YHWH’s hand giving the scroll to the prophet to eat. In Ezekiel 8-11 the author is making sure that the audience understands that the imagery in the new vision is the same as the imagery in the inaugural vision. In Ezekiel 40-48 anthropomorphic concepts are expressed in a non-visionary context. The sacrifices are YHWH’s food (Ezek. 44:7, 15) and the Zadokite priests are allowed to be close to the Lord while the

⁵⁵⁹ R. Kasher, "Anthropomorphism, Holiness and Cult: A New Look at Ezekiel 40-48," ZAW 110 (1998): p. 192.

⁵⁶⁰ Kutsko, *Between Heaven and Earth - Divine Presence and Absence in the Book of Ezekiel*, p.88.

⁵⁶¹ Kasher, "Anthropomorphism, Holiness and Cult: A New Look at Ezekiel 40-48," p.192.

Levites are kept at a distance (Ezek. 42:13; 43:19; 44:15-16; 44:13).⁵⁶² This closeness to YHWH can be seen as an anthropomorphic expression.

YHWH is also described as transcendently anthropomorphic. The Israelite concept of YHWH had much in common with their neighbours' concept of gods. YHWH's anthropomorphism is external as well as internal (anthropopathism). YHWH's qualities are as similar to humans', but purified and amplified to "superhuman" level. Even though humans were created in the image of God, there is a huge difference of degree.

In this respect the view found in the Hebrew Bible does not radically differ from the conviction concerning the similarity between gods and humans in the Babylonian Atrahasis myth. God has human form but not human size.⁵⁶³

Hendel states:

Yahweh has a body, clearly anthropomorphic, but too holy for human eyes...Like the bodies of Marduk, Ninurta, Ningirsu and Aten, Yahweh's body was believed to be incommensurate with mundane human existence: it has a different degree of being than human bodies...It is a transcendent anthropomorphism not in form but in effect, approachable only by the most holy, and absent in material form in the cult...⁵⁶⁴

The luminosity of YHWH is the key feature which suggests the transcendent anthropomorphic nature of YHWH. The luminosity suggests God's holiness, and humans as unholy beings cannot see YHWH and stay alive. "The divine body is also characterised by a divine substance (ruah) antithetical to mortal flesh (basar)."⁵⁶⁵ This luminosity of YHWH is sometimes defined as the glory of YHWH and can be so dangerous that it consumes everything that it touches. I will explore the dangers of glory of the Lord and the term itself in the next two chapters.

Just like *puhlu melammu* of the Mesopotamian deities, the flames of glory of the Lord can destroy YHWH's enemies (Psalm 97:3f). Gazing upon the glory can be deadly (Ezek. 33:17-23).

⁵⁶² Ibid., p.194.

⁵⁶³ K. van der Toorn, B. Becking, and P. W. van der Horst, *Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible* 2nd ed. (Leiden ; Boston : Grand Rapids: Brill ; Eerdmans., 1999), p.362.

⁵⁶⁴ Hendel, "Aniconism and Anthropomorphism in Ancient Israel," in *The Image and the Book - Iconic Cults, Aniconism and the Rise of Book Religion in Israel and the Ancient Near East*, p.223.

⁵⁶⁵ Williams, "A Body Unlike Bodies: Transcendent Anthropomorphism in Ancient Semitic Tradition and Early Islam," p. 25.

YHWH shrouds himself with a cloud to protect his people and Israel, and if YHWH wants to punish his enemies or one of his own, YHWH removes the clouds and exposes them to his glory (Num. 16:19; 20:16).⁵⁶⁶

This *de facto* aniconism focuses on anthropomorphism concentrating on “a maximal degree of purity and danger” while the *programmatically* aniconism of Deuteronomy is “more philosophical and abstract”.⁵⁶⁷

The author of the book of Ezekiel was influenced by Ancient Near Eastern understanding of the divine body. Accordingly, the author is describing YHWH in anthropomorphic terms.

The author of the book of Ezekiel clearly sees YHWH as being different from the composite gods of Babylon. YHWH is described only in anthropomorphic terms. As a result the human race is exalted to a new level. The exiles who felt rejected, lost and worthless in the Babylonian religious system and society are reminded that they are the pinnacle of creation. It is of paramount importance to the author of the book of Ezekiel to make the vision of YHWH as vivid as possible and YHWH as corporeal as possible. Only if he did this would the exiles who were immersed in Babylonian religion and society fully appreciate YHWH and see him as being real and present in Babylon. An abstract God found in the temple in Jerusalem is not an option for the author and his audience, who are immersed in Babylonian society.

Humanity as divine image

For Canaanites and Israel's other neighbours, the king was a central institution. The king was a political as well as a religious figure and was viewed as the earthly representative of the gods.⁵⁶⁸ The cultic statues of the gods resembled the king, who upon his death was called a god.

However, for the Israelites the importance of the king varied at different times. Israelite society was decentralised and the authority was divided between local kinship groups.⁵⁶⁹ In times of crisis, “judges” would be appointed to lead militia which would disband after the crisis.

⁵⁶⁶ Ibid., p.26.

⁵⁶⁷ Hendel, "Aniconism and Anthropomorphism in Ancient Israel," in *The Image and the Book - Iconic Cults, Aniconism and the Rise of Book Religion in Israel and the Ancient Near East*, pp.223-24.

⁵⁶⁸ R.S. Hendel, "Worldmaking in Ancient Israel," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament*, 17, no. 56 (1992): p. 11.

Unlike their neighbours, in the time of exile the Israelites did not have an earthly king. Only YHWH was the true king. The prohibition of graven images and the absence of those images in Israel contrasts with the abundance of images of gods in Canaan, associated with the fact that in Canaanite religion the earthly king represented the heavenly king.⁵⁷⁰

The Israelites saw YHWH as the only king, and having images of the king was blasphemous. According to this political theology, YHWH is exalted on the wings of cherubim but the anthropomorphic image that mirrors the image of God is absent. In fact, in the Holy of the Holies the ark of YHWH was empty.

The sacred emptiness of Yahweh's throne obscures the notion that the celestial king is the mirror image of the political king. On this divine body no political claims authorizing kingship can be made...The body politic and the body of God are related to each other in such a way that the king (in his political and physical body) no longer serves as the mediator or "cosmic axis". The cosmos has been reformulated such that the celestial king and his people are partners, the political king having been effaced from the structure.⁵⁷¹

During this period of programmatic aniconism, the earthly king is not a focal point of the Israelite religious and political aspects of society and hence there is no need for the anthropomorphic images of YHWH. YHWH becomes incorporeal, formless.

The author of the book of Ezekiel finds himself in a foreign land, in a society where there was a clear relationship between Marduk and his earthly representative, Nebuchadnezzar. In the eyes of the prophet's audience, Marduk and his earthly representative have destroyed the temple and transported the majority of the population to Babylon.

The author of the book of Ezekiel must answer some crucial theological questions: where is YHWH? How should YHWH be described in the absence of the cultic images? What is the role of King Jehoiachin and King Nebuchadnezzar? The relationship between the Babylonian earthly king and his god was clear, and this relationship was perceived to be so close and productive that King Nebuchadnezzar managed to achieve the unthinkable—to destroy the temple—and Marduk

⁵⁶⁹ Ibid., p.12.

⁵⁷⁰ Ibid., p.14.

⁵⁷¹ Hendel, "Aniconism and Anthropomorphism in Ancient Israel," in *The Image and the Book - Iconic Cults, Aniconism and the Rise of Book Religion in Israel and the Ancient Near East*, pp. 226-27.

managed to defeat YHWH. The author of the book of Ezekiel had to completely re-interpret current political theology. The author is trying to describe YHWH “in an overtly iconic, cultic context”.⁵⁷² In describing YHWH in the Babylonian context, the author transforms the well-known story about YHWH’s ark. However, the sacred ark of YHWH which was in the temple was destroyed together with the temple. The people of God were exiled. The once empty throne made of wood and surrounded by gold-plated cherubim also made of wood becomes a live, mobile throne in the vision of the prophet. As mentioned above, in a dramatic twist the cherubim are absent and replaced with Babylonian supernatural beings. The once empty throne is now occupied by the glory of YHWH in the form of a human. The message of the author to his audience is that YHWH, God of Israel, is alive, majestic and present in Babylon. The one true celestial king, YHWH not Marduk, is sitting on the throne consisting of Marduk’s defeated enemies.

The author emphasises the importance of the relationship between YHWH and the people by stating that the glory of the Lord has the shape of a human being. The author is extremely careful with the language he is using to describe the anthropomorphic glory of YHWH. Even though the language would indicate some three-dimensional qualities in someone seated on the throne, the glory of the Lord is too abstract to function like a statue.⁵⁷³

The only true representation of YHWH can be found in humans, not in lifeless statues.⁵⁷⁴

Herring suggests that the author of Ezekiel sees a renewed Israel as the image of God.⁵⁷⁵ This is an interesting proposition. Due to the limits of this thesis, I will not explore Herring’s suggestion in more detail.

The author of Genesis already exalted the human race by stating that all humans are made in the image of God. In the book of Ezekiel, even though the glory of the Lord is described in human form, due to its elusiveness and intangibility, humans take the position of concrete representation of YHWH.⁵⁷⁶ “In the absence of the temple, and without any type of cultic symbol, YHWH’s

⁵⁷² Herring, *Divine Substitution - Humanity as the Manifestation of Deity in the Hebrew Bible and the Ancient Near East*, p.181.

⁵⁷³ *Ibid.*, p.204.

⁵⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p.208.

⁵⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, p.215.

presence could be manifested through living humans.”⁵⁷⁷ Kutsko argues that “the essential issue is not whether God is conceived of in human form but why such anthropomorphic theophanies occur and how they function in the context.”⁵⁷⁸

The author describes YHWH in such a vivid, detailed, graphic way because of the way Marduk and other ANE gods are depicted. YHWH’s anthropomorphic description is needed so that YHWH is portrayed as not defeated, present in Babylon and in control. Surrounded by a society which was overtly iconic, aniconic Israelites had to adapt the theology of a transcendent, formless, abstract God and find the mediator. The author clearly states that only humans can be the image of God, not idols.

The appearance of the glory of the Lord introduces YHWH’s judgment, guarantees the presence of YHWH in the midst of the exiles, and authorises Ezekiel as leader.⁵⁷⁹ The description of the glory of the Lord as having the shape of a human makes sense when one realises that according to Ezekiel nothing could represent YHWH but humans. How important the relationship between YHWH and his people is to Ezekiel can be seen in the fact that God is described having a human form.

The author of the book of Ezekiel modifies the theology of Genesis 1:26-27, switching the focus from humans to YHWH and divine realities. In Genesis, the focus is on the creation of humans, their role and gender. Humans are the pinnacle of creation and they are God’s representatives on Earth. Their role is to have dominion over the rest of creation. Humans are also clearly defined by their respective genders.

The author of the book of Ezekiel built on the theology of the book of Genesis, but the main focus is on YHWH rather than humans. In the book of Ezekiel demarcation of the divine and earthly realms is clear. The supernatural wheels are touching the ground, and above the wheels are four living beings, and on the top of the dome a throne on which the glory of the Lord sits. YHWH is coming in all his splendour to the heart of Marduk’s realm. The climax of the entire vision is the description of the glory of the Lord.

⁵⁷⁷ Ibid., pp.215-16.

⁵⁷⁸ Kutsko, *Between Heaven and Earth - Divine Presence and Absence in the Book of Ezekiel*, p.90.

⁵⁷⁹ Ibid., p.91.

In the book of Ezekiel the gender of the living beings is in a state of flux and is impossible to determine. I have argued above that this is purposely done in order to highlight the supernatural character of the living beings. One of the faces of the living beings is that of a human and their overall appearance is that of humans. Humans are clearly portrayed as part of creation. The role of humans is not discussed. In fact, at this point in the vision it looks like the place of humans has been downgraded. Instead, the role of YHWH is highlighted.

The author reverses the focus of the book of Genesis, where humans are created in the image of God. The word “image” is never used, as discussed above. Instead, the glory of the Lord seems to have a human form. In this way, the human form is elevated to the highest level. What initially looks like downgrading humanity ends up being humanity elevated to the highest level. Some human qualities have been attributed to the divine, instead of divine characteristics being attributed to humans as in the book of Genesis.

At the same time, comparing YHWH’s glory to the human form could be regarded as the most sacrilegious blasphemy. According to the author of Genesis, it is humans who have the spark of divinity in them as a result of being created in the image of God. The author does this because he is immersed in the Babylonian culture where gods were represented in a variety of different ways.

The author strongly emphasises that only humans can represent YHWH. The living beings are composite, supernatural beings, but human form is reserved for the glory of the Lord. The human form of the glory of YHWH is highlighted in Ezekiel 2:9, where the hand of God is stretched out, giving the scroll to the prophet.

The author of the book of Ezekiel is struggling to find the language to describe the presence of God in aniconic theology.⁵⁸⁰ The language is abstract and concrete, iconographic and iconoclastic, and while YHWH’s glory is described in highly anthropomorphic and zoomorphic imagery, the author states at the same time that the material representation of God is an

⁵⁸⁰ Ibid., p.3.

abomination.⁵⁸¹ “Paradoxically, with the context of condemning idols, Ezekiel graphically describes God in physical terms.”⁵⁸²

For the author of the book of Ezekiel, the quintessential cause for the exile is idolatry.⁵⁸³ Idolatry is understood to be “the misinterpretation of God’s image, illegitimate expression of his presence...”⁵⁸⁴ The worship of idols was widespread in Babylon, but the author saw it as incompatible with worship of the Lord. YHWH could not be represented by a statue.

As mentioned above, the author of the book of Ezekiel transforms Babylonian political theology, where the relationship between God and his earthly representative is in focus and the king is the only proper image of God. This is why the author emphasises the human form of the glory of the Lord. The focus is not on the earthly representatives, as in Genesis, but on the one true king—YHWH. Not only is representation of YHWH by wooden sculptures idolatry—a misinterpretation of YHWH—but “the folly of idols is that they represent non-gods”.⁵⁸⁵

The author never uses the word **סִלְוֹתֵי־הָאֱלֹהִים** in connection with idols or other gods. The strategy is clear: if the author employs the term in his setting, the word would give credence to the idols and gods and strongly suggest that they are real representations of gods or that they are real and alive. The author is clear that “idols are never gods”.⁵⁸⁶

The author successfully challenges the Mesopotamian concept of a statue being the image of a god (*salami li/ilāni*) while adapting the theology found in the book of Genesis. The author of the book never uses the term “image of God” but is clearly aware of it. Instead of the word **צֶלֶם** “image” the word **דְּמֻת** “likeness” is used. The author is carefully describing a very detailed vision and uses the word **דְּמֻת** “likeness” “very effectively to suggest that this appearance was in a form more like that of a man than of any other creature”.⁵⁸⁷ Also, the author of the book of Ezekiel uses the word to acknowledge the resemblance between the glory of the Lord and the

⁵⁸¹ Ibid.

⁵⁸² Ibid.

⁵⁸³ Ibid., p.26.

⁵⁸⁴ Ibid., p.27.

⁵⁸⁵ Ibid., p.28.

⁵⁸⁶ Ibid., p.38.

⁵⁸⁷ Miller, "In the "Image" and "Likeness" of God," p.291.

human form, unlike the author of Second Isaiah, who refuses to compare God with any three-dimensional form.⁵⁸⁸

The language of Ezekiel 1:26 is cautious, and inadequate to describe the glory of the Lord. Still, the language used is dangerous, because words **מַרְאֵה** and **דְּמוּת** both strongly imply a concrete representation.⁵⁸⁹ The author does not use words such as **דְּמוּת** and **צִלְמִים** as the use of these words would give credibility to idols.

Kutsko argues that the author is trying to base his theology on the theology found in the book of Genesis, to contradict Babylonian ideology and to abstain from using the language that would suggest the existence of other gods.⁵⁹⁰ However, I argued in this thesis that the author of the book of Ezekiel is not afraid to use Babylonian imagery in describing the living creatures and proclaiming his message.

Nevertheless, it is evident that the author of the book of Ezekiel uses the terminology found in the book of Genesis. The author of the book of Ezekiel refuses to use certain terms because of the possibility that they would give credence to idols, but instead uses other words. For the author, idols are merely images of humans.

However, the author still needs to explain why the temple was destroyed and why the people went into exile and why Marduk was victorious against YHWH.

In Chapter Seven of this thesis I will argue that in another radical twist the author of the book of Ezekiel portrays Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon, as YHWH's tool who brings order to the world. The author is stating that YHWH is in control of historical events, even devastating events such as the destruction of the temple and the exile. It is YHWH who is behind the Babylonian king, not Marduk. The author implicitly declares the Babylonian king as YHWH's earthly agent later in the book, in oracles against nations.

⁵⁸⁸ Ibid., p.302.

⁵⁸⁹ Kutsko, *Between Heaven and Earth - Divine Presence and Absence in the Book of Ezekiel*, p.67.

⁵⁹⁰ Ibid., p.68.

Conclusion

The purpose of this chapter was to determine what are “the living creatures” mentioned in the first chapter of the book of Ezekiel. After examining relevant archaeological evidence, the following conclusions can be drawn: the composite creatures which correspond to the typological profile of biblical cherubim are depicted as supernatural beings, more precisely, the protectors of the king or deity’s throne, and are depicted in close proximity to a sacred tree.

There are four different quadruped composite beings represented in the iconography of Israel and Judah: a ram-headed winged lion, a human-headed winged bull, a human-headed lion and an aquiline-headed winged lion. The winged quadrupeds with leonine bodies and human or aquiline heads were most likely iconographic influences on biblical authors who modelled the biblical cherubim upon them.

The following conclusion can be made: the author of the book of Ezekiel modelled his living creatures on the supernatural creatures of the Ancient Near Eastern pantheon. The living beings are composite beings, threatening and monstrous but totally submissive and inferior to YHWH. This argument is further strengthened by one of the most significant findings of this thesis namely, the intertextual connections between the first chapter of the book of Ezekiel, Enuma Elish and the “A Vision of the Nether World” text. The supernatural beings, the Destructive, the Pitiless, the Trampler, and the Flier, are mentioned in the Enuma Elish as four beings that pulled Marduk’s war chariot, and the text bears striking similarities to the first chapter of the book of Ezekiel and the description of the living creatures and YHWH’s chariot.

The author employed the terrifying image of the living creatures as part of his radical theology. The living creatures represented supernatural beings, whom some of the exiles would perceive as victorious and more powerful than YHWH. By depicting the living creatures as foreign supernatural beings under the absolute control of YHWH, the author makes a very important theological statement: YHWH is the universal God.

The author of the book of Ezekiel radically and subversively proclaims to his audience, in the heart of Babylonian empire, that Marduk should be perceived as unable to act independently of YHWH. YHWH is depicted as triumphantly coming to Babylon carried by Marduk’s subdued monster and has always been in absolute control of historical events.

The following conclusions also emerged from this study: The text of “A Vision of the Nether World” describes the vision of 15 composite gods engulfed in brilliant light. The gods were variously described as winged humanoids with single aquiline, bovine, leonine heads and most remarkably as having multiple faces.

According to the author of the book of Ezekiel, idolatry is the reason per se why the temple is destroyed and why the people are in exile. The author uses the well-known tradition and develops it with the intention of showing his audience that Jerusalem is so corrupt that it might be described as an underworld full of terrors and the place where foreign gods are openly celebrated.

As well as using ANE texts and iconography extensively, the author of the book of Ezekiel also alluded strongly to Jeremiah 10:11-16, openly emphasising the futility of idols and idol worship. Unlike Jeremiah, the author of the book of Ezekiel could not be so direct and open, due to living in the heart of the Babylonian empire. Instead, by using certain terms or markers he would activate both stories in the minds of his audience. The audience would also recall Jeremiah 51:36-37,48, which openly speaks of Babylon being destroyed by YHWH.

One of the most significant findings to emerge from this study is the intertextual connection between Ezekiel 1 and Genesis 1:26-27. According to the author of the book of Ezekiel, YHWH is the true king. The author does not follow Babylonian theology, where the relationship between Marduk and his earthly representative, Nebuchadnezzar, is reciprocal. The author transforms this theology by diminishing the role of King Jehoiachin and focusing on YHWH. The fact that King Jehoiachin is in exile does not mean that YHWH is defeated. YHWH does not depend on King Jehoiachin, and the king's defeat is not indicative of YHWH's powerlessness. The author also elevates the human race to the highest level by strongly arguing that only humans can represent YHWH in explicitly iconic Babylon.

The following conclusion has also been reached: the author of the book of Ezekiel and his audience found themselves in a difficult predicament. The theology of YHWH as an abstract, formless God who was present in the now destroyed temple was not an option for the author in Babylonia. YHWH had to be described in a more corporeal sense. The author looked for inspiration in ANE texts, radically reinterpreting them and describing YHWH as more superior

than Marduk. The description of YHWH is influenced by the description of Marduk in Enuma Elish.

The following chapter will focus on the root **כבד**-*kbd* and the most common derivatives. Furthermore, intertextual connections between the book of Genesis and the book of Ezekiel will be examined. I will also explore how the author is strongly stating that YHWH is in control of historical events, even devastating events such as the destruction of the temple and the exile. It is YHWH who gives power to the Babylonian king, not Marduk. King Nebuchadnezzar is YHWH's tool in bringing order to the world.

Chapter Seven

Intertextuality Ezekiel 1:28

In this chapter I will give an overview of the use of the root **כבד**-*kbd* and determine the basic meanings of the most important derivatives. However, I will not explain every single possible meaning of the word derived from the root **כבד**, due to lack of relevancy to the main purpose of this thesis and limited space. This chapter examines the phrase **כְּבוֹד־יְהוָה** “the glory of YHWH” because it plays a significant role in the book of Ezekiel. Furthermore, I will explore the theological usage of the word *kābôd* against the basic meaning of the word and identify any other relevant literary features in this verse.

The phrase **כְּבוֹד־יְהוָה** is a technical term to describe the appearance of YHWH in light, and is used here for the first time in the book of Ezekiel.⁵⁹¹

The root **כבד**-*kbd* is extensively used in the Hebrew bible and a large number of different words can be derived from the same root. The most important nominal derivatives are **כָּבֵד** “heavy” and the substantive **כְּבוֹד** “honour, respect, majesty.”⁵⁹² **כְּבוֹד** can have the basic meaning of weight, but it can also denote size or quantity, difficulty, burdensome, physical or mental disability, and it can be used to describe decisive moments in a battle (see Appendix I). **כְּבוֹד** “honour”, “respect”, “majesty” will be explored in more detail in this chapter.

This chapter will argue that the author of the book of Ezekiel is using sufficiently familiar yet distinctive elements found in the book of Exodus as markers to activate the Exodus texts to formulate and present his own theology to his audience. Furthermore, this chapter will focus on Exodus 16:9-12; 24: 9-11,15-17; 33:18-23; 34:5-7, as these are the passages which share some common motifs and themes with Ezekiel 1:28. One common theme is the concept of “the glory of YHWH”. The author of the book of Ezekiel takes the theme of the glory of YHWH found in the book of Exodus and develops it.

⁵⁹¹ Zimmerli, *Ezekiel: A Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Ezekiel*, p.123.

⁵⁹² David J. A. Clines, *The Dictionary of Classical Hebrew*, vol. 4, 6 vols. (Sheffield Sheffield Academic Press., 1998), p.349.

In the book of Ezekiel, the visual rather than auditory elements of the vision are emphasised. The glory appears in Babylon, at the heart of Marduk's realm, and is not obscured by meteorological phenomena. The glory is not limited by territorial borders or by the physical sanctuary. The mobility of the glory is constantly highlighted. The similarities between the two characters Moses and Ezekiel will also be examined. It will be argued that the character of Ezekiel was modelled on the character of Moses.

The author of the book of Ezekiel describes the glory of the Lord in Babylon and finds justification in Exodus 16 and 24 where the glory appears to be outside of a physical building such as the tabernacle or temple. The glory of the Lord is described in detail and almost blasphemously described as having "human form". When Moses sees the glory of the Lord he only sees the back of it. Sometimes the audience sees it, but there is minimal description of it (Exodus 16:10) or it is obscured by the clouds (Exod. 24:16) or described simply as devouring fire on the top of the mountain (Exod. 24:17).

On the other hand, the author of the book of Ezekiel clearly states that the glory of the Lord that he saw in his vision seemed to have "human form". Even though YHWH is occasionally described in anthropomorphic terms in the Hebrew bible, no other prophet apart from Ezekiel has ever described YHWH in such a detailed way (Gen. 3:8, 8:21, 31:49; Exod. 3:4, 33:11, 33:21-23; Num. 11:18; Deut. 8:3, 9:10, 32:18, 33:12; 2 Sam. 22:7, 9, 16; 2 Chron. 7:16; Job 33:4, 40:9; Psalm 29:10, 34:15, 37:13, 89:34, 95:4-5; Isa. 30:27, Dan. 7:9; Amos 7:7).

Furthermore, the author of the book of Ezekiel also focuses on the visual rather than auditory elements of the vision. Unlike the multitude of people who see the glory of the Lord in Exodus 24, it is only Ezekiel the prophet who sees the detailed vision of the glory.

It will be argued that the author's intention is to describe Ezekiel as "the new Moses" hence he is the only one who sees it. The author describes the prophet Ezekiel's relationship with YHWH as being as unique as the relationship between YHWH and Moses. Daringly, the author of the book of Ezekiel depicts the prophet seeing the glory of the Lord and not dying. What he has seen is much more intricate than what Moses described. In this aspect Ezekiel is greater than Moses. The author of Ezekiel modifies another longstanding tradition, according to which YHWH was stationary (usually on the top of a mountain) and the prophet was moving towards YHWH. In the

first chapter of the book of Ezekiel, the writer completely reverses the earlier tradition and describes the prophet as stationary while the glory of YHWH is dynamic and coming towards the prophet.

Intertextual connections between Ezekiel 1:28 and Genesis 9:13 and the rainbow motif will be explored. Only in these two passages is the rainbow mentioned as an atmospheric phenomenon, and the same word for living creatures is used in both texts. Different meanings and the use of the word קִשְׁתָּהּ “bow” in the Hebrew bible will be examined as well.

It will be argued that the word “rainbow” or “bow” is a polyvalent symbol which has three distinct yet interrelated meanings: military (a weapon of war), rainbow (a meteorological phenomenon) and the cosmic firmament. The word “rainbow” is used by the author as a marker which would activate several different texts in the minds of his audience. Ancient Near Eastern iconography will be explored, focusing on the gods holding bows and arrows.

This chapter will argue that YHWH has put down his bow and with this act he is declaring his victory over Marduk. The author is using this symbol as a radical declaration of his support for the Babylonian King Nebuchadnezzar and King Jehoiachin. YHWH is portrayed as the God warrior and the rainbow invokes Chaoskampf⁵⁹³ motifs of YHWH conquering the waters of chaos in Genesis 9. YHWH is the only true divine king and the king of Babylon is his earthly agent, while King Jehoiachin is vital for the Davidic dynasty to continue and hence is called a king too.

The author also depicts his vision beautifully by focusing on the radiance of the glory of the Lord which is luminescing through a crystal-like dome, giving the impression that the firmament is multicoloured. The author of the book of Ezekiel is able to describe, through cosmology found in the book of Genesis, that YHWH, whom some of his audience perceived to be stationary and based in the temple, and finally defeated by Marduk, is actually the Lord of the universe.

⁵⁹³ C. A. Strine and C. L. Crouch, "Yhwh's Battle against Chaos in Ezekiel: The Transformation of Judahite Mythology for a New Situation," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 132, no. 4 (2013).

Survey of כְּבוֹד “weight”, “honour”, “majesty”

כְּבוֹד “weight”, “honour”, “majesty” derives from כָּבַד and it appears 200 times, including 19 times in the book of Ezekiel. There are 24 occurrences in the Pentateuch, seven in the books of Deuteronomy through to Second Kings, 18 in Chronicles, 38 in Isaiah, 51 in Psalms and 16 in Proverbs. Psalms primarily speaks of *kəbôd YHWH*, while Proverbs speaks more of human *kābôd*.⁵⁹⁴

The substantive, כְּבוֹד “weight”, “honour”, “majesty” is used in the text to describe:

- physical “heaviness”, i.e. quantity, imposing numbers
- majesty or honour in human relations, i.e. one person attributing honour to a person in reference to that person’s health or significance
- YHWH’s majesty and honour.⁵⁹⁵

כְּבוֹד often appears with the meaning “body,” “substance” or “mass”, hence “power” or “might”. In Isaiah 5:13 it stands in parallel with *h^amônô* and means “multitude”.⁵⁹⁶ It is also implied in Isaiah 8:7. In Isaiah 10:16; 17:4 it is synonymous with “fatness”. In Psalm 145:11f it appears in connection with *g^ebûrâ*- strength. כְּבוֹד can mean “strength”, as in Job 29:20 and Psalm 3:4.⁵⁹⁷ It can also mean “wealth” as in Genesis 31:1 and Isaiah 10:3, 22:24, or stand in conjunction with *ôšer* “wealth” (1 Kgs 3:13; Prov. 3:16; 8:18; 22:4; Psalm 49:17).⁵⁹⁸

The verb כָּבַד in *piel* form can be used as a participle for verbs of praise: in the imperative call to praise (Isa. 24:15; Psalm 22:24); in the vow of praise in Psalm 86:12; 91:15; in the praise of the nation anticipated (Psalm 86:9; Isa. 25:3); in praise of the animals (Isa. 43:20).⁵⁹⁹ It can also describe worship of God in general (Dan. 11:38; Deut. 28:58).

⁵⁹⁴ G. Johannes Botterweck and Helmer Ringgren, *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament* trans., John T. Willis, vol. 7 (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1995), p.24.

⁵⁹⁵ Jenni and Westermann, "Theological Lexicon of the Old Testament " p.593.

⁵⁹⁶ Botterweck and Ringgren, "Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament " p.25.

⁵⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁹⁸ Ibid., p.26.

⁵⁹⁹ Jenni and Westermann, "Theological Lexicon of the Old Testament " p.595.

However, it is more correct to understand the usage of the word against the basic meaning of the word “to make weighty”, that is to give God the weight due to YHWH. The *niphal* has a reflexive meaning in reference to God, who provides self with appropriate honour.⁶⁰⁰ In some passages God is the subject of the verb **כבד**. In the *qal* it has the basic meaning “to be heavy”, for example, “the hand of God was heavy upon X” (1Sam. 5:6, 11; Psalm 32:4; Job 23:2; 33:7). Heaviness is ascribed to God’s action, not to God.⁶⁰¹ God can be “heavy” against the enemies of Israel as well as against individuals.⁶⁰² YHWH is honoured above all. God is God of **כבוד** (Psalm 29:3), the king of **כבוד** (Psalm 24:7, 9, 10) and YHWH’s kingdom is the kingdom of **כבוד** (Psalm 145:11).⁶⁰³

People ascribe **כבוד** to YHWH (Psalm 96:7), divine beings offer YHWH **כבוד** (Psalm 29:1), and the whole of creation gives **כבוד** to YHWH (Isa. 42:12).⁶⁰⁴ In Joshua 7:19, **כבוד** means “testimony”. Kings (Isa. 14:18; Psalm 21:6; Prov. 25:2), priests (Exod. 28:2, 40) and sages (Prov. 3:35) are given **כבוד**.⁶⁰⁵ Parents and slave owners get **כבוד** (Mal. 1:6). The term also denotes personal honour and dignity which is attained through humility and generosity.⁶⁰⁶

When **כבוד** denotes “glory” or “splendour” it usually refers to YHWH, God’s sanctuary, YHWH’s city or other sacred objects such as the throne (1 Sam. 2:8; Isa. 22:23; Jer. 14:21; 17:12), the temple (Hag. 2:9; Psalm 29:9), holy garments (Exod. 28:2,40) and especially crowns (Job 19:9; Psalm 8:6).⁶⁰⁷

In the Ancient Near East, divine beings and rulers are described as being surrounded with glory. Crowns or the headdresses were especially associated with glory.⁶⁰⁸ In Egypt the crown was deified as a goddess and depicted as a fiery diadem. In Assyria awe and terror were associated

⁶⁰⁰ Ibid.

⁶⁰¹ Ibid.

⁶⁰² Ibid.

⁶⁰³ Botterweck and Ringgren, "Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament " p.26.

⁶⁰⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁰⁵ Ibid., p.27.

⁶⁰⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁰⁷ Ibid., p.28.

⁶⁰⁸ Ibid., p.29.

with crowns. According to Greek mythology, Athena crowned Achilles with a cloud of fire.⁶⁰⁹ In the ANE texts majestic glory evokes reverence and fear.

In some passages **כְּבוֹד** is described in eschatological terms (Isa. 4:5, 24:23). In postexilic texts, **כְּבוֹד** will be revealed to all the flesh (Isa. 40:5). Isaiah uses ancient terminology, such as “light,” “God’s coming,” “brilliance,” and “shining,” which is prominent in Deuteronomy and the book of Habakkuk.⁶¹⁰ However, in Deuteronomy 33:2 and Habakkuk 3:3f the **כְּבוֹד** of God appears to give the people the law or to deliver them from enemies. In Isaiah 40-66 the purpose of **כְּבוֹד** is to attract other nations and lead to the path of righteousness. In Psalms **כְּבוֹד** has the same universal eschatological purpose (Psalm 102:16ff). The same idea is implied in Isaiah 6:3, Numbers 14:21, Habakkuk 2:14 and Psalm 72:19, where **כְּבוֹד** will fill the whole earth as universal salvation.⁶¹¹

Similarly, in the Sinai account the frightening aspects of YHWH’s glory are prominent.⁶¹² “Divine fire”, one of the most graphic and dangerous aspects of YHWH’s glory, appears at the consecration of the tabernacle (Lev. 9:23) and the dedication of Solomon’s temple (2 Chr. 7:1), and the same fire consumes offerings (1 Kgs 18:39).⁶¹³ The fire can also kill a person who transgresses the commandments (Lev. 10:1) or strikes enemies (Psalm 97:3). The glory of YHWH threatens God’s people if they rebel against their God (Exod. 16:7, 10; Num. 14:10, 16:19, 17:7, 20:6).⁶¹⁴ When **כְּבוֹד** is manifested it is also followed by signs of reverence—prostration, praise and acclamation (Lev. 9:24; Ezek. 1:28, 3:23).⁶¹⁵ *K’bôd YHWH* is a specific term for the manifestation of God’s presence to the people.⁶¹⁶

The term first appears in Exodus 16:7, “and in the morning you will see the glory of the Lord”, and in v. 10 “and behold the glory of the Lord appeared in the cloud”. The presence of God is

⁶⁰⁹ Ibid.

⁶¹⁰ Ibid., p.35.

⁶¹¹ Ibid., p.36.

⁶¹² Ibid., p.30.

⁶¹³ Ibid., p.31.

⁶¹⁴ Ibid.

⁶¹⁵ Ibid.

⁶¹⁶ VanGemeren, "New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology & Exegesis " p.581.

something that is visually perceived and connected to atmospheric phenomena (cloud).⁶¹⁷

However, this manifestation of God's presence is not limited to the wilderness period. It can be clearly identified in postexilic writings.

The term occurs in three contexts:

1. In passages linked to the Sinai experience which deal with the establishment of the cult (Exod. 24:16f, 40:34f; Lev. 9:6, 23)
2. In the account of events during the wilderness wandering (Exod. 16:7, 10; Num. 14:10, 16:19, 17:7, 20:26)
3. In passages where YHWH shows himself to be majestic in historical acts (Exod. 14:4, 17f; Lev. 10:3).⁶¹⁸

Exodus 24:16f, 40:34f and Leviticus 9:6, 23 describe one progression of events. Mt Sinai is a station during Israel's exodus and a holy mountain. The cult is established at this mountain. The writer uses **כְּבוֹד** to describe the glory of YHWH of Israel, which was witnessed for the first time.⁶¹⁹ **כְּבוֹד** emphasises the uniqueness of the experience and the historical event. God wants to address Israel and a mediator is required (Moses), who was told to build the tent of meeting which is filled with **כְּבוֹד־יְהוָה**.⁶²⁰ The essential structure of the cult is established. **יְהוָה** **כְּבוֹד־יְהוָה** is of paramount importance in the historical events (Exod. 16; Num. 14, 17:6-15, 20:1-13) as well. The sequence describes events which are similar to Exodus 24:15-18.

The writer uses the phrase **כְּבוֹד־יְהוָה** to emphasise that the majesty of the God is encountered. The uniqueness of the writer's adaption of the *kābôd* concept is "in association of the name of YHWH with the basic components of holy events, holy place, holy time, the mediator of the holy", which Israel has not experienced prior to events at Mt Sinai.⁶²¹

In the book of Exodus and the book of Ezekiel, **כְּבוֹד־יְהוָה** is described as a radiating fire surrounded by clouds (Exod. 16:10; 24:16, 40:34, Ezek. 1:4, 10:4). Atmospheric phenomena

⁶¹⁷ Ibid.

⁶¹⁸ Jenni and Westermann, "Theological Lexicon of the Old Testament" p.600.

⁶¹⁹ Ibid.

⁶²⁰ Ibid.

⁶²¹ Ibid., p.601.

such as clouds are an important part of theophany, since they protect humans from the fatal danger of seeing YHWH.⁶²² Only Moses saw God face to face (Num. 12:8; Deut. 34:10; Exod. 24:18) and only once does God reveal himself to Israel without the protection of clouds, at the consecration of the tabernacle (Lev. 9:23).⁶²³

According to this tradition, YHWH does not descend in the clouds. YHWH's **כְּבוֹד** is continuously in the tabernacle and its presence is manifested by the clouds.⁶²⁴ This notion of the glory of YHWH and the tabernacle or temple is obviously developed by the Jerusalem priesthood. Fire and clouds in other source strata are described as: accompanying phenomena (Psalm 98:2f; Exod. 19:16ff; Deut. 4:11, 5:22), and instruments of YHWH's power and protection; guiding the people (Exod. 13:21; Num. 10:34; Deut. 1:33); protecting the people (Exod. 14:19ff; Psalm 105:39); divine agents who destroy the enemy (Exod. 14:24; Psalm 97:2f; Hab. 3:5; and the vehicle for YHWH to descend to the Earth.⁶²⁵ In later Jewish literature **כְּבוֹד** is replaced by the *š'kînâ* and the divine chariot throne *merkābâ* which is first found in the book of Ezekiel.⁶²⁶ **כְּבוֹד** often alternates with YHWH's "face", "goodness", "power", "beauty", "steadfast love" or "salvation" (Exod. 33:18ff; Psalms 62:7; 63:2-4, 65:5; 73:16ff).⁶²⁷

One usually finds that in Exodus and Numbers material the **כְּבוֹד-יְהוָה** manifests itself to inform the people of God's will and it usually happens after Israel's rebellion (Exod. 16:10; Num. 14:10, 16:19, 17:7, 20:6). According to this view, the tabernacle is the central sanctuary from which God calls the mediator—Moses. The tent is covered with clouds and filled with **כְּבוֹד**. The tabernacle is the place where Moses meets God and receives the laws to govern his people (Exod. 25:22, 29:42-45; Num. 7:89).⁶²⁸

In Exodus 33:7-11 and Numbers 11:26, 12:5, the tent is the place where Moses meets God and talks to him. However, the meeting occurs in the front of the tent where God descends in a pillar of cloud. In those passages the tent is sometimes located outside the camp and sometimes in the

⁶²² Botterweck and Ringgren, "Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament " p.31.

⁶²³ Ibid.

⁶²⁴ Ibid., p.32.

⁶²⁵ Ibid.

⁶²⁶ Ibid.

⁶²⁷ Ibid., p.33.

⁶²⁸ Ibid., p.34.

middle of the camp, and YHWH speaks to Moses from within it.⁶²⁹ In the book of Exodus, God dwells permanently in the tabernacle and announces God's will. In all texts the **כְּבוֹד־יְהוָה** is honoured and respected (Exod. 33:10).

In the book of Ezekiel **כְּבוֹד** occurs repeatedly in three different contexts:

1. At the conclusion of the call vision 1:28 and the conclusion of commissioning in 3:23
2. In chapters 8-11 in the context of the abandonment of the temple
3. In chapter 43f in the context of the return of **כְּבוֹד** to the temple.

The fundamental idea is the same as in the texts above. The **כְּבוֹד** is God's majesty in which he appears to the people in the temple, through a mediator.⁶³⁰ However, in Ezekiel the glory of the Lord becomes more mobile and is not confined by the temple. The majesty of God leaves the city and the temple. The glory of the Lord returns to the new temple. The second peculiarity in Ezekiel's description of the glory of the Lord is the fact that **כְּבוֹד** is a visible phenomenon. In the book of Ezekiel the glory of the Lord is depicted in great detail, with its mobility emphasised.

Parallels between the book of Exodus and the book of Ezekiel

There are a number of parallels between the book of Ezekiel and the book of Exodus. Many scholars, such as Idestrom⁶³¹ and McKeating⁶³², have explored these striking similarities. It is plausible to say that when the author of the book of Ezekiel used the expression **בְּרֵאשִׁית אֱלֹהִים** to his audience this was a marker which was employed to catch the audience's attention. The phrase would remind the audience of one of the most famous stories or theophanies in the Hebrew bible—the story of Moses and the burning bush. The author uses this phrase following the description of the glory of YHWH with the intention of describing the prophet Ezekiel as a kind of “new Moses”.

⁶²⁹ Ibid.

⁶³⁰ Jenni and Westermann, "Theological Lexicon of the Old Testament" p.601.

⁶³¹ Rebecca G S Idestrom, "Echoes of the Book of Exodus in Ezekiel," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 33 (2009).

⁶³² Henry McKeating, "Ezekiel the 'Prophet Like Moses'," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 19, no. 61 (1994).

The similarities are distinctive enough to alert the reader that the author of the book of Ezekiel is drawing parallels with the book of Exodus. Both Moses and Ezekiel are described as having a priestly background, both were called to become prophets and leaders to their people in a time of crisis, both received their calls far from home, both served the people in exile, both experienced numerous theophanies, both saw the glory of the Lord, and both were given instructions regarding a covenant relationship and a divine plan for worship focusing on the tabernacle or the temple.⁶³³

Both Moses and Ezekiel receive the call through a theophany. Both theophanies are unusual and miraculous. Both prophets hear the voice of the Lord, both are reluctant to accept their mission, both experience resistance and stubbornness from their people, both proclaim messages of judgment and redemption, and both are intercessors and mediators between YHWH and the people.⁶³⁴ Both Moses and Ezekiel will see the glory of the Lord a number of times, and the glory appears at critical points in each book. The divine glory is associated with both judgment and salvation. In the book of Exodus, Moses sees the glory of the Lord at Sinai (Exod. 24:16-17), and his wish to see the glory of the Lord is granted in Exodus 33:18-23; 34:5-7. The book of Exodus concludes with the glory filling the tabernacle in Exodus 40:34-38. The glory is mentioned in Exodus 16:7,10 and one may argue that even the pillar of fire and the pillar of cloud could also represent the glory of the Lord.⁶³⁵

Similarly, the prophet Ezekiel sees the glory of the Lord at the beginning of his ministry (Ezek. 1:28; 2:22), in his vision of Jerusalem and the temple (Ezek. 8:4; 9:3; 10:4; 11:22-23). Finally, he sees the glory returning to the temple in Ezekiel 43: 1-5. No other prophet sees the glory of the Lord the way Ezekiel does. Even in Isaiah 6 there is no explicit mention of the glory, even though this is implied in the praise of the seraphim and the prophet's description of the glory. Other prophets see the glory (Hab. 2:14; Isa. 4:5; 6:3; 40:5; 60:1, 2; 66:18, 19) but these are not personal encounters, which again puts Ezekiel on the same level as Moses.⁶³⁶

Besides the similarities between the two characters, there are striking similarities between the two books. Both the book of Exodus and the book of Ezekiel contain more references to the

⁶³³ Idestrom, "Echoes of the Book of Exodus in Ezekiel," p.492.

⁶³⁴ Ibid., pp.493-95.

⁶³⁵ Ibid., p.495.

⁶³⁶ Ibid., p.496.

glory of the Lord than any other books (Exod. 16:7, 10; 24:16-17; 40:34-35, Ezek. 1:28; 3:12, 23; 9:3; 10:4; 10:18-19; 11:23; 31:18; 39:13; 43:4-5; 44) and both books emphasise the theme of knowing YHWH through divine acts of salvation or judgment. In both books one of the main themes is that even foreign nations will recognise that YHWH is God through the divine acts, themes and motifs of judgment through plagues, and idolatry as the main cause of judgment is common.⁶³⁷

McKeating argues that ‘the organization of the book of Ezekiel around three key visionary experiences...itself constitutes a parallel with the career of Moses as presented in the Pentateuch.’⁶³⁸ Furthermore, he argues that:

- Moses’ encounter of the divine (burning bush) on Horeb parallels Ezekiel’s call
- Moses’ encounter at Sinai parallels Ezekiel’s vision in chapters 8-11 (themes of idolatry, divine punishment, slaughtering of the unfaithful)
- Moses’ encounter at Nebo, where he views the promised land and YHWH speaks to him, parallels Ezekiel’s vision of the city, temple and land in chapters 40-48.⁶³⁹

The parallels between Ezekiel 8-11 and Exodus 32-34 are significant. In Ezekiel 8, the prophet witnesses idolatry being committed in the temple. The parallel can be found in Exodus 32 in the golden calf incident. In Ezekiel 9, judgment is proclaimed to all inhabitants in Jerusalem because of the idolatry by six agents. The parallel can be found in Exodus 32:25-29, where the Levites slaughter 3000 unfaithful Israelites after the golden calf episode. Ezekiel 9 alludes to the story of the plague of the firstborn (Exod. 11-12), where all the faithful are urged to mark their door frames. Ezekiel intercedes with YHWH on behalf of the people to spare them, just as Moses does on behalf of his people in Exodus 32:31-35.

This is followed by Moses seeing the glory of the Lord. Similarly, Ezekiel sees the glory of the Lord following idolatry, judgment and intercession. The glory of the Lord was present among the Israelites throughout the wilderness experience. In the same way, the glory of the Lord is present among prophet Ezekiel’s audience in Babylon.

⁶³⁷ Ibid., pp.497-99.

⁶³⁸ McKeating, "Ezekiel the 'Prophet Like Moses'," p.99.

⁶³⁹ Ibid.

It is clear that the author of the book of Ezekiel, faced with cataclysmic events of his time, was looking at the history of his people and trying to make sense of what was happening. Naturally, he found many answers in the book of Exodus.

The biblical evidence suggests that the prophet Ezekiel, the character in the book, was modelled upon the character of Moses.⁶⁴⁰ Scholars such as McKeating and Block support this hypothesis. McKeating states:

...this would suggest that the perception of Ezekiel as a Moses figure is the perception of those who organized the Ezekiel tradition rather than that of the prophet. Whether these organizers connected him specifically with Deuteronomy 18:15 and with the “prophet like Moses” who is mentioned there, we cannot say. That they saw him as a prophet like Moses seems very certain.⁶⁴¹

Block adds that:

the parallels between Ezek. 40-48 and the Mosaic Torah can hardly be coincidental ...These correspondences strengthen the impression that Ezekiel is perceived as a second Moses.⁶⁴²

The themes of the new exodus (Ezek. 20-33-44), the new covenant (Ezek. 34:25; 37:26) and the importance of the tabernacle and worship (Ezek. 40-48) are present in the book of Ezekiel.

The glory of the Lord - כְּבוֹד־יְהוָה

Identification

As mentioned above, the author of the book of Exodus states that Moses has seen the glory of the Lord in Exodus 16:9-12; 24: 9-11, 15-17; 33:18-23; and 34:5-7. These are the passages which share some common concepts with Ezekiel 1.

⁶⁴⁰ Idestrom, "Echoes of the Book of Exodus in Ezekiel," p.504.

⁶⁴¹ McKeating, "Ezekiel the 'Prophet Like Moses'," p.108.

⁶⁴² Block, *The Book of Ezekiel: Chapters 25-48*, p.498.

Availability

It is likely that the author of the book of Ezekiel and his audience were familiar with the stories of Moses and his people in the wilderness. Those stories were embedded in the consciousness of the ancient Israelites.

Exodus 16:9-12:

Then Moses said to Aaron, “Say to the whole congregation of the Israelites, ‘Draw near to the LORD, for he has heard your complaining.’”¹⁰ And as Aaron spoke to the whole congregation of the Israelites, they looked toward the wilderness, and the glory of the LORD appeared in the cloud.¹¹ The LORD spoke to Moses and said,¹² “I have heard the complaining of the Israelites; say to them, ‘At twilight you shall eat meat, and in the morning you shall have your fill of bread; then you shall know that I am the LORD your God.’”

Lexical dependence

The passage contains a phrase **כְּבוֹד יְהוָה נִרְאָה בְּעָנָן** which is remarkably similar to the phrase **מִרְאֵה דְמִנּוֹת כְּבוֹד יְהוָה** found in Ezekiel 1:28. The word **בְּעָנָן** “the cloud” is found in both verses. The phrase is used to describe theophany. In this case it is also used as a marker which would activate both texts in the minds of Ezekiel’s audience.

Conceptual dependence

In this passage Moses and Aaron are responding to complaints raised by the Israelites. The people are complaining about lack of food and certainty, stating that it would have been better to die in Egypt where they were settled and had enough food rather than die of starvation in the wilderness. The threat of starvation is mentioned six times in Exodus 16:6-12. The people are in fact complaining about YHWH rather than food and shelter. They complained against Moses five times and against YHWH three times in Exodus 16. The rebellion of the people against YHWH reaches such a level that YHWH promises to reveal himself by showing his glory to the people.

The author of the book of Exodus describes a theophany, an initial revelation of YHWH in the wilderness, which then progresses to the ascent to the summit of Mt Sinai (Exod. 24:16-17), the

descent into the completed tabernacle (Exod. 40:34-35) and the invasion into the altar (Lev. 9:23).⁶⁴³

In the book of Ezekiel, the description of the glory of YHWH is inspired by the account of the glory of the Lord in the Exodus material. Only in Exodus 16 and during the Sinai theophany does the glory of the Lord appear to be outside a physical sanctuary.⁶⁴⁴ The circumstances of the author of the book of Ezekiel are very similar to the circumstances of Moses and his people after they left Egypt. The glory of YHWH serves as a link connecting two exilic communities, and helps the author of the book of Ezekiel to adapt well-known tradition to proclaim his message to his audience.

There are several similarities between the activity of the glory of the Lord in the book of Ezekiel and in the book of Exodus. According to Keck:

(1) the Glory appears unenclosed only when there is no available physical sanctuary; (2) the people are in a condition of dislocation and outside Israel / Judah; (3) the Glory is not a constant presence, but appears intermittently, to address specific purposes; (4) when the Glory does appear, it speaks to a priest-prophet (Moses / Ezekiel), who is then directed to deliver a message to the people; and (5) these conditions, which converge in both the pre-Tabernacle wilderness and in Ezekiel, constitute the only circumstances in which the Glory ever appears independently of a physical sanctuary in Priestly presentation.⁶⁴⁵

The author of the book of Ezekiel uses the glory of the Lord as a thematic link between the Babylonian exile and the wilderness exile “and invoked the Glory’s activity as a connection between these two different settings”.⁶⁴⁶ However, the author does not simply use the old tradition, he also transforms it.

Apart from the similar vocabulary, the book of Ezekiel shares some common themes and motifs with Exodus 16. In the book of Exodus the people are grumbling about YHWH. Besides not trusting YHWH, food is a central issue.

⁶⁴³ T. B. Dozeman, *Exodus, Eerdmans Critical Commentary* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2009), p.384.

⁶⁴⁴ Elizabeth Keck, "The Glory of Yahweh in Ezekiel and the Pre - Tabernacle Wilderness," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament*, Vol.37,, no. 2 (2012): p.201.

⁶⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p.207.

⁶⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 208.

The author of the book of Ezekiel implicitly states that the exiles are complaining against YHWH. In Ezekiel 2:3, YHWH states that the exiles are “a nation of rebels who have rebelled against me; they and their ancestors have transgressed against me to this very day”. The author also plays on the motif of food. In Ezekiel 3:1 the prophet is instructed to eat a scroll:

He said to me, “O mortal, eat what is offered to you; eat this scroll, and go, speak to the house of Israel.” So I opened my mouth, and he gave me the scroll to eat. He said to me, “Mortal, eat this scroll that I give you and fill your stomach with it.” Then I ate it; and in my mouth it was as sweet as honey.

In the book of Ezekiel the people are urged to “draw near to the Lord” and see his glory. The people will see the glory of YHWH because YHWH heard their complaints against him.

Thematic development

The author of the book of Ezekiel incorporates familiar yet distinctive elements found in the book of Exodus. Like the exiles in the book of Exodus, Ezekiel’s audience was in exile, far away from their homes and the temple. Like the people in the book of Exodus, they most probably complained, stating that perhaps it was better to stay in Jerusalem and die there rather than be exiled to a foreign land. At the start of Ezekiel’s prophetic mission the exiles have spent some time in Babylon, and a return to Jerusalem was not an option.

The difference between the book of Exodus and the book of Ezekiel is that the author of the book of Ezekiel does not even give the people a chance to openly complain. Instead of following the Exodus tradition, in which the people complain to a mediator (Moses) who then communicates YHWH’s response to them, the author of the book of Ezekiel implies the people’s dissatisfaction in YHWH’s strong response.

Instead of following the Exodus tradition of complaint –mediation – response – theophany, the author of the book of Ezekiel reverses the process, starting radically with the most detailed theophany in the entire Hebrew bible, followed by YHWH’s response then the prophet’s mediation and finishing with the implied dissatisfaction of the people which started the entire process.

Perhaps the people are so assimilated to the new way of thinking and living that they are indifferent to YHWH. This sort of spiritual apathy can only be challenged with an extraordinary theophany. The exiles in the book of Exodus saw the glory of the Lord shrouded by a cloud. The cloud is most probably the same cloud of divine presence that led them from Egypt. However, due to the people's complaints the cloud is now described as something negative and threatening:

The cloud symbolizes the positive aspect of unconditional divine guidance and providence. But in Exod 16 the negative aspect of the cloud becomes apparent, because it is manifested now as a specific response to Israel's complaints. It is not simply the old, kindly, cloud but a manifestation of theophany, which is positive but also negative. In fact, this duality is a feature of the theme of cloud theophany throughout the Bible, especially in the covenant and prophetic traditions. In the complex of ideas and symbols associated with holy war, Yahweh appears on or in a cloud to attack Israel's foes, but also to punish Israel for its sins⁶⁴⁷

In the book of Ezekiel the heavens are opened up and the glory of the Lord is shown in all its splendour. The presence of YHWH is imposing. The cloud's negative/threatening and positive/promising aspects are developed in Ezekiel 1:4 and Ezekiel 1:28.

YHWH in the book of Ezekiel does not respond to his people. Due to the seriousness of their spiritual apathy YHWH warns the prophet: "Whether they hear or refuse to hear (for they are a rebellious house), they shall know that there has been a prophet among them." (Ezek. 2:5)

This is the signal to those who "hear" that their situation is very serious. YHWH has come to Babylon and YHWH is not there to hear their complaints as in the book of Exodus. YHWH is not asking for the people to "draw near" to him so he can hear their complaints. YHWH is there to proclaim judgment. The prophet states in Ezekiel 5:8: "therefore thus says the Lord GOD: I, I myself, am coming against you; I will execute judgments among you in the sight of the nations." Through YHWH's judgment rather than good deeds (Exod. 16) the exiles are to know that YHWH is their Lord.

⁶⁴⁷ Stephen A. Geller, "Manna and Sabbath: A Literary -Theological Reading of Exodus 16," *Interpretation* 59, no. 1 (2005): p.9.

At this point, the author of the book of Ezekiel has captured his audience's attention. By borrowing a cluster of words such as "appearance", "the glory of the Lord" and "the cloud", which serve as markers, the author activates the Exodus 16 text. The next motif that the audience would recall is the motif of food/hunger.

The author of the book of Ezekiel develops the motif of food/hunger. The people in the book of Exodus are focused on finding enough food to eat to physically sustain them through their journey to the promised land, and through their demands they disobey YHWH and show their lack of faith.

However, Ezekiel eats a scroll provided by YHWH, which is, ironically, as sweet as honey, similar to manna (Exod. 16:31), and in the process he obeys YHWH. Ezekiel's audience does not need physical food but spiritual nourishment. It is safe to assume that the majority of the exiles continued their lives in Babylon in relative comfort and that basic needs such as food and shelter were not an issue.

What the prophet is proclaiming is that his audience needed their manna in the form of YHWH's revelation. Ezekiel's audience is spiritually starved, and only through the words of Ezekiel the prophet will they satisfy their hunger and re-establish their relationship with YHWH.

The author of the book of Ezekiel develops the tradition of the glory of the Lord. As mentioned above, in the Exodus material, the glory is described as "out in the open" and not in the sanctuary only twice: in Exodus 16 and at the Sinai theophany.

The author of the book of Ezekiel was sufficiently familiar with the Exodus material to see how the glory of the Lord during the wilderness period could help him proclaim a new radical message that the glory of YHWH is not bound by territory or by physical objects such as the temple.

By using the phrase "the glory of the Lord" he reminds his audience of the theophany during the wilderness period, when the glory was in an unclean land and was not constrained by a physical sanctuary. The concept of YHWH coming to Babylon was almost impossible to comprehend, but the author is announcing to his audience that it happened before and that it happened on at least two occasions.

In Ezekiel 11:16 the author makes an even more radical statement:

Therefore say: Thus says the Lord GOD: Though I removed them far away among the nations, and though I scattered them among the countries, yet I have been a sanctuary to them for a little while in the countries where they have gone.

According to the author of the book of Ezekiel, the true temple is among the exiled Babylonian community and not in Jerusalem among the remnant.

The author of Ezekiel states that YHWH is a sanctuary to the exiles for a little while. “In other words, God’s sanctuary used to be a physical place in a certain land, but has temporarily become a form of God himself in a different land.”⁶⁴⁸ However, this is a temporary solution until the new temple is built and a new cult is established.

The cult is established on Mt Sinai, which is paralleled by Ezekiel’s vision of the new temple (Ezek. 43-48). The Sinai theophany is essentially about the beginning of a nation and the beginning of proper worship. Ezekiel uses this tradition to depict the unenclosed glory of the Lord in Babylon which will again fill the new temple, therefore creating a new nation and proper worship which is described in minute detail.

In the case of the author of Ezekiel, YHWH is not waiting for the response of the exiles as he hoped in Exodus 16. In the book of Ezekiel, YHWH is creating Israel’s response.⁶⁴⁹ The radical message of the author of Ezekiel is that this is not simply a new beginning. The glory of the Lord is creating a radical new “beginning all over again”.⁶⁵⁰

Summary

There are some strong lexical connections between Ezekiel 1:28 and Exodus 16:9-12. Both texts mention **כְּבוֹד־יְהוָה** “the glory of the Lord”, as well as the words **בְּעֶנָן** “cloud”, and **מְרֹאָה** “appearance”. Those phrases serve as markers which activate both texts in the minds of the audience. By alluding to the Exodus text, the author of the book of Ezekiel radically challenges another well-known tradition, namely the movement of the glory of the Lord. The radical

⁶⁴⁸ Keck, "The Glory of Yahweh in Ezekiel and the Pre - Tabernacle Wilderness," p.212.

⁶⁴⁹ Ibid., p.216.

⁶⁵⁰ Ibid.

theology states that the glory of the Lord can leave the tabernacle or temple and come back when conditions are right.

The author challenges the usual theophany progression: complaint – mediation – response – theophany, and in fact starts with the most unusual and detailed theophany, followed by YHWH's response, which in this case is judgment mediated through the prophet, and finishes with implied complaint by the people. In fact, even Ezekiel does not complain. Only once, when he is ordered to eat bread prepared by using human dung as fuel for the fire, does the prophet Ezekiel implore YHWH to change the decision (Ezek. 4:15).

The author develops the Exodus tradition, and instead of YHWH showing his glory and in the process doing a good deed for his people, YHWH is coming to judge his people in all his splendour. Unlike the Exodus audience, who were physically hungry and through their demands disobeyed YHWH, Ezekiel's audience is in a state of spiritual apathy and need something radical to awaken them from their indifference to YHWH. The author of the book of Ezekiel ironically describes the prophet eating the words given to him by YHWH, which were as sweet as honey, just like manna was. Those words are all the food that the exiles in Babylon need.

The author of the book of Ezekiel develops the theology of the glory of the Lord. The radical theology is based on the Exodus tradition of unenclosed glory in a foreign land. However, the author proclaims the mobility of God as well as the fact that YHWH is not bound by geographical borders or physical structures such as the tabernacle or the temple. The author is using the tradition of the glory of the Lord to proclaim the message of a completely new beginning, the creation of a new nation and new temple, and the re-establishment of proper worship. In the meantime YHWH himself is among the exiles and YHWH himself is a temporary sanctuary.

It might be safely assumed that the author of the book of Ezekiel and his audience were aware of the Exodus texts, and that the author consciously used certain phrases to activate both texts in the minds of his audience to help his audience understand the new radical message.

Identification

As mentioned above, the author of the book of Exodus states that Moses saw the glory of the Lord in Exodus 24: 9-11, 15-17. These verses share some common concepts with Ezekiel 1.

Exodus 24:9-11, 15-17:

Then Moses and Aaron, Nadab, and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel went up,¹⁰ and they saw the God of Israel. Under his feet there was something like a pavement of sapphire stone, like the very heaven for clearness.¹¹ God did not lay his hand on the chief men of the people of Israel; also they beheld God, and they ate and drank.

Then Moses went up on the mountain, and the cloud covered the mountain.¹⁶ The glory of the LORD settled on Mount Sinai, and the cloud covered it for six days; on the seventh day he called to Moses out of the cloud.¹⁷ Now the appearance of the glory of the LORD was like a devouring fire on the top of the mountain in the sight of the people of Israel.

Availability

As discussed above, it is likely that the author of the book of Ezekiel and his audience were familiar with the stories of Moses and his people in the wilderness.

Lexical dependence

In a brief look at the passages one can hear the same words resonating in Ezekiel chapter 1: כְּבוֹד־יְהוָה “glory of the Lord”, וּמֵאֵרָא “and the appearance of”, כְּאֵשׁ “like fire”, as well as הָעֶנָן “a cloud”, הַסַּפִּיר “sapphire”, הַשָּׁמַיִם “the heavens”, לְטָהֳרָה “clearness” which is very similar in meaning to הַקְּרָח “crystal” and כְּמַעֲשֵׂהָ “work of” or “workmanship”, וּמַעֲשֵׂיהֶם found in Ezekiel 1:16 where the word is used in connection with semi-precious stones. The cluster of words and phrases suggests that the author of the book of Ezekiel was aware of the context of Exodus 24.

Conceptual dependence

Exodus 24 starts with the symbolic act of binding the people of Israel and YHWH to each other through the dashing of blood on the altar and the people. This is followed by Moses’ summons to Mt Sinai, where he sees the glory of the Lord. Moses then descends from the top of the mountain

and instructs the people to build the Ark of the Covenant, where one can find the description of two cherubim (Exod. 25). This is followed by the building of the tabernacle in Exodus 26.

The author of the book of Ezekiel clearly alludes to Exodus 24, as they share common themes and motifs. The prophet Ezekiel, just like Moses, is chosen, and the glory of the Lord is revealed to him. The appearance of the glory of the Lord is like a devouring fire. In Ezekiel 1:1-4 the fire is described as “fire flashing forth continually”. In Ezekiel 1:27 it is described as “enclosed all around”. The description of two cherubim is basic, and the cherubim are clearly inanimate statues attached to the Ark of the Covenant. The author of the book of Ezekiel develops this theme.

The mobility of the ark is attested to in the book of Exodus. However, it is subject to human desire and manipulation. The ark is carried by the Israelites during the 40 years in the wilderness, it is used as a weapon during the battle of Jericho, it is captured by the Philistines and finally it is returned to the Israelites. The author of the book of Ezekiel radically develops this concept by emphasising that the glory of the Lord comes and goes of its own accord and it cannot be stopped, used as a weapon, summoned or brought back.

In the book of Exodus the emphasis is on the holy mountain and the cloud. In Exodus 24:15-17 the mountain is mentioned four times and the cloud three times. Moses goes up to see the glory of the Lord. Moses is mobile while the glory of the Lord is stationary. The glory is still shrouded in the cloud. The author of the book of Ezekiel challenges and adapts this notion too.

The author of the book of Exodus describes the building and measurements of the tabernacle. The description is detailed. It describes the tabernacle itself, the framework, the curtains, the altar, the court and priestly vestments.

In Ezekiel 40-48 the author of the book of Ezekiel significantly develops this motif. The author offers a blueprint for a new restored temple and land. The new temple is described in minute detail. In Ezekiel 43 the glory of the Lord returns to the new temple and completes the circle.

Thematic development

Unlike Exodus 24:9-11, where a multitude of people see the glory of the Lord, in Ezekiel's account it is only the prophet who sees YHWH, due to the author's desire to portray Ezekiel as a

new Moses. In biblical theophany accounts, seeing God is emphasised less than hearing God.⁶⁵¹ Usually, seeing is followed up with auditory phenomena in the form of the spoken word of God. The dominant biblical position is that hearing is the primary way of encountering the divine.⁶⁵²

However, in some accounts visual perception is presented as more important. For instance, in Exodus 24:9-11 seeing God is contrasted with reading the book of the covenant in order to highlight the superiority of the experiences of Moses, Aaron, Nadab, Abihu and the 70 elders.⁶⁵³ The theophany itself does not contain any auditory phenomena.

This is a unique theophany, both in the description of what is seen and the actions taken after the experience. The people see God and they eat and drink. The intensity of the vision is demonstrated by the statement that the people saw the God of Israel, which is followed by the description of the throne. The vision is finished with the statement that the people's lives were spared by YHWH, which highlights the uniqueness of the encounter, perhaps indicating that this time only lives were spared.

Seeing God face to face is described in the great majority of cases as potentially lethal. Jacob states, "I have seen God face to face and remained alive" (Gen. 32:24-32). Moses, his close companions and 70 elders "saw the God of Israel" but God did not lay his hands on them (Exod. 24:11). In Exodus 33:20, YHWH clearly states that "no person can see me and live". "Divine incomparability and human frailty being what they are, seeing God is understood here as metonymic for the most powerful and intimate contact with the divine which the Bible can admit to."⁶⁵⁴ Clearly direct contact with the divine is very dangerous. According to Exodus 24:9-11, seeing is superior to hearing.

The author of Ezekiel struggles between respecting and following the aniconic tradition which highlights the notion that YHWH cannot be confined to a static image. At the same time, the author is trying to follow the abundant examples in the biblical literature where YHWH is

⁶⁵¹ George Savran, "Seeing Is Believing: On the Relative Priority of Visual and Verbal Perception of the Divine," *Biblical Interpretation* 17, no. 3 (2009): p. 320.

⁶⁵² *Ibid.*, p.326.

⁶⁵³ *Ibid.*, p.320.

⁶⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p.329.

described in anthropomorphic terms.⁶⁵⁵ The vision of the glory of the Lord in the book of Ezekiel is a very good example where visual and auditory elements are described as two separate events.

At one point these two separate events are brought together in order to describe “the fullness of the encounter with the divine”.⁶⁵⁶ It seems that the order of visual phenomena followed by auditory phenomena is an important one. The initial focus on visual phenomena helps the author to catch the audience’s attention. The prophet in the text is startled by the visual phenomena and he is trying to describe what he sees.

This is especially evident in Ezekiel’s account of the glory of the Lord in which as the glory approaches the prophet is able to describe those visual phenomena in more detail. As the glory is coming into focus, the auditory elements start to be perceived and described. The auditory component often clarifies the significance of the visual phenomena.⁶⁵⁷ In Ezekiel’s case a very complex, highly symbolic and detailed vision is clarified to be the vision of YHWH by YHWH speaking to the prophet at the end of initial vision.

The author describes the vision in great detail, unlike any other prophet. His description is such that he describes in minute detail the living beings, who are clearly not cherubim. They are supernatural beings who themselves were worshipped by the Babylonians and possibly by some assimilated exiles. This subversive theological point is even more accentuated by the anthropomorphic description of YHWH himself sitting on the throne.

While the author of the book of Exodus describes bricks and pavement, he does not dare to describe God. The closest the author comes to describing God is to describe the glory of the LORD as “a devouring fire on the top of the mountain”. However, the author of the book of Ezekiel expands this theme, stating boldly that what he saw in the vision had a human form engulfed in fire.

It is also plausible that the author of the book of Ezekiel is alluding to Exodus 24:9-11. The divine being in the Ezekiel vision identifies itself by using the standard formula, “Thus says the Lord God”. The author describes the dome above the living creatures as “shining like crystal”. In

⁶⁵⁵ Ibid., p.321.

⁶⁵⁶ Ibid., p.324.

⁶⁵⁷ Ibid., p.325.

the Exodus account, under YHWH's feet is "something like a pavement of sapphire stone, like the very heaven for clearness". The author of Ezekiel describes YHWH's throne as "in appearance like sapphire".

The author takes a turn and develops the motif of eating by stating that the prophet ate the scroll that YHWH provided for him. Even though the author states that the scroll tasted like honey, the entire experience rendered the prophet unable to move for seven days, which is in contrast to the joyful account in Exodus 24:9-11 where the people saw God and ate and drank. In the Exodus account, the people celebrated the unusual opportunity to see God and the re-establishment of the covenant between God and his people.

In Ezekiel's account, YHWH makes the prophet eat "words of lamentation, mourning and woe". The nature of the vision of YHWH is different according to the author of the book of Ezekiel. The vision, despite all its splendor, actually has a very ominous character, which is in agreement with the notion that the living creatures are threatening beings too. YHWH is not celebrating, since there is no reason for celebration.

Instead, by alluding to Exodus 24:9-11, the author ironically proclaims to his audience that YHWH is coming to judge his people. The author is using the well-known tradition of Exodus 24:9-11 and modifies it to proclaim his message. The author is playing with the theme of idolatry, perhaps even warning his audience when he mentions that the living creatures had feet like the sole of a calf's foot, possibly alluding to the episode of the golden calf. The prophet is incorporating idols themselves into his vision, and then in Ezekiel 6, YHWH proclaims his judgment, highlighting Israel's idolatry.

In the book of Ezekiel the mysterious living beings which are harmonised with the cherubim in Ezekiel 10 are alive. In fact the entire throne, which could be seen as the ark, is alive and moving. The throne, the cherubim and YHWH are described as living and mobile and subject to no-one, especially not to the will of the people. In the book of Ezekiel the glory of the Lord comes and goes as it pleases.

The author of the book of Ezekiel reverses the movement. It is YHWH who is coming from the north to meet the prophet, and he sees the glory not on the top of the holy mountain but in the valley of the river Kebar in the unclean land of Babylon. The glory of the Lord is revealed to the

prophet in all its splendour. The heavens are opened and the prophet describes what he sees in detail.

The anthropomorphic figure sitting on the throne is obscured from view by radiant fire, not the cloud. When the cloud is mentioned in Ezekiel 1:28, it resonates with the Genesis imagery of the post flood promise to humankind. The cloud appears in Ezekiel 1, but only at the beginning of the vision and at the end of the vision, and it does not play the crucial role of hiding the glory of the Lord as in other theophanies.

In Exodus 24, Moses and the people are described as descending and ascending on several occasions. YHWH is at the top of the mountain, while the people and Moses are at a significant distance. This movement highlights the distance between YHWH and his people, and focuses on the essential role of the mediator (in this case Moses) to bridge the gap.⁶⁵⁸ The distance is highlighted for the purpose of the demarcation of the sacred and profane. The author is careful to keep a distance. The sacred is even protected by being enveloped by the clouds, and Moses is kept at a safe distance.

The author of Ezekiel challenges this tradition by describing the prophet as static while the glory of YHWH is dynamic and coming towards the prophet. In the first chapter of Ezekiel the sacred is invading the profane. The divine is coming to the mortal, from the heavens to the banks of the river Kebar. The movement is involuntary and forceful. The prophet does not have a choice.

YHWH is coming towards the prophet and seizes him by his hand. The exiles do not have a choice. The prophet's audience would be puzzled by the reversal of the movement. Once again the author of the book has secured the audience's attention.

However, as the role of Moses is accentuated by the distance between YHWH and his people, so is the role of Ezekiel emphasised by YHWH's movement towards the prophet and sudden unexpected closeness of God. Even the prophet himself is not sure how to behave until the absolute last moment when he realises what he is witnessing, and only then does he prostrate himself before the glory of YHWH.

⁶⁵⁸ Dozeman, *God on the Mountain - a Study of Reduction, Theology and Canon in Exodus 19-24*, p.117.

The glory of the Lord appears in all its splendour and is not hidden among the clouds. The author is proclaiming to his audience that YHWH, their God, is coming to them. Since they are unable to return to Jerusalem, YHWH is coming to Babylon. The author is using the well-established tradition of the glory of the Lord appearing on mountains and temporary structures to point out that it is possible for God to come even to the centre of Marduk's realm to be with his people.

The verb to “dwell” or “tabernacle” שָׁכַן used in Exodus 24:16 suggests that Mt Sinai was not a permanent dwelling place for YHWH.⁶⁵⁹ The author is clearly breaking with temple theology, according to which YHWH dwells in the temple and is static. The author of Exodus develops the theology of God not bound by location. The movement of the glory of YHWH in the books of Exodus and Leviticus is clearly defined as following: the glory of the Lord moved from Mt Sinai to the tabernacle then to the midst of the people during worship in Leviticus 9:23-24.⁶⁶⁰

In the books of Exodus and Leviticus, the movement to a theophany and the appearance of the glory of YHWH consists of five sequences. It starts with a blood ritual for the purpose of sanctifying the people (Exod. 24:6, 8; Lev. 8:22-30); followed by a meal before YHWH in the form of public worship (Exod. 24:9-11; Lev. 8:31-32); followed by the period of consecration prior to actually approaching the glory of the Lord (Exod. 24:15-16; Lev. 8:33-36); followed by the mediator actually approaching the very presence of YHWH (Exod. 24:16-18; Lev. 9:23); and finally climaxing with the theophany of the glory of YHWH before all the people (Exod. 24:17; Lev. 9:23-24).⁶⁶¹

The author of Ezekiel does not follow these steps. He starts with the glory of YHWH approaching him—a mortal—followed by the realisation that he is in the very presence of YHWH. This is followed by the eating of the scroll. In the book of Ezekiel the glory of the Lord is only visible to Ezekiel. It is not revealed to anyone else. The entire theophany is a very individualistic experience and affects the prophet more than anyone else.

In Exodus 24:11 the author states, “God did not lay his hand on the chief men of the people of Israel”. The author of the book of Ezekiel challenges this tradition too. YHWH did put his hand

⁶⁵⁹ Ibid., p.130.

⁶⁶⁰ Ibid., p.133.

⁶⁶¹ Ibid., pp.117-18.

upon him and the spirit lifted him up. The author is clearly portraying the prophet as more than 70 elders and more like someone who has a unique relationship with God, someone more like Moses.

Summary

The cluster of the words found both in Exodus 24:9-11, 15-17 and Ezekiel 1:28 suggests that the author of Ezekiel was aware of the context of Exodus 24. In Exodus 24, Moses and others see the glory of the Lord, while the author of Ezekiel describes that only the prophet Ezekiel had this privilege and only on him did YHWH place his hand. The reason for this is the author's desire to portray Ezekiel as the new Moses. The prophet Ezekiel has seen the glory of the Lord, and the author reminds his audience that the prophet survived, just as Moses, Aaron and others survived the Mt Sinai encounter with the divine.

While the author of Exodus only describes part of the throne of YHWH and only looks up to YHWH's feet, the author of Ezekiel develops this tradition and describes the entire throne in minute detail, finishing by describing the divine as having something like human form. The throne of YHWH which was found in the tabernacle and the temple surrounded by two inanimate cherubim becomes a living, mobile throne of the Lord consisting not of cherubim but of defeated supernatural beings. The mobility of the glory of YHWH is emphasised. Unlike the static glory described in Exodus 24, the glory of the Lord in the book of Ezekiel is mobile and coming towards the prophet.

The prophet must eat the words of "lamentation, mourning and woe" because YHWH is coming to judge his people. There is nothing celebratory about it, unlike Exodus 24 where the people eat and drink in the presence of the glory of the Lord.

The distance between the people and YHWH is constantly emphasised in the book of Exodus because of the importance of the demarcation of the sacred and the profane. However, in the book of Ezekiel, YHWH is dynamic and invades the realm of Marduk, the heart of the profane, by coming to Babylon. YHWH is not defensive. The Lord is not obscuring himself in the clouds or other meteorological phenomena.

In the book of Ezekiel, the heavens are opened and YHWH is on the offensive, revealing his glory to a mortal like never before. The movement is involuntary and it is forceful. The author of the book of Ezekiel is clearly breaking with temple theology, according to which YHWH dwells in the temple and is static.

Identification

The author of the book of Exodus also states that Moses saw the glory of the Lord in Exodus 33:18-23 and 34:5-7. These are the other passages which share some common concepts with Ezekiel 1.

In Exodus 33:18-23:

¹⁸ Moses said, “Show me your glory, I pray.” ¹⁹ And he said, “I will make all my goodness pass before you, and will proclaim before you the name, ‘The LORD’; and I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show mercy on whom I will show mercy. ²⁰ But,” he said, “you cannot see my face; for no one shall see me and live.” ²¹ And the LORD continued, “See, there is a place by me where you shall stand on the rock; ²² and while my glory passes by I will put you in a cleft of the rock, and I will cover you with my hand until I have passed by; ²³ then I will take away my hand, and you shall see my back; but my face shall not be seen.”

Exodus 34:5-7 describes the theophany:

וַיֵּרֶד יְהוָה בְּעָנָן וַיִּתְיַצֵּב עִמּוֹ שֵׁם וַיִּקְרָא בְּשֵׁם יְהוָה:

⁵ The LORD descended in the cloud and stood with him there, and proclaimed the name, “The LORD”.

Availability

As mentioned above, it is likely that the author of the book of Ezekiel and his audience were familiar with the stories of Moses and the exiles. Those stories were embedded in the consciousness of the ancient Israelites and they especially resonated with the exiles in Babylon.

Lexical dependence

This passage is setting the scene for Exodus 34:5-7. In this passage the auditory perception and experience of the divine which has been the norm has been challenged. The author of the book of Exodus uses words such as “your glory” אֶת־כְּבוֹדְךָ “The LORD” יְהוָה, “my face” וּפְנֵי and כַּפִּי “my hand”. The author of the book of Ezekiel uses the same words, combining them and using them differently, which will be explored below in more detail.

Conceptual dependence

Childs questions the role of the passage, stating that in preceding material Moses interceded with YHWH on behalf of the people who sinned in the incident involving the golden calf and what follows in chapter 34.⁶⁶² It appears that Moses asks YHWH a question that was important to Moses personally. He asks for an extraordinary visual revelation.⁶⁶³ The man who could not look at the burning bush is now asking to see YHWH’s glory.⁶⁶⁴

In the Hebrew bible, the glory of YHWH has been described as something that humans are able to see. For instance in Exodus 16:7,10, Moses and the Israelites could see the glory. In Exodus 24:16-17 on Mt Sinai, Moses and the Israelites also saw the glory which looked like consuming fire. Moses has seen the Lord on numerous occasions. However, the vision was always mediated by some meteorological phenomenon.

There are numerous instances of humans seeing the face of God and surviving. For instance, in Genesis 32:30, Jacob states that he saw God face to face but that his life was preserved. Moses

⁶⁶² B.S. Childs, *The Book of Exodus - a Critical, Theological Commentary* (Louisville: The Westminster Press, 1976), p. 595.

⁶⁶³ G. Savran, *Encountering the Divine* (London: Continuum International Publishing 2005), p.88.

⁶⁶⁴ W.H.C. Propp, *Exodus 19-40, a New Translation with Introduction and Commentary, The Anchor Bible* (New York: Doubleday, 2006), p. 606.

speaks or knows YHWH face to face on numerous occasions (Exod. 33:1; Num. 12:8; Deut. 34:10). In Exodus 24:10, Moses, Aaron and the seventy also saw YHWH.

On the other hand, YHWH explicitly states in Exodus 33:20, “you cannot see my face; for no one shall see me and live”. Numbers 4:15,19-20 speaks about humans dying if they come in contact with the tabernacle, whether it be physically or visually. In Leviticus 10:1-5, Aaron’s sons die because of their inappropriate behaviour when they offered unholy fire to YHWH. Apart from this, it is their proximity to the divine that places them in mortal danger, leading eventually to their death. In 2 Samuel 6, Uzzah touches the ark and dies. Savran sums it up: “... death will result from inappropriate encroachment upon the divine precincts or from even inadvertent contact.”⁶⁶⁵

Even characters like Moses himself, who did enjoy a unique, intimate relationship, are not entirely safe. In Exodus 4:24-26, YHWH decides to kill Moses without clearly explaining why. The quick action of Zipporah saves his life. It seems that the actions of an individual and the quality of the relationship between the person and YHWH do not guarantee the safety of that person when the Creator and the creature meet.⁶⁶⁶

The danger associated with seeing the Creator is highlighted by meteorological phenomena which induce fear (loud noise, lighting, dark clouds and fire). It is also highlighted by the state of mind of the character who realises that they are looking at the Holy One. Moses feared to look upon YHWH, and Ezekiel fell on his face when he realised who was talking to him. In Exodus 33:18-23, the roles of the human and the divine seem to be reversed.⁶⁶⁷ It is YHWH who is reluctant to show himself, while Moses with no fear implores God to reveal himself to him.

Instead of seeing God’s glory YHWH paradoxically shields Moses with YHWH’s own hand and passes by him only to reveal to Moses YHWH’s back. What Moses is asking to see, **כְּבוֹד־יְהוָה** he cannot see. The Lord reveals his glory to Ezekiel but not to Moses. It is also interesting to notice that YHWH protects Moses by placing his hand over him while he passes⁶⁶⁸ while Ezekiel

⁶⁶⁵ Oppenheim, "Akkadian Pul(U)H(T)U and Melammu," p. 191.

⁶⁶⁶ Ibid., p. 192.

⁶⁶⁷ Ibid., p. 201.

⁶⁶⁸ Ibid., p.89.

is swept off his feet the moment he realises that the Holy One is nearby and the hand of YHWH is upon him. As a result Ezekiel is stunned for seven days (Ezek. 3:14-15).

YHWH declares that Moses cannot see his face, stating that no mortal can see the essence of God. However, almost anticlimactically, Moses can see YHWH's glory in passing. The Lord "passes" twice in the book of Exodus: once through Egypt (Passover) in Exodus 12:12 and again in Exodus 33:22 when YHWH passes by Moses. The first passing is clearly in judgment, while the second one is benevolent.⁶⁶⁹ What Moses sees is YHWH's goodness and not a glory that represents power and majesty. YHWH elaborates on what is meant by his goodness in Exodus 34:5-7.

YHWH continues to speak to Moses, reminding him that God reveals himself through his act and his name and therefore YHWH will show his goodness, which is later identified with glory. YHWH also uses the formula "and I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show mercy on whom I will show mercy", which is very similar to the name of the Lord in Exodus 4:14: "I am who I am."

Thematic development

The author of Ezekiel combines sufficiently familiar yet distinctive elements such as "glory", "The LORD", "my face", and "my hand". For instance, he combines "glory" and "The LORD" found in the book of Exodus into a construct "glory of the Lord". "My face" which cannot be seen in the book of Exodus is the face of the Lord. In the book of Ezekiel, "my face" refers to the face of the prophet Ezekiel.

In the book of Ezekiel, "my hand" becomes the more technical expression "the hand of the Lord". I have explored the expression in Chapter Four of this thesis. In the book of Exodus, the Lord is "passing by" on three occasions, while in the book of Ezekiel the Lord's throne is moving "straight ahead" and "darted to and fro". Whenever the spirit moved the living creatures would move, and whenever the spirit of the living creatures moved the wheels would move. In the book of Ezekiel, there is clearly much more movement, in different directions but overall towards the prophet rather than away from him as in the case of Moses.

⁶⁶⁹ V. P. Hamilton, *Exodus - an Exegetical Commentary* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic 2011), p.570.

One of the most striking differences between the two accounts (Moses' and Ezekiel's) is the fact that the prophet Ezekiel is on the bank of the river Kebar, not on a mountain. The glory of the Lord appears to Ezekiel outside a physical sanctuary. The author of the book of Ezekiel will declare that YHWH himself has been the sanctuary for some time (Ezek. 11:16) before the new temple is built and the glory of the Lord re-enters it after leaving the Jerusalem temple. He does not ask to see the glory of the Lord. In fact only at the last moment does he recognise that it is YHWH coming towards him. YHWH gives no choice to the prophet or his audience. YHWH is coming closer and closer from the north towards the prophet. The movement is gradual. At first the prophet only hears fear-inducing noise and gradually he is able to see the glory of the Lord.

In the book of Ezekiel, the glory does not simply pass by in anticlimactic fashion. The glory of the Lord comes in all its power and majesty, and it is moving from afar directly towards the prophet, so that the prophet sees the glory of the Lord face to face. The face to face vision is implied by the author's positioning of the divine character on the throne and his description of the loins.

The author clearly portrays the prophet Ezekiel as the one to whom was granted the chance to see the glory of the Lord without him even wishing to do so, while the same was denied to Moses. The author of the book of Ezekiel describes the prophet as someone who does not have a choice. The hand of the Lord was on him, and unlike Moses who asks YHWH to show him his glory of his own accord, Ezekiel does not have a choice. Moses is reluctantly given the privilege of seeing the glory, and the vision in fact is very limited. God almost tenderly protects Moses, paradoxically with his own hand, and shows him his back.

In contrast, in the book of Ezekiel, YHWH seizes the prophet with his hand and forces him to see his glory, leaving him fully exposed to the glory of the Lord as never seen by anyone before. The effect on Ezekiel is such that he lies stunned for seven days after the vision. Ezekiel's vision of the glory of the Lord is "the most detailed description of the divine to be found in the bible... Ezekiel defies the biblical norm of presenting only a limited description of the divine."⁶⁷⁰

Faced with this reality, the author of the book of Ezekiel alludes to Moses' experience on Mt Sinai, portraying the prophet Ezekiel as the new Moses. Moses did have a unique relationship

⁶⁷⁰ Oppenheim, "Akkadian Pul(U)H(T)U and Melammu," p.58.

with YHWH, but Ezekiel is described as having the same quality of relationship forced upon him. This gives the prophet Ezekiel the authority to proclaim his message.

As mentioned above, Moses is described as someone who can see the face of the Lord and stay alive. However, the description of what he has seen is very limited. The description of Ezekiel's vision is clearly more detailed than that of Moses. As Ezekiel does not have a choice whether he sees the Lord, so his audience does not have a choice about what YHWH is about to proclaim to his people. An intimate tender vision of Moses is developed into a forced and a very detailed vision of Ezekiel. In the case of Ezekiel it is he who is hiding his face by falling on the ground and prostrating himself in front of YHWH. In Moses' vision it is YHWH who hides his face from Moses by covering Moses' face.

The author of the book of Exodus uses a number of words and phrases that are completely absent from the book of Ezekiel. For instance, the author of the book of Exodus mentions that the Lord is gracious and that the Lord will show mercy. God also states that he will allow Moses to see his "goodness". In fact, the only case of the Lord being compassionate towards Israel is found in Ezekiel 16:6, where God out of his compassion saves Israel, which is portrayed as an abhorrent baby left on the field to die.

The author of the book of Ezekiel does not portray YHWH in his initial vision as gracious, merciful or as showing his goodness. Instead, YHWH comes on a war chariot with all his power and majesty to judge his people. In fact, the prophet is warned that he will face opposition. The prophet is asked to do a number of bizarre things, and anguishes over some, such as using human dung to prepare his meal. The Lord speaks negatively about his people, characterising them as an idolatrous nation. The omission of words such as mercy, goodness and graciousness suggests that YHWH is allowing the prophet to see his glory but the glory of God is not a benevolent phenomenon. YHWH is coming to judge his people.

Summary

In Exodus 33:18-12, Moses is asking for an extraordinary visual revelation. Moses and his people have been able to see the glory of the Lord on several occasions. However, the description of what they saw is very limited. The dangers of associating with the divine are attested to throughout the Hebrew bible. Even Moses is not immune to it and was almost killed

by YHWH. In the Sinai account the author clearly states that nobody can see God face to face and live. The danger is highlighted by the meteorological phenomena.

The author of Exodus reverses the roles in the Sinai account, and God becomes the one who is hiding his face from Moses, tenderly protecting him with his own hand and allowing him to see the back of YHWH. Moses, despite his unique relationship with YHWH, is not given permission to see the glory of the Lord. It is YHWH who, according to his own words, will be gracious and merciful to whom he will be gracious and merciful.

The book of Ezekiel develops this theme and describes how the prophet Ezekiel is allowed to see the most detailed description of YHWH recorded in the Hebrew bible. The author describes Ezekiel as the new Moses. His relationship with YHWH is as unique as the one between the Lord and Moses. In some areas Ezekiel's vision is superior to Moses'. Ezekiel's vision is definitely more detailed than the one of Moses at Mt Sinai.

While Moses was asking freely to see the glory of the Lord, Ezekiel is forced to see it. YHWH does not protect Ezekiel in any shape or form from the effects of seeing and being in contact with the glory of the Lord. The prophet is swept off his feet and lies stunned for seven days following the encounter with the divine. It is clear from the Sinai account that Moses has seen the back of YHWH. In his vision, the prophet Ezekiel describes how he has seen something like a throne and something that seemed like a human form seated on the throne. The author then describes what he sees downwards and upwards from the loins, which strongly suggests that the prophet was looking directly at the front of YHWH.

The author states that the prophet Ezekiel was allowed to see what Moses was denied. Marker words such as “your glory” אֶת־כְּבוֹדְךָ “The LORD” יְהוָה, “my face” וּפְנֵי and כַּפִּי “my hand” “would remind Ezekiel's audience of the Sinai vision of God and Moses' encounter with the divine. The climax of a very elaborate vision that the author was describing happens when the author declares that this is the glory of YHWH. The audience would remember Moses' account and would be in awe of what they are hearing.

The glory of the Lord described in the book of Ezekiel is not a benevolent force. Instead, it represents power and majesty. YHWH is coming with his war machinery to the heart of

Marduk's dominion. YHWH is coming to judge his people. The military connotations will be discussed below.

Unlike the Sinai account, where the glory of the Lord moves away from Moses, the glory in the first chapter of Ezekiel is steadily moving towards the prophet. The glory is much more mobile, going back and forward. The prophet first hears then sees the glory, and the movement is rapid. The urgency of God's message is highlighted by the forcefulness and quick advancing of the glory. Ezekiel in his opening vision does not describe YHWH as merciful or gracious. The Lord is coming to judge his people and Ezekiel will proclaim his judgment.

As mentioned above, the glory does not require a physical sanctuary. The author of the book of Ezekiel is proclaiming to his audience that YHWH does not need the temple or tabernacle. As during the wilderness period, the glory is able to move freely. In the book the author refers to the glory of the Lord as the temporary sanctuary for his people.

Intertextual connections between Genesis 9:13 and Ezekiel 1:28

In Chapter Four of this thesis I have already demonstrated intertextual connections between Genesis 7:11 and Ezekiel 1:1. The similarities between the two passages are significant. The author of the book of Ezekiel uses a familiar story, Noah's story, to proclaim his radical message. At the beginning of the first chapter of the book of Ezekiel, the author alludes to the flood story, and at the end of the same chapter the author once again reminds his audience of Noah's story and the covenant between YHWH and the world. The author mentions the rainbow.

I will explore the different meanings and use of the word קִשְׁתּוֹ "bow" in the Hebrew bible. This thesis will argue that the word "rainbow" is a polyvalent symbol which has three distinct yet interconnected meanings: military (a weapon of war), rainbow (a meteorological phenomenon) and the cosmic firmament.

The author uses the word קִשְׁתּוֹ "rainbow" as a marker which would activate several distinctive texts in the minds of his audience. The initial mentioning of the rainbow in the cloud on rainy days unmistakably reminds the audience of the Noah's story. Also, the word reminds the audience that YHWH has put down his bow, and that with this act he is declaring his victory

over Marduk, and the author is using this symbol to radically declare his support for King Nebuchadnezzar and King Jehoiachin.

The author also depicts his vision beautifully by focusing on the radiance of the glory of the Lord which is luminescing through a crystal-like dome, giving the impression that the firmament is multicoloured.

Identification

אֶת-קִשְׁתִּי נָתַתִּי בְּעַנְנֵי וְהָיְתָה לְאוֹת בְּרִית בֵּינִי וּבֵין הָאָרֶץ: ^{Ge 9:13}

I have set my bow in the clouds, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and the earth.

כְּמִרְאֵה הַקִּשְׁת׃ אֲשֶׁר יִהְיֶה בְּעַנְנֵי בַיּוֹם הַגּוֹשֵׁם כִּן מִרְאֵה הַגְּוֵה׃ סָבִיב הוּא ^{Eze 1:28}

מִרְאֵה דְמוּת כְּבוֹד־יְהוָה וְאִרְאָה וְאֶפְלַע עַל-פְּנֵי וְאֶשְׁמַע קוֹל מִדְּבָר:

As the appearance of the bow in the cloud on a rainy day, such was the appearance of the brightness all around. This was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the Lord. When I saw it, I fell on my face, and I heard the voice of someone talking.

Only in these two passages (Ezek. 1:28, Gen. 9:13) is the rainbow mentioned as an atmospheric phenomenon.⁶⁷¹ As demonstrated previously, it is highly likely that the author of the book of Ezekiel and his audience were familiar with one of the most important stories in the Hebrew bible.

In Genesis 7:11, the author states:

בַּיּוֹם הַזֶּה נִבְקְעוּ כָּל-מַעֲיִנֹת הַתְּהוֹם רַבָּה וְאִרְבַּת הַשָּׁמַיִם נִפְתְּחוּ

⁶⁷¹ Willem. VanGemeren, *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology & Exegesis* vol. 3 (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1997), p.1004.

“...on that day all the fountains of the great deep burst forth, and the windows of the heavens were opened”. In Genesis 7:12, the author states that the rains started falling. In Ezekiel 1:1, the author states: **וַאֲרָאָה מִרְאֵי־אֱלֹהִים** “...the heavens were opened, and I saw visions of God.” In Genesis 9:13, the author finishes the flood narrative with the new covenant between YHWH and the world, and uses the motif of the rainbow as the sign of the covenant and the hope:

אֶת־קִשְׁתִּי נָתַתִּי בַעֲנָן וְהִיְתָה לְאֹת בְּרִית בֵּינִי וּבֵין הָאָרֶץ

“I have set my bow in the clouds, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and the earth.”

Similarly, the author of the book of Ezekiel uses the motif of the rainbow at the end of his vision account to remind his audience of the everlasting covenant and to offer his audience hope: “As the appearance of the bow in the cloud on a rainy day, such was the appearance of the brightness all around. This was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the Lord.” The motif of the rainbow is found in both books, and only in those two cases does it depict a meteorological phenomenon.

Availability

As mentioned above, intertextual connections between the book of Genesis and the book of Ezekiel have been already demonstrated in Chapter Four of this thesis. Therefore it is likely that the author and his audience were aware of the creation story about Noah and the rainbow.

Lexical dependence

The two verses share a common phrase: **אֶת־קִשְׁתִּי נָתַתִּי** “my bow in the clouds” and

הַקִּשְׁתַּת אֲשֶׁר יְהִיָּה בַעֲנָן “the bow in a cloud”.

The word **קִשֶׁת** means “bow” as a tool for hunting, a weapon of war, a rainbow or a symbol of power or sovereignty.⁶⁷² The noun is attested in all Semitic languages and is found in the Dead Sea scrolls. As a hunting tool and weapon of war, the bow has been known to all ancient

⁶⁷² G. J. Botterweck, H. Ringgren, and Fabry H. J., *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, vol. 13 (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2004), p.202.

civilisations. The earliest examples were made of wooden staves held together by bow strings made of animal sinew, twisted hemp or linen. Mesopotamians developed a composite bow, an improved version, consisting of a number of wooden laminae bound or glued together.⁶⁷³

The word appears 76 times in the Hebrew bible. On 72 occasions it depicts a military weapon, a warrior's bow, and rarely a hunting tool.⁶⁷⁴ The word is found in phrases such as "bend the bow" (Isa.5:28, 21:15); "shoot with the bow" (1Sam.31:3); "ready the bow to shoot" (Psalm 7:13); "draw the bow" (1 Kings 22:34); arm oneself with a bow" (1 Chron. 12:2); and "shoot with the bow" (Jer. 4:29).⁶⁷⁵ The biblical Hebrew language does not have a separate word for rainbow, perhaps because of the geographical position of Israel and its climate, where the rainbows are a rare phenomenon.⁶⁷⁶

Conceptual dependence

קִשְׁת׃ in the sense of "rainbow" appears only in two chapters and four occasions in the entire Hebrew bible, in Genesis 9:13,14,16 and Ezekiel 1:28. The word always appears with the word בְּעָנָן "cloud" and this construct has a significant theological role in the Hebrew bible.⁶⁷⁷

Scholars have been divided about the meaning of the word and how one should interpret it.

There are three main definitions: the word קִשְׁת׃ can be translated as "rainbow" or as a military weapon in the hands of a warrior God, or the word can be interpreted as the firmament which divides the holy from the profane, the heavenly from the earthly, dividing the waters above from the waters below.

The arguments that are used to support the translation of the word as "rainbow" are the following:

1. God places the bow in the clouds (Gen. 9:13)

⁶⁷³ Peterson, *Ezekiel in Context-Ezekiel's Message Understood in Its Historical Setting of Covenant Curses and Ancient Near Eastern Mythological Motifs*, p. 203.

⁶⁷⁴ Ellen van Wolde, "One Bow or Another? A Study of the Bow in Genesis 9:8-17," *Vetus Testamentum* 63 (2013): p.126.

⁶⁷⁵ Peterson, *Ezekiel in Context-Ezekiel's Message Understood in Its Historical Setting of Covenant Curses and Ancient Near Eastern Mythological Motifs*, pp.204-05.

⁶⁷⁶ Arnold, *Genesis*, p.126.

⁶⁷⁷ Peterson, *Ezekiel in Context-Ezekiel's Message Understood in Its Historical Setting of Covenant Curses and Ancient Near Eastern Mythological Motifs*, p.206.

2. The bow appears in the clouds (Gen. 9:14)
3. YHWH sees the bow in the clouds (Gen. 9:16).⁶⁷⁸

Scott argues that the word **בְּעָנָן** “cloud” expresses in the majority of the cases cloud or mist in general and only in minority of cases a cloud that brings rain.⁶⁷⁹ One fact that is often overlooked is that according to the text, a year passes between the rain stopping in Genesis 8:2 and the appearance of the rainbow in Genesis 9:13.⁶⁸⁰ The bow is placed in the sky by YHWH to remind the people of the everlasting covenant. The word is clearly seen as a meteorological phenomenon closely associated with clouds and rain.

There are five arguments which support the idea that the word **קֶשֶׁת** denotes a warrior bow:

1. In 72 out of 76 examples the word denotes a weapon and includes the notion of a mighty warrior.
2. The word is used in fighting events (Gen. 48:22, 49:23; 1 Sam 31:3; 2 Sam. 1:18-27) in which the bow is used to strike a decisive blow in the final stage of the battle.
3. Ancient Near Eastern iconography depicts warrior gods with bows, denoting power and might.
4. In Mesopotamian texts the bow becomes a sign of victory over the flood.
5. In Babylonian texts the bow is placed as a new constellation, the Bow Star, in the sky.⁶⁸¹

In Ancient Near Eastern iconography the deities are depicted as solar deities holding the bow in front of them and blessing with the other hand, while presenting the bow to the king. In the process the deities are depicted as aiding and transferring the power to the King. The power of the deity is also depicted by the deity carrying the weapons.⁶⁸² According to van Wolde, the bow

⁶⁷⁸ Arnold, *Genesis*, p.125.

⁶⁷⁹ R. B. Y. Scott, "Meteorological Phenomena and Terminology in the Old Testament," *Zeitschrift für die Alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 64, no. 1 (1952): p.24.

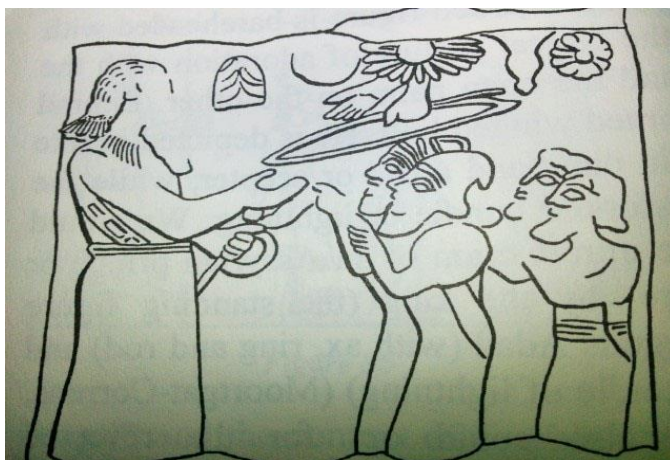
⁶⁸⁰ Arnold, *Genesis*, p.129.

⁶⁸¹ *Ibid.*, p.138.

⁶⁸² *Ibid.*, p.135.

is closely connected to the warrior god. When God places his bow in the sky from above towards the earth he is transferring some of his power to humans.⁶⁸³

The relief from Nineveh (ill. 13) depicts a winged disc (tenth century BCE).⁶⁸⁴ Even though it does not show a deity, the scene shows the Assyrian king holding a ring and a rod in one hand, while the other hand is open and receives the adoration of four enemies. The winged disc is surrounded by a semicircle of feathers symbolising wings. From the wings two hands are coming forth, one holding a bow as if to give it to the king while the other is blessing the king.⁶⁸⁵



ill.13

On the bronze disk of unknown provenance dating to the ninth century BCE (ill. 14) one can see three characters: two kneeling characters on stylised mountains holding the wings of a stylised sun disc from which the upper body of a male god emerges.⁶⁸⁶ The male god is standing on a stylised mountain. The supporting characters have horned crowns, suggesting that they are divine

⁶⁸³ van Wolde, "One Bow or Another? A Study of the Bow in Genesis 9:8-17," p.147.

⁶⁸⁴ Othmar Keel, *The Symbolism of the Biblical World - Ancient Near Eastern Iconography and the Book of Psalms* (New York: The Seabury Press, Inc, 1978), p.217.

⁶⁸⁵ M. Klingbeil, *Yahweh Fighting from Heaven - God as Warrior and as God of Heaven in the Hebrew Plaster and Ancient Near Eastern Iconography*, vol. 169, *Orbis Biblicus Et Orientalis* (University Fribourg: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht Gottingen, 1999), p. 258.

⁶⁸⁶ Kutsko, "Ezekiel's Anthropology and Its Ethical Implications," in *The Book of Ezekiel - Theological and Anthropological Perspectives*, p. 259.

or semi-divine beings. The male god is holding a bow in front of him while blessing with the other hand.



ill. 14

A glazed tile from Assur (890-884 BCE) depicts the sun disc surrounding the winged god while surrounded by the rays or flames of fire (ill. 15).⁶⁸⁷ The bearded god has wings and a feathered tail in his hand, and he is holding a bow which is ready to fire the arrow. Below this image one can see the head of a charioteer and part of a horse's head. The winged disc is surrounded by stylised clouds with raindrops suspended in the clouds.⁶⁸⁸

⁶⁸⁷ Ibid., p.260.

⁶⁸⁸ Keel, *The Symbolism of the Biblical World - Ancient near Easter Iconography and the Book of Psalms*, p.216.



ill.15

A relief from Nimrud (883-859 BCE) depicts a winged god with the sun disc placed around his upper body (ill.16). The bow, arrow and quiver are clearly identifiable. The tip of the arrow is a three-pointed fork, perhaps symbolising a flash of lightning.⁶⁸⁹



ill. 16

In all these instances, the divine beings possess bows and arrows. In each case the divine beings are connected to meteorological phenomena, and in some cases the bow stands side by side with the blessing gesture offering the bow to the king. All the divine characters are depicted as having wings. In the book of Ezekiel, YHWH is described as anthropomorphic, while the wings were clearly attached to the lesser living beings. In each case the bow and arrows denote power and might. The gods depicted are clearly warriors too.

⁶⁸⁹ Ibid., p.217.

The first relief is especially interesting, depicting a god transferring his bow to the human king. Van Wolde states:

It is the individuality of the bow and the individuality of the covenant as well as the superiority of the powerful party that stands over against the extensive earth as a whole that characterizes this text. The powerful deity transports his weapon of attack into the clouds over the earth as a sign of his covenant with the human beings and the other living beings on earth, as a sign of his abdication of his weapon of attack and a transfer of power.⁶⁹⁰

Wright states that the victories on the battlefield of the earthly king were perceived as “divine confirmation of the King’s rule”.⁶⁹¹ At the same time, the plague, enemy attacks, famine and similar catastrophes were perceived as “punishment for the King’s failure to comport himself in keeping with the expectations of a deity or deities”.⁶⁹²

The relationship between the human and divine king is reciprocal. The human king’s success reflects the involvement of the divine king, and the success of the divine king, his power and authority, are confirmed by the success of the human king on the battlefield.⁶⁹³

The author of the book of Ezekiel developed this theology by depicting YHWH coming on his war chariot and leaving his bow pointing upwards as if he is symbolically supporting the Babylonian king and the exiled King Jehoiachin as the only legitimate Davidic king. The author’s audience would perceive King Jehoiachin as defeated and not supported by YHWH.

What the author of the book of Ezekiel is stating is radical. YHWH had come to the heart of Babylonian empire after being victorious in the battle against Marduk. As demonstrated in Chapter Four of this thesis, the author of the book of Ezekiel is pro-Jehoiachin. The Davidic dynasty is of paramount importance to the author of the book of Ezekiel. After his win, YHWH is symbolically transferring some of his power and support to Nebuchadnezzar as well as the exiled king.

⁶⁹⁰ Arnold, *Genesis*, p.147.

⁶⁹¹ Jacob L. Wright, *Military Valor and Kingship: A Book - Oriented Approach to the Study of a Major War Theme, Writing and Reading War - Rhetoric, Gender and Ethics in Biblical and Modern Context* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2008), p.38.

⁶⁹² Miller, "In the "Image" and "Likeness" of God," p.39.

⁶⁹³ Crouch, "Ezekiel's Oracles against the Nations in Light of a Royal Ideology of Warfare," p.477.

The symbol of the rainbow also reminds the audience that YHWH is the only true king. The Chaoskampf motif was important in both Hebrew and Babylonian traditions. Marduk fought against Tiamat and defeated chaotic forces. Similarly, YHWH fought the chaotic forces of the waters in the first chapter of the book of Genesis and reinstated order. YHWH wins the battle and YHWH's kingship is confirmed, and the audience is reminded about the universal kingship of YHWH through the motif of rainbow.

When the author describes the movement of the living creatures' wings he states that they sounded like "the sound of mighty waters". This is clearly a Chaoskampf motif whose purpose is to reassert YHWH's kingship and power over the forces of chaos.⁶⁹⁴ The author is making this point deliberately. The Chaoskampf motifs are further highlighted in the book and especially in the oracles against the nations.

Boadt states:

...the choice of strongly mythical material is not accidental but determined by the need to effectively counteract the attractiveness to a beleaguered people of the religious cults of their stronger neighbors, the mocking of the mythical 'plots' proposed by Egyptian (or Canaanite or Babylonian) belief, such as the divine role of pharaoh, highlights how much more profound is the perception of God given Israel. Ezekiel's biting sarcasm and his caricature of foreign beliefs accents the point that foreign myths do not reflect the true relationship of God and man, but only that of man exalting himself, the ultimate self-delusion.⁶⁹⁵

If the living creatures are seen as supernatural beings and Marduk's helpers, the rest of verse 24 makes more sense. The supernatural beings are representatives of chaos. However, instead of being dangerous and destructive they are caricaturised. They cannot move without the spirit and they are merely pulling the divine chariot with YHWH clearly riding it.

The author modifies the nature of the forces of chaos and states that even though the living creatures' wings sounded as "mighty waters" the noise sounded more precisely like "the thunder

⁶⁹⁴ Strine and Crouch, "Yhwh's Battle against Chaos in Ezekiel: The Transformation of Judahite Mythology for a New Situation," p.887.

⁶⁹⁵ L. Boadt, *Ezekiel's Oracles against Egypt - a Literary and Philological Study of Ezekiel 29-32*, vol. 37, *Biblica Et Orientalia* (Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1980), 170-71.

of the Almighty... like the sound of an army’’. Even the author of the book of Ezekiel clearly brings in the imagery of an army with the Almighty being the supreme commander. The imagery of mighty waters, an army, fire, lightning and chariots contributes to the understanding of the rainbow as the weapon of warrior God—YHWH.⁶⁹⁶

The author of the book of Ezekiel reinstates YHWH’s status as the divine king and moves away from a directly reciprocal relationship between the divine king and the earthly king. Throughout the book of Ezekiel, YHWH’s kingship is emphasised, while King Jehoiachin is explicitly mentioned only once. As only a true divine king could, YHWH moved freely through Marduk’s dominion. YHWH moved back and forward from Jerusalem to Babylon. While strongly supporting the defeated earthly king, the author of the book of Ezekiel emphasises the divine kingship of YHWH.

The author goes a step further by implicitly declaring the Babylonian king as YHWH’s earthly agent later in the book in the oracles against the nations. The fact that Jehoiachin was defeated and exiled and Jerusalem and the temple destroyed posed a major theological and ideological challenge. Zedekiah was not supported by the author of the book of Ezekiel, as he had disobeyed YHWH and rebelled against Babylon. Even Jehoiachin had disobeyed YHWH on some level since he was deported.

It seems that the king of Babylon is the only king who has YHWH’s support. He is winning battles and therefore can be seen as YHWH’s earthly agent. According to Collins:

...in lieu of the now-defunct Judah, Ezekiel identifies the king of Babylon as YHWH’s earthly agent for establishing order; Egypt is (re) confirmed as a chaotic force, opposing YHWH and his Babylonian agent; and Judah’s status is rendered a variable predicted on its political allegiances.⁶⁹⁷

The author of the book of Ezekiel has achieved a paradigm shift in the understanding of the divine king–human king relationship. In the first chapter of the book of Ezekiel, the author has declared that YHWH is the universal king, the one and only true divine king. His divine kingship after the initial vision cannot be disputed.

⁶⁹⁶ N. R. Bowen, *Ezekiel, Abingdon Old Testament Commentaries* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2010), p.4.

⁶⁹⁷ Collins, *Genesis 1-4, a Linguistic, Literary, and Theological Commentary*, p.889.

By mentioning the name of Jehoiachin and calling him a king, the author radically supports him as only legitimate Davidic king. Zedekiah aligns himself to the forces of chaos/Egypt and therefore cannot be called a king. Instead, Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon is called a king. This is especially clear in the oracles against the nations.

However, the major modification is that it is YHWH who is behind Nebuchadnezzar, not Marduk. The rainbow confirms YHWH's divine kingship status as well, as it is the sign that YHWH is transferring some of his power to the Babylonian king. It seems that the author of the book of Ezekiel employs irony to mock both sides, the Babylonian as well as his audience. It is YHWH who is the divine king and not Marduk, but at the same time the Babylonian king is YHWH's earthly agent.

In this way the author of the book of Ezekiel deals with the major theological and ideological conundrum and reconciles the divine kingship of YHWH and the cataclysmic events of the temple and Jerusalem being destroyed, the defeat of the earthly king and YHWH's people being exiled.

Besides seeing the bow in Genesis 9:13 as a rainbow or a weapon of war, there is a third explanation proposed by Turner. He finds the explanation in Genesis cosmology described in Genesis 1:6-8 where God created the "firmament" to act as a barrier between the waters above and the waters below.

The firmament was imagined as a dome-like structure which supported heavenly waters and heavenly bodies. In Genesis 1, the windows of heaven were opened and the "heavenly ocean" started inundating the earth, hence reversing the process of creation. In Genesis 9, YHWH promises never to use the waters from above to cause the flood and the destruction.

The rainbow symbolises "a pictorial representation of the firmament".⁶⁹⁸ In the two other covenants, the Sabbath and circumcision were visible signs of the covenants. The rainbow plays the same role in the everlasting covenant with Noah. The bow-shaped structure represents the dome-like structure of the firmament.

⁶⁹⁸ Laurence Turner, "The Rainbow as the Sign of the Covenant in Genesis IX 11-13," *Vetus Testamentum* 43, no. Jan (1993): p. 121.

Support for this interpretation can be found in the first chapter of Ezekiel, where the author describes the living creatures and in verse 22 describes the dome above their heads. The same word רָקִיעַ “dome” or “firmament” is found in Ezekiel 1 and Genesis 1. The same word is found in close proximity to the word קַשְׁתָּה “rainbow”.

The function of the crystal-like dome was clearly to separate the creatures from the Creator and the holy from the profane. Turner suggests that the firmament and the rainbow are “explicitly linked” in Ezekiel 1 and that the two words are “associated by strong implication” in Genesis 9.⁶⁹⁹

Another interesting point is that the author of Ezekiel clearly describes the dome being transparent or translucent and shining like a crystal. The author continues to describe the vision and what he sees above the dome, where the glory of YHWH is described as the rainbow in a cloud on a rainy day. Turner suggests that if the dome is transparent, the radiance of the glory of the Lord could shine through, giving the dome the colours of the rainbow.⁷⁰⁰

The use of the term קַשְׁתָּה “rainbow” in the book of Ezekiel is conceptually dependent on its understanding and use in Genesis 9. As mentioned above, only in Genesis 9 and Ezekiel 1 is the word understood as a meteorological phenomenon. Whether the author of the book of Ezekiel understood it as more than that, as a weapon of the warrior God, is an interesting question, especially in the light of my suggestion in which the living creatures are to be interpreted as defeated, submissive supernatural beings.

The author clearly associates the word with rain and cloud, undoubtedly seeing it as a meteorological phenomenon. However, one cannot exclude the possibility that the rainbow was a polyvalent symbol. The rainbow could be also identified as the warrior God’s weapon of war, especially in light of YHWH coming to the heart of Marduk’s realm on a military chariot pulled by defeated supernatural beings.

Turner’s interpretation that the word is closely associated with the word “firmament” and that the rainbow symbolised the dome is a significant one, especially if the entire vision of the prophet

⁶⁹⁹ von Rad, *Genesis - a Commentary*, p.122.

⁷⁰⁰ Ibid.

Ezekiel is seen as “a miniature representation of the cosmos in relation to God. God comes to the prophet in this microcosm, of which the world itself is the macrocosm.”⁷⁰¹

Rainbow as cosmological symbol

Thematic development

The author of the book of Ezekiel alludes to the book of Genesis on many different levels. On the basic level the words “firmament”, “cloud”, and “rainbow” are all markers which simultaneously activate both texts in the minds of his audience. To the author of the book of Ezekiel, the word “rainbow” represents just that, a meteorological, visible phenomenon which in the book of Genesis has become a cosmic symbol for the everlasting covenant between YHWH, his people and the whole earth. When the image of the meteorological phenomenon of the rainbow is evoked, it is the notion of the covenant that is evoked in the minds of his audience.

For the first time in Ezekiel 1:28, the audience realises that what the prophet sees is the glory of YHWH. Previously, microcosmic representation of infinite God was found in the temple. Faced with the reality of the temple being destroyed, the author reverts and alludes to the cosmology described in the book of Genesis. The author of Genesis describes the formation of the universe and the earth, but focuses on the earthly realm, while the heavenly realm is not described.

The author of the book of Ezekiel develops this theme and radically focuses on the description of the heavenly realm. He plays on the wording in Genesis and states in Ezekiel 1:1 that “the heavens were opened”, not “the windows of heaven” as in Genesis, but the heavens themselves. Due to the heavens themselves being opened, the author is able to see the heavenly realities.

He is able to describe through the cosmology found in the book of Genesis that God, whom some of his audience perceived to be stationary and based in the temple, and finally defeated by Marduk, is actually an infinite God, the Lord of the universe. The author of the book of Ezekiel reminds his audience to remember God who created Earth, long before the temple was built, cosmic God who is not bound by geography or buildings.

The author is reminding his audience that the infinite God can use the finite when need be. The author describes a mobile, microcosmic representation of the universe. As in Genesis, the

⁷⁰¹ Brownlee, *Ezekiel 1-19*, p.18.

rainbow functions as a reminder of the everlasting covenant. The author's audience could perceive the exile as as cataclysmic as the flood. Everything that they knew was erased from the face of the earth. I have explored the similarities between Noah and Ezekiel and similarities between the situation Noah found himself and the situation Ezekiel and his audience found themselves in Chapter Four of this thesis.

The faithful remnant surrounding the prophet Ezekiel are implicitly reminded that YHWH will never again use a flood to destroy his people and that God made an everlasting covenant with his people. As a matter of fact, YHWH made his covenant with Noah when there were no recognisable geographical features of the earth, due to the flood. Therefore, the covenant is not bound by regional borders either.

The author of the book of Ezekiel is implicitly telling his audience not to be disheartened but to remember the covenant and to start acting accordingly. YHWH did allow the temple to be destroyed, his people to be exiled and sent to a foreign land. However, YHWH is always faithful to his covenant and is coming to Babylon. In fact he is coming to Babylon as warrior God.

The rainbow reminds the audience that the covenant between YHWH and the people, the relationship between God and the people, still exists and this bond is everlasting. The rainbow in the book of Ezekiel is the reminder of that relationship rather than a hope or promise that YHWH will fix their situation and return them to Jerusalem.

Rainbow as military symbol

As mentioned in Chapter Six of this thesis, it is highly likely that the author of the book of Ezekiel and his audience were familiar with Enuma Elish, as it was read annually. The author of the book of Ezekiel in his description of his vision alludes to Enuma Elish Tablet IV, where the author describes Marduk and his war machinery. Marduk is proclaimed to be the king. He is on the chariot pulled by four monstrous creatures. Other gods prepare him for the trip. Marduk makes a bow as one of his weapons. He is preceded by lightning, his body is engulfed in fire and he creates destructive winds.

28. They were glad (and) did homage, (saying) Marduk is King!

29. They bestowed upon him the scepter, the throne, and the royal robe(?)

30. They gave him an irresistible weapon smiting the enemy (saying)
31. "Go and cut off the life of Ti'amat"
32. May the winds carry her blood to out-of-the-way places
33. After the gods his fathers had determined the destiny of Bel
34. They set him on the road-the way to success and attainment
35. He made a bow and decreed (it) as his weapon
36. An arrowhead he put (on the arrow and) fastened the bowstring to it
37. He took up the club and grasped (it) in his right hand
38. the bow and the quiver he hung at his side
39. The lightning he set before him
40. With a blazing flame he filled his body
41. He made a net to inclose Ti'amat within (it),
42. (and) had four winds take hold that nothing of her might escape;
43. The south wind, the north wind, the east wind, (and) the west wind,
44. The gift of his (grand)father, Anu, he caused top draw nigh to the border(s) of the net.
45. He crated the inhullu: the evil wind, the whirlwind, the wind incomparable.
46. The fourfold wind, the sevenfold wind, the whirlwind incomparable
47. He sent forth the winds which he had created, the seven of them;
48. To trouble Ti'amat within, they arose behind him.
49. The lord raised the rain flood, his mighty weapon.
50. He mounted (his) irresistible, terrible storm chariot;
51. He harnessed for it a team of four and yoked (them) to it,
52. The Destructive, The Pitiless, The Trampler, The Flier.
53. They were sharp of tooth, bearing poison.¹

The similarities between the two accounts are striking. The author of the book of Ezekiel was facing a theological conundrum. The temple was destroyed, the people were exiled, and King Jehoiachin is in exile too. Jerusalem was destroyed and the people defeated. In the past, the armies of Israel and Judah had been defeated on numerous occasions. The prophets explained the defeat as the means of divine punishment and as a short-term defeat. However, the cataclysmic events of the Babylonian destruction of Jerusalem and the temple affected the core of the nation's psyche. Even the unconditionality of the Davidic covenant is questioned.

Furthermore, the defeat of the earthly king implied the defeat of YHWH. The defeat of King Jehoiachin posed a major theological and ideological challenge.⁷⁰² The author of the book of Ezekiel focuses in the first chapter almost solely on describing YHWH as the divine king and God as creator of the universe. The author continues to focus on YHWH as the divine king throughout the rest of the book. The use of mythological terms of a cosmological type is especially evident in the oracles against the nations (Ezek. 25-32).⁷⁰³

The language used in the first chapter of the book of Ezekiel is modelled on the mythological and cosmological language of Enuma Elish. However, the author of the book of Ezekiel develops the theme and modifies the tradition. To start with, YHWH is the only divine character. There are no other gods described in Ezekiel's vision. There is nobody to proclaim YHWH as king, nobody to set him on his throne, nobody to set him on his way. YHWH is coming to Babylon in the terrifying chariot, so similar to Marduk's chariot that in the minds of his audience it could very well be the same chariot.

As argued in Chapter Six of this thesis, YHWH has defeated Marduk, taken his chariot and his terrifying living beings and subdued them to the point that they cannot move or act independently of YHWH. YHWH also comes in all his splendour. The war machinery is enormous, loud and terrifying, with lightning, winds and clouds surrounding it. Enclosed in fire, YHWH is radiating glory. This luminescence is described in cosmic terms as the bow in a cloud on a rainy day. YHWH also comes without any weapons. The only weapon that is alluded to could be the very bow that Marduk fashioned for himself. This could be seen as the ultimate humiliation. YHWH has never lost the battle. The author makes this point by describing YHWH coming to the heart of Marduk's realm.

Summary

The author makes a paradigm shift in royal military ideology. The earthly king might be defeated and exiled but YHWH is not. The exiled king is still the only legitimate king and heir of the Davidic dynasty. The Davidic covenant will survive the threat. YHWH's rightful place and status are re-established. YHWH's earthly agent is the king of Babylon, and it was YHWH not Marduk who placed him in that position.

⁷⁰² Crouch, "Ezekiel's Oracles against the Nations in Light of a Royal Ideology of Warfare," p.478.

⁷⁰³ Ibid., p.492.

YHWH defeated Marduk and is still coming to Babylon, almost to taunt the Babylonians, and to offer hope to the faithful remnant. In another twist, in subsequent chapters, the author explains that YHWH came to Babylon to judge his people. The same chariot that the prophet Ezekiel has seen in Babylon goes back to Jerusalem, and after seeing the idolatry in the temple leaves it.

While clearly modelled on Enuma Elish the author's account is still framed by the Genesis account of Creation. The language used is deeply rooted in Genesis. The author describes the firmament, the rainbow, winds, rainy days and clouds. In the book of Genesis the rainbow's primary role is to remind God not to destroy his people again. In the book of Ezekiel it is the glory of the Lord which is radiating like rainbow.

Perhaps this was a sign to the audience that the exile is not a total annihilation. The rainbow is mentioned to remind the audience that even though YHWH is coming to judge his people God will not destroy them all. This is the sign that perhaps there is a small faithful remnant who will change their ways. The motif of the rainbow reminds the audience that once before YHWH was victorious against the forces of chaos and YHWH's status as the divine king was established.

The author of the book of Ezekiel is using the same motif to activate both texts to remind the audience of YHWH's primordial battles, which YHWH won, and of the fact that the Lord won the battle against Marduk and that YHWH's status as the divine king is not dependent on the status of the earthly king.

This study has shown that the word קֶשֶׁת “bow” is a polyvalent symbol which has three distinct yet interconnected meanings: military (a weapon of war), rainbow (a meteorological phenomenon) and the cosmic firmament. The word קֶשֶׁת as “rainbow” only appears in two books on four occasions, in the book of Genesis 9:13,14,16 and in Ezekiel 1:28, closely associated with the word “cloud”.

There are equally strong arguments to support the translation of the word as the atmospheric phenomenon of the rainbow and as a warrior bow. The connection of the word “rainbow” with the word “cloud” strongly suggests that the rainbow was seen as an atmospheric phenomenon. At the same time there is overwhelming evidence in ANE iconography, Mesopotamian and biblical texts that the bow was perceived as a warrior bow.

ANE iconography depicts the transfer of power from the deity to the earthly representative of that deity (the king). The author of the book of Ezekiel mentions the rainbow in Ezekiel 1:28, which becomes a marker. The word, in the mind of his audience, alludes to the rainbow of Genesis 9 and YHWH's victory over primordial forces.

The author of the book of Ezekiel is again depicting YHWH as God the warrior who is coming to the heart of Marduk's realm with Marduk's own bow on a war chariot signifying the total defeat of Marduk. The bow is pointed upwards, symbolising his support for King Jehoiachin and later on in the book for the Babylonian king (Ezek. 29-32). The rainbow reminds the audience that YHWH is the only true king, who is in absolute control of primordial forces, other gods and their earthly representatives, even the destruction of the temple and the exile itself. King Nebuchadnezzar is the agent of YHWH responsible for bringing order.

The major modification is the fact that behind King Nebuchadnezzar is YHWH, and not Marduk as the audience had assumed. Behind the destruction of the temple and the exile is YHWH, through the Babylonian king, and not Marduk. The author of the book of Ezekiel strengthens this argument by depicting YHWH leaving the temple and returning to the new temple of his own volition. The rainbow also alludes to the covenant of Genesis 9 and YHWH's promise to the people.

The author of the book of Ezekiel, by employing the rainbow as a marker, reminds his audience to remember the covenant, not to be disheartened and to start acting according to the covenant. The exile may feel as devastating as the flood, but YHWH promised that he will never again destroy humanity. The rainbow reminds the audience of the relationship between them and YHWH, the relationship that they have neglected for a long time.

The word "rainbow" can also be interpreted as a representation of the firmament. The author mentions the word "dome" or "firmament" in Ezekiel 22, and this is the same word used in Genesis 1 to describe the firmament separating the waters from above from the waters below. The dome is described as crystal clear, while the glory of the Lord is luminescent and multicoloured, giving the dome the appearance of being multicoloured too.

The main focus for the author of the book of Ezekiel in the first chapter is to describe YHWH as the king. While reinstating YHWH to his rightful position, the prophet Ezekiel starts to shift the

accepted royal military ideology. The author fully supported Jehoiachin as the only Davidic king. However, faced with the fact that King Jehoiachin is in exile and has no power, in the later chapters of the book the author implicitly states that the Babylonian king is YHWH's earthly representative. King Jehoiachin politically sided with the king of Babylon, but the radical point is that behind the king of Babylon is YHWH who transferred the power to him.

Conclusion

In Ezekiel 1:28 the author is trying to describe the centre of his vision and to finally identify it. The author is very cautious and is struggling to describe the indescribable. In the book of Ezekiel, **כְּבוֹד** occurs repeatedly in three different contexts: at the conclusion of the call vision 1:28 and the conclusion of commissioning in 3:23, in chapters 8-11 in the context of the abandonment of the temple, and in chapter 43 in the context of the return of **כְּבוֹד** to the temple.

It is also clear that the phrase **כְּבוֹד-יְהוָה** is a fixed term of central significance in Exodus and Numbers material and subsequently in the book of Ezekiel. It is a specific term used to describe the uniqueness of the experience of the visible, majestic manifestation of God's presence to the people.

The evidence from this research suggests that there are strong intertextual connections between the book of Exodus and the book of Ezekiel. The two main characters, Moses and Ezekiel, share many common characteristics. The author of the book of Ezekiel describes the prophet Ezekiel as the new Moses, which is further highlighted by the fact that Moses' name is not mentioned in the book of Ezekiel at all. The relationship between YHWH and Ezekiel is as equal to the one between Moses and YHWH. In some aspects it is even more unique. Ezekiel has seen what was denied to Moses. He has seen the most detailed vision of the glory of the Lord recorded in the Hebrew bible.

The author of the book of Ezekiel is consciously using familiar yet distinctive words to allude to the Exodus texts and justify some of his theology. The concept of the glory of YHWH serves as the link which connects two exilic communities. However, the author of Ezekiel developed the theme of the glory of the Lord to a new level. The author focuses more on the visual than on the auditory elements of the vision and describes the vision in minute detail.

The glory of the Lord is used throughout the book of Ezekiel to proclaim the radical message of a completely new beginning, the creation of a new nation and new temple, and the re-establishment of proper worship, while employing subversive elements adapted from the Babylonian religion. In the meantime, during the exile, it is YHWH himself who will become a sanctuary to his people.

In the book of Ezekiel, YHWH's encounter with the prophet is forceful and involuntary. The prophet and his people do not have a choice. Unlike the encounter between Moses and YHWH on Mt Sinai, where the benevolent encounter with the glory of the Lord is initiated by Moses and where YHWH protects Moses from the dangers of facing the divine, Ezekiel is fully exposed to the danger. The prophet Ezekiel is allowed to see what Moses was not permitted to see. He sees YHWH face to face and in great detail, which makes his vision more intricate than that of Moses and his relationship with YHWH equal to the relationship between Moses and YHWH.

YHWH in the book of Ezekiel is on an offensive. The Lord is not described as merciful or gracious. YHWH is coming to proclaim his judgment. The military connotations of the vision are highlighted by the use of the word "rainbow". The word is a polyvalent symbol which has three interconnected, separate meanings: military, meteorological and cosmic.

Ancient Near Eastern evidence depicts gods holding a bow and giving it to their earthly representatives in the process of transferring some of their power. If the entire vision can be seen as YHWH riding on the chariot that he won in the battle with Marduk, and if the chariot consists of Babylonian supernatural beings, then YHWH is coming to the heart of Marduk's realm, and this would be perceived as the biggest insult to Marduk and the Babylonian religion.

YHWH is the supreme God. However, in a radical development YHWH symbolically transfers some of his power and gives support and legitimacy to Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon. The radical shift in royal ideology is that YHWH is behind King Nebuchadnezzar, and YHWH is behind the destruction of the temple and the exile. All along, YHWH has been in control of historical events.

Chapter Eight

Conclusions

The main argument of this thesis is that the first chapter of the book of Ezekiel contains a radical and subversive theology which has not been researched in depth. My research of the current literature suggested that a number of questions have not been answered adequately, creating a significant gap in the current scholarship.⁷⁰⁴

The purpose of this thesis, as indicated in the introduction, is to determine answers to the following questions: Why does the author put so much energy and effort into the description of the “living beings”? Why are they so bizarre and why does he call them the “living beings” and not “cherubim” as they are called in Ezekiel 10? Why does the author describe YHWH in highly anthropomorphic terms? Why does the author clearly state, dangerously bordering on blasphemy, that the glory of the Lord had humanoid form? Why does the author mention the name of an insignificant Judean king who is in exile with no power or authority? Why did he refer to him as “King Jehoiachin”? Finally, who is the God of Ezekiel?

To answer these questions and highlight the radical and subversive theology contained in the first chapter of the book of Ezekiel, I developed a methodology that would enable me to explore the texts and identify “markers” which the author consciously placed in the text with the intention of activating other texts.

Due to the radical and subversive nature of his message, the writer could not simply quote other texts. I have argued that the combination of literary criticism and intertextuality would enable me to do a systematic survey of the markers and to explore texts and iconography which are in dialogue with Ezekiel 1.

The author of the book of Ezekiel and his audience were in Babylon—an unclean land, the realm of Marduk. The exiles felt abandoned by YHWH and entertained the possibility that Marduk had defeated YHWH. Without the temple they did not have the means to worship YHWH and re-

⁷⁰⁴ This thesis does not contain a separate chapter on review of historical and current research on the topic. Instead, the review is interwoven into the thesis.

establish their relationship with the Lord. Without priests and prophets the worship of YHWH in Babylon is impossible. The author of the book states that Ezekiel—the character—fulfills both roles and speaks about a new temple and a new priesthood in Ezekiel 40-43 in much more detail.

One of the more significant findings to emerge from this study is the fact that the author of the book of Ezekiel was pro King Jehoiachin. The writer of the book of Ezekiel was against Zedekiah and his political machinations. He is never called a king or mentioned by name, while subversively King Jehoiachin is called “king” and the time of the visions is determined by the time King Jehoiachin has been exiled. The association of the title and the name of the king with the dates in the book of Ezekiel is not purely chronological, but a deeply subversive statement. It is a political and theological announcement. King Jehoiachin is the only legitimate Davidic king.

In the following chapters the author will discredit the remnant living in Jerusalem and their religious and political leaders. However, radically, Jehoiachin is called “king,” a designation reserved for Nebuchadnezzar and the kings of the surrounding nations.

This study has shown that the author of the book of Ezekiel had to depict the prophet Ezekiel as someone who had the authority to communicate the word of God to his audience. This required that YHWH be portrayed as a mobile God who is not bound by the geographical borders of Judah and that the Lord is present with the exiles in Babylon.

I do acknowledge that there is a substantial amount of material written in regard to the mobility of YHWH. The uniqueness of this study is in discussing how YHWH travels to Babylon. The evidence from this thesis suggests that YHWH was using Marduk’s war chariot to enter his realm. The monstrous creatures were crucial for Marduk’s mobility, glory and win over Tiamat and the forces of chaos. The audience was expecting to see Marduk coming to Babylon in the prophet’s vision, but instead it is YHWH who is riding on Marduk’s chariot. The living beings described in the first chapter of the book of Ezekiel closely resemble the monstrous creatures described in Enuma Elish.

The radical message to the author’s audience is that YHWH is the supreme God who never lost the battle against Marduk and is now victoriously coming to the heart of Marduk’s realm riding on Marduk’s own chariot, confirming Marduk’s total defeat and reasserting YHWH supremacy.

The author believed that only someone equal to Moses might be able to lead the people to YHWH and away from spiritual apathy. Hence, the relationship between YHWH and the prophet is described as intimate and on the same level as the relationship between Moses and YHWH. The vision is initiated by YHWH and the prophet cannot cause it by some external means. It deeply affects the prophet, to the point that he is immobilised for days. This is not an individual, extremely intense, spiritual episode but instead a lifelong experience. The prophet is unable to do anything without the hand of the Lord being upon him. This process gives the prophet the authority to speak on behalf of YHWH in exile.

The author states that the heavens themselves were opened and the prophet Ezekiel had the unprecedented privilege of seeing the heavenly realm and the glory of the Lord as no one before—not even Moses. YHWH gives the authority to the prophet, and the author reminds the audience that YHWH could come to Babylon if he wished, transforming and alluding to the story of Noah and YHWH. However, this was a radical notion and required a radical vision and portrayal of YHWH.

The writer describes the vision by dedicating 20 verses to the depiction of the living creatures, which seems excessive unless there is a purpose to it. As mentioned above, one of the most significant findings to emerge from this study is that the living creatures represent supernatural beings, a part of Marduk's divine war machinery.

The living creatures are not cherubim and they do not resemble cherubim as traditionally portrayed in Hebrew bible. The exiles would initially interpret the chariot as Marduk's war chariot, victorious and more powerful than YHWH, coming to Babylon. However, even more controversially, the author of the book of Ezekiel states that the terrifying living beings are completely subdued by YHWH and that it is YHWH, not Marduk, who is sitting on the throne on top of the chariot. It is El Šadday who is coming to the heart of Marduk's realm, majestic, victorious and in control.

The mobility and holiness of God are highlighted by the description of the wheels. YHWH is not bound by space. In the following chapters YHWH will do the unthinkable. Due to the level of idolatry, YHWH will leave the temple and only return when the conditions are right. YHWH has

been described as far from defeated. King Jehoiachin and Zedekiah are defeated, but YHWH is not.

The writer of the book of Ezekiel is subversively using Babylonian mythology and iconography, radically transforming it with the intention of portraying YHWH as the supreme deity. The evidence strongly suggests that the author of the book of Ezekiel was alluding to Enuma Elish and “A Vision of the Nether World”. The author is controversially transforming the well-known Babylonian tradition replacing Marduk with El Šadday. According to the writer, it is YHWH who has calmed the forces of chaos and defeated Marduk. YHWH is victorious and in Babylon. Another significant finding of this thesis is that the author re-interprets Babylonian political theology. According to Babylonian political theology, the earthly king was a mirror image of the heavenly king. If Marduk was a supreme god, powerful and victorious in the heavenly realm, King Nebuchadnezzar would be equally successful in his campaigns. The deity and the earthly king were inextricably connected.

Traditionally, Marduk has been depicted in anthropomorphic terms. The author once again emulates the dominant culture and describes the glory of the Lord in anthropomorphic terms. In an overtly iconic society it would be expected that YHWH be depicted in concrete, anthropomorphic terms. Only by portraying YHWH in such an anthropomorphic, tangible way, would the exiles see the Lord as real and present in Babylon.

In Babylonian theology the supreme deity can be represented by a statue. Even earthly kings can be represented by three-dimensional statues and be worshipped. The author was faced with the important question of how to represent YHWH in a Babylonian context.

According to the author of the book of Ezekiel, only a human form, as the highest form, can represent YHWH. The author controversially reverses the focus of the book of Genesis and attributes some of characteristics of humans to YHWH rather than following the book of Genesis, where some of the divine characteristics are attributed to humans.

Surrounded by an overtly cultic and iconic society, aniconic Israelites had to transform their theology of a transcendent, formless, abstract YHWH and find a mediator. The author clearly states that only humans can be the image of God, not idols.

The temple has been destroyed, the people are exiled and the king who is supposed to be victorious is in captivity in Babylon. In a radical shift the writer portrays King Nebuchadnezzar as YHWH's earthly agent. King Jehoiachin might be defeated and exiled, but YHWH is not. The author of the book of Ezekiel reinstates YHWH's status as the divine king and moves away from a directly reciprocal relationship between the divine king and the earthly king. YHWH's status as the divine king is not dependent on the status of any earthly king. In fact, YHWH's earthly agent is the king of Babylon.

The major modification is the fact that behind King Nebuchadnezzar is YHWH and not Marduk as the audience assumed. It is YHWH and not Marduk who placed him in that position. Therefore, according to this theology, behind the destruction of the temple and the exile is YHWH, through the Babylonian king and not Marduk.

This study has found that there are significant similarities between the book of Exodus and the book of Ezekiel. As mentioned above, the two main protagonists, Moses and the prophet Ezekiel, share many similarities. Significant intertextual connections have been identified between Ezekiel 1:28 and Exodus 16:9-12; 24:9-11, 15-17; 33:18-23; 34:5-7. To justify the theology of a mobile YHWH who can come to Babylon, the author reminds his audience of examples where YHWH was not bound by the temple, the tabernacle or geographical borders.

The glory of the Lord in the book of Ezekiel is not enclosed in the temple walls or shrouded in obscuring clouds. It is transparent and detailed. The glory of the Lord is invading the realm of Marduk. The movement cannot be manipulated by humans, and later in the book of Ezekiel, the glory of the Lord will leave the temple and return only when conditions are right.

Important conclusions can be drawn from the intertextual connections between Genesis 9:13 and Ezekiel 1:28. The writer is using the word "rainbow" as a polyvalent symbol which functions as a marker to activate several distinctive texts, as well as the iconography of the Ancient Near East. The rainbow in the first chapter of the book of Ezekiel has three distinct yet interconnected meanings: a meteorological phenomenon, a weapon of war and the cosmic firmament. The rainbow as a meteorological phenomenon symbolically reminds the audience of the book of Genesis and YHWH's promise to the people. ANE iconography strongly suggests that the rainbow can be seen as a weapon of war and a way to symbolically show the transfer of power

from the deity to the earthly king. YHWH has arrived in Babylon using Marduk's chariot and holding what could be the very bow that Marduk fashioned for himself. This scene could be seen as the ultimate victory of YHWH, not just against Marduk, but also against the primordial forces of chaos.

The tension in the theology of the book of Ezekiel is evident. The author is constantly negotiating the thin line between more orthodox theology and the new situation in which he and his audience find themselves. The author of the book of Ezekiel cannot openly declare his theology due to possible repercussions and the possibility that his audience would reject it. What he is about to proclaim can be seen as too radical and subversive. The writer consciously alludes to the well-known stories found in the Hebrew tradition as well as well-known stories from the Babylonian tradition. He then radically transforms them to proclaim his theology.

In this thesis, I have argued the following points: YHWH is not defeated by Marduk, in fact, the opposite is the case. YHWH is in control of historical events, including the exile and the destruction of the temple. Due to the overtly iconic society, the author depicts the Lord as corporeal and concrete rather than abstract and formless. Furthermore, YHWH is in control of king Nebuchadnezzar who is now seen as YHWH's agent.

The author describes King Jehoiachin as the only legitimate king, and sees that the continuation of the Davidic dynasty lies with him. The writer radically transforms well-known Hebrew and Babylonian traditions and stories to proclaim the main points of his message outlined above. Furthermore, the prophet Ezekiel is the new mediator between YHWH and his people. He has seen the face of the Lord and lived. He has seen YHWH's war machinery on the offensive to Babylon. It is the same chariot that Marduk used before he was defeated by YHWH.

The prophet Ezekiel has the authority to communicate with and lead the people back to YHWH. The author is aware of the spiritual apathy and the real danger of syncretism or of abandoning faith in YHWH altogether. He is aware that he lives in extraordinary times which require extraordinary measures. The writer is constantly balancing orthodoxy and blasphemy, drawing the attention of his audience.

The first chapter of the book of Ezekiel is a theological and literary masterpiece. The author is able to keep the audience's attention through suspension, sudden twists and most of all through

clear and conscious allusions using specific words or images as markers. Ezekiel 1:1-28 sets the tone for the rest of the book.

Future research

Due to the limitations of this thesis, I was unable to do a detailed examination of the following questions: Why does the author call “the living creatures” cherubim in Ezekiel 10? Why is the face of the ox dropped and the faces of the cherubim introduced in the same chapter? This will be an area of my further research as it is connected to my thesis. Intertextuality could also be applied to provide methodological continuity to my thesis.

I was also unable to undertake further investigation of the connection between the glory of the Lord leaving the temple and YHWH being “a sanctuary” to the exiles “for a little while” (Ezek. 11:16).

The similarities and differences between the accounts of Marduk’s abandonment of his city and YHWH’s abandonment of Jerusalem deserve closer examination. In the so-called “Marduk prophecy” Marduk describes how he left his city on three occasions and travelled to Hatti, Assyria and Elam. It is interesting that the departures correspond to “the conquest of Babylon by Mursilis I (1620-1590 BCE), Tukulti-Ninurta I, and Kudur-Nahhunte (ca. 1160 BCE)”.⁷⁰⁵ This will also be an area of my further research. I was unable to explore the return of the glory of the Lord to the new temple in Ezekiel 43.⁷⁰⁶ This area is also connected to my thesis and deserves careful, detailed examination.

Ezekiel 1:1-28 will continue to inspire writers, painters, mystics and theologians for years to come. The first chapter of the book of Ezekiel contains a radical and subversive message, and it should not simply be seen as a stepping stone to the rest of the book. So much theology is compacted in those 28 verses. The reader should not rush through it but enjoy the literary and theological beauty of it.

⁷⁰⁵ Daniel Block, *The Gods of the Nations - Studies in Ancient Near Eastern National Theology* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2000), p.123.

⁷⁰⁶ Another promising area for further research could be exploring intertextual connections between the book of Daniel and the book of Ezekiel focusing on the visions described in the book of Daniel.

The final question is who is the God of Ezekiel? According to the first chapter, the God of Ezekiel is transparent, majestic, victorious, real, present and personal. In the vision, YHWH is transparent and not obscured by the clouds and as such the Lord is more accessible to the prophet and his audience. El Šadday is an awe-inspiring king. The Lord is the warrior God who has defeated Marduk and has no rivals.

YHWH is the living God who is truly present among the exiles. The God of Ezekiel is a personal God who has a lifelong impact on the prophet and who elevates the human race to the highest level by showing the prophet the vision of the humanoid glory of the Lord. The Almighty is also the God of hope who wants to re-establish his relationship with the people in exile.

The God of Ezekiel is the God of exiles wherever they might be, and YHWH has been “a sanctuary to them for a little while, in the countries where they have gone” (Ezek. 11:16). The God of Ezekiel is always with God’s people and due to the extreme circumstances the exiles find themselves in, YHWH reveals himself to the prophet and his audience in an unprecedented way.

Appendix

The root **כבד**-*kbd* is extensively used in the Hebrew bible and a large number of different words can be derived from the same root.

The root *kbd* (West Semitic) and *kbt* (East Semitic) is common in all the Semitic languages: Akkadian *kabātu*, Amorite *kbd*, Ugaritic *kbd*, Arabic *kaboda*, Ethiopic *kabada*, Old South Arabic *kbd*, Tigr. *käbdä*, Amharic *käbbädä*, Phoenician/Pun *kbd*.⁷⁰⁷ Only Aramaic uses *yāqār* (be heavy/be precious) instead of *kbd*.⁷⁰⁸

The most important nominal derivatives are the adjective **כָּבֵד** “heavy” and the substantive **כְּבוֹד** “weight”, honour”, majesty”. It can also mean: “heavy organ” meaning “liver” (animal liver: Exod. 29:13; Lev. 3:4); the centre of human emotions (Lam. 2:11) “soul” or “inner being” (Gen. 49:6; Psalm 7:6),⁷⁰⁹ *kōbed*-abstract “weight”, *kēbēdut*-“difficulty”, and *kēbūddā*-“valuable”.⁷¹⁰ The verb occurs 114 times: *qal* 23 times, *niphal* 30 times, *piel* 38 times, *pual* 3 times, *hithpael* 3 times, and *hifil* 17 times.⁷¹¹

כָּבֵד - “heavy”

Qal is closest to the basic denotation “to be heavy”. The *niphal* is used commonly in relation to human subjects as the passive: “to (be)come recognised, honoured.”⁷¹² When YHWH is the subject it is used in the reflexive sense of “show oneself to be weighty/important”. It can also mean “be made heavy”, “enjoy respect”, and “behave with dignity”.⁷¹³ The *piel* mostly has a declarative or estimative meaning, such as “honour” or “approve”⁷¹⁴ It also has a wider range of meanings such as “recognise”, “respect”, “esteem”, “consider skilled” (in something) or

⁷⁰⁷ Botterweck and Ringgren, "Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament " p.13.

⁷⁰⁸ Jenni and Westermann, "Theological Lexicon of the Old Testament " p. 590.

⁷⁰⁹ Clines, "The Dictionary of Classical Hebrew," p.352.

⁷¹⁰ Jenni and Westermann, "Theological Lexicon of the Old Testament " p.591.

⁷¹¹ Ibid.

⁷¹² Botterweck and Ringgren, "Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament " p.16.

⁷¹³ Clines, "The Dictionary of Classical Hebrew," p.349.

⁷¹⁴ Botterweck and Ringgren, "Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament " p.16.

“venerate”.⁷¹⁵ In some instances it can mean “make dull” or “make insensitive” (1 Sam. 6:6) or “cleanse”.⁷¹⁶

When YHWH is subject it can mean “revere”.⁷¹⁷ The *pual* similar to the *niphal* and the *piel* performs as the passive of the *piel* “be honoured” or “become rich” (Prov. 13:18, Isa. 58:13).⁷¹⁸ The *hiphil* functions mostly as causative of the *qal*. Therefore the meanings are strongly associated to those of *qal*.⁷¹⁹ It can have a range of meanings, such as “make something heavy to someone”, “deal heavily with”, “make someone unresponsive”, “harden”, “let something weigh heavily”.⁷²⁰ The *hithpael* functions as the reflexive or passive of the *piel*.⁷²¹ It can mean: “multiply”, “increase”, “put on airs”, “honour oneself” or “glorify oneself”.⁷²²

There is no theological usage of the adjective כָּבֵד. The literary meaning is “heavy in weight” and it can only be found in few passages (1Sam. 4:18; Exod. 17:12; Prov. 27:23). In fact, the meaning of the word כָּבֵד is better translated as “weight as burdensome-weight in its function”, such as heavy yoke placed on someone. The meaning is usually close to the meaning of the English words “impede”, “burden”, oppress”, “be onerous”. In Exodus 9:7 and Isaiah 59:1 the verb is used in the sense of stubbornness.⁷²³

The weight can be seen as positive and negative. The negative sense of the word is more dominant in the biblical text. The word “weight” can be used in the text to signify a burden that must be carried bodily or weight that comes or falls upon a person.⁷²⁴

The first category includes the passages with reference to the heavy yoke (1 Kgs 12:11; 2 Chr. 10:11; 1 Kgs 12:4; 2 Chr. 10:4). Some passages speak of rulers placing heavy yokes on people (1 Kgs 12:10; 2 Chr. 10:10; 1 Kgs 12:14; 2 Chr. 10:14; Isa. 47:6 etc.).⁷²⁵ Furthermore, it includes the passages which speak of sins as heavy burdens (Psalm 38:4), misfortune (Job 6:3), passages

⁷¹⁵ Ibid.

⁷¹⁶ Clines, "The Dictionary of Classical Hebrew," p.350.

⁷¹⁷ Botterweck and Ringgren, "Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament " p.16.

⁷¹⁸ Clines, "The Dictionary of Classical Hebrew," p.351.

⁷¹⁹ Botterweck and Ringgren, "Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament " p.16.

⁷²⁰ Clines, "The Dictionary of Classical Hebrew," p.351.

⁷²¹ Botterweck and Ringgren, "Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament " p.17.

⁷²² Clines, "The Dictionary of Classical Hebrew," p.352.

⁷²³ Botterweck and Ringgren, "Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament " p.16.

⁷²⁴ Ibid., p.591.

⁷²⁵ Ibid., p.17.

mentioning a task too large to be considered a heavy burden (Exod. 18:18; Num.11:14), and passages which talk about the mouth, tongue (Exod. 4:10) or heart as heavy (Exod. 7:14).⁷²⁶

The second category includes passages which speak of being overcome by the weight of a hailstorm (Exod. 9:18, 24), a swarm of flies (Exod. 8:20), locusts (Exod. 10:14), an epidemic (Exod. 9:3) or famine (Gen. 12:10, 47:4, 13). A group of people can be called “heavy” to emphasise their abundance or number (Gen. 50:9; Num. 11:14).⁷²⁷ The element of size and quantity is especially evident in those passages.

In the Hebrew bible, heavy can also mean “burdensome”. Absalom’s hair became burdensome and he cut it off (2 Sam. 14:26). A large number of visitors can be seen as burdensome as well (2 Sam. 13:25). Compulsory labour can be perceived as burdensome (Exod. 5:9; Neh. 5:18). YHWH’s hand can be heavy, illustrating the lament of the oppressed (Job 23:2; Psalm 32:44; 1 Sam. 5:6, 11).⁷²⁸

In four passages battle is described as “growing heavy”, pointing at the crucial moment of the battle (Judg. 1:35, 20:34; 1 Sam. 31:3 etc.).⁷²⁹ Body organs, especially ones which do not function properly, can be described as “heavy” as well. The word “heavy” is used in Exodus 4:10 to describe Moses’ possible speech impairment.⁷³⁰ Heart is the most frequently unresponsive part of the body in the Hebrew bible. Pharaoh’s heart is unresponsive, which is clearly a spiritual condition (Exod. 7:14, 8:15, 32:11, 9:7, 10:1; 1 Sam. 6:6 (Philistines)).⁷³¹ Other unresponsive body parts are eyes (Gen. 48:10) and ears (Isa. 6:10, Zech. 7:11).⁷³² Heaviness as a positive experience can be noted in the passages dealing with wealth (Gen. 13:2), greatness (Gen. 50:9; Exod. 12:38) and solemnity (Gen. 50:10).⁷³³

The verb **כבד** has a basic meaning of “to be/become heavy” and all the occurrences can be understood against this basic meaning. In the social context *piel* is translated in most passages as “to honour” as in “to acknowledge someone as heavy”. In the family realm it can mean

⁷²⁶ Jenni and Westermann, "Theological Lexicon of the Old Testament " p.591.

⁷²⁷ VanGemeren, "New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology & Exegesis " p.578.

⁷²⁸ Botterweck and Ringgren, "Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament " p.18.

⁷²⁹ Ibid.

⁷³⁰ Ibid.

⁷³¹ VanGemeren, "New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology & Exegesis " p.578.

⁷³² Ibid.

⁷³³ Jenni and Westermann, "Theological Lexicon of the Old Testament " p.592.

acknowledgment of parental authority (Exod. 20:12; Deut. 5:16; Mal. 1:6).⁷³⁴ It can also describe recognition of dynastic succession by demonstration of dominion (2 Sam. 10:3; 1 Chr. 19:3) and royal confirmation in the presence of the people (1 Sam. 15:30).⁷³⁵ *Niphal* correspondence to *piel* as in: “people are honoured by people”. Some people are honoured because they have demonstrated their competency. For instance, in 2 Samuel 23:19, 23, Benaiah and Abishai are honoured because they are stronger and have more courage than others. David is also honoured for many of his qualities, such as his faithfulness (1Sam.22:14).⁷³⁶ Honour in the Hebrew bible is seen as acknowledgment of the other’s status in the community, not as a hierarchical reward.⁷³⁷

Piel of כָּבַד can also express religious honour. “Honour” between humans and God denotes much more than the word “honour” when used in the context of human interaction. “It denotes the total human response to YHWH’s love and favour.”⁷³⁸ This includes the private prayer of an individual (Psalm 86:9; Isa. 25:3), observance of laws or commandments (Deut. 28:58; Isa. 58:13) and the sacrificial cult (Psalms 50:23).⁷³⁹ Individuals who despise the wicked but honour those who fear YHWH (Psalm 15:4), and those who are kind to the needy (Prov. 14:31) honour YHWH. In fact, humans (Psalm 22:24; 86:12), animals (Isa. 43:20) and the whole circle of the earth (Psalm 86:9; Isa. 24:15) honour YHWH. Only in the book of Daniel 11:38 is כָּבַד used for religious worship in general and the worship of other gods.⁷⁴⁰ In some passages YHWH honours certain humans (1 Sam 2:30, Psalm 91:15, Isa. 43:4, 49:5).⁷⁴¹

One of the most important derivatives of the root כָּבַד-*kbd* is כָּבֵד - “heavy”. There is no theological usage of the adjective כָּבֵד. The *qal* is closest to the basic meaning “to be heavy”. It can also mean to “(be) come recognised or honoured”, “show oneself to be weighty/important”, “be made heavy”, “enjoy respect”, “behave with dignity”, “honour/approve”, “recognise”, “respect”, “esteem”, “consider skilled” (in something), “venerate”, “make dull” or “insensitive”.

⁷³⁴ VanGemeren, "New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology & Exegesis " p.579.

⁷³⁵ Botterweck and Ringgren, "Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament " p.19.

⁷³⁶ Ibid.

⁷³⁷ Jenni and Westermann, "Theological Lexicon of the Old Testament " p.593.

⁷³⁸ Botterweck and Ringgren, "Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament " p.19.

⁷³⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁴⁰ Ibid., p.20.

⁷⁴¹ VanGemeren, "New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology & Exegesis " p.579.

The verb is sometimes used to mean “revere”, “be honoured/become rich”, “make something heavy to someone”, “deal heavily with”, “make someone unresponsive”, “harden”, “let something weigh heavily”, “multiply”, “increase”, “put on airs”, “honour oneself” or “glorify oneself”.

The negative sense of the word “weight” is more prominent in the Hebrew bible. The word can usually be translated as “impede”, “burden”, “oppress”, “be onerous”, “stubbornness”, “heavy yoke”, “heavy burden”, “misfortune”, while body parts such as the mouth, tongue or heart can also be heavy.

The verb can also be used to “acknowledge someone as heavy” or “honour” the person. The sole function of human beings is to “honour” God and YHWH can also “honour” certain individuals.

Summary

The most important nominal derivatives are כָּבֵד - “heavy” and the substantive כְּבוֹד - “honour”, “respect”, “majesty”. כָּבֵד can have the basic meaning of “weight”, but it can also denote size or quantity, difficulty, burdening, physical or mental disability, and it can be used to describe decisive moments in a battle. However, there is no theological usage of the adjective כָּבֵד.

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