

# Of Hinges and Echoes: Ezekiel 20:32 as a Hermeneutical Key to the Book of Ezekiel

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In this paper, I will suggest that Ezekiel 20:32 is a hermeneutical key to the book of Ezekiel. As a hermeneutical key, it can provide a reference point for navigating the rest of the book.

The overall structure of the book of Ezekiel and Ezekiel 33 as a hinge chapter.

Many of Ezekiel's oracles are dated down to the day and month of the year. Based on the work of Freedy and Redford,<sup>1</sup> Hill and Walton suggest the following dates for the oracles:

Chariot vision (1:1-3)	June 593 BCE
Call to be a watchman (3:16)	June 593
Temple vision (8:1)	Aug/Sept 592
Discourse with elders (20:1)	Aug 591
Second siege of Jerusalem (24:1)	Jan 588
Judgment on Tyre (26:1)	Mar/Apr 587/586
Judgment on Egypt (29:1)	Jan 587
Judgment on Egypt (29:17)	Apr 571
Judgment on Egypt (30:20)	Apr 587
Judgment on Egypt (31:1)	June 587

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<sup>1</sup> K.S. Freedy and D.B. Redford, "The Dates of Ezekiel in Relation to Biblical, Babylonian and Egyptian Sources," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 90, no. 3 (1970). Reference from Andrew E. Hill and John H. Walton, *A Survey of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 2009), 559-560.

Lament over Pharaoh (32:1)	Mar 585
Lament over Egypt (32:17)	Apr 586
Fall of Jerusalem (33:21)	Dec/Jan 586/585
New temple vision (40:1)	Apr 573

With the exception of three that relate to Egypt (29:1, 17; 32:1), the dated oracles are chronologically arranged. The significance of the dating is found in the way they cluster around the fall of Jerusalem and the destruction of the temple.<sup>2</sup>

A consideration of the dated oracles together with analysis of the undated oracles suggests that the book of Ezekiel has a very clear structure, which can be summarized in the following way.

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<sup>2</sup> Note that Daniel Block summarizes a complex discussion about dating in Ezekiel, particularly with regard to 24:1 in Daniel I. Block, *The Book of Ezekiel Chapters 1-24* (NICOT. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 772-774. Block concludes that the siege of Jerusalem began (24:1) on January 5 (modern equivalent) 587 and that the fugitive's announcement (33:21) came on January 8 585 (see Block, Ezekiel 1-24, 28-29.) Whichever calculation methodology is employed, the fact remains that the dates recorded in Ezekiel cluster around the fall of Jerusalem.

The Book of Ezekiel					
Ezekiel the prophet	Judgment		Hinge	Restoration	Eternal hope
Chs 1-3	Chs 4-24	Chs 25-32	Ch 33	Chs 34-39	Chs 40-48
Ezekiel is prepared for his ministry of <b>condemnation</b> – a watchman	Sign-actions and oracles of judgment against Israel; Jerusalem and the temple will be destroyed	Oracles of judgment on the nations	Ezekiel is prepared for his ministry of <b>consolation</b> – a watchman. The news of Jerusalem's fall changes everything.	New shepherd, renewed land, renewed covenant, renewed people, new unity.	The Lord returns to a new temple, new city and new land
				<b>Purpose: for the glory of the LORD's name</b>	
Before Jerusalem's fall		After Jerusalem's fall			

A key feature of this proposal for an overall structure<sup>3</sup> is the identification of Ch 33 as a hinge in the book. Can this identification be justified?

A connection between Ezekiel Chs 24 and 33 is evidence to support the suggestion of the hinge nature of Ch 33. An important aspect of the connection between Ezekiel 24 and 33 lies in the “muteness” imposed on Ezekiel by the Lord in 3:26-27.

The exact nature of Ezekiel’s muteness has been a matter of debate.<sup>4</sup> The section that precedes the imposition of muteness, Ezekiel 2:1-3:15, is characterized by a striking sequence of divine commands followed by divine enabling. In 2:1 The Lord commands Ezekiel to stand on his feet so that he can speak to Ezekiel. Then in 2:2-7, the Spirit, who has animated Ch 1 (1:4, 12, 20, 21) lifts Ezekiel to his feet and the Lord speaks with him. 3:1 sets up the section 3:1-15 with three commands: “Eat, go and speak.” Progressively through this section, Ezekiel is enabled to eat (3:23), to speak (3:5-11) and to go (3:12-15). In the next section (3:16-21) Ezekiel is called to be a “watchman” (הַצֹּפֵה) for Israel and given a message to the wicked (3:18-19) and a message to the righteous (3:20-21). Once again in 3:24 Ezekiel is enabled to stand so that the Lord can speak with him. All these cases demonstrate a close connection between divine command and divine enabling.

The next section 3:24-27 seems at first sight to reverse the tight connection between divine command and divine enabling seen in the previous

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<sup>3</sup> Note that various commentators, while identifying the separate sections in the same way, allocate them to different overall structures. For example, Daniel Block identifies the end of Ch 24 as the primary division in the book, with Chs 1-24 labelled “Part 1: Messages of Doom and Gloom for Judah/Israel” (see Block, *Ezekiel 1-24*, vii.) and Chs 25-48 labelled “Part 2: Messages of Hope and Restoration for Judah/Israel” (see Daniel I. Block, *The Book of Ezekiel Chapters 25-48* (NICOT. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), vii.) Block regards Chs 25-32 as presenting “negative message of hope” for Judah/Israel in that the oracles against the nations anticipate “the judgment of the enemies of God’s people” (Block, *Ezekiel 25-48*, 3.) Moshe Greenberg notes that “the ancients” (in the history of rabbinical thought) saw Chs 25-32 as part of the consolation of Judah, but he finds little evidence of that in the text. See Moshe Greenberg, *Ezekiel 1-20: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (Anchor Bible. Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1983), 4-5.

<sup>4</sup> See Robert R. Wilson, “An Interpretation of Ezekiel’s Dumbness,” *Vetus Testamentum* 22 (1972).

section. Ezekiel’s “incarceration” in his house and his imposed muteness seem to work against his commission to speak to the wicked and the righteous. His incarceration means that he “cannot (or must not) go out among the people” (3:24) (וְלֹא תֵצֵא בְּתוֹכָם). And his muteness (אֶל־חֶבְדָּךָ וְלִשׁוֹנְךָ אֲדַבֵּיק “and your tongue I will make [it] stick to the roof of your mouth” – 3:26a) will prevent him from being a “reprover” to the people (לָהֶם לְאִישׁ מוֹכִיחַ וְנִאֲלַמְתָּ וְלֹא־תִהְיֶה) “and you will be mute and you will not be to them, to each one, a reprover” 3:26b).

Daniel Block argues that the nature of Ezekiel’s muteness depends on an understanding of the word מוֹכִיחַ (*môkîaḥ*). After surveying the options Block argues that in this case the context requires a mediating sense for *môkîaḥ*.<sup>5</sup> That is, Ezekiel will not be able to perform the prophetic role of mediating for, or even interceding for, Israel. He will only be able to serve as an accuser. But a better understanding appears to lie in the sense of the very next verse, where the Lord says to Ezekiel, “But when (בְּ) + Infinitive Construct = temporal) I speak with you” (וּבִדְבָרֵי אוֹתְךָ) “I will open your mouth” (אֶפְתַּח אֶת־פִּיךָ). In other words, Ezekiel will be mute in some sense (publicly, officially, in his role as a prophet?) except when the Lord speaks and enables him to speak God’s words to Israel (כֹּה אָמַר אֲדֹנָי יְהוִה) “thus says the LORD God” 3:27b). Hence Ezekiel’s muteness can be understood not as a reversal of the pattern of divine command and enabling in 3:1-15 but as a continuation of it. Everything that Ezekiel says (in his role as a prophet) is “from the Lord” for he cannot even speak as a prophet unless the Lord opens his mouth. Effectively, it will not be Ezekiel that speaks, but the Lord.<sup>6</sup> He will be the Lord’s prophet par excellence. The connection between divine command and divine enabling (in this case by partially “disabling” Ezekiel) stands.

The foregoing discussion of Ezekiel’s muteness is aimed at supporting a link between Ezekiel 24 and 33. Ezekiel 24 begins with a date notification, and Ezekiel is commanded to take careful note of the day (אֶת־טַעֲמֵם הַיּוֹם) “the day, this very day” – cf. Gen 7:13) because on that very day

<sup>5</sup> Block, *Ezekiel 1-24*, 157.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Christopher J. H. Wright, *The Message of Ezekiel: A New Heart and a New Spirit* (The Bible Speaks Today. Nottingham, England: IVP, 2001), 72.

Nebuchadnezzar had laid siege to Jerusalem. As a sign of judgment, Ezekiel's wife, the delight of his eyes, dies (24:16-18). In the last three verses of Ezekiel 24 the Lord promises Ezekiel that at a certain forthcoming moment his muteness will end. A fugitive (פְּלִיט) from the destruction of Jerusalem, which represents the removal of the delight of the eyes of the people, will report the news, and on that very day Ezekiel's mouth will be opened and he will be no longer mute. This change in Ezekiel's status will be a sign to the people, and as a result they will know "that I am the LORD" (כִּי־אֲנִי יְהוָה).

Two years<sup>7</sup> later (so forging a connection between Ezekiel 24 and 33), on another carefully recorded date, all that the Lord promised to Ezekiel comes about (Ezekiel 33:21-22). After an eighteen-month siege of Jerusalem the city falls. Someone escaping from the devastation arrives in Babylon six months later with the news that the city has fallen. Ezekiel's mouth is opened; he is no longer mute. The Lord had promised (24:27) that the end of Ezekiel's muteness would be a sign to Israel such that they would know that he is the Lord. It seems very likely that the sign connected with the end of Ezekiel's muteness is the evidence that his prophecies of the destruction of Jerusalem in Ezekiel 4-24 have been fulfilled. When Ezekiel had spoken during his period of muteness, his hearers will now understand that it was as if the Lord had spoken, for Ezekiel was unable to speak anything except the word of the Lord. His prophecies have been fulfilled with the destruction of Jerusalem, so the people can see in retrospect that the period of Ezekiel's "mute" ministry was indeed characterized by declaration of the Lord's word.

Besides the connection between Chapters 24 and 33, the redactor of Ezekiel has woven very strong connections between Ezekiel 3, 18 and 33. They can be characterized in the following way.

Ezekiel 3:17-19, apart from a small number of additions and subtractions,<sup>8</sup> reappears word for word in Ezekiel 33:7-9.

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<sup>7</sup> The maths as calculated from the recorded dates says three years, but there are some problems with the dating. See Block, *Ezekiel 25-48*, 254-255.

<sup>8</sup> Comparing the Hebrew text shows that 33:7-9 adds only five words to 3:17-19 and leaves out only seven words. None of the changes alters the fundamental meaning of the text.

Ezekiel 3:20-21 is strongly related to Ezekiel 33:10-20, but there are significant differences. The latter passage contains some strong echoes of Ezekiel 18.

Ezekiel 3:22-27 connects to Ezekiel 33:21-22.

The connections between Ezekiel 3 and Ezekiel 33 can be detailed as follows:

<b>Ezekiel 3:17</b> The Lord has appointed Ezekiel a watchman for the house of Israel	<b>Ezekiel 33:7</b> The Lord has appointed Ezekiel a watchman for the house of Israel
<b>Ezekiel 3:18-19</b> The watchman's words against the wicked. Two scenarios: Situation 1: The wicked person is not warned Situation 2: The wicked person is warned but does not turn	<b>Ezekiel 33:8-9</b> The watchman's words against the wicked. Situations 1 & 2 are repeated.
<b>Ezekiel 3:20-21</b> The watchman's words to the righteous. Two scenarios: Situation 3: The righteous person turns from righteousness and is not warned Situation 4: The righteous person is warned and does not turn from righteousness	<b>Ezekiel 33:10-20</b> Situation 3 is repeated, but the sin of the "righteous" man is explained. His sin is "trusting in his own righteousness" (v 13). A new situation (as an echo from Ezekiel 18) is introduced, Situation 5: The wicked person is warned and turns from sin.
<b>Ezekiel 3:22-27</b> The Lord imposes "incarceration" and muteness upon Ezekiel	<b>Ezekiel 33:21-22</b> Ezekiel's muteness is brought to an end

In Ezekiel 33:10-20, the situation of Ezekiel's hearers has changed from a hard-headed attitude (הַמָּה וְקָשִׁי-לֵב הַמָּה) "for all the house of Israel is strong of forehead and hard of heart" 3:7), which were the conditions when Ezekiel's muteness was imposed. It has also changed from the "sour grapes" attitude of Ezekiel 18, where Ezekiel's hearers were

essentially portraying themselves as “righteous” persons who were suffering from the sins of a former generation. (Ezekiel 18 is a chapter-length exposition of the principle of individual responsibility before the Lord.) Rather, Ezekiel’s hearers in 33:10-20 now recognize their sinful status before the Lord. But now they regard themselves as without hope because of their sin (v 10). The Lord makes it very plain that they are not without hope; rather they can repent and live (vv 14-16). If only they will understand their hope, they will be much better off than supposed “righteous” people who trust in their own righteousness (v 13).

Not only does Ezekiel 33 echo from Chapter 18 the case of “Situation 5” (the wicked person who is warned and turns from sin), it also reuses the words from the Lord that he takes no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that the wicked repent and live (compare Ezekiel 18:23; 31-32 and Ezekiel 33:11). In Chapter 18, the principle is first cast as a question: “Have I any pleasure in the death of the wicked, declares the LORD God, and not rather that he should turn from his way and live?” (33:23). The principle is again repeated in a heightened way as the Lord definitively rejects the idea in vs 32 and closes with two imperatives (כִּי לֹא אֶחְפֹּץ בְּמוֹת) “For I do not take pleasure in the death of the dying, declaration of the LORD God. So turn (imperative) and live (imperative).” Between vv 23 and 31 are urgent calls to repent.

In Ezekiel 18 this basic principle about the Lord’s character is put forward in response to the “sour grapes” principle. Chapter 33 reuses these words, but now in the context of a realization of personal sinfulness and a consequent loss of hope (33:10).

Chapter 33 thus brings together three great themes from earlier in Ezekiel: The theme of Ezekiel’s role as a watchman for Israel from Chapter 3, the theme that the Lord desires that none perish but rather turn from sin and live from Chapter 18, and the question of the imposition and resolution of Ezekiel’s muteness. These are all connected with the news that Jerusalem has fallen, which finally reaches the exiles in 33:21.

Now Ezekiel embarks on a new phase of his ministry, in which he is no longer “mute” and in which he is no longer required to predict the fall of

Jerusalem. It marks a turning point in Ezekiel's relationship to the Lord, to his audience and to his message.<sup>9</sup>

The above argument is designed to support the conclusion that Ezekiel 33 is a hinge chapter in the book as a whole. The quotes collected together in footnote 9 (many more could have been chosen) are designed to show that much of current Ezekiel scholarship takes a similar opinion. So far then, the argument of this paper has justified the inclusion of Chapter 33 as a hinge chapter in the overall structure of Ezekiel.

The chapters that follow point to the beginning of a new world. Through Ezekiel the Lord makes great promises. Daniel Block has helpfully summarized the promises under six headings:<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> "The disaster vindicated his prophecies concerning Jerusalem and established his credit." Moshe Greenberg, *Ezekiel 21-37: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (Anchor Bible. New York: Doubleday, 1997), 681-682. "History was not at an end, but at a new beginning." Wright, *Ezekiel*, 227. "To borrow a phrase from his contemporary Jeremiah (1:10), having uprooted and torn down, destroyed and overthrown, he [Ezekiel] may now turn toward the reconstructive tasks of building and planting." Block, *Ezekiel 25-48*, 235. "After the judgment oracles of Ezekiel 1-24 and the oracles against the foreign nations in chapters 25-32, we finally get to the good news in chapters 34-48. The turning point in the saga is chapter 33..." Iain M. Duguid, *Ezekiel* (NIVAC. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1999), 382. "We come to a new section of Ezekiel... This time, however, the oracles are hopeful rather than judgmental." Douglas K. Stuart, *Ezekiel* (The Preacher's Commentary 20. Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1989), 299. "The fall of Jerusalem is now the great historical proof of Yahweh, which reveals that Ezekiel with his message will not be frustrated and will not have to remain speechless with shame... What in the eyes of the world seems to be the fall and end of Israel is in reality the proof of the efficacy of the call this is proclaimed over Israel." Walther Zimmerli, *Ezekiel 2 (Chs 25-48)* (Hermeneia - A Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible. trans. James D. Martin; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983), 194. "The Lord's teaching by way of Ezekiel is that the supposed impasse does not obtain: the future is open." Robert W. Jenson, *Ezekiel* (Brazos Theological Commentary on the Bible. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 2009), 254. "... once the news that the city of Jerusalem has fallen reaches the prophet, the book shifts by stages from the minor key to the major, and themes of promise and restoration begin to come to the fore." Paul M. Joyce, *Ezekiel: A Commentary* (Library of Hebrew Bible/ Old Testament Studies 482. London: T & T Clark, 2009), 190. "The sovereign power and holiness of Yahweh God, the reliability of his word, and the veracity of the prophet have all been vindicated by the destruction of the holy city and the nation." Werner E. Lemke, "Life in the Present and Hope for the Future," in *Interpreting the Prophets* (eds. James L. Mays and Paul J. Achtemeier; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987), 201.

<sup>10</sup> Daniel I. Block, "Ezekiel: Theology," in *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis* (ed. Willem A. VanGemeren; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1997), 624-625.

1. A new exodus. Not exodus from Egypt this time. Now the Lord will regather his people out of the countries to which they have been scattered during the exile (Ezek 11:16-17a; 20:41; 34:11-13a, 16; 36:24a; 37:21a).
2. New life in a cleansed Land. The Lord will bring them back to their homeland, which will have been cleansed of its defilements (Ezek 11:17b-18; 20:42; 34:13b-15; 36:24b; 37:21b).
3. A new spiritual life. The Lord will revitalize his people spiritually, renewing his covenant with them, giving them a new heart, and infusing them with his Spirit, so that they may walk in his ways (Ezek 11:19-20; 16:62; 34:30-31; 36:25-28; 37:23-24).
4. A new Shepherd. The Lord will restore the dynasty of his servant David as an agent of well-being and symbol of unity for the nation (Ezek 34:23-24; 37:22-25).
5. New unity and prosperity. The Lord will bless Israel with unprecedented prosperity and guarantee the security of the whole nation in their own land (Ezek 34:25-29; 36:29-30; 37:26; 38:1-39:29).
6. The LORD will dwell with his people forever. The Lord will permanently reside in their midst and reorder the worship of the nation (Ezek 37:26b-28; 40:1-48:35).

The book of Ezekiel moves in an ordered, structured manner from judgment to salvation for the Lord's glory. In that movement, Chapter 33 represents the turning point.

## The single verse Ezekiel 20:32

Attention now turns to the single verse Ezekiel 20:32. The location of this verse in its context in Ezekiel 20 will be a key aspect of what follows.

### Translation

וְהָעֹלָה עַל-רִיחֹכְם הִיזָה לֹא תִהְיֶה אֲשֶׁר | אַתֶּם אֹמְרִים נְהִיָּה כְּגוֹיִם בְּמִשְׁפַּחֹת  
הָאָרְצוֹת לְשֶׁרֶת עֵץ וָאֶבֶן:

A literal translation: “But<sup>11</sup> the thing that is going up<sup>12</sup> upon your spirit will never ever<sup>13</sup> be; that is, you saying: “Let us be<sup>14</sup> like the nations, like the clans of the countries, serving<sup>15</sup> wood and stone.”

A more idiomatic translation: But what is occupying your minds when you think, “Let us be like the nations, like the clans of other countries, and worship wood and stone”; that will never ever be.

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<sup>11</sup> Waw + not finite-verb is often disjunctive; in this case a Waw + participle (used substantively) together with the context suggests a disjunctive meaning.

<sup>12</sup> Qal fem. sing. participle of עֹלָה. The word in this form is morphologically identical to the word עֹלָה which denotes the “whole burnt offering.” The noun עֹלָה (“whole burnt offering”) is used 20x in Ezekiel, but not occurring at all outside the final vision of Ezekiel 40-48. See also footnote 15. No commentator referred to makes any suggestion about this coincidence. But could the Lord through Ezekiel be suggesting a possible pun on the word? The whole burnt offering was the way in which the worshipper, via the vicarious sacrifice, was symbolically transported into God’s heavenly presence. The aspirations of Israel (represented by the elders in Ezekiel 20) are represented as the polar opposite of that symbolized by the עֹלָה; they think to be like everyone else rather than to live in God’s presence.

<sup>13</sup> An Infinitive Absolute preceding the negation of a yiqtol of the root הִיָּה suggests a strong emphasis.

<sup>14</sup> A Cohortative sense is suggested by the placement of the verb in its clause.

<sup>15</sup> The root of this word, שֶׁרֶת, often has the sense of “worship.” HALOT, 1661-1662. The root is used 17x in Ezekiel; this use in Ezekiel 20 is the only use of the root outside of the final vision of Ezekiel 40-48.

## Despair or desire?

Ezekiel 20:32 is cast as an expression of what the exiles to whom Ezekiel is ministering are thinking. Is it an expression of despair or desire? Despair: “There’s no point in being distinctive as God’s people; it’s getting us nowhere and it creates many problems; let’s just give it up and be like everyone else.” Desire: “Here’s our basic mindset: We simply don’t want to be distinctive, we just want to be like everyone else.”

Other reflections of the exiles quoted by Ezekiel suggest the possibility that it is an expression of despair. The “sour grapes” principle quoted in Ezekiel 18:2 appears to represent a proverb that has been adopted in the exilic community: “The fathers have eaten the sour grapes, and the children’s teeth are set on edge.” Later in the chapter, in 18:25, the people are saying, “The way of the Lord is not just.” In Chapter 33, the community has another saying in vs 10: “Surely our transgressions and our sins are upon us, and we rot away because of them. How then can we live?” See also 12:22; 37:11. Despair is an emotion that is current amongst Ezekiel’s audience.

But more than simply an expression of despair, the words in vs 32 can also be taken as a statement of positive desire, an “expression of faithless determination; Ezekiel’s compatriots are determined to fit into the family of nations in which they find themselves.”<sup>16</sup> The section that immediately precedes vs 32, verses 30-31 form a climax to the first half of Ezekiel 20, in which Israel is portrayed as a persistently rebellious people, who, in particular, have consistently fallen into idolatry of the worst kind. The sentiment expressed in vs 32 can be seen as a coda to what comes before, explicating how it was possible that the Lord’s people could fall into such idolatry. How could it happen? It could happen because, in the depths of their being, they did not want to be distinctive. They wanted to be like the other nations of the ancient Near East, worshipping idols.

But the Lord says that what they desire (or what they fear) will never, ever happen.

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<sup>16</sup> Block, *Ezekiel 1-24*, 649. See also Duguid, *Ezekiel*, 263.

## The context of the single verse: Ezekiel 20

Chapter 20<sup>17</sup> comes towards the end of Ezekiel’s ministry of condemnation against Jerusalem. The structure of this chapter can be represented in the following way.

Ezekiel 20				
Ezekiel the prophet	Judgment on Israel	Hinge	Restoration	
20:1-4	20:5-29	20:30-31	20:32	20:33-44
Ezekiel is prepared for his ministry of condemnation	A cyclical pattern in Israel’s history	Israel is like the nations	The Lord’s determination: Israel will not be like the nations	New exodus, new wilderness, new entry into the land, renewed worship. Purpose: for the glory of the Lord’s name

### Ezekiel 20:1-4. Ezekiel is prepared for the ministry of chapter 20

The first dated oracle since 8:1, which was the temple visionary sequence of Ezekiel 8-11, begins in Ezekiel 20:1. “Certain of the elders of Israel” (מִזְקְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל אַנְשִׁים) had come and sat before Ezekiel once previously in the book (14:1). In Ezekiel 14 the elders are characterized as having “lifted up their idols into their hearts” (הֶעֱלוּ גִלּוּלֵיהֶם עַל-לִבָּם); the use of the root עלה in this characterization may be intended to reinforce the idea that the legitimate worship of the Lord (symbolised by the עלה) has been replaced by worship of idols. In Ezekiel 14 the Lord emphasizes through repetition (14:4, 78), in response to the question “Should I indeed let myself be consulted by them?” (הֲאֶדְרִשׁ אֶדְרִשׁ לָהֶם), that he will indeed speak to

<sup>17</sup> Ezekiel 20:45-49 (in English versions, following LXX) are versified as Ezekiel 21:1-5 in the Hebrew text

these idolatrous elders, but only words of clear judgment. In Ezekiel 20, the elders come for the same purpose as in Ezekiel 14 (לְדַרְשׁ אֶת־יְהוָה). On this occasion the Lord expresses his determination that he will not allow himself to be consulted by the elders (חַי־אָנִי אִם־אֲדַרְשׁ לָכֶם) – “as I live, I will not be inquired of by you”).<sup>18</sup> The same determination, stated in the same words, is expressed at the end of the main section in 20:31. What comes in between is a recital of Israel’s history like no other. Block writes that “Ezekiel’s ‘theology of history’ is revisionist in the extreme.”<sup>19</sup> It represents the Lord’s response of judgment against Israel, as in Ezekiel 14. In Ezekiel 14 the word of judgment is based on the current attitudes of the elders who presume to come to inquire of the Lord while “lifting up” idols in their hearts. In Ezekiel 20 those current attitudes of the elders (representing Israel) are historically grounded in the story of Israel’s rebellion from the very beginning of their life as a nation. Even though, unlike in Ezekiel 14, the Lord says he will refuse the request of the elders to be “consulted,” the message given to Ezekiel is a response to their request. Perhaps the “refusal” is a rhetorical device to emphasize the impertinence of the inquiry,<sup>20</sup> or to make clear that the Lord knows their supposed “seeking” of the Lord is not wholehearted (cf. Jer 29:13).

The repeated question, “Will you judge them? Will you judge them, O Son of man?” (הֲתִשְׁפֹּט אֹתָם הֲתִשְׁפֹּט בְּן־אָדָם) in 20:4 has been interpreted as meaning “Arraign them! Arraign them!” with the interrogative particle conveying an indignant (or impassioned<sup>21</sup>) affirmation;<sup>22</sup> or “Will you (not rather) judge them – judge, son of man”;<sup>23</sup> or as signifying an impatient imperative “set out the case against them.”<sup>24</sup> Steven Tuell suggests that unlike the Lord’s interaction with the elders of Israel in Ch

<sup>18</sup> See Williams’ *Syntax*, 456 for use of אִם in oaths and exclamations

<sup>19</sup> Block, *Ezekiel 1-24*, 614. Allen characterizes this section in the same way; Leslie C. Allen, “The Structuring of Ezekiel’s Revisionist History Lesson,” *CBQ* 54 (1994): 448.

<sup>20</sup> Cf. John B Taylor, *Ezekiel: An Introduction and Commentary* (Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries. Leicester, England: IVP, 1969), 156.

<sup>21</sup> Greenberg, *Ezekiel 1-20*, 363.

<sup>22</sup> Block, *Ezekiel 1-24*, 618.

<sup>23</sup> Walther Zimmerli, *Ezekiel 1 (Chs 1-24)* (Hermeneia - A Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible. trans. Ronald E. Clements; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979), 399.

<sup>24</sup> Taylor, *Ezekiel*, 156-157.

14, here the Lord calls upon Ezekiel to judge them.<sup>25</sup> Even though the word of judgment that follows is from the Lord, Ezekiel is questioned as to whether he is able/willing to declare this word of judgment. Douglas Stuart argues that the repetition of the question is the Lord's way of asking Ezekiel if he is sure he is willing to take up the task.<sup>26</sup> If Tuell's and Stuart's observations have merit, the first four verses of Ezekiel 20 can be seen as the Lord's preparation of Ezekiel for the ministry of condemnation that he is about to undertake as represented by the rest of the chapter. As Ezekiel retells the history of Israel in 20:5-29, the rebellion of the represented generations is expressed using the root מרה ("to be recalcitrant, rebellious" vv 8, 13, 21), which recalls the seven-fold use of this root in chapter 2-3 (2:5, 6, 7, 8; 3:9, 26, 27). In chapters 2-3 Ezekiel is being prepared as a watchman for his overall ministry of condemnation which occupies chapters 4-32 of Ezekiel. Hence the preparation of Ezekiel in 20:1-4 for the particular ministry of condemnation he must perform in Ezekiel 20 can be seen as echoing his preparation for his entire ministry of condemnation as laid out in Ezekiel 23.

### **Ezekiel 20:5-31. A cyclical pattern of rebellion in Israel's history**

The Lord outlines, through Ezekiel, Israel's cyclic history of rebellion against him over the last eight centuries of their history from exodus to exile. The cycle works through four "generations" of Israel's past. Over their life as a nation, since the first exodus out of Egypt, the Lord has repeatedly rescued Israel when all seemed lost. Every time he has rescued them, he has done it for a repeated particular reason which is laid in this section.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Stephen S. Tuell, *Ezekiel* (New International Bible Commentary. Peabody: Hendrickson, 2009), 127.

<sup>26</sup> Stuart, *Ezekiel*, 168.

<sup>27</sup> The following table is modified from Wright, *Ezekiel*, 157.

	Israel in Egypt	First wilderness generation	Second wilderness generation	Israel in the land to exile
God resolves to bless Israel	5-6	10	17	27-28a
His requirements	7	11-12	18-20	
Israel's rebellion	8a	13a	21a	28b-29
God's resolve to punish	8b	13b	21b	[30-31]
Reprieve (for the sake of God's name)	9	14	22	
Yet some punishment		15-17	23-26	

The Lord had thought to destroy the nation in Egypt, because they had become like the nation where they lived, worshipping the detestable idols of Egypt (serving idols of wood and stone). But the Lord relented for the reason outlined in v 9 “But I acted for the sake of my name (לְמַעַן שְׁמִי), that it should not be profaned in the sight of the nations...”

The Lord then thought to destroy the first wilderness generation, for they also profaned the Lord. They refused to be distinctive, wanting to be like everyone else (serving idols of wood and stone). But the Lord relented for the same reason as in vs 9.

The story repeats; it feels like an endless cycle. The second wilderness generation is no different from the first (wanting to serve idols of wood and stone), but they are spared for the same reason (vv 18-22) as in vv 9, 17.

The dreary circle dance between Israel and the Lord continues in the Land of Promise. Over and over the cycle repeats. In this way Ezekiel summarizes the history of the various judges and the kings of Israel and Judah. Finally, the Lord sends Israel into exile, which is where Ezekiel and the exiles find themselves. Note that the exile is portrayed as both punishment and reprieve for Israel. The Lord swore (v 23) to scatter them “among the nations” (בְּגוֹיִם) and to disperse them “through the countries” (בְּאֶרְצוֹת) because they had rebelled against him, even though what they deserved

was to be destroyed. The Lord acts in this way not for the sake of his people's destiny but for the sake of his name, that it not be profaned amongst the nations.

In vv 27-31 Ezekiel brings the history right down to the present time in his day (see "to this day" [עַד הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה] in vv 29, 31). The cyclical pattern seems to break down; in the white heat of God's present anger against the exiles a fresh reprieve seems out of the question.

The stunning conclusion comes in vv 30-31: "Therefore say to the house of Israel, 'Thus says the LORD God: Will you defile yourselves after the manner of your fathers and go whoring after their detestable things (שִׁקּוּצִים)?<sup>28</sup> When you present your gifts and offer up your children in fire, you defile yourselves with all your idols to this day. And shall I be inquired of by you, O house of Israel? As I live, declares the Lord God, I will not be inquired of by you.'" Israel as a nation has become just like the nations, worshipping wood and stone, even to the extent of offering their children up to idols by fire.<sup>29</sup> Here is the essence of Israel's sin – a refusal to be distinctive, to be devoted to the One True God. Instead they want to be like the nations, serving wood and stone.

Vss 30-31 suggest a (final) resolve to punish Israel – God will not even be inquired of by elders who come to Ezekiel pretending to desire God's word but who only have idolatry in their hearts. It seems in v 31 that the dreary cycle has come to an end. But in fact, the cycle repeats one last time, for the Lord will continue to act לְמַעַן שְׁמִי ("for the sake of my name" the conclusion in v 44) as becomes clear in what follows.

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<sup>28</sup> The lemma שִׁקּוּץ is used 28x in the Hebrew Bible, most frequently in Ezekiel, and in Ezekiel, most frequently in chapter 20 (vv 7, 8, 30). Its sense is always "abhorrence, abomination" (HALOT, 1640)

<sup>29</sup> Christopher Wright comments: "We have no verification of this [child sacrifice], but, given the desperation and trauma of the situation, it is not unthinkable that some exiles may have felt that only such desperate actions could placate the anger of God. Such was the extent of the spiritual and moral darkness that they imagined they might placate Yahweh's anger by doing the thing that was actually arousing that anger more than anything else." Wright, *Ezekiel*, 161-162.

## Ezekiel 20:33-44. The promise of restoration

An important background for the Lord acting for the sake of his name is found in the exodus narrative. In both Exodus 32:11-14 and Numbers 14:13-20, through the mediating work of Moses, the Lord relents from destroying Israel for the sake of his name. It is therefore entirely appropriate that the restoration of Israel promised in Ezekiel 20:33-44 is expressed as a new exodus. For example, the repeated language of vv 33-34 “with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm” (בְּיָד חֲזָקָה וּבְזְרוּעַ נְטוּיָה) reproduces exactly a phrase found in Deuteronomy 4:34. In the Deuteronomy 4 passage Moses is describing the exodus event to the second generation of Israel, and significantly he does that in the context of upholding the utter incomparability of God (“has any god ever attempted...”). In fact, in Deuteronomy 4:39 he calls upon Israel to know that “the Lord is God in heaven above and on the earth beneath; there is no other” (אֵין עוֹד). The exodus event demonstrates that God is unique, there is no other god. So how foolish for Israel to desire to be like the nations, serving wood and stone.

The (Ezekiel 20) passage goes on to speak of the testing time of a second wilderness experience, in which God will separate the faithful from transgressors, and a second entry into the land, where all the house of Israel, all of them (כָּל-בֵּית יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּלֹה) will serve the Lord and worship him. The Lord will accept their worship (vv 40-41) and they will know the Lord. This will all be possible because, as v 44 concludes, the Lord will deal with Israel not according to their evil ways or corrupt deeds, but for the sake of his name.

The second exodus, the second wilderness experience, the second entry into the land will not be merely physical experiences which would be just as susceptible to failure as the first series. The new exodus events will be the Lord’s definitive actions for the sake of his name. What the Lord will achieve will be a new covenant relationship with his people. In the language of Jeremiah, the Lord’s actions will constitute him establishing a new covenant which will not be like the old covenant, which the fathers broke.

The details of how the Lord will achieve this final work of salvation will be given in the chapters that follow the great turning point of the book in Ezekiel 33. In fact, Chapters 33-48 give the details of how the Lord will work out the promises of Ezekiel 20:33-44.

For example, Ezekiel 36:16-38 has many echoes of Ezekiel 20.

The reason why God poured out his anger (20:8, 21; 36:18):

Because they had profaned his holy name (20:9; 36:21)

by worshipping idols (20:30; 36:18).

And yet God will bring them back from the lands where he scattered them (20:41; 36:19, 24)

for the sake of his holy name (20:41; 36:23)

In turn, the people will repent and loathe themselves for their former evil (20:43; 36:31)

A major link between Chs 20 and 36 is that of threat and fulfilment. In 20:8, 13, 21 God is quoted, "Then I said I would pour out my wrath"; in 36:18 he says, "I did pour out my wrath." In Ezekiel 20:9, 14, 22 God is about to execute judgment for the sake of his name which Israel has defiled; in 36:20 he has completed his judgment for his name's sake.

The program of Ch 36 has two goals: First, to restore the honour and holiness of the divine name by bringing Israel back to its land; and second, to give them a new heart to replace the former idolatrous one condemned in Ch 20.

Ezekiel 20:33-44 provides an introduction to the content of Ezekiel that comes after the hinge chapter of Ezekiel 33. But these verses themselves follow the hinge verse of Ezekiel 20.

### **Ezekiel 20:32. The hinge of Ezekiel 20**

If the above analysis has merit, then it is possible to see Ezekiel 20 as a microcosm of the whole book. The parallels can be represented by displaying the two structures together.

The book of Ezekiel					
Ezekiel the prophet	Judgment	Hinge	Restoration	Eternal hope	
Chs 1-3	Chs 4-24	Chs 25-32	Ch 33	Chs 34-39	Chs 40-48
Ezekiel is prepared for his ministry of <b>condemnation</b> – a watchman	Sign-actions and oracles of judgment against Israel; Jerusalem and the temple will be destroyed!	Oracles of judgment on the nations	Ezekiel is prepared for his ministry of <b>consolation</b> – a watchman. The news of Jerusalem's fall changes everything.	New shepherd, renewed land, renewed covenant, renewed people, new unity.	The Lord returns to a new temple, renewed worship, new city and new land
Before Jerusalem's fall		After Jerusalem's fall			

Ezekiel 20				
Ezekiel the prophet	Judgment on Israel		Hinge	Restoration
20:1-4a	20:4b-29	20:30-31	20:32	20:33-44
Ezekiel is prepared for his ministry of <b>condemnation</b>	A cyclical pattern in Israel's history	Israel is like the nations	The Lord's determination: Israel will not be like the nations	New exodus, new wilderness, new entry into the land, renewed worship. <b>Purpose: for the glory of the Lord's name</b>

The hinge of Chapter 20 is vs 32. It is central to the microcosm of the whole book; it is central to the whole book.

## Thematic connections between the hinge verse of Ezekiel 20 and the hinge chapter of the book

To further support the notion that the hinge verse of Ezekiel 20 reflects the hinge chapter of the whole book, note the thematic connections between Ezekiel 20:32 and Ezekiel 33. Ezekiel 3:17 and 33:7 record the Lord's commissioning of Ezekiel as a watchman for Israel in identical words: בְּן־אָדָם צִפֹּה נְתַתִּיךָ לְבַיִת יִשְׂרָאֵל ("son of man, a watchman I have made you for the house of Israel"). These two acts of commissioning form an *inclusio* around Ezekiel's "mute" ministry of condemnation, largely taken up with his prediction of the fall of Jerusalem. But taking note of the difference in context between the two acts of commissioning in Ezekiel 3 and Ezekiel 33 provides additional insight.

In Ezekiel 3 there is no indication that Ezekiel was to declare his commissioning publicly; the emphasis in Ezekiel 3 is on the preparation of Ezekiel for his painful task of confronting the rebellious house with their hard foreheads and stony hearts (3:7). One day (when Ezekiel's signs and warnings were all vindicated by historic events) the people would know that a prophet had been among them (2:5). In Ezekiel 33 the Lord's commissioning of Ezekiel as a watchman, echoing his private word to Ezekiel in Ch 3, becomes part of Ezekiel's public word to his hearers. That public commissioning is linked to the echo from Ezekiel 18 regarding the Lord's will that his people not perish but that they repent, for "why should you die, O house of Israel?" (33:11) The commissioning in Ezekiel 33:7 is preceded by a parable in which the role of a watchman is laid out, and in the parable the "people of the land" (33:2) appoint the watchman. In other words, the commissioning in Ezekiel 33:7 is surrounded by elements in which Ezekiel's hearers are depicted as or called to be active. Because of historic events the exiles now understand with utmost clarity that a prophet has been among them in the person of Ezekiel. Furthermore, the very first message that this proven prophet, now publicly commissioned watchman, is given is a condemnation of the people who remain in the land of Israel who are acting like the nations, raising their eyes to their idols and shed blood (33:25). Ezekiel warns his hearers that if they ignore him and treat him only as an entertainer (33:32) then new disaster will

come, significantly signalled by a repetition in 33:33 of the words of 2:5 that then they will know that a prophet has been among them (וַיִּדְעוּ כִּי נָבִיא הָיָה בְּתוֹכְכֶם).

Ezekiel's recommissioning in Ch 33 thus lays out in the most stringent way imaginable the two options that face the exiles in the light of historic events: be distinctive or be like the nations. These two options are summarized in a single verse in Ezekiel 20:32. It is true that in 20:32 the two options are not laid out as a choice facing Ezekiel's hearers; rather they are laid out as the Lord's determination regarding the future of Israel. But the Lord's determination in 20:32 forms the background for his public recommissioning of Ezekiel as a proven prophet/watchman. The Lord's determination regarding Israel will bear fruit historically as Ezekiel's hearers heed his warnings. In this way the hinge verse of Ezekiel 20 provides the thematic background for the lessons of history brought together in the hinge chapter of the book, Ezekiel 33.

## **The place of Ezekiel 20 in the book as a whole**

A final piece of evidence supporting the notion that Ezekiel 20:32 can serve as a hermeneutical key to the book of Ezekiel derives from the place of Ezekiel 20 in the book. If the chapter is a microcosm of the book, what is its function here in the text? Why deploy it here and not elsewhere?

Chapter 20 begins with the specification of a date. Approximately a year has passed since the last recorded date in the book (8:1). The date recorded in 8:1 begins the account of Ezekiel's second visionary experience in chapters 8-11, which culminates in a symbolic depiction of the glory of the Lord leaving Jerusalem. The next date to be recorded (24:1), a little over a year later, will mark the beginning of the siege of Jerusalem. Ezekiel's wife dies and the promises referred to above (which will be fulfilled in chapter 33), conclude the section of the book chronologically located before the fall of Jerusalem. The event referred to in chapter 24, the siege of Jerusalem, is the historical consequence of the symbolic event of chapters 8-11, the departure of the Lord's glory from Jerusalem. Chapter 20, the only dated oracle between Chapters 8-11 and Chapter 24, functions both to explain the reason for the Lord's departure from Jerusalem in Chapters 8-11

and its consequence in Chapter 24. Chronologically it sits almost at the halfway point between the dates recorded in 8:1 and 24:1.

It is likely that the careful recording of dates in 8:1, 20:1 and 24:1 is significant. The account of Israel's history in Ezekiel 20 is, as noted above, "revisionist"; that is, as Craigie puts it, the "facts" are the same as what Ezekiel's hearers are accustomed to, but the perspective is quite different.<sup>30</sup> But for the final readers of the book of Ezekiel, this "revisionist history" is told in a carefully recorded historical setting that is chronologically located about halfway between the symbolic vision of chapters 8-11 and its historical outworking in chapter 24. In other words, in the structure of the first half of the book, Ezekiel 20 provides a clear chronological and thematic link between the carefully dated visionary experience of Ezekiel 8-11 and the carefully dated oracle of chapter 24.

To summarize the above discussion, while Ezekiel 33 is rightly considered the most significant hinge chapter in the book, Ezekiel 20 performs an important connecting function in the first half of the book. Ezekiel 20 can be considered a microcosm of the whole book, and the hinge of Chapter 20 is v 32. Furthermore, there are significant thematic connections between the hinge verse of chapter 20 and the hinge chapter of the book.

## **Ezekiel 20:32 as a hermeneutical key – some examples**

This section outlines three examples of the way in which Ezekiel 20:32 can be useful as a hermeneutical key to other sections of Ezekiel.

### **The juxtaposition of Ezekiel 4-24 and Ezekiel 25-32**

The wearying detail of multiple oracles of judgment against Israel in Ezekiel 4-24 demonstrate the persistent desire of Israel to pursue idolatry. Even though the histories of Israel told in both Ezekiel 16 and 20 end with restoration oracles, there is emphasis within these restoration conclusions

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<sup>30</sup> Peter C. Craigie, *Ezekiel* (The Daily Bible Study Series. Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1983), 143.

of the self-loathing Israel will feel when they remember their sins (16:61-63; 20:43). Even the restoration oracle of 11:17-21, which previews Ezekiel 36, ends with the Lord's condemnation of those who continue to pursue "abominations."

As soon as the fall of Jerusalem is previewed in Ezekiel 24, the book progresses to the oracles against the nations in Ezekiel 25-32. It appears that the judgments that are applied to Israel are now applied to the nations. But Christopher Wright has helpfully suggested that the opposite is true. The irony is that what Ezekiel [and other prophets, e.g. Amos, Isaiah and Jeremiah all have oracles against the nations] is called to say against the nations he must now declare against Israel. It is as if Yahweh is now treating Israel as his enemy.<sup>31</sup>

In contrast to Israel's apparent determination to be like the nations who are condemned in Ezekiel 25-32, the Lord is determined that, for the sake of the glory of his name, the idolatry of Israel will come to an end. His purpose for the exile is that he might be a sanctuary for Israel a little while as Jerusalem and temple are destroyed (11:16). His purpose for the new exodus outlined in the final verse of chapter 20 and elaborated in Ezekiel 34-37 is that Israel's idolatry and abominations cease for the glory of his name (36:21, 32). Then his name will no longer be profaned among the nations, for Israel's desire to be like the nations, to serve wood and stone, will not finally succeed.

## **The structure of the oracles against the nations (Ezek. 25-32)**

Daniel Block notes that the oracle against the nations contain a central promise in Ezekiel 28:24-26, an oracle of the restoration of Israel which he argues is the key to understanding the import of these chapters. He notes that there are 97 verses before this central section, which address oracles of judgment on six nations: Ammon, Moab, Edom, Philistia, Tyre and Sidon. Further, following the central section are 97 verse that declare judgment on one nation: Egypt.<sup>32</sup> What the Lord declares against the

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<sup>31</sup> Wright, *Ezekiel*, 231.

<sup>32</sup> Block, *Ezekiel 25-48*, 4-5.

nations Ezekiel must now declare against Israel. But as the central section, Ezekiel 28:24-26 affirms, the Lord has blessing in mind for Israel despite their sinfulness. How crucial it is then, that Israel not be like the nations, serving wood and stone.

### **Three great visionary sequences of the glory of the Lord**

The principle of Ezekiel 20:32 also applies to Ezekiel's visions of the glory of the Lord. There are three great visionary sequences in Ezekiel, in Chs 1-3, 8-11 and 40-48. Each of these is dated. In each case, the "hand of the Lord" is upon Ezekiel (1:3; 3:14; 8:1; 40:1). In a way these three visions define Ezekiel's life as a prophet.

In the first vision (Chs 1-3) it is as if Ezekiel has come to the exiles for the first time; he has indeed come to them for the first time as a prophet. The first vision begins an awesome picture of the glory of the Lord and continues to Ezekiel's commissioning and the imposition of muteness.

In the second vision (Chs 8-11) the glory of the Lord leaves the temple in Jerusalem. The vision provides shocking detail of the way in which Israel has become like the nations, serving wood and stone. Idolatry is happening even within the temple of the Lord; idolatry that will drive the Lord out of the temple. The Lord leaves the temple not as a defeated god who cannot stand up against the gods of the nations, but as the jealous God who simply will not tolerate his people being like the nations, serving wood and stone. By the end of Chapter 11 the Lord has left the temple, and there is nothing left for the temple and Jerusalem but to be destroyed. Without the Lord's presence there is no reason for Jerusalem to exist, and very soon, historically, the city and the temple are obliterated. The Lord's leaving the temple and Jerusalem is thematically connected to his determination that Israel serving wood and stone like the nations will not be tolerated.

But the Lord has not been defeated, and at the end of Chapter 11 the Lord gives Ezekiel some crucial words for people who thought to restrict the Lord's presence to the temple. Ezekiel 11:16 "Thus says the LORD God: Though I removed them far off among the nations, and though I scattered

them among the countries, yet I have been a sanctuary to them for a while in the countries where they have gone.” The Lord goes on in Ezekiel 11, to promise that he will draw a faithful remnant from the exiles, bring them back to the Promised Land and make them a distinctive people again. Though the exiles were scattered amongst the nations, they will not simply melt into them and disappear, as was the fate of other ancient Near Eastern nations that were vanquished in battle and deported to foreign lands. But Israel will never, ever be like the nations, who serve wood and stone. Rather, God will show his glory through them, that the world might know that he is the Lord.

Ezekiel records his final visionary experience in Chapters 40-48. The vision comes to Ezekiel in the year 573 BC, when the earthly Jerusalem and the temple are in ruins. Ezekiel sees a new temple, and he sees the glory of the Lord returning to a new temple. In keeping with the finality of what he is doing here, the Lord says twice over that he will dwell with his people forever (43:7, 9). Sandwiched between these two promises of eternal dwelling are sharp words that describe how things will be different now. They will be different, now that the Lord is dwelling with his people in a new and permanent way, because no longer will Israel be like the nations, serving wood and stone.

## **Conclusion**

Ezekiel 20:32 may not be the only hermeneutical key to the book of Ezekiel, but it is a useful one. It connects thematically to the overall structure of the book. Ezekiel 20 performs an important connecting function in the first half of the book. Verse 32 provides the hinge of Ezekiel 20, which itself is a microcosm of the whole book. There are significant thematic connections between Ezekiel 20:32 and Ezekiel 33, which chapter performs a hinge function for the whole book. Finally, Ezekiel 20:32 provides an interpretive grid for significant aspects of the book of Ezekiel, including the juxtaposition of Ezekiel 1-24 and 25-32, the structure of Ezekiel 25-32, and the sequence of visions of the glory of the Lord in Ezekiel 1-3, 8-11 and 40-48.