

The Proclamation of Salvation in the Book of Ezekiel: Restoration or Traces of 'Eschatological' Hope?

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This paper is concerned with a *quaestio disputata et disputanda*: is Ezekiel's message of salvation primarily to be understood in the sense of a restoration that is meant to reinstate the pre-exilic institutions? Or does this message of salvation bring into consideration a qualitative change in the post-exilic time in such a way that at least traces of an 'eschatological' hope come into view? Two preliminary observations are necessary here.

1. The Preliminary Observations

1.1 *The Book of Ezekiel – A Work in Progress*

In his account of the state of research in relation to Ezekiel, Karl-F. Pohlmann comes to the following conclusion: "The current principal point of contention is whether the so-called 'holistic' interpretation, what may be called 'final-text-exegesis', or the literary-critical and redaction-critical oriented research can do justice to the facts contained in the 'Book of Ezekiel.'"¹ The following reflections are based on the conviction that the Book of Ezekiel had a long history of growth, a history that found its starting point in the work of the historical prophet who was active during the Babylonian exile. This initial work was then revised and updated by the School of Ezekiel (agreeing with Zimmerli). This growth probably continued even into the Hellenistic era, with further interpretations and re-interpretations during this long process of the book's transmission.

1.2 *The Book of Ezekiel as an Exilic Literature*

Although it is not the historical figure Ezekiel, but the book named after him (together with its moving history of tradition) that is the centre of interest, the

¹ Karl-Friedrich POHLMANN, *Ezechiel. Der Stand der theologischen Diskussion* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 2008), 209: "Der Hauptstreitpunkt ist derzeit, ob die sog. 'holistische' Interpretation bzw. 'Endtextexegese' oder die literar- und redaktionskritisch orientierte Forschung dem Sachverhalt 'Ez-Buch' gerecht werden kann".

fact still remains that the Book of Ezekiel presents itself as exilic literature. The catastrophic experience of the Babylonian exile necessitated a critical reflection on Israel's past. At the same time, the question arose anew and radically in this time of woe as to what the future of the people would look like. In order to cope with the fact of the exile, it was necessary not only to understand the past but also to have fresh visions for the future. The book's stated historical context is the Babylonian exile, when the prophet called 'Ezekiel' worked, and this affirmation is not altered in the following centuries when the message of Ezekiel was adapted and interpreted according to different perspectives.² The time of the exile with its experiences of demolition, the connected necessity of a new beginning and re-orientation, as well as the dramatic renewal of Israel and of each Israelite by God, made the experience of the exile the 'existential context' of later re-reading of the Ezekielian message. How does the future salvation that arises from the crisis experience of the exile present itself according to the Book of Ezekiel?

2. Thesis

The message of salvation of the Book of Ezekiel, as generated by the crisis experience of exile, is not primarily geared towards a political restoration but rather towards a new quality of the relationship of Israel to her God against the backdrop of the world of the other nations. Future salvation is not primarily a restoration in the sense of creating a new version of the past. With the return from the exile and the rebuilding of Jerusalem, the promises are not yet fulfilled. The words of salvation reach beyond the physical restoration and make it appear to be merely a preliminary fulfilment. This is valid not only for the rebuilding immediately after the exile. It is also valid for the later phases of consolidation, even into the late Old Testament times under the Hasmoneans.

The traces of an "eschatological" hope are clearly indicated in the Book of Ezekiel and are not to be overlooked: They point towards a coming fullness of time which far exceeds human capability. In fact, they point towards a future salvation of Israel in a life before the face of God.

I am quite aware that the use of the expression "eschatological" is at the same time a pointer to a problem.³ This essay employs the expression "eschatological"

² Among the different perspectives on the revisions, see for example, Karl-Friedrich POHL-MANN, *Der Prophet Hesekiel/Ezechiel. Kapitel 20–48, mit einem Beitrag von Thilo Alexander Rudnig*, Das Alte Testament Deutsch 22.2 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2001), 526, who, starting from an older prophetic book, accepts *gola*-oriented and *diaspora*-oriented redactions which were once again edited "von einer bereits der Apokalyptik nahestehenden oder von ihr beeinflussten Bearbeitung" ("from a revision already close to the apocalyptic tradition or influenced by it").

³ The original concept coined in the systematic theology of the nineteenth century emphasizes the close of this present time, focuses on the hereafter and the life after death, and knows a

in a particular way. “Eschatological” here means ‘a vision of future that cannot be improved or retracted.’ In the phase of this no-longer-revisable salvation, Israel finds her abiding place before God. This gives a special meaning to the aspects of the change and the transformation, which include an essentially qualitative renewal with respect to the past. This will be elaborated in what now follows with some appropriate texts from the Book of Ezekiel.

3. Unfolding the Thesis

The proclamation of salvation is concentrated in the third part of the Book of Ezekiel (Ezek 33–48), but it is not limited thereto. The rough outline of the Book of Ezekiel, according to the so-called tripartite eschatological scheme, can only manifest in a very schematic fashion how much the judgement oracles and the message of salvation are linked together in Ezekiel. Just as the prophetic words of judgement in Ezek 1–24 and 25–32 are repeatedly interrupted by perspectives of salvation (see Ezek 11.14–21; 13.9; 14.6, 11; 16.53–63; 17.22–24; 20.39–44; 28.24, 25–26), so too the message of salvation in the third section of the Book of Ezekiel expressly includes both words of judgement and words of threat (compare Ezek 33.23–33; 34.1–10, 17–22; 35; 36.16–20; 38–39; 43.7–9; 44.6–10; 45.9). The earlier misdeeds and faults of the people are not relegated to the realm of the forgotten, but rather are remembered. This remembering belongs to the horizon of salvation (see Ezek 36.16–23, 29, 31; 39.23–24).⁴ The resulting interconnection of subject and argument, even in the case when it is owed to diachronic processes of redaction, allows the ‘change’ from punishment to salvation to appear central in the case of ‘eschatological’ texts, and for the coming salvation, which arrives with the change, to manifest new qualities. In the journey through the threefold eschatological structure of the Book of Ezekiel this interconnection of themes, old and new, will be concretely explained.

cosmic-universal, a collective-communitarian and a personal-individual dimension. This narrow understanding of “eschatology” plays scarcely any role in an Old Testament eschatology. If Old Testament texts are qualified as “eschatological”, the concept is employed now and then in a very broad sense and in reference to all prophetic promises. However, such a concept clarification does not explain much. Klaus KOENEN, “Eschatologie”, in *WiBiLex Wissenschaftliches Bibellexikon im Internet WiBiLex. Nummer 1* (January 2007; accessed on 15 April 2013), suggests this paraphrase for a concise definition of the expression: “Eschatology describes the idea of a definitive inner-worldly time of salvation ... One awaits not the end of time, but a change of time which leads to the fulfillment of creation; no other world but this world instead; no life in heaven, but heaven on earth; no end of time, but an end of suffering in a time without end.”

⁴ The Book of Deuteronomy, in which Moses prepares the people for the gift of the land (cf. Deut 4.9–10, 23; 6.10–12; 8.10–18; 9.7), also sees this connection of “remembering” or “not forgetting” and salvation. In Deut 9.7, 23–24, for instance, the history of the people’s sins, which preceded the renewal of the covenant, is remembered.

3.1 *The Message of Salvation in the Context of the Judgement Oracles: Ezekiel 1–24*

In studying the message of salvation within the oracles of judgement against Israel in Ezek 1–24, an extensive diachronic explanation must be provided. Nevertheless, there arises through the work of redactors on the level of the book a foundational and thematic connection which gives the salvation message of Ezekiel its profile.

3.1.1 *Salvation for the Banished* (“far from God”, v. 15): *Ezekiel 11.14–21*. Within the vision about the sin of Israel at the sanctuary and of the departure of the divine glory from the Temple in Ezek 8–11, there is a passage that speaks about the judgement on the city, on the one hand (Ezek 11.1–12), and, on the other, about salvation for the community living in the exile (Ezek 11.14–21). It is the first word of salvation in the Book of Ezekiel that a redactor has consciously inserted. According the view of “the people of Jerusalem” (ישבי ירושלים) the banished ones are, “far from Yhwh” (רחוק מעל יהוה; v. 15), but in the view of Yhwh, these very people, who had to undergo his judgement, are allowed to experience in the midst of this judgement the hidden nearness of God: ואהי להם למקדש מעט (“surely I have been near them as their sanctuary”; v. 16b). Precisely for these apparent losers in history Yhwh begins to unfold a new future (vv. 17–20a). In that way, the message of salvation receives a function that is critical of authority and destabilizing of system. According to Ezek 11.14–21, salvation is promised to those who are in need of it, and who have also brought with them a readiness for a new beginning, which they manifest in turning away from the false gods (v. 18). The saving future itself is described as a fundamental and transforming action of Yhwh: an inner renewal of man (a לב אחד “united, undivided heart”, as לב בשר “a heart of flesh”, and ורוח חדשה “and a new spirit”) and as a new exodus (the gathering of those destroyed, the reunification of the people of God, the gift of the land). If one accepts with Barthélemy that the original message of salvation had in mind the changing of the human heart from a לב האבן (“heart of stone”) to לב אחר (“another heart”)⁵ then that would have brought into expression in

⁵ In an article deserving attention, Dominique BARTHÉLEMY has shown that the MT לב אחד “one heart” could have replaced an older and accepted reading found in the LXX. That means that an earlier אחר would have been corrected in many parts of the Book of Ezekiel in favour of a later אחד. He sees the reason for this revision of text in a pejorative use of אחר, which could be clearly observed at the time of the Books of Chronicles. “Il semble donc bien qu’en corrigeant ... אחר en אָחַד, les transmetteurs du Texte Massorétique d’Éz 11.19a aient voulu éviter que leurs contemporains ne risquent de comprendre cet ‘autre cœur’ (que le Seigneur donnera à ceux qu’il aura ramenés de l’exil) comme un cœur idolâtre ou effronté”: “It seems that, in correcting ... אָחַד to אַחַר, the transmitters of the Masoretic Text of Ezekiel 11.19a wanted to avoid risking their contemporaries understanding this “other heart” (which the Lord will give to those that will be brought back from exile) as an idolatrous or brazen heart.” (Dominique BARTHÉLEMY, “‘Un seul’, ‘un nouveau’ ou ‘un autre’? A propos de l’intervention du Seigneur sur le cœur de l’homme selon Éz 11,19a et des problèmes de critique textuelle qu’elle soulève,” in *Der Weg des*

a particularly vivid fashion the change wrought by Yhwh. From the undivided heart (לב אחד), to remain with the MT, on the one hand, and, on the other, from the gift of the new spirit (רוח חדשה), there arise the freedom and the enablement to live according to the law of Yhwh (v. 20). Just as the final introduction למען at the beginning of v. 20 shows, the real goal of the divine action is located in the preparation and enabling of people, in this case the exiles, to open their lives to the divinely proclaimed will of God and to live by it. The covenant formula, והיו לי, לעם ואני אהיה להם לאלהים (“and they will be my people, and I will be their God”), appears here in its two-part formulation, expressing the new quality of the unity between God and his people. This is very much more than mere restoration. Rather, there comes into view a future of God’s people in a situation of lasting salvation. This future is no human possibility. It can only come into reality by means of a heart that has been healed and renewed by God himself, and by means of a unity that God has brought about in God’s people.

3.1.2 *The Community of Yhwh Beyond Judgement – Without False Prophecy: Ezekiel 13.9.* In his oracle of judgement against false prophecy⁶ in Ezek 13.9, Ezekiel threatens the false prophets with expulsion from the future community of Yhwh, after the judgement:

“They will not belong to the community of my people, and they will not be listed in the list of the House of Israel, and they shall not enter the land of Israel ...”.

בסוד עמי לא־היו
ובכתב בית־ישראל לא יכתבו
ואל־אדמת ישראל לא יבאו

With this threefold denial, the false prophets, who had just been profiled as messengers of salvation, are denied a share in the salvation on the other side of the judgement. In reverse, this means that in the saving future, which Ezekiel sees on the other side of judgement for the community of Yhwh, there will be no more false prophecy, those powers which becloud or darken the reality of God with their words. The way of judgement, which the people of Yhwh are to follow, separates between life and lies.⁷ It is only through this that the way opens for the knowledge of God, a knowledge that is not veiled, as the fourfold use of

Menschen. Zur philosophischen und theologischen Anthropologie: Festschrift für Alfons Deissler, ed. Rudolf MOSIS and Lothar RUPPERT [Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder, 1989], 335.) For the details in the argumentation one can refer to the article itself.

⁶ For more detail, see Franz SEDLMEIER, “‘Wie Füchse in den Ruinen ...’ Falsche Prophetie und Krisenzeit nach Ezek 13”, in *Gottes Wege suchend: Beiträge zum Verständnis der Bibel und ihrer Botschaft: Festschrift für Rudolf Mosis zum 70. Geburtstag*, ed. Franz SEDLMEIER (Würzburg: Echter Verlag, 2003), 293–321; Rudolf MOSIS, “Ezechiel 13: Verkündigung aus eigenem Herzen. Zur Unterscheidung der Geister,” *Trierer Theologische Zeitschrift* 120 (2011): 46–63.

⁷ In hindsight, Zech 10.2 sees the misbehaviour of the false prophets as one of the causes of the exile.

the formula of recognition in v. 9, 14, 21, 23 shows.⁸ This transparency between Yhwh and his people reflects the desire for conversion found in Ezek 14.1–11.

3.1.3 Israel's Guaranteed Place before God: Ezekiel 14.1–11. The word of judgement in Ezek 14.1–11 against the idolaters and against the prophets, who put themselves at the service of idolatry, is to be understood as a *call to conversion* that aims at salvation and new life.⁹ Some of the elders, representatives and speakers of the people of Yhwh come to Ezekiel in order to consult God through him. They thereby reveal that Yhwh is the decisive reference point of their lives. At the same time, they still depend on other gods and are not ready to free themselves from them. However, service to the gods and faith in Yhwh do not go together. Ezekiel receives the task of manifesting this hypocrisy. As a prophet and a priest, he combines the situational prophetic oracle of judgement with the typical priestly style of teaching the law (vv. 3–5, 7–10) which comes in form of casuistic statements of law and is formulated as permanently valid. Through the combination of prophetic oracle of judgement and priestly teaching of the law, Ezekiel was able to transcend the immediate circumstances and make a timeless argument: Yhwh-worship and the service of the gods are mutually exclusive. Ezekiel 14.1–11 aims at a believing Israel, so much that she has left every hypocrisy and ambivalence behind and become totally transparent to God. Readiness for conversion is the preparation for the coming salvation. Thereby, Israel will find a lasting place before her God that cannot be abrogated. Verse 11a vividly expresses this goal of the ways of God:

למען לא־יתעו עוד בית־ישראל מאחרי ולא־יטמאו עוד בכל־פשעיהם

So that those of the house of Israel will no longer leave me for what is mistaken, and will no longer make herself impure with all her wrongdoing.

The concluding covenant formula certifies this goal of the ways of God – the abiding and non-longer-losable communion with him: “Then they will be my people (והיו לי לעם), and I, I will be their God (ואני אהיה להם לאלהים נאם אדני) – saying of my Lord, Yhwh” (v. 11b).

3.1.4 God-given Conversion and God's 'Eternal Covenant': 16.53–58, 59–63. The great historical narrative in Ezek 16 about the chosen mistress, Jerusalem, who

⁸ The fact that the New Testament also warns against false prophets and reckons with them even unto the return of Christ shows that the New Testament also understands itself as ‘between-times’ and therefore knows that the fulfillment of that which has begun with Christ is still pending. Some relevant texts are: Mt 7.15–20; 24.4–5, 23–25; Mk 13.21–23; Gal 1.8–9; Eph 4.14; 1 Tim 4.1–2; 2 Tim 3.13; Tit 1.10; 2 Pet 2.1–3; 1 Jn 2.18; 3.7–8; 4.1–6; 2 Jn 7–11; Jud 3–4; Rev 13.11–17 etc.

⁹ For more details on the issue, see Rudolf Mosiś, “Ezek 14,1–11 – ein Ruf zur Umkehr,” *Biblische Zeitschrift* 19 (1975): 161–194 (reprinted in Rudolf Mosiś, *Gesammelte Aufsätze zum Alten Testament*, Forschung zur Bibel 93 [Würzburg: Echter Verlag, 1999], 201–241).

becomes a prostitute, finds its apex in the God-inspired reconciliation (vv. 59–63) and in the promise of God’s eternal covenant.

In this conversion, the two sisters Samaria and Sodom are connected with their former daughter cities (v. 53). These two, as observed in the rare formulation of v. 61, are given to Jerusalem as daughters (וַתְּתִי אֹתָהֶן לְךָ לְבָנוֹת), “even if not from your covenant” (וְלֹא מִבְרִיתְךָ).¹⁰ According to Zimmerli, these statements mean that the thought arises, “dass Jerusalem seine Wiederherstellung im Rahmen eines Großisrael erfährt, in dem auch Samaria, die Kapitale des Nordreichs, und Sodom, die verwunschene Tiefe des Jordantals, nicht fehlen.”¹¹ This would allow for the further claim that the minimal promise would include a transformed political programme, in which Jerusalem could achieve liberation and pre-eminence and so limit Samaria’s area of influence (Ezek 16.59–63).¹²

¹⁰ The formula וְלֹא מִבְרִיתְךָ “if also not from your covenant” is not clear. Much depends on the understanding of the preposition מִן (see Daniel I. BLOCK, *The Book of Ezekiel 1–24*, New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 518). If the preposition were understood as *causative* (see GKC § 119z) ‘because, as a result of’, the undeserved position of Jerusalem and the divine sovereignty is stressed. As מִן-*privativum* understood (WALTKE and O’CONNOR § 11.2.11e: “a *privative* marker”) “it marks what is missing ... or unavailable”. With the denial of the preposition, there would be added the contrary idea that “Samaria and Sodom are not kept outside the covenant as second-class citizens. Instead, as the daughters of Jerusalem they are fully incorporated into the covenant people of Yahweh” (BLOCK, *Ezekiel 1–24*, 518). Were the preposition understood in a *concessive* sense that would mean that “Sodom and Samaria will become benefactors of this covenant, even though they had no covenantal ties with Jerusalem. This interpretation seems to account most satisfactorily for the second person suffix on *bērit*” (BLOCK, *Ezekiel 1–24*, 518).

¹¹ “... Jerusalem experiences her restoration as part of a Greater Israel, including Samaria, the capital of the northern kingdom, and Sodom, the haunted ruin of the Jordan Valley” (Walther ZIMMERLI, *Ezekiel 1–24. 1. Teilband*, Biblische Kommentar Altes Testament XIII/1 [Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1979], 370). Compare also Karl-Friedrich POHLMANN, *Der Prophet Hesekiel/Ezekiel. Kapitel 119*, Das Alte Testament Deutsch 22.1 (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 2008), 235 (under the reference to Hölscher): “V. 61 deutet an, daß Jahwe für die weitere Zukunft doch wieder eine Vormachtstellung Jerusalems vorgesehen hat: ‚Jerusalem soll die Metropolis des ganzen Landes mit allen seinen Orten werden.‘” Similarly Leslie C. ALLEN, *Ezekiel 1–19*, Word Biblical Commentary 28 (Dallas: Word, 1994), 246: “Sodom and Samaria and their dependencies, restored as promised in vv. 53 and 55, would be subordinated to Jerusalem as capital of a promised land that included their territory (cf. 47.15–20).” Compare also BLOCK, *Ezekiel 1–24*, 518: “Jerusalem will receive Samaria and Sodom as daughters, an inheritance granted to her by Yahweh. By this act, those whom she had previously despised are now rendered her subordinates; Judah, Israel, and Sodom will be united as one nation under the rule of Jerusalem.”

¹² Thomas KRÜGER, *Geschichtskonzepte im Ezechielbuch*, Behefte zur Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft 10 (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1986), 329–333, sees in Ezek 16.44–63 an effort at work “die stärker am Grundsätzlichen interessierten und Spielräume der Konkretisierung offenlassenden Restitutionsprognosen des EB [= *Ezechielbuch*] zu konkretisieren und in ein politisches Programm umzusetzen” (332). While 16.44–58 could have in mind ... “ein mit Samaria und Idumäa/Edom assoziiertes Judäa/Jerusalem”, “ohne eine Vormachtstellung Jerusalems zu behaupten, was den politischen Realitäten der Zeit nach Gedalja entsprechen könnte”, then 16.59–63 would have had a change of these realities in view (see KRÜGER,

Even if this kind of restorative struggle stands behind the text or if vv. 59–63 should be read in the sense of a restoration, the text itself still shows evidence that something more is in view than mere political restoration.

In her forgetfulness the woman Jerusalem had once “not thought” (vv. 22, 43) of the saving divine actions on her behalf in the days of her youth. It is the thought of God (v. 60), of a God who remains true to his covenant and who does not break his promise, which will also make possible and effect a new thinking on Jerusalem’s part (vv. 61, 63). The fact that God is ‘mindful’ of his people is also the cause and the solid ground for the change of destiny.¹³ The earlier covenant, which Yhwh had once established (v. 8), had been broken by Jerusalem, while the chosen bride had still scoffingly set aside and forgotten her promised vow (v. 59). This full rupture is a fact and, as such, it will be inscribed into the coming history of Jerusalem after salvation. Jerusalem will consequently have always to picture herself such that infidelity is a part of her identity (vv. 61, 63).¹⁴ From her own potentialities, the way of Jerusalem led into a history of guilt, in which she was in solidarity with Samaria and Sodom. On the other hand, in contrast with his bride, God remained aware of his covenant into which he had entered (v. 60). Indeed, he will set up a new covenant “for you” (והקמנתי לך), namely Jerusalem, as an “eternal covenant” (v. 60). This “eternal covenant” (ברית עולם) will be withdrawn from human grip, and so it may not be broken by the human partner. At the same time, it is Yhwh who extended the “eternal covenant” between himself and his people to Samaria and Sodom. In this case, it is not the superiority of Jerusalem but rather the extension of ברית עולם that stands in the foreground. Finally, God’s ‘radical fidelity’¹⁵ expresses itself in the victory of his mercy and love. The salvation announced here renews the people of God from their roots and offers the gift of ברית עולם not only to Israel but to the nations of the world, as the inclusion of Sodom indicates.

3.1.5 *The “Tender Branch” (v. 22) – A Trace of Messianic Promise? (Ezek 17.22–24).* According to Ezek 17, the Davidic kingdom seemed to have reached its end as, among other texts, the dirge in Ezek 19 bears witness. The collapse of the kings of Israel in their function as mediators of salvation sets up the negative back-

Geschichtskonzepte, 332 n. 229). This change could thereby bring about a freeing of Jerusalem from Samaria’s realm of influence.

¹³ The biblical writings frequently stress that God’s remembering means a change of destiny. Cf. Gen 8.1 (Noah); 19.25 (Lot); 30.22 (Rachel); 1 Sam 1.19 (Hanna). “In diesem Gedenken,” – thus C. WESTERMANN – “ist das Erbarmen mit dem Todbedrohten impliziert; zugleich aber ist damit schon das rettende Handeln eingeleitet” (Claus WESTERMANN, *Genesis 1–11*, *Biblischer Kommentar Altes Testament I/1* (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1983) 92 f.).

¹⁴ For a salvation expectation that is exclusively understood as political restoration, the recollection of the past guilt history in the form it is done here would make no sense.

¹⁵ Martin MARK, “Ewiger Bund als radikalisierte Treue: Zur rhetorischen Strategie von Ezechiel 16” in *Gottes Wege suchend*, 203.

ground against which vv. 22–24 highlight salvation beyond the demise of the Davidic dynasty. This salvation will be the work of God alone, which he himself will bring about in a future that is not clearly determined. For this salvific future, which God and only he can bring about (theocentrism!), he will also make use of a mediating kingly figure. The humble beginning of the messianic king – the ‘tender branch’ and his unimaginable growth into a ‘world-tree’ (i. e., universal acknowledgement of the nations of the world) – show that this growth process will be effected by God alone. This salvation is for Israel, Jerusalem, and Zion,¹⁶ but it will also open itself out to the nations of the world. The concrete localization of salvation (“the mountain of the height of Israel”), together with its universal width and efficacy (the horizon of the nations of the world), do not exclude each other, but condition each other mutually. Even if Ezek 17.22–24 in its *gola*-oriented view pictures a descendent of Jehoiachin (e. g., Zerubbabel; 1 Chr 3.19; Hag 1.1), the aforementioned vision concerning the world-tree cannot be accounted for as a hyperbolic expression of hope for a political restoration. Indeed, the messianic dimension in Ezek 17.22–24 will be articulated later in Ezek 34.23–24 and 37.24–25. Likewise, the concrete location of salvation on the high mountains of Israel will emerge again in Ezek 20.40 and in Ezek 40.2.

3.1.6 A Cultic Service Pleasing to God and Israel’s Acceptance by God: Ezekiel 20.39, 40–41. Ezekiel 20 reflects Israel’s history, beginning with its great tradition of exodus, which it destroys, contending that Israel’s denial of her God reaches to the roots of her existence as a nation. In the light of this denial, Yhwh announces a new exodus (vv. 33–39, 40–44), which will not be under the sign of salvation as in Deutero-Isaiah but under the omen of judgement. This new exodus will lead Israel out of exile in order to prevent her from assimilating to the world of the nations; it will lead into the ‘wilderness of the nations,’ in order to remove Israel from the field of influence of the nations. In the immediate confrontation, ‘face-to-face’ with her God, Yhwh’s people will be confronted with a decision ‘for’ or ‘against’ Yhwh. The exclusion of the rebels implies (by analogy with Ezek 13.9; 14.1–11; 18 and the pericopae of the sentries) a future community of the people of Yhwh who belong very decisively to him.

Verses 40–44, concluding the chapter, provide a theology that clearly diverges from previous context. Regarding Israel’s infidelity to the covenant relationship through the worship of the other gods, God himself will obviate it, in the sense that he will make future infidelity impossible.

How this will happen is not indicated. At the same time, Israel will be rendered ‘incapable’ of serving the gods further. The goal of the journey, which God himself travels with his people, is a new presence of God among his people and a new

¹⁶ This connection of Jerusalem and Zion is a matter of fact, even when Ezekiel never mentions Zion explicitly.

presence of the people before the face of God. Put another way, the object is to overcome the separation from God experienced in the exile. This overcoming is expressed in the images of Israel's 'self-disgust' and 'abhorrence' at her godless past. The memory of these will inspire a new search for God, indeed a new turning towards God. As was already expressed in Ezek 17.22–24, the God-given salvation will be bound to a definite place, to Zion, even though this name is never mentioned in the Book of Ezekiel. Verses 40–42 spell this out: "my (Yhwh's) holy mountain" and "the high mountain of Israel." In the future, the sacrifice that is pleasing to God will also take place here, and through it God will be 'served' in truth (Ezek 43.27). The use of the metaphor "sweet odour of sacrifice," which Yhwh is pleased to accept, brings into view the inward relationship of Yhwh to his people in an unequalled manner: Yhwh and Israel will each be within the other. As in the earlier judgement (vv. 1–39), so here the fulfilment is proclaimed in the forum of the nations of the world. With the renewal of Israel, Ezekiel has in view, once again, the whole world. The coming salvation is consequently of universal importance, for Yhwh brings about this salvation "for the sake of my name." As proof of the universal power and glory of Yhwh, Israel will be led into a new and pleasant future and will find an abiding place before her God.

3.2 The Proclamation of Redemption within the Framework of the Oracles Concerning the Foreign Nations: Ezekiel 25–32

In the final edition of the book, the oracles concerning the foreign nations mark the transition to the proclamation of salvation in Ezek 33–39, 40–48. At the same time, these words open a sphere which influences, in a not insignificant fashion, the understanding of the proclamation of salvation.

3.2.1 The Horizon of the Oracles Concerning the Foreign Nations in Ezekiel 25–32. The oracles concerning the foreign nations in general: The fact that in Ezek 25–32 a total of seven nations are held up as the objects of the divine judgement, and that, furthermore, the saying against Sidon (28.20–23) is composed almost exclusively from pre-existing textual building blocks, shows that the final redactors focused on the sevenfold number of the nations.

The seven date formulae are conspicuous, which, with the exception of Ezek 29.17, all revolve around the fateful years of 587–585 BCE. Also conspicuous are the seven songs of lament that proclaim the collapse of Tyre (presented as four complaints: Ezek 26.17–18; 27.2–27; 27.32–36; 28.12–19) and Egypt (presented as three complaints: Ezek 31; 32.2–6; 32.18–32). Over and above all this, there is the large complex of oracles against Egypt in Ezek 29–32 that may have once constituted an independent collection, and, once again, were composed from seven smaller words of judgement. The last of these words of judgement against Egypt (Ezek 32.17–32) mentions seven nations and their fate in the underworld.

It is probable that the number seven should be understood as pointing towards universal or all embracing salvation. Were the focus on the restoration of Israel in the Persian period (resetting into a pre-exilic *status quo* or validating the temple community of Persian Yehud), such an encompassing judgement would be unnecessary. Universal judgement of the nations is meaningful and necessary only if a qualitative change in the destiny of Israel is also in sight, a change which includes abiding salvation for the nations of the world too.

3.2.2 *The Oracles Concerning Tyre, Ezekiel 26–28*. There is no Old Testament text where Tyre comes to such prominence as in the Book of Ezekiel, which devotes three large chapters, made up of four oracles, to that rich seaport-state. The first two oracles of judgement are directed against the *city*, while the two subsequent oracles are against its *rulers*. In that way, the collapse of the city at first is described realistically (Ezek 26) and then it is clothed in an allegorical and artistic statement (Ezek 27) depicting the collapse of the beautiful ship Tyre, over which a lament for the dead is made. A corresponding succession of judgement-lament marks the two following oracles also: the word of judgement against the ‘prince’ (נגיד; Ezek 28.1–10) and the lament of the dead for the ‘king’ (מלך) of Tyre in vv. 11–19.

The once thriving *city* will be thrown down into the underworld (Ezek 26.19–21; 27.26–36), and it will remain there forever. The judgements and laments over the city clearly go beyond the human horizons of space and time. The destiny of Tyre ends in the realm of the underworld, and they extend its unhappy lot infinitely (“forever”). Ezekiel 26.21b is formulated as follows: “Whoever seeks you, will *never* find you (ולא־תמצא־י עוד לעולם) – a saying of God, the Lord.” A similar statement is found in Ezek 27.36b and 28.19b.¹⁷ In addition, there are universal effects on the world’s nations and the hereafter, which Ezek 27.26–36 expressly highlights. The worldwide lament about death and the picture of the world’s abiding horror of the hereafter widen space and time immeasurably – a widening of horizon which would not be necessary if the dramaturgy of the Book of Ezekiel was aimed merely at a restoration of the nation of Israel as a Temple community.

In a corresponding fashion, the words of judgement are also directed against the *prince* or *king* of Tyre, who is similarly threatened with final destruction. To him it is said: “You have become a picture of ‘the horrible’; *you will be nothing forever* (ואינך עד־עולם)” (Ezek 28.19b). A renewed widening of horizons is evident here. The *prince* is compared with the wise king Dani’el, that legendary figure from the early times who may be mythical. Something similar is true of the *king*. Eden is his home, and he lives in the company of the cherub, in the fiery presence of the Godhead. Even the lot of this ruler leads down into the depths of

¹⁷ Ezek 27.36b: “You have become the picture of horror, *you are nothing forever*”. Ezek 28.19b: “You have become like a picture of horror, *you are nothing forever*.”

the underworld, into an everlasting oblivion. Now mythical statements are not to be equated with 'eschatological' statements. Still, through the tendency towards the mythical, and along with the aforementioned extension of space and time, there exists a renewed widening of horizon which makes it difficult to reduce the quality of the current change for the people of Yhwh to a mere political restoration.

3.2.3 The Oracles Concerning Egypt, Ezekiel 29–32. Just as in the aforementioned oracles of judgement against Tyre, the seven oracles about Egypt in Ezek 29–32 are formulated to condemn the Pharaoh's hubris. First, the prophet announces the judgement of Yhwh against the role of Egypt in Israel's history – as an undependable and deceitful coalition partner.

In any case, the historical dimension is consciously overlooked while Egypt is described in its ambivalence as a world power with an inclination towards self-divinisation. When the Pharaoh is addressed as *הַתַּנִּינִים הַגְּדוֹל*, "the great crocodile" (29.3), there emerges in this address a certain multivalence. The motif of the crocodile is many-layered. It can express the strength of the Pharaoh and his armies, as epigraphic evidence shows. In his link with the waters, he is at the same time an element of chaos and, as such, the very contradiction of the divinity of the creator who conquers the beast and in that way ensures the order of creation.

Since the cosmic-mythological elements in Ezek 28 (against Tyre) and in Ezek 29–32 (against Egypt) occur frequently, the imagery is to be interpreted as a mythological code ("als mythologische Chiffre"), which "must be translated with 'the great dragon' or its equivalent, and can hardly be simply compared with an animal." The expression, "the great crocodile" "means ... in the mythological language the historically real world power in his divinised essence".¹⁸ This transgression of boundary will bring about the downfall of the Pharaoh and will destroy the whole of Egypt, his realm of power (compare Ezek 30.1–19 with the motif of 'the Day of Yhwh').

The grandiose image of the Pharaoh as 'world tree' Ezek 31.1–18 now develops the image of world power in accord with the example of Assyria, which collapsed because of its own self-exaltation, and transfers this image at the same time to the Pharaoh. Through the interconnection between the destinies of the two world powers, the one in the North and the other in the South, the phenomenon of world power is depicted in a unique way.¹⁹ The *one* tree stands opposite all the

¹⁸ Rudolf Mosis, "תַּנִּינִים," in *Theologisches Wörterbuch zum Alten Testament*. Vol. I. Stuttgart; (Berlin; Köln; Mainz: Verlag W. Kohlhammer, 1973), 933 f.: Der Ausdruck "das große Krokodil" "meint ... in mythologischer Sprache die historisch-reale Weltmacht in ihrem gottwidrigen Wesen".

¹⁹ It is to be assumed that an original text, which presumably had nothing to do with the Pharaoh, was reworked. How this text, which had as its content the motif of the tree of beauty, looked originally may only be described hypothetically. The suggestions that are offered thereto are equally manifold.

remaining trees (note the frequent use of the particle כּל). It becomes the centre, just as its intimidating size and its fruitfulness show. This tree not only bursts all spaces in a horizontal direction, it also outstrips the usual vertical borders: the roots reach to the very waters of the flood, the treetop reaches up to the clouds. Thus, the world power seems to stand out again in its multivalence: it offers a home for all and at the same time leans towards the position where it creates and absolutizes its own world order. The felling of the tree, which is pushed into the underworld, shakes the underworld. Ezekiel 31 is a paradigmatic text, which demystifies every world power. In this way, Israel's view, blinded as it is by the fascination of the world powers, is freed to observe a greater reality: Yhwh himself. The quality of future salvation, which God himself will bring about, can in the light of the fall of the great powers clarify that which is of lasting and ultimate reality. This question is posed and has to be answered.

The dirge about the Pharaoh, who is metaphorically addressed as 'the crocodile in the waters' (ואתה כתניס בימים; Ezek 32.1–16), and the descent of Pharaoh with all his forces into the underworld in Ezek 32.17–32, shows once more that here the foundation of Yhwh's historical might is being expressed. It is not accidental that we find here again a sevenfold group of nations – Assur, Elam, Meschech, Tubal, Edom, the princes of the North and of Sidon – indicating that all the nations of the world are in view.²⁰ Not only Assyria and Egypt (see Ezek 31), but all the kingdoms of the past, whether great or small, ended in the realm of the dead: nothing from them has remained. This fate will be the fate of the Pharaoh, too. In the middle of the gloomy picture of Egypt's fate (a picture devoid of consolation), a message of fundamental significance and consequence can be heard: the Pharaoh of Egypt and all his property will end where all the kingdoms and all holders of power end, even those who reigned in terror and shook the world. They all end in the world of the dead. This judgement inspires all to fear God and prepares an end for the lordliness of the lords. Thus, it reveals who is truly the Lord of history. The horizon of God's saving might cannot and should not remain behind the horizon of his might as expressed in judgement. There is an abidingly valid alternative to the world of the dead. The alternative is an irrevocable salvation for Israel. Judgement on the powers of the world (who, as we have seen, are presented as anti-God) makes smooth the coming of the

²⁰ According to Larry BOADT, *Ezekiel's Oracles against Egypt: A Literary and Philological Study of Ezekiel 29–32*, *Bibliotheca Orientalis* 37 (Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1980), a basic text 32.17–28 was added to verses 29–32 in order to get the sevenfold number of the nations: "All that can be ascertained is that the final redaction creates a general impression of about 7 nations" (151). See also Marco NOBILE, "Beziehung zwischen Ezek 32,17–32 und der Gog-Perikope (Ezek 38–39) im Licht der Endredaktion," in *Ezekiel and his Book. Textual and Literary Criticism and their Interrelation*, ed. Johan Lust, *Bibliotheca ephemeridum theologiarum lovaniensium* 74 (Leuven: Leuven University Press 1986), 255–259. According to Nobile the final redaction presents a connection expressly between Ezek 32.17–32 and the Gog pericope.

lordship of Yhwh. Thus, here too, there is more to be seen than hope for mere national restoration.

3.2.4 The Overcoming of Hatred towards Israel and the Lasting Salvation for Israel: 28.24, 25–26. Among the oracles on the foreign nations, Ezek 28.24, 25–26 presents itself as an explicit oracle of salvation and is connected with the oracle against Sidon in Ezek 28.20–23. The contrast between the oracle of judgement against Sidon (vv. 20–23), which stands as an example for the enemies, and the proclamation of salvation of v. 24 and vv. 25–26 to the House of Israel, is typical.

Verse 24 focuses on the consequences that result from Yhwh's judgement of the Nations for the people of God. Not only Sidon, but the nations of world in general, will overcome their hatred of Israel, as expressed in the images of 'stinging thorn' and 'painful sting,' so that the contempt of the nations might end. This change in the destiny of Israel – no longer to be the object of the hatred and contempt of the nations – finds its culmination in the knowledge of the God by the nations.

While v. 24 characterizes the God-given amnesty as the end of oppression and threat, vv. 25–26 offer an inner view of God's salvation. The word of salvation in vv. 25–26 is indeed formulated from the beginning in relation to its context. Evidence for this is the fact that various statements from Ezek 33–39 appear in these verses, especially from Ezek 39.21–22. On the level of the redaction of the whole book, verses 25–26 thereby have the purpose of preparing the salvation statements in Ezek 33–39 and of connecting the sayings of the foreign nations with the proclamation of salvation. At the same time, this means that these verses belong to a late phase in the composition of the Book of Ezekiel.

The following important themes emerge in vv. 25–26:

- The *new gathering of Israel*, as a central motif of the prophetic proclamation of redemption.²¹
- *Yhwh's proof of his holiness*: Yhwh makes holy his name precisely through and in the fact that he overcomes the nations' hatred of Israel and gathers Israel. In this way, he shows himself before the world of the nations as the God who is great in history and determines its course. This theme is central in Ezek 36.16–23.
- The *dwelling in the land that was once given to Jacob, and dwelling in safety*: The first expression, 'dwelling in the land', that was given to Jacob, is re-employed in Ezek 37.25. The second expression, 'dwelling in safety', emerges twice in this short passage. It appears anew in Ezek 34.25, 27–28, and further in both chapters that deal with Gog and Magog in Ezek 38.8, 11 and 39.26.

²¹ It is found in Ezekiel in the following places: Ezek 11.17; 20.34, 41; 34.13; 36.24; 37.21; 37.8 and 39.27.

- The image of *house building* and of the *planting of vineyards* shows the relationship of the salvation statements in the Book of Ezekiel with those found in the Book of Jeremiah.
- The concluding *knowledge of God* indicates the purpose of this word and provides at the same time the purpose of all the ways of God also for the nations. It is not a question of the happy possession of some kind of salvation benefits, even when these are certified by God. The reference to God himself (and the recognition of Yhwh acting in history on humanity and on the world, together with his covenant fidelity) is the decisive salvation gift, towards which Israel is on the way. Therein is Israel already in touch with fullness in this temporal world, with the fullness of time.

3.3 Images of the Fullness of Salvation: Ezekiel 33–39, 40–48

3.3.1 *Yhwh, the Good Shepherd, and his Prince: Ezekiel 34.11–16, 23–24; 37.24–25.* Due to the incriminating misbehaviour of the shepherds of Israel (Ezek 34.1–10) and of the wicked members of the flock (vv. 17–19) the prophet announces two oracles of salvation (vv. 11 + 15–16 and 20–22). It is Yhwh himself as the good shepherd who will follow his scattered people, gather and unite them, care for his own, and prepare a pasture for them, all of which expresses “the indestructible community life of God and his people.”²² Here, the decisive claim is that Yhwh is not far from his people. Note v. 12: “on the day of cloud and cloud darkness” (ביום ענן וערפל) he is “in their midst” (M. Buber: “mitten inne”). Thus, God’s faithfulness accompanies the judgement and becomes the starting point of a new hope and a new life. The new exodus is not simply a repeat of the first but implies a new beginning after judgement. Verse 15 confirms and certifies that communion with Yhwh (note the emphatic *אני*) is the goal of the new exodus and of the guidance of the good shepherd.

The misbehaviour in the community (vv. 17–19) moves Yhwh to take action in a twofold way: through the freeing (נצל) of the oppressed from the hand of the oppressors (vv. 20–22) and through the gift of a shepherd according to the mind of Yhwh (vv. 23–24). The statement in Ezek 34.23–24 is influenced by Jer 23.5–6 and Ezek 37.24–25. Ezek 37.24–25 announces “one shepherd only” (רועה אחד), who is “my [Yhwh’s] servant David” (עבדי דוד), and is at the same time “king over them” (מלך עליהם). The political dimension of this statement is self-explanatory from the context of Ezek 37.15–28, which announces the unity of the two kingdoms of Israel and Judah which were divided many hundreds of years earlier, a unity which is presented as a political reality. In contrast, in Ezek 34.23–24 the title מלך (“king”) is replaced by the title נשיא (“prince”), a term

²² “die unzerstörbare Lebensgemeinschaft von Gott und Volk”; Ernst HAAG, “Herz-Jesu-Fest. Ezek 34,11–16” in *Die alttestamentlichen Lesungen der Sonn- und Feiertage. Auslegung und Verkündigung. Lesejahr C/2*, ed. Josef SCHREINER (Würzburg: Echter Verlag, 1971), 135.

lacking the same political connotations. This new title could explain itself as standing in opposition to the bad shepherds.²³ Above all, however, the double transparency of the mediating figure should become visible here: in relation to Yhwh (עבדי דויד; “my servant David”) and in relation to the people (נשיא בתוכם; “the prince in their midst”). On the basis of this double transparency Yhwh can bring about his salvation which is unfolded in the following images in vv. 25–30. Here there is more happening than a mere new version of the pre-exilic kingdom.

3.3.2 *The ‘Covenant of Peace’ and Paradisiacal Fullness of Life: Ezekiel 34.25–30.* The state of the salvation which the expression ברית שלום (“covenant of peace”) intends, is developed in three stages in vv. 25–30. (1) With the elimination of the wild beasts and of fear (vv. 25, 28), there comes into view a salvation that cannot be lost beyond the judgement, since the wild animals serve on the one hand as instruments of the judgement of Yhwh (Ezek 5.17; 14.15, 21; 33.27), and, on the other hand, act as ciphers for chaotic and life-destroying powers. (2) With the fruitfulness of the soil (vv. 26–27, 29), the whole land is transformed. The grey areas – “wildernesses”, “forests” and “the district of my hill”, perhaps the destroyed area around the Temple mountain – will be transformed simultaneously into a paradisiacal space. There will be no more “hunger,” which had been a part of Yhwh’s instruments of judgement (Ezek 5.12, 16, 17; 6.11–12; 7.15). With it there comes into view a renewed lasting salvation after the judgement. (3) Liberation from the yoke of the nations (vv. 27–28, 29) will be explained as a new exodus in an analogy with the liberation from Egypt. The concluding covenant formula, itself linked to the divine promise of assistance, brings the restored relationship to God into the foreground and at the same time makes clear that the previously described transformation is evidence of the real goal and the centre of that which is meant by “the covenant of peace”, namely, the living and non-losable communion with Yhwh.

3.3.3 *The Resurrection of the Dead Bones: Ezekiel 37.1–14.* In the strength of the Spirit, Ezekiel sees – as it appears in the scenario of Ezek 37.1–2 – a boundless and comprehensive lack of hope. Among the people of God in the exile, signs and traces of life have completely disappeared, as the discussion in v. 11 indicates. Through the action of the word of Yhwh and of the spirit what is impossible, humanly-speaking, occurs: the wonder of the resurrection of Israel. It is still contested whether the resurrection relates merely and exclusively to the exiled Israel and is to be understood in the sense of a mere restitution, or whether there also comes into view (following a later stage of elaboration from Hellenistic times)

²³ See Daniel I. BLOCK, *The Book of Ezekiel 25–48*, New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 300: “Ezekiel’s preference for *nāšî’* over *melek*, the normal designation for Israel’s rulers, is not intended to deny this person’s true kingship but to highlight the distinction between him and the recent occupants of the office.”

the resurrection of individuals, due to the violent death of the righteous people. In the latter case, there would certainly be an “eschatological” statement in the narrow sense of the concept. Leaving this debated hypothesis aside, it would still have to be asked whether one could be content with an interpretation of the vision of the dead bones as the renewal of Israel in the exile, as if Ezek 37.1–14 deals merely with a restitution of the earlier situation which was obtained before the exile. The salvation promises in vv. 12–14 link the opening of the graves, and the leading out from them, with the exodus theme (vv. 12–13), and link the leading into the land with the gift of the divine spirit (v. 14). The gift of the land is thus connected as in Ezek 36.24–28 with the inner renewal of Israel. That is more than mere restitution in the sense of political restoration.

3.3.4 The Unity of the Future People of Yhwh: Ezekiel 37.15–28. The understanding of the vision of the future unity of Yhwh’s people, divided since the death of Solomon, as a real political programme for post-exilic efforts at restoration, can hardly be maintained. Even if in late Old Testament times, such as under the Hasmonaeans, there were tendencies to instrumentalize the salvation message of Ezekiel for legitimating one’s own ruling dynasty, this was only possible at the price of doing violence to the texts. Ezekiel 37.15–28, the last symbolic-action of the Book of Ezekiel, is divided into two parts – the sign-act proper (vv. 15–19), and the connected explanatory discourse (vv. 20–28). The latter divides again into two sections, which are determined through the two headings אֶחָד (“one/unity”; vv. 20–24a) and עוֹלָם (“eternal”; vv. 24b–28). The oracle of salvation announces the unbreakable future unity of Yhwh’s people that can never again be lost, just as the discourse about “covenant of peace,” which is at the same time an “eternal covenant” presents. The ultimate ground of this “eschatological” salvation-benefit of “unity” is God’s abiding and, at the same time, unavailable presence among his people. With this promise of the abiding presence of God among his people, the climax of Ezekiel’s proclamation of salvation is reached. With it is laid the bridge to the vision in the temple in Ezek 40–48.

3.3.5 Gog from Magog and the Horizon of the Proclamation of Salvation: Ezekiel 38–39. Within the Book of Ezekiel, the proto-apocalyptic text of Ezekiel 38–39 is inserted into the proclamation of salvation in Ezek 33–48. The Gog pericope also should be read and understood in connection with this “eschatologically” impregnated message of salvation. According to the received text, composed as it is in the Masoretic Text tradition, the Gog pericope separates the connection of Ezek 37.15–28 with the promise of God dwelling among his people from the temple vision of Ezek 40–48, and shifts the second temple vision into an unforeseeably distant future, which lies beyond the threat posed through Gog in a distant future. The Septuagint manuscript Papyrus 967 (Pap967) and the Wirceburg Codex (OL^w) witness to another and probably older text sequence, according to

which the vision of the dry bones in Ezek 37.1–14 belongs not before but after the Gog pericope. It is not convincing merely to say that the vision of the dry bones is only mentioned because those Israelites, fallen in the battle against Gog from Magog, were awoken again to life for the sake of the restoration of Israel. The universal scenario of oppression in Ezek 38–39 does not describe some kind of military struggle, but rather – in a further development of the oracles against the foreign nations in the Book of Ezekiel – a general danger for the people of Yhwh already gathered in peace. When Gog is conquered as the last great enemy, then the resurrection of Israel will come into view as an event at the edge of the turn of an era.

A possible argument for a foregrounding of the Gog pericope in the succession of events in MT could lie in the presumed anti-Hasmonaeen tendency of MT, as suggested by Konkel and others. If the Hasmonaeans were monopolizing for themselves the successive events as recorded in Pap967, relating the Gog pericope to the successful battles against the Seleucids and ideologically used the vision of the dead bones, the unity of the people of God, and a second Temple vision for self-legitimization, they could explain the current era as an era of realized salvation. Such an eschatology is obviated by pushing the second Temple Vision into a more distant future, after the future decisive battle against Gog in order to characterize their own current era as merely a temporary intervening time. This context can (possibly) be applied to the late text Ezek 36.23bβ–38 as well.

3.3.6 The Comprehensive Transformation of the People of God: Ezekiel 36.16–23a, 23bβ–38. Ezekiel 36.16–38 speaks of God's new beginning with his people in spite of Israel's infidelity. The defamation of the divine name before the nations of the world is replaced by the God-effected hallowing of the name, which will be made known to all nations by means of the divine saving action. This saving action also includes, besides a new exodus and the inner renewal of Israel, the transformation of man ("new heart," "heart of flesh," "new spirit," "my spirit") and of the whole area of life, which, like the Garden of Eden, makes visible the God-effected renewal. The covenant formula or the formula for belonging together: "then you will be my people" (והייתם לי לעם) – "and I, I will be your God" (ואניכי) receives therewith a new quality, because the quality of the relationship between the covenant partners has grown to become something else. Even when discourse is not explicitly about a "new covenant," this covenant is to be understood as a "new" and "lasting covenant" on the basis of the renewal of humanity already experienced.

Ezekiel 36.26–38, a late text, probably presupposes the statements in Ezek 11.19–20 and 18.31, and equally the statements from Jer 32.37–41, which have already been employed in Ezek 11.19–20, and presumably also Jer 31.31–34. In Jer 31.31–34 there emerges the expression "new covenant" (ברית חדשה), unique in the Old Testament. The newness is to be seen in the fact that Yhwh "gives" the

Israelites the Torah “in the inside” and writes it on their heart (v. 33) in order to enable them to know God. The new covenant is therefore connected with forgiveness of sins.

Ezekiel 36.26–38 can thereby refer back to the undivided “one” heart (Ezek 11.19; Jer 32.39) as also to the combination of “new heart” / “new spirit” in Ezek 18.31. With the new formulation of “heart of flesh,” Ezekiel indicates that this heart does not present any more a foreign body, but rather the human being who is at peace with himself, who also allows himself to be healthy, and makes him receptive to the life directive of Yhwh. While the expressions “a new heart” and “a new spirit” describe the anthropological transformation, which is clearly expressed in the movement from a “heart of stone” to a “heart of flesh,” the expression “my spirit” does not belong to the human side but to the side of God. It is this human heart, once filled by the spirit of God, which facilitates a life lived according to the Torah of Yhwh and transforms man to become a faithful partner in a new and lasting covenant.

Ezekiel 36.23bβ–38 can also possibly be regarded as one of the latest texts of the Book of Ezekiel in its critical function against the Hasmonaeen court theology. This is because the description of the coming salvation as given in Ezek 36.23–24 leaves no doubt about the fact that the realization of this salvation, including the preparation of man, is the work of God solely, and the fullness of salvation can only be realized as God’s work. However, this means not only that the quality of being the fullness of time is removed from the Hasmonaeen epoch, but also that Ezek 36.23–24 brings to expression the eschatological fullness of salvation, and precisely as a gracious and God-effected event.

3.3.7 *The Second Temple Vision – New Temple, New Cult, New Land, New City, New Acceptance by God: Ezekiel 40–48.* The concluding chapters of the Book of Ezekiel (Ezek 40–48) refuse to be reduced to a planning preparation for a real new reconstruction after the exile. Even if the text material is truly heterogeneous, and different hands may have worked on it with varying message intentions, still the second Temple vision in its basic meaning is to be understood as a visionary design of a salvific future after the judgement. This future salvation after the judgement as a real utopia remains relevant for the contemporary time. From the future point, it frees the present, insofar as it allows a standing before God even in the present time, namely, the gracious acceptance by God (Ezek 43.27).²⁴

²⁴ The dissertation of Tobias HÄNER explains this well: Tobias HÄNER, *Bleibendes Nachwirken des Exils. Eine Untersuchung zur kanonischen Endgestalt des Ezechielbuches*, Herders Biblische Studien 78 (Freiburg, Basel, und Wien: Herder, 2014), 540–45. With reference to the metaphor ‘verbal icon’ which was brought into the discussion by Stephen S. TUELL (“Ezekiel 40–42 as Verbal Icon” *CBQ* 58 [1996]: 649–664), Häner has in his reception-oriented study come to this conclusion: “Die vorliegende Untersuchung hat ... gezeigt, dass in wirkungsästhetischer Sicht

Notwithstanding all linguistic and content differences from the previous chapters, the references back to Ezek 1–39 are not to be overlooked.²⁵ It is obvious that the tension created from the beginning of the Book of Ezekiel (Ezek 1–39) is to be brought to its conclusion in Ezek 40–48. The contexts (jubilee year, Babylonian *akitu*-Feast, exodus tradition and land acquisition tradition, including the renewal of the Passover under Josiah), which are connected with the relevant dating in Ezek 40.1, and the constructed measurements which describe the Temple area (Ezek 40–42), all suggest that an ideal and visionary design is being presented here.

The twenty-fifth year of the reign of Jehoiachin (Ezek 40.1) refers to the year 573 BCE. Since the thirtieth year from Ezek 1.1–2 is in fact the fifth year from the abduction of Jehoiachin in 598/7 BCE, Ezekiel sees the second vision in the Temple twenty-five years after the beginning of the exile. If one counts backwards another 25 years then one meets with the reform of King Josiah (623/22 BCE). In the setting of this reform, both king and people commit themselves again to follow the Torah of Yhwh (2 Kings 23.1–2). They purify the Temple and the land from the worship of the other gods (2 Kings 23.4–20) and celebrate the Passover, according to 2 Kings 23.21–23. Between this reform and the second Temple vision lie fifty years. While the beginning of the exile of 598/7 marks the greatest temporal distance between two jubilee years, the date in Ezek 40.1 indicates the beginning of a new year of jubilee. In fact, in Ezek 46.17 a year of liberation comes into view.

Moreover, Ezek 40.1 speaks of a year's beginning, and indeed of the tenth day. Now the Old Testament recognizes two year-beginnings. According to the older calendar, the month of Tischri in the autumn, the Day of Reconciliation, is celebrated on the tenth day (see Lev 16.29; 23.27; Num 29.7). Lev 25.9 clearly expresses that on this day the jubilee year is to be launched with the blowing of the trumpet. The later New Year's date, the tenth day of the month of Nisan in the spring, is connected in Babylon with the *akitu*-feast. While Marduk leaves his temple Esaglia on this day, in order to receive the homage of the gods of his

die Schlussvision weder ein (von Israel zu verwirklichendes oder gegen die gegenwärtige Ordnung polemisiertes) Programm vorgibt noch sich in erster Linie als Verheißung des künftigen Heilswirkens YHWHs präsentiert, sondern die Exilierten als den unmittelbaren Adressaten des Propheten, dann aber auch den Leser als Adressat des Buches, in die Gegenwart YHWHs versetzen will. Die bereits erwähnte, von Tuell vorgeschlagene Bezeichnung als ‚verbale Ikone‘ erweist sich daher für Ezek 40–48 als passend. ... Die Visionsschilderung vermittelt dem Leser – wie dem Beter vor der Ikone – eine ewige, transzendente Wirklichkeit, der damit die Gegenwart des Göttlichen erfahren soll“ (550–551).

²⁵ The two date indications in Ezek 40.1 (“in the twenty-fifth year after our abduction” and “in the fourteenth year after the capture of the city”) refer to the beginning of the exile (Ezek 1.1–2) and to the taking of the city of Jerusalem (Ezek 33.21–22). They take up the whole book of Ezek 1–39 by means of these centrally positioned statements. The return of the glory in 43.1–12 sets up the bridge to the visions in Ezek 1–3 and 8–11; the level in 37.1–14 to the one of 3.22–23.

great kingdom, Yhwh enters into the Temple, unimpressed by the Babylonian scenario, in order to remain abidingly present to his people.

The tenth day of the month of Nisan hints at still further inner-biblical references: according to Exod 12.3–5, there begins on this day the selection of the lambs for the Passover, which will be celebrated on the fourteenth day of Nisan. Joshua 4.19 recounts that Israel came into the promised land on the tenth of Nisan and there set up camp in order some days later – on the fourteenth of Nisan – to celebrate the Passover in the Promised Land. With that, there is therefore a conscious celebration at the beginning of the second Temple Vision of the exodus tradition, the conquest tradition, and the renewal of the Passover under Josiah. The whole Temple vision lies under the symbolism of the new exodus. In the fact that the new exodus and the homecoming into the land are connected to the forgiveness of guilt (Ezek 36.25) and the gracious acceptance by God (20.39–44), which according to Ezek 43.13–27 is expressly assured, the connection with the day of reconciliation and the year of jubilee may also be indicated.²⁶

The return of the glory of God (Ezek 43.1–12) transforms the Temple area into a place of abiding presence of God. In the Temple there takes place the cult as revised according to the cult directive of Ezek 43.13–46.24 and whose principal task is the full reconciliation with God. In that fashion, the acceptance, as announced in Ezek 20.41, comes to its fullness through God (Ezek 43.27).

The text pieces imported at a later time, which deal with the various priestly classes and positioning the Zadokites before the other Levites, tend to reflect later conflicts in the second Temple. An “eschatological” perspective is again provided against this by the spring flowing out of the Temple (Ezek 47.1–12), perhaps also with the ideal division of land (Ezek 47.13–48.29) and the special renaming of the city (Ezek 48.30–35): ושם־העיר מיום יהוה שמה.

4. Summary

The Book of Ezekiel presents a complex tapestry in which many and different voices, sometimes even contradicting one another, are heard. To the radicalism of the judgement, which Ezekiel proclaims, there corresponds the radicalism of a new beginning. This new beginning does not allow itself to be reduced to a new version of past greatness, past structures, past institutions. Throughout the Book of Ezekiel there may be voices that speak of a restitution of what has been in terms of a restoration. Yet there is still the stamp of a change which influences the whole book, and which does not deny what is qualitatively new in the phase of salvation after the judgement. The good news of salvation of the Book of Ezekiel is impregnated with a life-fullness, in which the people of Yhwh find

²⁶ See in this regard the dissertation of HÄNER, *Bleibendes Nachwirken*, 541–544.

their lasting and henceforth secure place before God. Whether this lasting place before God, in particular cases, also brings into focus the boundary between here and hereafter depends on the interpretation of some central texts such as Ezek 36.16–38; 37.1–14, 15–28; 38–39. This becomes still clearer when one thinks of the lateness in the development of the relevant texts or the revision on them. The early inner-biblical reception, as with the Jewish and Christian reception and also some newer interpretations, does not exclude *a priori* such theological borderline questions concerning the Book of Ezekiel.

The salvation message of Ezekiel is not in the first instance one of restoration. It shows too clearly the traces of an “eschatological fulfilment”, within time and even to the borders of time. Ezekiel is and remains borderline-crossing, both in the oracles of judgement and in the oracles of salvation.

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