

AN OLD TESTAMENT PERSPECTIVE ON IMAGINING IN A  
CHANGING SOCIETY: EZEKIEL AS CASE STUDY

by

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## Summary

The rapid changes in society today have caused many a leader in different environments to admit that they feel overwhelmed by, and inadequate to face the reality that this brings along. Our society is, according to many, in a transition, or as Roxburgh (2010) calls it, in an “in-between time”. This “in-between time” can be labelled as post-modern, post-colonial, post-democratic, or whatever language seems fitting; the fact of the matter is that studies are starting to show that leaders are struggling to lead in this changing landscape. This has also become particularly true in church leadership. This issue has been visited by many practical theologians of late. What has not been done yet was to visit this problem from an Old Testament perspective and to see if the Old Testament can contribute to this issue.

In this study the Old Testament prophetic book of Ezekiel is taken as case study to see if it can shed any light on the matter. Ezekiel as prophet needs to speak to an audience that is also in rapidly changing circumstances. The lives of most Judeans changed with the first Babylonian exile of 597 BCE and got worse with the final exile in 586 BCE that also included the fall of Jerusalem. Suddenly the “known” became “unknown” and the familiar surroundings and lifestyle of Judea were substituted by the unfamiliar surroundings of Babylon and life as exiles. In these times people look to their prophets and their leaders to make sense of the reality and to offer some hope for the future. Ezekiel responds to this with communication. His communication criticises and energises. His communication seems vivid and metaphorically loaded and in the end

stirs up imagination. This imagination gives clarity and hope for the future.

What this study therefore attempts to do is to look for the process of this communication. It tries to find the different stages that Ezekiel goes through in his communication process. Out of these stages or steps it then builds a process of communication that is suggested as a possible Old Testament perspective on a modern-day problem. In this endeavour it proposes to build a bridge between practical issues of church life, leadership in the church and Biblical Studies.

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## Chapter 1 Overview of Study

### 1.1 Introduction

It was the singer/songwriter Bob Dylan who noted that “The times they are a-changing” in his well-known 1963 song. In the new millennium this has become even truer. Change has become the only unchangeable! The fact is that today, more than ever, the pace of change has picked up. We, the modern-day people, are sometimes struggling to cope with all the changes. The so-called calm waters of my youth and the landscape of my own country (South Africa) have dramatically changed politically and socially over the last twenty years. Being on the receiving end of many changes leaves you sometimes puzzled and confused amidst it all. “Then you’ll better start swimming or sink like a stone” is the practical advice of Dylan in his song about change. This sentiment is echoed by Leonard Sweet (1999:18) in his book *Soulsunami* where he compares the changes that have hit our “Dick and Jane childhoods of the 1960s and 1970s” to a huge tidal wave, sweeping away everything that is comfortable and known to us. Usually in these times people look to their leaders and their poets to give them hope for the future.

The Old Testament book of Ezekiel also pivots on dramatic changes in the life of Israel as a people. These changes were set and brought about by the reality of the Babylonian exile (cf. McKeating 1993:11). It ties up with the books of Isaiah and Jeremiah and shares in their “(a) focus on this crisis, (b) referring the crisis to the defining reality of YHWH and (c) construing the crisis as one of YHWH’s judgments that produces the crisis and YHWH’s fidelity that makes possible a hope for the future of Israel beyond exile” (Brueggemann 2003:191). The finality of the Babylonian exile realized in 587 BCE when Jerusalem fell and the temple was destroyed. This completed a time of Babylonian expansionism and left many Judeans destroyed and hopeless. It was in these times that they also looked to



their prophets and poets to give them reasons for their situation and hope for the future. This is what Brueggemann (1985:2) refers to as “prophetic imagination”: Images and imaginations of the future that inspire and give hope in spite of harsh realities.

Ezekiel makes reference to the events of 587 BCE:

In the twelfth year of our exile, in the tenth month on the fifth day, a man who had escaped from Jerusalem came to me and said, “The city has fallen!” (33:21)<sup>1</sup>

This text (as will be explained later) will be regarded as an important “pivoting point” in the communication of the Ezekiel text. Up to this point the oracles of Ezekiel appear to have been oracles of judgment against the people of Israel and other nations. From this “pivoting point” onwards, there seem to be definite changes in Ezekiel’s communication. These changes and process of communication will be studied in later chapters.

Along these lines the book is widely divided into two big units. The first one is chapters 1-24 and is concerned with the impending judgment upon Jerusalem and the second unit, chapters 25-48 is concerned with the anticipated restoration of Israel (Brueggemann 2003:192). Up to the fall of Jerusalem the text appears to warn the people of YHWH and give reasons for the calamity that is busy unfolding. The tenor of the communication is judgmental and harsh. After 587 BCE the text is trying to give hope for the future (cf. Brueggemann 1985:3-7; Dillard & Longman III 1995:316). The plausibility of this changed communication, the process it goes through, and the effect it had will be some of the key areas this study will be focusing on.

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<sup>1</sup> All English Bible references are from the 1986 *New International Version* except when indicated otherwise.

## **1.2 The actuality and relevance of the proposed study**

What would the relevance of this study be? Let me start with a personal observation. For twenty years I have been a full-time pastor in a Pentecostal church denomination in South Africa. It has been my observation that the excellent contributions that scholars make to the science of Old Testament Biblical Studies seldom make it to the practical level of the pastor in the congregation. This causes many pastors to ignore a wide spectrum of Old Testament texts labelling them as “irrelevant to their situation”, or “irrelevant for preaching and teaching”. Biblical Studies skilfully takes the scholar to a better understanding of the text, but then fails to take the text to the many communicating functions in the church environment. These functions are: preaching, teaching in smaller groups, leading change and vision casting as integral parts of leadership in the local church. If Biblical texts are rhetorical units that persuade, this persuasion needs to find its way to the modern-day listener as well. This is the reason why Biblical Studies is being taught at post-graduate level to aspiring ministers/pastors. These young students want to learn how to use the Bible responsibly but also relevantly. The gap between the end-result of the researcher and the relevant material that a communicator in a church environment could use, sometimes feels like a bridge too far to cross. Watson (2002:132-139) when discussing some of the calls for a “change in the commentary (Bible commentaries) genre”, notes that there is an unnecessary division between “academic” and “popular”. Biblical Criticism generally shies away from Theology and the role of faith. This leaves little room for hermeneutical, not to mention practical uses. Let me elaborate a little more. Ezekiel for example is rarely (apart from one or two texts) used for communicating perceived truths or to inspire the church to dream of a future. It is as if the preacher cannot find his/her way through all the critical work that has been done on the book. The theological and even practical aspects of the book

never come to the fore. Another aspect that has not received enough attention is whether these texts can shed light on the important role that pastors have to play nowadays: the role as a leader and a change agent. A key question that this study will ask is:

**Can a text like Ezekiel provide a perspective on the crucial function of leader and change agent that a church leader must play?**

This question will be the focus of this study as it sets out to find a communication process in the texts of Ezekiel that can enhance communication in today's leadership environment.

As mentioned above, the Old Testament and specifically a book like Ezekiel have been ignored and deemed irrelevant for preaching and leadership<sup>2</sup> guidance. The church in general is more likely to use the New Testament when communicating their beliefs and values. When in crisis, believers and communicators are more likely to turn to the New Testament for inspiration. Many communicators read and interpret the Old Testament through their understanding of the New Testament. For them, the Old Testament only supplies the footnotes to the New Testament. Snyman (2002:126-160) dealt with this very problem. According to him (:127) the Old Testament in some communication gets diluted to being relevant only as far as it refers to the Messiah. This Christological interpretation of the Old Testament introduces a whole new discussion about whether the "messianic texts" of the Old Testament are indeed relevant to the coming of Jesus Christ. This however is not relevant to this study.

When trying to seek an Old Testament perspective to modern-day situations (as this study will attempt), I find Goldingay's plea very persuasive when he says:

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<sup>2</sup> Wessels (2003) brought the issue of leadership into dialogue with the Old Testament. A later chapter will give more attention to this.

In principle I am not interested in the Old Testament as a merely theoretical discipline. I am interested in it because I have found that the Old Testament has a capacity to speak with illumination and power to the lives of communities and individuals. Yet I also believe it has been ignored and/or emasculated and I want to see it let loose in the world of theology, in the church and in the world (2003:18).

Old Testament studies and in particular recent scholarship have, according to Brueggemann (2006:29-40), become “intensely critical, but thin on interpretation”.<sup>3</sup>

This study will thoroughly do the critical “groundwork” but will attempt to interpret the text of Ezekiel and in particular the communication process resulting from the text. This response of Ezekiel, as will be shown, does leave clues to finding an Old Testament perspective on a modern-day problem.

### **1.3 Research question**

In the light of the previous discussion it is necessary at this point to formulate a research question.

The research question of this study will then be the following:

**Can the imaginative response of Ezekiel’s communication supply an Old Testament perspective that is relevant to the challenges<sup>4</sup> of modern-day realities?**

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<sup>3</sup> Brueggemann makes this observation when he discusses three commentaries that have appeared in the same year (1986) on the prophetic book of Jeremiah. They were by Carroll, RP, McKane, W and Holladay, WL.

Further questions that will arise would be:

**How does Ezekiel in his communication go about showing them how to face their devastating reality? Does the communication change to imagine something new? Can this leave clues (even create a process) on how to imagine in a changing modern-day reality? Can his approach be relevant for leaders in the church to communicate, edify and imagine anew?**

The aims and objectives while studying the abovementioned questions can be summarized as follows:

- Looking at Ezekiel's response to his changing circumstances.
- Studying if/how the communicative rhetoric in the book of Ezekiel has changed in response to the changing circumstances.
- How it helped the exiles to accept the realities of their devastated homeland and their new living conditions as exiles in a foreign country.
- Establishing the methodology/model on how the prophet Ezekiel and the book in its final form use phrases, sign-acts and metaphors to imagine a "new reality".
- Creating a model by which communicators today can imagine and communicate in our "changing modern-day reality".

Stringing words together to formulate questions and objectives for study can be very misleading when it is not clear what is intended with certain words. This is especially true when one is sensitive to the fact that different words can have different meanings depending on one's own context. The subsection on "thematic

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<sup>4</sup> These challenges will be elaborated on shortly.

keywords” (1.6) will clarify this. The following subsection will discuss the methodology that would be employed when studying the demarcated (1.5) texts of Ezekiel and on how this study will go about to suggest a model for communicating.

## 1.4 Methodology

To stay true to the theme of study, the approach of the study has to deal with the historical situation in which the prophet of Ezekiel communicates. I am well aware that the words, “rhetoric” and “rhetorical communication” will appear in some of the paragraphs of this study, but it is important to note that this study will not be a rhetorical enquiry that is done strictly along the lines of *Rhetorical Criticism*, but it will lean strongly on some insights from *Rhetorical Criticism*.

*Rhetorical Criticism* as part of Biblical Criticism has its origins in the *Literary Criticism* and more precisely *Form Criticism*. It is also generally accepted that this methodology was adopted by the Old Testament scholar James Muilenburg<sup>5</sup> in 1968 to denote a methodological approach to scripture to supplement that of *Form Criticism*. Seeing a text as rhetorical in its nature firstly looked at the art of composing the text with the use of rhetorical mechanisms such as parallelism, chiasmus, inclusio, and metaphors, but in time it grew and also added the art of persuasion that the text might have. In the former the intent of the author is in focus; in the latter, the response of the audience becomes central (cf. Fox 1980: 1-4; Soulen & Soulen 2001:322-324; Tate 2006:164-165).

The following summary of Fox (1980:4) gets close to the crux of rhetorical criticism:

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<sup>5</sup> This was proposed by Muilenburg in a paper that was published in 1969 “Form Criticism and Beyond.” *JBL* 88 (March 1969):1-18.

The task of rhetorical criticism is to examine and evaluate the interactions among three constituents of the rhetorical transaction that takes place between rhetor and audience: strategies<sup>6</sup>, situations<sup>7</sup> and effects<sup>8</sup> (effects potential as well as real, ideal as well as actual, long range as well as immediate).

It is in this paragraph that the methodology of this study finds its closeness to rhetorical criticism. There is (1) a real historical situation to which the prophet must strategically respond with (2) his communication. This communication is filled with metaphors that (3) borrow from, but also shape the audience's theology that produces an effect on their immediate perception of reality and their future hope. After this is established this study will add a final process. It will try to suggest a communication model from Ezekiel's response that can be followed to communicate in uncertain transitions in history: Transitions like those that communicators and leaders find themselves in today.

This study's methodology, though not rhetorical in the conventional sense of the word, will use the abovementioned processes. Firstly it will be **historical** in its nature. It will argue the historical situation (reality) of the audience and the communicator of the specific texts. There has to be a historical consciousness when one approaches a text. Texts are influenced by a cultural and historical context. In most cases a prophet's communication is a response to these contexts. One cannot deny the influence of the *Historical Critical* method of Biblical interpretation in this part of the process. The *Historical Critical* method of

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<sup>6</sup> The strategies would be, as explained earlier, the different rhetorical mechanisms such as parallelism, chiasmus, inclusio, and metaphors that the rhetor uses to persuade.

<sup>7</sup> The situation would refer to the actual situation that the rhetor and the audience find them in. It will be argued in this study that Ezekiel encounters three somewhat different rhetorical situations (one while Jerusalem was still standing and only a few people were exiled, the other, after the city has fallen and the full blown exile began and finally when the exiles returned home) and that he needed to change his rhetoric to be persuasive.

<sup>8</sup> The effects in the case of Ezekiel will be studied. His imagining of a future is indeed relevant to this study, but this study will continue further to enquire about the relevance of this imagining to a current reality.

Biblical interpretation seeks to salvage the original text in its original setting (*Sitz im Leben*). It tries to focus on the history of the text and its originating circumstances. The three criticisms that are associated with this are *Source Criticism, Form Criticism, and Redaction Criticism* (cf. Soulen & Soulen 2001:79-80; Tate 2006:166). I will give attention to what some researchers suggested concerning the sources and redaction processes of Ezekiel, but will focus more on the historical setting of the text as a backdrop to the communication found in the texts. Renz (1999:27-55) devoted a whole chapter to the historical context of the book of Ezekiel before he looked at the rhetorical function of the book. He notes (:27) that the establishment of the rhetorical contexts (historical setting) is what distinguishes a rhetorical approach from literary approaches of Biblical Interpretation. Ezekiel is a book filled with dates and makes a historical assumption possible. Clarity on the situation in which the prophet receives his communication as well as of the situation of his audience is crucial. The Babylonian exile will be suggested as the historical situation.

Secondly ***the communication*** (rhetorical response) of Ezekiel will be studied. Texts will be demarcated for this purpose and the selection of these texts will be explained (1.5) later in the chapter. Tate (2006:323) makes the observation that Rhetorical Criticism shares two assumptions: “that language is adequate, if imperfect; to communicate human intentions and a communicative act includes an intentional use of language, a response and a rhetorical situation”. It is this “intentional use of language” of Ezekiel that will be the result of the second part of the methodology process. It would entail reading through the demarcated texts verse by verse to do an exegetical explanation of the communication. With the historical context as background it will look at how the prophet communicates. Phrases, images and metaphors employed by Ezekiel will be identified and discussed and be summarized at the end of each text. Many of the metaphors that the prophet uses are indeed loaded with ideology, in particular gender ideology. Feminist Criticism, although it cannot be diluted to a single



methodology, critically responds to the gender verification of women and try to expose the patriarchal structures and indeed textures that are part and parcel of prophetic metaphor<sup>9</sup>. Although I am respectfully aware of these responses, the aim of this second part of the methodological process will be not to critique the metaphor that the prophet employs but to try and understand what its rhetorical (communicative) function is.

Thirdly this study will determine how this communication **shaped the theology** of the audience. What is meant with “theology”? In general “theology” is understood as “speech about God” (Tate 2006:372) or speech on “the nature of God and God’s relationship with humanity and the rest of creation” (Brown 2007:30). The theological conclusions at the end of each part of Ezekiel’s communication will indeed be concerning the nature of YHWH and his actions and his relationship to his people. Soulen and Soulen (2001:192-193) note that “theological interpretation” challenges Historical Critical methods in the fact that it tries to free the text from its history and to allow it to speak for itself in whatever community. This is not the route that this study wants to take. Rather an understanding of how the communication shaped the perceptions of the audience is anticipated: how they saw themselves in relationship to their covenantal partner (YHWH) and what they expect their future to be like. These imaginations of their future have to be rooted theologically in the way they understood their relationship with YHWH is to be.

The final process will look for a **model or a communication process** that the prophet used to respond to his historical situation and how it could supply an Old

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<sup>9</sup> Van Dijk-Hemmes (1993) wrote an article on the “The Metaphorization of Woman in Prophetic Speech: An Analysis of Ezekiel 23.” Her work along with others like Magdelene (1995), O’Brien (2002 & 2008) and Gordon and Washington (1995) all responded critically to the female metaphors that the prophets use to depict the relationship between YHWH and his people. Also a Reader entitled, *The Feminist Companion to the Latter Prophets*, edited by Brenner (1995) contains a huge amount of articles by different contributors dedicated to this problem.

Testament perspective on our modern-day situation<sup>10</sup>. This process will not suggest sermons on Ezekiel, but rather: What can be learned from this in order to create a model for communicators to communicate new “imaginings” in current (new) realities?

In the end the following question will be answered: *Can the communication process of an ancient text like Ezekiel suggest a way to communicate relevantly in a current day reality?*

### **1.5 Demarcation of the texts to be studied**

Ezekiel consisting of forty-eight chapters cannot be studied as a whole and the parameters for a study like this do not allow for such a quantity of exegesis. This forces me to demarcate certain sections to draw the conclusions that may be relevant for this study. Before this is motivated a general overview of how the book of Ezekiel is divided is given.

Joseph Blenkinsopp (1990) divides the book of Ezekiel into seven parts:

- Part One:  
Ezekiel 1-3 “Ezekiel’s prophetic call”.
- Part Two:  
Ezekiel 4-24 “The fall of the House of Judah”.
- Part Three:  
Ezekiel 25-32 “Judgment on the Nations”.
- Part Four:  
Ezekiel 33 “The fall of Jerusalem”.
- Part Five:  
Ezekiel 34-37 “Resurrection and Restoration”.

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<sup>10</sup> This modern-day situation will be described in depth in paragraph 1.6.2.

- Part Six:  
Ezekiel 38-39 “Gog of the Land of Magog”.
- Part Seven:  
Ezekiel 40-48 “Vision of the New Temple and Commonwealth”.

There are those that suggest a chronological division to the book: The chronological division of Ezekiel uses the dates in the book to divide the book into its different parts. Thirteen dates are given which with few exceptions follow a chronological sequence (cf. Blenkinsopp 1990:4; le Roux 1987:175-176 and Mulenbunrg 1962:568). Most scholars however stick to a three-part division of the book, although some like Renz (1999)<sup>11</sup> choose to emphasize different cycles in the different parts. These cycles are distinctive through the use of certain catchphrases. Dillard and Longman III (1994:320-321) suggest an uncomplicated three-part division of the book:

- Part One:  
Ezekiel 1-24 “Judgment on Judah and Jerusalem”.
- Part Two:  
Ezekiel 25-32 “Oracles against Foreign Nations”.
- Part Three:  
Ezekiel 33-48 “Blessing for Judah and Jerusalem”.

The seven-part division of Blenkinsopp is a workable option because despite its detail, it leaves room for selection. His divisions of chapters 4-24 are all texts that deal with YHWH’s people and the judgment that is upon them, while the division of chapter 34-37 isolates the chapters of hope for the people of YHWH in a smaller section. This textual division of Blenkinsopp enables a smaller selection of texts (three from each division) all pertaining to the people of Judah. This

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<sup>11</sup> Thomas Renz (1999) in *The Rhetorical Function of the Book of Ezekiel* made valuable contributions on the rhetoric of Ezekiel and will be studied later.

selection is made necessary due to the many chapters in the book. As was mentioned above a chapter-by-chapter study of Ezekiel would be too much to fit into the parameters suggested for a study like this. Secondly, it allows extracting portions relevant to the themes suggested in the title of this study: These themes are *“rhetoric”*, *“metaphor”* and *“imagining in a changing society”*.

The following texts will then be studied and will be addressed in two separate chapters (chapters 4 and 5). The first three are grouped together and are all chapters that address the audience before the final fall of Jerusalem. I will in future refer to them as “judgment texts” due to their judgmental tenor:

- Ezekiel 6 and 7 are the introductory chapters of Ezekiel’s criticizing rhetoric. After establishing his credentials in Ezekiel 1-3 and establishing an overview of his whole message in Ezekiel 4 and 5 the prophet now builds his case against Judah to show the situation of the exiles because of their own doing (cf. Bowen 2010:30). This therefore sets the tone for the rest of the oracles to follow.
- Both Ezekiel 6 and 7 start with the “word formula” (“and the word of the Lord came to me”) and that will be crucial to the aims and objectives of this study.
- Both Ezekiel 6 and 7 end with the “recognition formula” (“then you will know”). This also aids the study in showing the importance of phrases and formulas in the communication process of Ezekiel.
- Ezekiel 6 and 7 are rich in metaphorical communication. As this study progresses, the use of metaphor will be established as a crucial part of the prophet’s communication.
- These two chapters use “the mountains” and “the land” as collective entities to speak of Israel as a whole. These metaphors play a role in the selection of the “texts of hope” where these oracles and their curses are reversed in chapters 34-36 (cf. Joyce 2007:91).

- Ezekiel 16 narrates with the use of a powerful metaphor the history of Israel. This historical narrative is filled with accounts of infidelity and is repeated in chapters 20 and 22, but the use of the “orphan who is made queen and then becomes a harlot” is the most powerful one that is employed by Ezekiel. It arrests the imagination and is therefore crucial for the aims of this study. The account of Ezekiel 16 is by far the most elaborate account and takes up sixty-three verses.
- Chapter 16 also starts with the “word formula” that further warrants its selection.
- These three chapters deal with oracles directed to “the land”, “the mountains” and “Jerusalem”. All three of these images function as collective entities to which the prophet directs his communication. In all three chapters the prophet uses different metaphors to warn the people of their situation and the consequences of their actions. This section is filled with imagery that strengthens the rhetorical communication, but also alludes to the tone of the rhetoric that is part of the pre-exilic texts<sup>12</sup> in Ezekiel. The tone of these chapters is indeed judgmental and functions as an explanation for the harsh reality in which the exiles find themselves.

#### Texts post the fall of Jerusalem: Imaginations of hope:

- Ezekiel 34, 36:16-38 and 37: These three chapters contain oracles that seem to be delivered after the news of the fall of Jerusalem that reaches Ezekiel in 33:21. The tenor is different and contains examples of the change of rhetorical communication in the Ezekiel text to answer the research question(s) of this study.
- No selections are made from chapters 40-48 because they are part of another sub-section and as will be seen in the next chapter, “scholarly are

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<sup>12</sup> The issue of pre-exilic and exilic texts in Ezekiel is part of the problematic nature of the book and has been disputed by different scholars in different eras of Ezekiel Criticism. This will be looked at in Chapter 2.

a bit polarized on the question of authorship of Ezekiel 40-48” (Joyce 2007:218). Due to the fact that a communication process will be derived from Ezekiel’s communication the selection must be from sections where there is more agreement about Ezekiel’s authorship.

- All three of the sections that were chosen start with the “word formula” and will be used later in this study.
- The many images and metaphors that the previous chapters employed to strengthen the theme of judgment are now used to show how YHWH will come to their rescue. They are: “mountains”, “the land”, “flock” and “sheep” and “shepherd”, and “covenant”.
- Finally one cannot study the use of metaphor and imagination in Ezekiel’s communication without examining his most powerful and well-known metaphor in chapter 37: The vision of the dry bones.

Selecting certain texts and demarcating portions for study comes with its limitations, but these rhetorical units can go a long way in suggesting “*an Old Testament perspective on imagining in a changing society*”.

## **1.6 Clarifying thematic words of the study**

Some words may have different meanings in different contexts. This makes it necessary to define and clarify some thematic keywords appearing in the theme of this study and in some of the questions posed.

### **1.6.1 “communication” and “rhetoric”**

In order to refrain from using the terms “communication” and “rhetoric” too loosely, it is necessary to define what this study understands them to be.

“Communication” would be the prophet’s verbal response when he responded to his realities. It refers to the words and images that his audience receives (in most cases audible, but in our case in text format) from him. Communication will also be used to refer to the function of leaders and preachers that communicate their message inside their reality to their modern-day audience. The word “rhetoric” may at times almost function as a synonym for the word “communication”. According to most dictionaries *rhetoric* the noun means *the art of persuasive or impressive speaking or writing*<sup>13</sup>, or *the art of using language in an impressive way, especially to influence people in a specific way*<sup>14</sup>. The approach that will be taken in this study is to understand rhetoric in a narrower sense as “the art of persuasion” rather than “the art of speech and composition” (cf. Renz 1999:1).

### 1.6.2 “changing modern-day reality”<sup>15</sup>

This “changing modern-day reality” is probably the one phrase that will need more explanation. The text of Ezekiel is rooted in a changing society. It, as will be argued later, addresses the people going into exile and later those in exile, but it gets re-interpreted by those coming out of exile back to their homeland. One can argue that change is constant in the lives of the different audiences of the Ezekiel text.

It is widely accepted that we, today, are in a changing society. Being a citizen of a country like South Africa one needs to deal with change almost on a daily basis. The government has changed (April 1994) and with that a lot of things

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<sup>13</sup> 1976 *The Concise Oxford Dictionary*. p.965.

<sup>14</sup> 1997 *Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary*. P.1008.

<sup>15</sup> This is not a study in post-modernism and I will discuss this subject briefly only to establish the “modern-day reality” that is relevant to this study’s attempt to read and imagine with the text of Ezekiel in this reality. Post-modernism has become a popular theme for study in many of the practical theology disciplines. Researches try to define some of the trends that leaders in the ever-changing landscape of church leadership encounter. It is also noted that “modern” and “post-modern” can be used to describe many different streams in different fields for example art, criticism and music.

have changed for the previously advantaged as well as the disadvantaged. Many of the strict rules concerning exposure to media have changed and with that an influx of new ideas and new ways of thinking entered our “once fenced-in” country. Add to this the fact that the internet has reduced the world to a global village and you have enough reason to label South Africa as a changing society. It is in this society that the church, in its hermeneutical- and communicating-function, is struggling. Leaders (church leaders) are challenged by new realities and need to respond by leading their people through this uncharted territory.

The south (of Africa) and South Africa in particular has a co-existing of three worldviews: pre-modernism, modernism and post-modernism (cf. Niemand 2007:25 and Weideman 2009:41). A general statement like this needs further discussion and therefore this section will be a longer discussion. First a few general observations:

- It is necessary to note that the pre-modernistic worldview is only visible in small sectors of our South African society. This will become apparent when the meanings of these worldviews are discussed below.
- The general movement of societies is an evolutionary one that moves from pre-modernism, to modernism on to post-modernism.
- The latest move from modernism to post-modernism is not a sudden move. It is rather a flow from the one to the other.
- Each new emerging worldview brings with it new ideas and technology, but also unique challenges.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> This unique challenge was the theme for a study that was done by HJ Weideman in 2009. The study was done phenomenologically and interviewed different church leaders in South Africa to determine the challenges that were posed by what he called the “huidige tydvak” (current time frame) in South Africa. I assume that the “huidige tydvak” is what the research question of this study refers to as a “modern-day reality”.



### **1.6.2.1 Pre-modern**

*Pre-modern* is defined as a worldview where most things that are out of our control are seen as sacred. The distinction between gods and humankind is very definite. The things that cannot be explained (due to lack of science) are ascribed to gods or the sacred. This would be the worldview that probably dominated the Dark-middle-ages before the Renaissance and the Industrial Revolution (cf. Geysler 2003:34; Weideman 2009:40). Even the universe was seen as three layers containing the heavens where the gods stayed, earth where humans dwelt, but also an underworld with creatures and spirits. In this worldview the good and the bad things that happen to you can be translated to blessings or curses from the gods. In a pre-modern worldview, tradition is seen as the authoritative power when it comes to knowledge, with no room for critical self-examination (cf. Craffert 2002:72).

### **1.6.2.2 Modernism**

*Modernism* would be the other existing worldview in South Africa. In trying to put a date to some of these transitioning worldviews Niemandt (2007:16) ascribes the time(s) before the Renaissance as pre-modern and from the 1500s onwards as the dawning of a new worldview. This transition was slow, but was helped on by thinkers such as Rene Descartes (1569-1650) with his slogan: “I think therefore I am”, the rise of humanism and the rapid development of science and technology. Modernism can also be called *The Age of Reason* where everything (including religion) was made more accessible through reason and comprehension. The establishment of schools of theology that was started by John Calvin following the Reformation is also evidence of this. Modernism builds on the assumption that everything in this world can be known, calculated and be fully described by scientific methodology. This lead to “reality” being reduced only

to what can be known, analytically described and scientifically explained (cf. Craffert 2002:73; Niemandt 2007:16-17).

In modernism all phenomena can be explained with science and reason. In this context science and reason means things/matters are controllable, verifiable and repeatable in a controlled environment. Along this line of thinking, politics, ethics, philosophy and also theology have become different branches of scientific research. In short all realities can be reduced to what can be observed by our senses (cf. Geysers 2003:37; McLarren 2000:1; Weideman 2009:42)

Niemandt (2007:16-19) has identified certain features of modernism:

- Modernism sets out to *control and to verify* everything. This inevitably leads to knowledge being power and the one with the most knowledge is the leader in his field. Everything, including the mysterious and people, could be controlled.
- Modernism celebrates *analytical thinking* and the ability to break down big problems into smaller ones that can be resolved through methodology. To do this, things (including living things) were dissected to arrive at a better understanding of its mechanics.
- Mechanical and industrial advancements lead to the belief that machines can be built to do almost everything. This also led to a *mechanical way of thinking*. Even religion and theology were organized into mechanical prayers and systematic theology.
- The rights and power of the individual lead to *individualism*. The individual's rights, happiness and freedom have become the driving forces behind products and planning.

Modernism, powerful as it may have seemed, had to make way for a new worldview at the turn of the millennium. This process of moving from

predominantly modern society to a post-modern society is according to Sweet (1999:17) “a 40-year transition from the age of information to a Bionomic Age that will begin no later than 2020”.

With hindsight it was easy to discuss the previous worldviews. History has left us many clues from which to draw our conclusions. It is this “next worldview” and “new age” that leaves many futuristic leaders and writers with uncertainty. There are however “sprouts” that point to this “post-modern worldview” and I will attempt to discuss this worldview below.

### **1.6.2.3 Post-modernism**

The word “post-modern” is problematic because it can be used to describe different things. Music, architecture, art as well as many other phenomena, have been described as post-modern, leaving the word post-modern open to different understandings. According to Sweet (1999:39)

...the term post-modern was first used in the 1870s by the British artist Johan Watkins Chapman. The next instance was in 1917 by Rudolf Pannwitz. Its dominant usage in the 1970s and the '80s was a negative association with deconstruction and dialectics, with a more positive connotation in the '90s coming with “ecological post-modernism,” “constructive post-modernism,” “restructive post-modernism,” etc.

The term “post-modern” appeared to be used to describe a new era/trend/mindset or reality that grew out of the previous that at that stage had been normative. It is then not far-fetched for writers, philosophers and leaders to speak of the new emerging worldview as “post-modern”: An era/trend or

worldview that grew out of the previous “modern” one. Writers alike are comfortable using the term “post-modern” when they try to put thoughts and words to what they feel is a new worldview. A distinction needs to be made between “post-modernism” and “post-modern”. Researching some of the books and papers written on this subject, it appears that some writers become confused with the two terms. Niemandt (2007:25, 26) use the word post-modern and post-modernism as the same word to describe the current reality and changing worldview. I would call the emerging worldview post-modern, but will use the word post-modernism when I speak about the attempts made by researchers and writers to understand and write about this. From time to time there is a definite shift in history. This happens over time and is much more easily identifiable in hindsight when the process is completed. It is the opinion of many observers that we are in such a time, a time when a new worldview is emerging. This emerging worldview has become our “modern reality” (Weideman 2009:39-43) and it is this “modern-day reality” to which this study will often refer.

Some features of this “new reality”:

- In this new reality there is always more to be said about any subject or situation, the canny observer never comes to a final conclusion. It questions most things.
- It is “green”. Being a post-mechanical worldview with machines, this new reality focuses on the environment and ecosystems, as well as the preservation of the earth. Everything needs to be recycled in order to preserve the limited natural resources we have. Consumerism is challenged and a greater social consciousness is apparent.
- It can also be described as predominantly post-organizational. The hierarchical structures that dominated a modern society have made way for networks, alliances and “flat” (as opposed to “top down”) leadership and management structures. In this management environment young and old have equal say.

- Although still humanistic, like the modern era, this new worldview and current reality emphasize friendships and community. The individual finds meaning as part of a group.
- Learning and teaching are changing from the traditional monologue of the teacher to one that is EPIC, EPIC being an acronym for Experience, Participation, Interaction and Community.

(cf. Niemandt 2007:20-24; Sweet 1999:186-239 and Sweet 2007:15-44).

In trying to describe the current affairs in our society, researchers use the metaphor of a perfect storm that has hit our society (cf. Joubert 2007:15). This storm is threefold: post-modern, post-Christian and post-round. *Post-modern* has been dealt with above. The coming of a *post-Christian* society has almost completed its advent in Europe. In Brussels 50% of all babies born are Muslim and in England there are more practicing Muslims than Anglicans. In the United States of America (US) the Christian landscape is also changing fast. Sweet (1999:46-47) notes that, “the percentage of ‘unchurched’ people in the South is nearly identical to that in the East and Midwest (41%, 45% and 43% respectively).” Those being Christian and attending church have dropped from 40% to 20%. This post-Christian society has in some instances changed to an “anti-Christian” society, where many people are negative towards the church and Christianity, this adding to the relevance of this study that tries to propose “an Old Testament perspective on imagining in a changing society”.

Our world being *post-round* would be the third aspect of this so-called “perfect storm”. Post-round would refer to our world becoming “flat” again. Globalization has turned the world into a global village where everyone’s actions impact everyone and where we can be anywhere at anytime with the help of satellite television, the internet and webcams. The cellular telephone has become a diary, a personal computer, a modem, an internet browser, a camera (some delivering high definition videos) and yes, a phone as well! Every person’s move can be

tracked and followed by everyone on social internet applications such as *Twitter* and *Facebook*! “The times they are a-changing”.

It is in these times that leaders and in particular church leaders struggle to lead and to communicate change.

### **1.6.3 “leaders”**

The subject of leadership is vast and may easily be one of the most observed and least understood disciplines and therefore this paragraph will only try to establish the meaning of “leaders” as understood for this study.

“Leaders in the church” would predominantly be the pastors (many words exist for this function) that have the responsibility to interpret and communicate the Biblical perspective on relevant matters on a regular basis. It can also be teachers of Sunday school and leaders of different ministries in the church, but mostly those leaders who have been trained in Hermeneutics and need to speak from the Bible in this modern-day reality. In the study of Weideman (2009) it was particularly these leaders that admitted that they found the challenges of the “new modern-day reality” daunting.

### **1.6.4 “imagination”**

In response to a changing society people must adapt and find new ways of seeing the reality and new ways to conduct themselves in this reality. As mentioned earlier, it is usually the prophets and the poets that help people to face this new reality. According to Brueggemann (1985:1-3) this is done by helping the people to imagine a hopeful future. In his words:

These poets not only discerned the new actions of God that others did not discern, but they wrought the new actions of God by the power of their imagination, their tongues, their words. New poetic imaginations evoked new realities in the community (:2).

Understandings of their current reality and “new imaginings” are evoked by Ezekiel (as will be shown in chapters 4 and 5) in a community that faces a new reality and needed hope for their future.

A whole chapter (6) will be dedicated to imagination, but this study in general will look at how the prophet Ezekiel leveraged the imaginations of his people with the help of metaphors and images and how communicators can learn from Ezekiel’s process.

### **1.6.5 “metaphors”**

In chapter 6 a more thorough excursion will explain the importance and relevance of metaphors in capturing imagination. Biblical metaphor in particular will be explained and dealt with. This study sees metaphors as the images (known and sometimes new) that the prophets used in their communication process to engage their audience and to aid the aim of their message. These metaphors are usually evocative and appeal to the imagination of the listeners or readers.

## 1.7 Chapters anticipated

In order to support logical discourse the study will proceed as follows:

*Chapter 2* will study the history of research done on Ezekiel. The chapter will be divided into three parts. The first part will look at prophetic research in general. The second part will discuss research prior to 1950 and the third (which would be more thorough) will look at the 1950s to the present day.

Ezekiel as a unit and the historical situation will be the focus of *chapter 3*. This will naturally go into some of the problematic issues of the book, touching on the date(s), the composition, the prophet himself and the overall consensus of the theology of the book. Important observations will be made on the historical setting of the book that is crucial to the methodology of the study.

In *chapter 4* the material selected as pre-exilic (before the fall of Jerusalem 586 BCE) and pre-Ezekiel 33:21 (the proposed pivoting point) will be studied. The exegesis of each section will have an introduction, then a verse-by-verse explanation of the text, on which conclusions in the form of a summary would follow.

*Chapter 5* will do the same as chapter four, but will look at the texts that followed after the fall of Jerusalem and the news of this (Ezekiel 33:21). The texts that will be studied in these two chapters have been selected in paragraph 1.5.

In *chapter 6*, the phenomenon of Imagination will be studied. Because “imagination” and “imagining” form a key part of Ezekiel’s communication and the aims of this study a whole chapter will be dedicated to it. The study will start off with the general subject of imagination, then will move to the prophets and then to the Ezekiel texts. It is in this chapter that an excursion on metaphors will be undertaken.

The challenge of *chapter 7* will be to derive a model for Imagining in a changing society. An attempt will be made to suggest a process (out of Ezekiel) that can help leaders and communicators face the new realities and to imagine anew. After each step of the process, it will be compared with modern-day models to



see if it can bring perspective that is relevant to the current day challenges. This might just go a long way to cross a bridge that has up to now, seemed too “far to cross” (cf. p 5).

Summaries and conclusions will make up the bulk of *chapter 8*. It will reflect on the issues that were spelt out in this (the first) chapter. This chapter will also include critical evaluation on the shortcomings of this study and proposals for further study.

## **Chapter 2 History of Research in Ezekiel Studies**

### **2.1 Introduction**

Now that the research questions of this study, the methodology and the aims and objectives have been laid out in the introductory chapter, this chapter will attempt to give a literary overview of the relevant research that was done on the book of Ezekiel.

The goal of this chapter will be to give a broad spectrum of the research that was done on Ezekiel. The chapter will be divided into three parts. Firstly it will look at the current research on the prophets as it stands. This will place Ezekiel in context of the wider and abundant research that has been done on the prophetic literature in general. Then the history of research on Ezekiel done prior to 1950 will be looked at briefly, and finally (which would be more thorough) an examination of the research from 1950 onwards to the beginning of the twenty-first century. The works of some of the major role players will be discussed.

### **2.2 Overview on prophetic criticism**

The multitude of research and material available in the field of prophetic criticism/studies has according to Wessels (2009:205) caused most researchers to focus and specialize their efforts. They either focus on some of the so-called “bigger prophets” or they work on the smaller ones, or the “Book of Twelve” as it has become known. A general overview of prophecy is needed and prompted him to write an article on some of the (and I translate directly from the Afrikaans heading) “tendencies in prophet research”.

## 2.2.1 Socio-anthropological contributions and the work of Joseph Blenkinsopp

The last thirty years have seen the emergence of many “new” approaches in this field. These approaches were aided by the tools of other academic disciplines such as Sociology and Anthropology<sup>17</sup>. These disciplines, much like the “new literary” approaches earlier, contributed immensely to the field of prophetic criticism. Many authors contributed to this field, but it is the work of Joseph Blenkinsopp (1983) that stands out for Wessels (2009:207-210) as a decisive work on the critical history of prophecy in Israel. As Blenkinsopp (1983:14) states:

While one can find many thematic and theological studies of prophecy, there are few critical histories. And those that are available rarely attempt to cover the entire span of the biblical period. In most cases attention is concentrated exclusively on the period of “classical” prophecy, the two centuries from Amos to Second Isaiah.

These prophets do however draw from a prophetic tradition that is richly imbedded in the history of Israel and he continues (1983:14) in saying that:

To ignore or pass rapidly over these developments puts us at risk of misunderstanding some crucial aspects of prophetic activity during the much better known period of Assyrian and Babylonian hegemony.

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<sup>17</sup> It was the work of Gottwald 1985, *Hebrew Bible: A Socio-literary Introduction*, 1993, *The Hebrew Bible in its Social World and in Ours* and those of Overholt, TW 1996 *Cultural Anthropology and the Old Testament* and Wilson, RR 1980 *Sociological Approaches to the Old Testament* that built a bridge from Social and Anthropological Studies back to the Old Testament Studies.

In defining the *Object of Study*, Blenkinsopp handles four areas. The first one looks at the *problem of the Canon*. Only fifteen books in the Canon are attributed to prophets, while a headcount of all the prophets in the Old Testament reveals fifty-five of which seven were prophetesses. This stressed the fact that the canonical prophets relied heavily on a tradition that by the eighth century covered a span of three centuries. He acknowledges that much of the history that we could learn from prophets is what has come to us through Biblical texts. These texts have definitely been clouded with ideology and interpretation. An important distinction however that Blenkinsopp (1983:25) makes is between the canonical prophets and the institution of prophecy. It appears that like the priesthood, there were also prophets who were appointed. These prophets functioned under the law. The canonical prophets saw themselves as different and claimed their authority in a direct way from their experience they had with God. This authority “put them outside of acknowledged jurisdictions and introduced an element of deep conflict into the life of the community”.

The second area that Blenkinsopp addresses is the shift that the study of the prophets made towards a *more modern criticism*. For most of the time up to the end of the nineteenth century the study of the prophets was trapped in what he calls “Idealist” and “Romanticist” (1983:30). This entrapment was mainly due to the major influence the church had on how prophecy should be interpreted. Old Testament prophets were seen as foretellers who spoke about the coming of the Messiah. Needless to say, this limited the possibility of research on the prophets going forward. The work done by Sigmund Mowinckel (1884-1966), who was a student of Hermann Gunkel (the father of *Form Criticism*), moved prophetic criticism forward in the early part of the twentieth century. Mowinckel, building on the conclusions of Gunkel concerning the original form of prophetic speech, was able to distinguish the original sayings in the book of Jeremiah and the prose

Deuteronomic style sermons in the book. From here on end prophetic studies became far more critical.

Thirdly he focuses on the different words and meanings when speaking of prophets. The most general one used for prophet is נְבִיא which in the passive form means “the called one”. There are others as well such as רֹאֶה, meaning “seer” אִישׁ־הָאֱלֹהִים meaning “man of God” given to this person we know as prophet. By attending to these names he derived that a tradition was already formed and that these prophets tapped into it. These meanings also made them act as if they had a mandate from YHWH and caused them to expect people to listen to them (cf. Blenkinsopp 1983:35-38).

The fourth area and probably the most important contribution made by Blenkinsopp was on the Location (Social) of the Prophet. He built on some of the research that was done by Wilson in 1980<sup>18</sup>. The conclusion of Blenkinsopp was that the prophets could be better understood when examined by looking at the social ties that they might have had with institutions like the monarchy, or certain groups like the farmers, or movements like prophetic schools, or the “YHWH only” movement. The expectations of these groups contributed to their message (cf. Blenkinsopp 1983:39-46 & Wessels 2009:210).

A final remark on the issue of *prophetic ecstasy*<sup>19</sup> is necessary. Besides the fact that not much has been done on the subject and that the occurrence of it seems to be among peripheral groups that appear to be social outcasts, there seems to be an interesting correlation. This correlation is between the incidence of this ecstatic behaviour, and that of situations of social or political unrest like invasion or occupation by a foreign power (Blenkinsopp 1983:45). An event like the exile

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<sup>18</sup> RR Wilson’s 1980 publication of *Prophecy and Society* followed shortly on an article he published in 1979 entitled *Prophecy and Ecstasy: A Reexamination*.

<sup>19</sup> Chapter 7 will devote a portion to this phenomenon.

of 586 BCE, in my opinion, should have sparked new instances of prophetic utterance from the prophets (like Ezekiel) who had experienced this traumatic happening.

### 2.2.2 Prophetic criticism at the end of the twentieth century

Besides the social and anthropological contributions, Davies (1996)<sup>20</sup> compiled articles and essays of some of the prominent research that was done on the prophets in the last two decades of the twentieth century. In compiling the different material for the reader, the question that guided the criteria was: What seems to be unique to the study of the prophets (by 1996)? Studying this reader pointed out some of these tendencies in prophetic criticism. In reviewing the publication Dearman (1998:600) comments that it “is a good indicator of the trends in research and of the variety of approaches currently in use by scholars”, these approaches being ideology and gender (cf. Wessels 2009:211). This reader published in 1996 contained twenty-two articles that were previously published in other journals. These articles represent the scholarly conversation on the prophets up to that point and are subdivided into four parts.

Firstly, *What are prophets?* This question is raised by Auld (1996:22-42) whether the concept of prophecy and the term נְבִיאִים is a creation of a literary tradition. In other words: the plausibility of prophets not being a social phenomenon, but rather a literary one. Robert Carroll (1996:43-49) and Hugh Williamson (1996:50-56) elaborated critically on this proposal. Carroll supported it and Williamson opposed the position that was held by Auld. Overholt (1996:61-84), known for his work on the social location of the prophets, maintained that the prophets were indeed genuine prophets and that they were seen as nothing less than that by

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<sup>20</sup> Tendencies in Prophetic Criticism was compiled and edited by Davies, PR 1996 *The Prophets: A Sheffield Reader*. Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press.

the people involved in the redaction of the books and the compiling of the anthologies. Reaction to this point of view was again voiced by Carroll and Auld in 1990, but the last article in this sub-section however, has the final say. Barstad (1996:102-126) took a stance of “positive scepticism” rather than “negative scepticism”. Although he applauds the work done by Auld and Carroll he maintains that there are enough witnesses to the existence of genuine prophets in Ancient Near Eastern Society. On this matter I agree. There is enough evidence that points to these prophets as historical figures delivering their oracles in person and public. I do however feel that an “either/or” approach robs a prophetic book of its overall rhetorical function as a unit. The prophet as a rhetor and the book bearing his name are both crucial in communicating. It is the prophet’s original words amidst real circumstances that make them relevant, but it is the redaction and reinterpretation that makes the books useful in different rhetorical situations. Dearman (1998:601) is of opinion that the article of Bastad deserves more attention. This is due to the scarcity of contributions that look at the place of prophecy in not only Israel and Judah, but specifically the broader area of the Ancient Near East.

The issue of *the composition of the prophetic books* gets attention in the second section of this Sheffield reader. Though the names of certain prophetic figures are attached to certain prophetic books, the process of composition is a far more complex one. There is a broad consensus that the final book that we received went through a long process of redaction. In this regard it has appeared that even separate books like the Book of the Twelve show thematic threads and may have been overworked to form a unit (cf. Reddit 2001:47-80). Three articles that deal with Isaiah are presented. The long agreed upon “three authors” of Isaiah gets questioned in a new light as attempts are made to look for unity in the book. Clements (1996:128-146) shows the many parallels of choice of words between 1-39 and 40-55 and looks again at the role of chapters 36-39. Tomasino (1996:147-163) contributes to this debate by showing the similarities between

chapters 66-68 and the opening passage (1.1-2.4), claiming that the opening passage provides a pattern on which the last two chapters of the book has been developed. The article of Carr (1996:164-183) surveys various attempts to unify the book of Isaiah and concludes that there is not enough evidence for this. He also asks if the quest for coherency is really that important. On this I tend to agree. It is the book presented to us as a unit that becomes relevant to our situation.

The next sub-section features five articles (1988-1996) on *prophetic ideology*. Davies (1996:16) argues that “ideology” is a better word to use, when speaking about the prophets, than “theology”. The prophets were not theologians but rather communicators of an ideology. Ideology also provides us as the reader with “some kind of relativity and a critical distance” because it represents a more “human perspective in a more obvious way than theology”. To Wessels (2009:213) ideology criticism is a “critical reading on the text that asks questions on what may be behind the texts”. What is it that the author of the texts tries to achieve?

In the first article Blenkinsopp (1996:186-206) reads second Isaiah (40-55) from a social political perspective. He shows how it represents sentiments of the post exilic community. The second article by Daniel Smith (1996:207-218) argues that the letter of Jeremiah in chapter 29 is “non-violent resistance”. The third and fourth articles (Stone 1996:219-232 and Sawyer 1996:233-251) deal with gender issues. Gender and gender ideological research have become a new trend in criticism and can be seen as part of the feminist movement in criticism. This inevitably leads to the so-called “porno prophecies” that are discussed in the final article in this section by Brenner (1996:252-275). The discrimination against women and the deification of men is part and parcel of an ideology. The Biblical text is wrapped in these ideologies and “Ideology Criticism” has done a lot to explain these texts and to make it more palatable. Ideology Criticism has done a



lot to explain some of the more difficult prophetic texts. The problem of violence in prophetic texts for instance has of late been addressed by Wessels (1998:615-628) and Maré and Serfontein (2009:175-185). They tried to interpret a violent text like the book of Nahum from an ideological perspective. Although ideology is a somewhat loaded word in certain settings it is, in my opinion, an approach (Ideology Criticism) that demands more attention as prophetic studies go forward.

The final sub-section in this reader deals with the subject of *reading prophecy*. Like the name of Overholt's article (1996:102-105) echoes, prophetic texts are "Difficult to Read". In conclusion the final five articles look at the encounter between literature and reader. It is all about "newer literary approaches" and the use of newer ways of reading. Van Dijk-Hemmes (1996:278-291) makes use of an inter-textual reading of the "love song" in Hosea 2 with texts out of the Song of Songs. This according to Davies (1996:18) "suggests an interesting development within 'canon (ical) criticism': displacing texts and reading them against each other". This approach has become more popular and was also done by O'Brien (2002:138-147) on the prophetic book of Nahum. Nahum's oracle of doom to the city of Nineveh (being destroyed in 612 BCE) without showing mercy towards her (cities being female in the Hebrew) inhabitants is read inter-textually with Lamentations. The reader of Nahum is to express joy at the fate of this city and her inhabitants. Lamentations tells the story of another ravished city, this time Jerusalem. Lamentations invites the reader to feel empathy for the ravished city of Jerusalem. This inter-textual reading of Nahum with Lamentations suggests that if Nahum is read differently, a different response is possible. If I have to be critical of this approach it would be the following: The reader makes his own call on what texts he/she wants to read together. This "call" is most of the time not a logical step for the next reader that tries to use the previous reader's interpretation. There appears to be a "jump in thought" where the second reader may lose the plot. This "jump" needs to be explained. Interpreters using this new

literary approach must make it known in no uncertain terms why they are reading certain texts together.

The following two articles<sup>21</sup> on Jeremiah explore the aspects and patterns of symbolic arrangements and the stylistic techniques used by the narratives of Jeremiah's oracles, but extend them to the communal and social context that may have produced them. The last two articles deal with literary analysis and were done on the Minor Prophets. Holbert's article (1996:334-335) works with the satire of the Jonah novel. He illustrates that when read carefully, Jonah emerges as the target of the book's satire. Finally Robertson (1996:355-369), by means of literary theory, opens the discussion on prophecy versus poetry when he analyses the book of Obadiah.

This Sheffield reader on The Prophets is according to Wessels (2009:215) a good summary of the recent tendencies in prophetic criticism. Combining previously separately published articles in one book usually attempts to do this. Dearman (1998:600) also testifies to this and feels that the Reader has succeeded in its objective to give account of the latest trends of research and scholarly conversation on the prophets.

In conclusion, apart from references to the so-called porno prophecies by Brenner (1996:252-275), not much research on the book of Ezekiel seems to impose itself on the current trends in research. The books of Isaiah and Jeremiah and even some of the Minor Prophets feature regularly. The next part of this chapter will try and give an overview of some of the major contributions on the book of Ezekiel.

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<sup>21</sup> They are by Stulman (1996:292-312; published in 1995) and Daimond (1993:313-33).

## 2.3. Ezekiel criticism as it stands

### 2.3.1 Up until the 1950s

By the turn of the nineteenth century most of the book of Ezekiel has been seen as relatively unproblematic, bearing the mark of one single author. Only a few voices raised some critical questions like the questioning of chapters 40-48 as authentic (Oeder 1756)<sup>22</sup>, or the possibility that the book may have been a Pseudepigraph written in the Persian period (Zunk 1873), or even later in the time of the Maccabees, as Seinicke (1884) suggested. These questions, few and not taken that seriously, did however prepare the way for some radical thinking on this prophetic book that followed (cf. McKeating 1993:31-32). This happened more or less in the first half of the twentieth century. This period seemed to provide a consensus that the book did not bear the stamp of one single author. I will discuss them briefly.

Radical criticism kicked off with a bang in 1900 when Richard Kraetzschmar detected two parallel recessions in the original text and by 1924 Gustav Hölsher claimed that of the 1 273 verses in the book, only 144 contained the original words of the prophet. He for example rejected all the hopeful material (chs. 40-48) as not original. Many of the additions in the book were according to him made by an early fifth century Zadokite redactor (Levitt Kohn 2003:9-10).

The other theory that also emerged out of this critical period in Ezekiel studies was the thesis that there were “two prophets” at work in the book. This “two prophet theory” took on different angles. Some pertained to the priestly and prophetic material of the book (Hölscher might call it poetry and prose) as those of two different prophets, while other theories, like those of Hertrich (1932) and Van den Born (1947) proposed different settings for different material in the book.

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<sup>22</sup> Most of these older scholars work are cited with the help of McKeating (1993) and Levitt Kohn (2003). Not any of the two libraries I consulted holds these works.

There were also suggestions of a Palestinian locality during the first part of the book and a Babylonian locality in the second half of the book. By the 1950s most scholars like Howie (1950) and Pfeiffer (1953) rejected this idea and a consensus was reached on the Babylonian locality of the prophet while delivering the original prophecies (ref McKeating 1993:36-41 & Levitt Kohn 2003:9-10). This consensus evidently posed the question of what material was original and can easily be assumed as those of the prophet in Babylonian exile and what were additions. This question dominated the second half of the twentieth century.

### **2.3.2 1950s up until the turn of the century**

#### **2.3.2.1 Fohrer and Greenberg**

The burning issue of Ezekiel's locality was raised by George Fohrer (1970:58-64) in his *Das Alte Testament*. Accepting the time of deporting as 597 BCE and the prophets calling in 593/2 BCE he struggles with the assumption that Ezekiel was a prophet primarily to Judah and Jerusalem, while being a deportee in Babylon. To him this raised doubts. He was not impressed with the possible answers given to this problem. For him the book could not be dated at any period other than the one it purports to belong to and the explanation of a double ministry (first in Jerusalem and then in Babylonia) for the prophet did not seem plausible. He concludes that Ezekiel did not address his oracles to Jerusalem, but primarily to the exilic community. A "Zadokite overworking", according to him, made some sections of the book relevant to the Palestinian community.

Fohrer's answer to me is satisfactory if one cannot accept the fact that he could not direct his prophecies to Jerusalem. To me it is possible and McKeating (1993:46) agrees, for Ezekiel to have been in Babylon and still have a keen interest in Jerusalem and the events in his homeland. With prophecies being put

into writing, it is not impossible for him to imagine that his words could reach those in Jerusalem to warn them of the impending judgment.

On this subject Greenberg (1983:15-17) agrees. He does not find Ezekiel's preoccupation with the fate of Jerusalem or him addressing the people of Jerusalem that strange. On this matter one can also observe that oracles against foreign nations are also addressed to an audience not present. In most cases these are accepted as from the prophet himself even if done from a distance.

Greenberg was another major contributor to Ezekiel studies in this period. His 1983 Commentary, Ezekiel, 1-20 challenges scholars to take up a more holistic view on Ezekiel. He starts his introduction (1983:18-27) by explaining the original intent of prophecy: Edification of the people. He then criticizes some former and contemporary scholars for doing too much in trying to ascertain the original material in Ezekiel. This has led according to Greenberg (:21) to "conservative" redaction that discards one third of the book as not original (e.g., Fohrer) to "radical" opinions which discard nine tenths of the book as not original (e.g., Hölsher). By "zooming in" (my own interpretation) only, the scholar just sees one point and can get strangled in the many details of text critical observations. By also "zooming out", more can be seen. Greenberg (1983:21) writes on his more holistic approach:

There is only one way that gives hope of eliciting the innate conventions and literary formations of a piece of ancient literature, and that is by listening to it patiently and humbly. The critic must curb all temptations to impose his antecedent judgments on the text; he must immerse himself in it again and again, with all his sensors alert to catch every possible stimulus – mental-ideational, aural, aesthetic, linguistic, and visual – until its features begin to stand out and their native shape and patterning emerge.

His (Greenberg's) work, bold in assuming Ezekiel as a whole and a product of art and intelligent design that contains a world of discoveries to the patient reader, I find attractive in many aspects. This is mostly the case because it allows the entire biblical text to communicate to me as a modern reader. This reader according to Greenberg (1983:26) who enters the text without preconception on what the ancient prophet may or may not have said, will encounter a mind (that of the prophet) "of powerful and passionate proclivities".

### **2.3.2.2 The work of Walther Zimmerli**

Widely seen as one of the major contributors to the interpretation of Ezekiel, the work of Walter Zimmerli<sup>23</sup> will need some closer examination. Zimmerli's approach is form-critical in its nature, but also traditio-historical in the way in which he shows how the book depended on existing forms and traditions. His thorough article entitled "*The Special Form- and Traditio-historical Character of Ezekiel's Prophecy*" published in 1965 set the bar for a new approach to the book of Ezekiel. Zimmerli argues (1965:515-527) how the original kernel of the prophecy is discernible by looking at some catch phrases and forms. These forms and the different traditions (pre-classical and classical prophecy, the use of sign-acts, priestly tradition and the Jerusalem-David tradition) also point to a lengthy period of redaction by which the book obtained its final shape. He also wrote a monumental two-part commentary on the book of Ezekiel. They were first published in German in 1969, but translated into English in 1979 (Part 1) and 1983 (Part 2). This benchmark commentary has become the new starting point for serious Ezekiel scholars. His meticulous handling of the form and tradition in the text has led to several important conclusions.

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<sup>23</sup> The two-part commentary of Walther Zimmerli contains the bulk of his work on Ezekiel. He summarized some of his ideas in a 1965 article entitled, "The Special Form - and Traditio-historical Character of Ezekiel."

Among his many contributions to the critical issues of Ezekiel he deals with the *issue of dating* and elaborates on the series of dates given in the book itself. He concludes by saying that “from the dates that are given in the book of Ezekiel itself, we can accept a position in the period between Jeremiah on the one hand and Haggai-Zechariah on the other” (1979:9).

He shows how this coincides with the dates found in *The Chronicles of the Chaldean Kings* and supplies a historical background of the period between 593-571 BCE when the prophet was active. He places Ezekiel as a prophet of a later period. This later placing of Ezekiel is also evident in the overlapping of the three circles of influence that is apparent in the book. He argues (1979:41) that prophetic writings in general show presence of three circles of traditions. These traditions: the Exodus from Egypt, the Election of Zion and the Election of David, find themselves in most of the prophetic books. Many of the earlier prophetic books are usually one-sided towards a certain circle of tradition, whereas Ezekiel appears to have all of these traditions in different chapters (cf. Zimmerli 1965:523-526). This points to a later dating but more importantly to the hand of redactors from later periods.

Zimmerli also holds that some of the material in the book can be traced back to the prophet himself. He argues that the oral form of the original prophecies is easily detectable. Of great significance to him are the speeches that appear in the first person form. He finds fifty-two instances of this and it encourages him to think that they were formulated by the prophet himself. All but seven of the fifty-two units are introduced with the same formula **וַיְהִי דְבַר־יְהוָה אֵלַי** (“and the word of the Lord came to me”). Another phrase also used in the rhetoric of Ezekiel is **וַיִּרְדֵּי־יְהוָה עָלַי** (“and the hand of the Lord was upon me”). These first person original prophecies become even more apparent when the phrase **אֵלַיָּהּ**

הִכִּינְתָהּ אֶת-פָּנֶיךָ (‘‘set your face against’’) is searched. It appears eleven times uniquely in Ezekiel. The above confirms that much of the prophet’s original material is to be found in the book itself. The volume of original material gets expanded when one adds the so-called ‘‘sign-acts’’. These prophetic enactments were common among the pre-classical prophets, but less frequent with some of the classical prophets. Isaiah has three examples and Jeremiah has seven. Ezekiel however has twelve of these ‘‘sign-acts’’.

Other forms that pointed to specific tradition influences are phrases like ‘‘I, the Lord, have spoken’’, ‘‘I am the Lord’’ (אֲנִי יְהוָה) and expanding on this form, ‘‘that they may know that I am the Lord’’. It also points to the words of YHWH acting as demonstrations of his divine power and authority. In summarising the significance of some of these forms McKeating (1993:54) makes the following observations:

- They point to connections to pre-classical prophecy, which in any case can be substantiated on other grounds. Strong connections to the priestly tradition are also visible. These connections will be looked at in the next chapter of this study.
- They enable us to identify important elements which give structure and coherence to the book.
- They give us some indication of the *Sitz im Leben* in which the prophet’s words were uttered. These indications coincide with attempts to place the book in the sixth century exilic period.
- They highlight some of the important theological claims of Ezekiel. This will be discussed below.
- It places emphasis on the ‘‘word event’’. This word event is very distinct to the Ezekiel tradition.
- In Zimmerli’s mind all these observations are consistent with the existence of a ‘‘school’’ which developed the Ezekiel tradition over a considerable period.



Even though Zimmerli (1979:68) feels that most of the rhythm and rhyme in Ezekiel was meant to be heard not read, he assumes this process of writing down expanded over a lengthy period. According to him (:73) the dated sections from chapters 1 to 33, with the exception of chapters 25-32 (Oracles Against the Nations) are set in proper sequence and may have been the first to be compiled into a book. The pronouncements of doom of chapters 1-24 are followed by messages of hope that neatly fit into the second section of prophecies that was added to the book. The Oracles Against the Nations chapters were then added and the last section, “the promise and program of new beginning (chs. 40-48), have been added to Ezekiel 1-39 in the final phase of redaction” (Zimmerli 1979:74). It was these additions that led him to deem “the bulk of the prophetic text to be secondary, written by the followers of the prophet” (Levitt Kohn 2003:10).

It is when studying some of his essays<sup>24</sup> that were edited and introduced by Walter Brueggemann under the title *I am Yahweh* (1982) that the true theological significance of Zimmerli’s work came to the fore. The following is a summary of the relevant major theological observations.

Firstly he (Zimmerli) sees the exile of 587 BCE as a *nullpunkt* (point zero). The changed world of Babylonian exile seemed to be full of despair and silence. It was in this silence that the words of YHWH could make a new history possible. This was the *blessing of the nullpunkt*. It created a space where YHWH could save (Zimmerli 1982:111-133).

Secondly he shows that revelation of YHWH is in his words. This “word event” as mentioned above, is the “prophetic words of self-manifestation” or the “proof

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<sup>24</sup> Four essays with the following titles comprise the book *I am Yahweh* (1982). They are: I am Yahweh, Knowledge of God according to the Book of Ezekiel, The Word of Divine Self-manifestation (proof-saying): A Prophetic Genre and Plans for rebuilding after the catastrophe of 587.

saying”. YHWH encounters the need of his time with his own words. These words become his self-disclosure that does not happen in a vacuum. It happens in a historical context. The prophet stands in this context and speaks these words (Zimmerli 1982:99-110).

Finally Brueggemann (1982:xv) concludes in an introduction to these essays:

Zimmerli shows us how to do biblical theology. He does not linger over comparative questions nor over issues of religious phenomenology. Rather the end result is an understanding and discernment of the God that is appropriate to Yahweh and distinctive to Israel...This God is revealed as a speaker...is inscrutably sovereign...This sovereignty is known always as judgement and salvation.

It is this “word event” that will be studied in later chapters when trying to find tendencies on how these words (rhetoric) can suggest ways of imagining in new realities.

Although according to McKeating (1993:43-44), the scholarly work from 1950 onwards was somewhat untidy in the way it petered out, consensus was reached on certain issues:

- Firstly there was a considerable degree of consensus that the prophet’s original placing was among the exiles. These scholars showed “impatience” with attempts to date him [Ezekiel] elsewhere (:43).
- This “impatience” was secondly further held with a general desertion of theories that locate Ezekiel’s ministry outside Babylonia. This view accepted that the prophet had been called to be a prophet during the exile of 593 BCE and may have been there and active up until 573 BCE.

- Thirdly they accept that there is a large body of material that may be accredited to the prophet himself and/or to the exilic period close to his lifetime.
- These scholars fourthly agreed that it was not always appropriate or necessary to split the book into parts with predominately priestly or prophetic material.
- Finally there was agreement on the opinion that apart from the original core material of the book that can be exilic in its dating, the book went through periods of additions and expansions.

### **2.3.3 Ezekiel at the turn of the century**

Some of the most recent contributions to the field of Ezekiel studies are summarised by Levitt Kohn (2003:9-31).

*Firstly* she looks at the apparent *influences* in the Ezekiel book. Looking at some of the Biblical influences, the book's relationship with the Priestly tradition has been a primary focus of many scholars. Many of these previous discussions have been on the chronological priority of the one over the other. Of late this has become less important and the examination of the way in which Biblical texts were reinterpreted in the face of new historical circumstances enjoyed attention. Levitt Kohn (2003:13) cites Fishbane's analysis (1985), along with Greenberg's as leading to "a wealth of new research into the way Ezekiel utilizes, and in some cases reformulates, earlier Biblical traditions (Levitt Kohn 2003:13)." The question is asked if Ezekiel purposely skewed the traditional material or whether he tries to propose and reinterpret a version that is different from the traditions. According to Levitt Kohn (2003:14) these new investigations are a "new found appreciation for Ezekiel as an author and shaper of Israelite traditions." This led to claims that Ezekiel is not so much filled with traces of Deuteronomistic or

Priestly redactions, but that the book itself imports, reinterprets and adapts Deuteronomistic motifs in the light of new realities! These realities all originated in the Exile. For example Ezekiel 20, as illustrated by Patton (1996:78), uses Exodus traditions to react to the fall of Jerusalem and to prepare the reader for the new laws revealed in Ezekiel 40-48. In this sense, Levitt Kohn (2003:111-112) refers to Ezekiel as a “new Moses”.

Other influences in the book are also visible. Ezekiel being the first prophet who sees visions of YHWH outside the land of Israel, shows linguistic and cultural influences from different Mesopotamian traditions. His temple vision in chapters 40-48 resembles some of the Sumerian temple hymns. It is argued that this was done to argue the supremacy of YHWH over the Mesopotamian religious ideas.

*The psychology of Ezekiel* has also received attention of late. His unconventional and sometimes bizarre behaviour has sparked some studies in the past (Broome 1946) that tried to put him on the couch for psycho-therapy as the theme of Smith-Christopher’s 1999<sup>25</sup> essay (*Ezekiel on Fanon’s Couch*) suggests. The prophet sometimes showed symptoms of a paranoid schizophrenic. Halperin’s (1993) publication *Seeking Ezekiel: Text and Psychology* elaborates on this idea. Halperin revisited and revised some of Broome’s initial psychoanalysis by closely reading several texts (Ez 8:7-12; 16:20-21; 20:25-26 & 23:37-39). The gesture of digging (Ez 8) alludes to intercourse and his discovery of dread and disgust on the inside is an image filled with female loathing. These images read alongside the mothers sacrificing their children to their lovers, him eating his own excrement and shaving his head with a sword has left us with “a Freudian smorgasbord” (cf. Levitt Kohn 2003:16-17). Smith- Christopher (1999) tried to explain Ezekiel’s behaviour by suggesting that the prophet suffered from post-traumatic stress. Witnessing the brutal realities and destruction of the exile left a mark on the psyche of the prophet. You cannot therefore blame the victim (cf.

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<sup>25</sup> Referred to in this paragraph after reading about his work in the Levitt Kohn (2003) article that overviewed some of the recent trends in Ezekiel studies.

Levitt Kohn 2003:17). In my opinion these studies into Ezekiel might be interesting, but miss one important fact. Ezekiel was a communicator who used words and actions as part of his rhetorical armoury to persuade his audience. Sometimes his methods were bizarre, but they did get the attention of his listeners, or as the next section would suggest, his witnesses.

Thirdly, and this will receive more attention, *the rhetorical function of the book* and indeed some of the prophet's actions have been studied. Ezekiel's so-called "sign-acts" and the rhetorical significance of these acts have been studied by various scholars, but not as significantly and comprehensively as by Friebel (1999). In his study he looked at Jeremiah as well as Ezekiel's sign-acts. After establishing the authenticity of these acts he argues that it had definite rhetorical functions:

The rhetorical (interactive) function of the prophetic sign-acts was a significant part of the whole communication event, for the prophets were not merely trying to disseminate message content didactically, but were attempting to persuade their audiences of a different way of viewing their situations and circumstances. Through the sign-actions, the prophets were trying to alter the people's perceptions, attitudes and behavioural patterns (Friebel 1999:40).

These acts were usually part of a rhetorical situation and according to Friebel (1999:71-72) these situations consisted of: (1) an exigence which is a perceived problem or defect; (2) the rhetor who tries to modify or remedy the problem through communication; (3) an audience who can be persuaded; (4) different rhetorical strategies that are used to influence the audience. Among these rhetorical strategies these sign-acts reside. Friebel uses this theory on the rhetorical situation to study each of the separate sign-acts employed by Jeremiah as well as Ezekiel. He concludes that:

... the sign-acts served the two prophets effectively as rhetorical vehicles in addressing a perceived exigence ...The sign-acts were adaptable to be used to transmit messages not only of judgment, but also hope (1999:466-67).

This strengthens an argument that is partly assumed as this study sets out, but that will also be established later. The argument being that the rhetoric of Ezekiel changes according to the rhetorical situation. The judgment needed hope in the latter part of the book. This was also apparent in the non-verbal communication (sign-acts) of the prophet, as Friebel has shown.

An important contribution on the rhetoric of Ezekiel that is not mentioned in the article by Levitt Kohn (2003) but needs to be mentioned is that of Thomas Renz (1999). His book, *The Rhetorical Function of the Book of Ezekiel*, is an in-depth study on how the prophets and in particular Ezekiel, used rhetoric to address an intense and traumatic rhetorical situation. Beginning with the meaning of rhetoric and rhetorical criticism he argues that rhetorical criticism is analogous to that of what form criticism<sup>26</sup> sets out to do. This being: (1) Defining the rhetorical unit; (2) Exploring the rhetorical situation with the understanding that each unit of rhetoric is part of a matrix of events, persons, traditions and institutions; (3) Investigating and trying to establish the basic issue at stake in the text; (4) Examining the various rhetorical techniques for example the arrangement of the texts, metaphors and stylistic devices used; (5) Finally evaluating the impact of the whole unit (cf. Renz 1999:13-14).

The approach of Renz follows these five steps as he builds his argument in this order and concludes his final chapter by evaluating the effectiveness of Ezekiel's

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<sup>26</sup> For Renz (1999:13) the stages of Form criticism are: Isolating the unit and analyzing its structure (*Form*). After this the genre (*Gattung*) is studied on which some assumptions are made on the setting(s) and finally the intention or function of the text(s) is established.

rhetoric. He departs from the fact that the book of Ezekiel was designed to shape the self-understanding of the exilic community. This self-understanding meant relinquishing the old (Jerusalem as a city that is now destroyed) and being open to imagine and receive the newness of God. This newness was centred in a spiritual renewal that was to come and that is clearly painted in chapters 40-48.

This Renz establishes by exploring four questions (1999:231):

- *Firstly:* Was the book a fitting response to the rhetorical situation? His conclusion is that the book of Ezekiel indeed provides an interpretation of the Ezekiel material that addressed the pressing issues of the exilic community. It does not address the specific issues that arose in the post exilic community in Jerusalem such as: diarchic leadership, mixed marriages and the deterioration of the Judean economy. It deals with the pressing issue at hand, this being the future of Israel. Will they have a future or will they disappear from history? In addressing this question it helps the exilic community to relinquish the old and imagine the new. This rhetorical angle makes Ezekiel indeed a fitting response to the rhetorical situation.
- *Secondly:* What happened after the exile? The general view that the Babylonian exile was a watershed in the history of Israel is held by Renz (1999:235), but some modifications are also made. The general view that Israel entered exile as an ethnic group, but returned from exile as a religious community is held only in part. There was a community in Jerusalem that displayed a marked shift in religious commitments, but this was not necessarily open to all people (like the vision of Ezekiel suggested) and the idea of a broader religious community did not happen throughout the diaspora (those people of Israel scattered outside the perimeters of Jerusalem and Judah). The utopian vision of

Ezekiel immediately after the exile did not happen as quickly. This led to renewed interest in the book by later communities such as the Qumran community and those left devastated by the destruction of the temple in 70 AD.

- *Thirdly*. Whose interests might have been served originally by the book? Renz (:242-430) concludes that the interests of the “YHWH-alone party” were served against those who brought more than one god from Judah and tried to incorporate some of the Babylonian deities. It also seems possible that interests of the Zadokites, as opposed to other groups contending for power, were served. This can be assumed from the prominence of the temple in the post exilic visions and the important role of the priesthood. The role of the priests and particularly the Zadokites will be looked at in the next chapter but for now I will agree with Renz (1999:245) that “a well-ordered temple service and holy community” enjoys prominence above the monarchy that failed Israel in the book of Ezekiel.
- *Fourthly*. Why was the book preserved beyond the communicative situation for which it was designed? If the book of Ezekiel was designed for the needs of an exilic audience, why was it preserved? Renz (1999: 245-46) answers the question as follows:

It seems that the post exilic community recognized in this book YHWH’s pattern for putting things right ... In this way the book of Ezekiel became an important document for their self-understanding. Comparable communities of Syrians, Phoenicians, Philistines and others disappeared from the scene, but the community of exiles from Judah and Jerusalem remained a distinct social group.



The book of Ezekiel was according to Renz (:246) able to transcend the original rhetorical situation. Apart from being relevant in the dire straits of exile, it became as relevant when coming out of Israel and continued to supply hope as a credible account of YHWH's ways with his people.

It is this capacity of prophetic books like Ezekiel that is crucial to this study. The book of Ezekiel supplied means to accept reality and to imagine possibilities.

Concluding her overview of the currents in Ezekiel criticism at the turn of the century, Levitt Kohn (2003:19-20) also mentions the contributions, mainly from feminist criticism, on Metaphor and Gender in Ezekiel. In *Jerusalem in the Book of Ezekiel: The City as YHWH's Wife*, Galambush (1992) explores the metaphor of a wife unfaithful to her husband. This text draws from the gender ideological viewpoints of the time. One of these viewpoints was that men controlled their women's sexuality. Van Dijk-Hemmes (1993) continued on this subject by showing how the metaphorisation of women in Ezekiel 23 is not different from "the modern pornographic depictions of female sexuality" (1993:163).

Levitt Kohn (2003:20) cited that Paton (2000), in defending these metaphors suggested, that some of the metaphors in Ezekiel 16 and 23 were not to legitimate Israelite violence against women; but rather to shock the prophet's audience.

I do agree that many of the metaphors employed by the prophets are chauvinistic in nature and in many instances humiliating and embarrassing to a female audience, but this is research that leaves the texts that are studied stuck in an ideology that only points to the "wrong" in it. It is necessary to call "the wrong", but Biblical texts need contributions that build a bridge to the modern-day reader

that allows her/him to meet the text stripped (speaking of metaphors) of its ideology and filled with new relevant possibilities.

## **2.4 Summary**

This chapter looked at the development of the studies on the book of Ezekiel. Many important contributions were made. These contributions become fundamental as the study of this intriguing book goes forward. They supply the boundary markers on a vast field of study. In the literary overview that was done in this chapter, the problem that was touched on in the first chapter (1.2) became more apparent: Old Testament studies on prophetic texts rarely contribute to the interpretive problems that the modern day interpreter encounters. In many instances, like feminist- and ideological-criticism, it only points to the problem.

The truth remains that these texts were highly relevant to the rhetorical situation in which it was received and was reinterpreted in different circumstances as time went on. Ezekiel's imaginations on a new Israel and Temple-based community at a time when it did not seem possible must evoke further study on the subject of imagination, specifically on how prophets did not necessarily foretell the future, but created it by helping people to imagine it. Along these lines this study will embark to propose a model for imagining in "a modern day reality".

The next chapter will look at the rhetorical situation of the book of Ezekiel. A study of the rhetorical situation will establish important departure points for chapters 4 and 5 that will study the demarcated texts (1.5) in Ezekiel. It will also open up some subjects into which further excursions will be needed.

## **Chapter 3 Key Elements to Understanding the Book of Ezekiel**

### **3.1 Introduction**

Before I embark on the enquiry (Chapters 4 and 5) of the demarcated texts in Ezekiel, it is necessary to argue some of the key elements that form an understanding of this Old Testament prophetic book. These elements will serve as departure points for this study. The chapter will cover the following headings:

- The historical background of the prophecies in the book of Ezekiel.
- The quest for the historical prophet.
- The composition and final form of the book of Ezekiel.
- The Theological themes of the book.
- The priestly influence on the book.

### **3.2 The historical background**

After the death of Solomon the years that followed, especially those years after 933 BCE when the kingdom split into a Northern and a Southern Kingdom, were years of steady decline. This decline was evident in every aspect of their national life. The moral and spiritual decay in the Northern Kingdom reached its pinnacle under the reign of Ahab and Jezebel (1 Kgs 17:1 - 22:40) who reigned from about 874-853 BCE. But it was only 130 years later that Samaria, the capital of the Northern Kingdom, fell to the Assyrians in 722 BCE. Although Samaria was overthrown by the Assyrians, it was in the waning years of the Assyrian world dominance. A new power was rising. They were the Babylonians. The people of the Southern Kingdom (Judah) saw the decline of Assyria as a glimmer of hope pointing to the possibility of former glory. A young king by the name of Josiah

was trying to reform Judah and to revive the kingdom spiritually, but also politically. He also tried to restore the former Davidic territory as well as the cultic reforms. He came into power in 640 BCE. His reforms set out to eradicate paganism and to promote YHWH worship. Some came to see him as a “second David” (Eybers 1977:171-177). The prophet Jeremiah (Jer 11; 22; 27-28) however criticized some of the people who were not sincere in their attempts<sup>27</sup>. The reforms were enacted but were superficial (cf. Cooper 1994:19-21; Drinkard 1996:160; Eybers 1977:172-177 and Hinson 1973:123).

When the “Book of the Covenant” was discovered in the temple in 622 BCE, Josiah used this to emphasize his reforms. This discovery gave momentum to the reforms and when Nineveh fell in 612 BCE, the people of Judah concluded that the reforms of Josiah were working. Unfortunately Josiah died on the battlefield in 609 BCE and with that ended any hope of restoration (cf. Cooper 1994: 22 and Hinson 1973:136). His son Eliakim replaced his brother Jehoahaz after only three months as the king of Judah. Pharaoh Neco took Jehoahaz captive and appointed Eliakim after changing his name to Jehoiakim (Jer 22:10-12; 2 Kgs 23:31-35). When Nebuchadnezzar defeated Pharaoh Neco he forced Judah to become a vassal state of Babylon. Jehoiakim remained loyal but plotted to break the hold of Babylon and to gain independence again. When Nebuchadnezzar learned of these plans he made his way to Jerusalem. Jehoiakim died before Nebuchadnezzar arrived in Jerusalem. The circumstances surrounding his death are uncertain. He was captured, murdered or he committed suicide. His successor was his eighteen-year old son, Jehoiachin. Like his father, he had hopes of regaining independence from Babylon. He hoped that Egypt could be his ally in that regard. Again Nebuchadnezzar learned of these plans and removed him from the throne and deported a group of captives

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<sup>27</sup> This is a point of discussion that I do acknowledge. What was Jeremiah’s relation to the reforms? Did he support it or did he oppose it from the beginning by standing outside the king’s structures (Goldingay 2003:687) and saw it as futile - much to the effect of “arranging deckchairs on the Titanic”? Or was he only warning that external practices cannot substitute inward obedience as Cooper (1994:21) holds? The focus of this study is however different.

to Babylon. Among these captives was a soon to be priest by the name of Ezekiel. This was the first exile and happened in 597 BCE. Jehoiachin was replaced by his father's brother Mattaniah (2 Kgs 24:17), who was given the name Zedekiah. Zedekiah joined in a widely spread rebellion led by Egypt. This also included Edom, Moab, Ammon, Tyre and Sidon. Nebuchadnezzar moved quickly on Zedekiah and laid siege to Jerusalem in 588 BCE. Zedekiah attempted to flee but was captured. Jerusalem fell in 587/586 BCE. Ezekiel learned of this finality (Ez 33:21) while already in Babylonian exile. This build up and the life in exile that followed, forms the historical background to the prophecies in Ezekiel (cf. Blenkinsopp 1990:10-12, Cooper 1994:22-23, Eybers 1977:180-185, Hinson 1973:136-139 and Mein 2001:54-59).

### **3.3 The quest for the historical prophet**

The first verse of the book itself (Ez 1:1) places Ezekiel among a Jewish group of exiles in Babylonia. It reads that, "I was among the exiles by the Kebar River". This over time has become a matter of debate. Some proposed that a historical figure was not necessary to produce the book. Many however regarded Ezekiel as a historical figure. This according to de Jong (2007:5) is a mistake made on "*a priori* assumption" that behind every prophetic book there is a historical prophet. He argues:

Surely it is possible that there was a priest called Ezekiel among the exiles of 597 BCE who played some role of importance among the first generation of exiles. The point is, however, that it may not be possible to determine with any plausibility the relation between the Ezekiel in the book and the Ezekiel behind it. Ezekiel in the book is a literary, theological creation, a paradigmatic figure, which functions as a model for the readers (2007:5).

He elaborates on this by seeing Ezekiel as the main narrator of the book. This narrator is set in between dates where he experiences different things. For de Jong (2007:6) the role of Ezekiel is more passive and that YHWH is the one who speaks and acts. As a narrator, Ezekiel's task is twofold: Firstly he is appointed as a watchman whose task is to announce disaster and to herald the future and secondly he functions as a paradigm<sup>28</sup> for the readers. In contrast the audience in the book serves as an anti-paradigm. Ezekiel listens and acts on YHWH's words while the audience do the opposite. The readers must emulate the actions of Ezekiel rather than those of the audience. He continues to argue this by discussing certain texts (Ez 12:1-6 and 24:15-24) and showing how these roles come together in Chapter 37. In conclusion he holds that the book of Ezekiel uses a prophetic figure "as a way of presenting YHWH's words and actions, to bestow the highest authority on what the author wants to say to his community" (de Jongh 2007:15).

This is not an entirely new viewpoint, seeing that scholars like Torrey (1934) and van den Born (1954) held this view. They not only felt that prophets like Ezekiel might have been literary figures, but argued that the whole narrative of the exile that we find in Chronicles-Ezra-Nehemiah were largely figments of romantic imagination. This did not gain a lot of support, especially when archaeological discoveries of Babylonian palace records dispelled most of these assumptions. These records attested to figures like Jehoiachin the king of Judah and his exiles (cf. Vawter & Hoppe 1991:11). For me de Jong's viewpoint means that we have to disregard the volumes of redaction critical work that has been done on the book. A position like his suggests that one author, in one period, must have produced this literary work. It ignores then the critical consensus that is held and that was stated aptly by McKeating (1993:31-32) when discussing the different

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<sup>28</sup> De Jong (2007:8) also notes that the symbolic acts of the prophet also serve this purpose. It portrays the message of YHWH and the appropriate response to it. He acknowledges that there are arguments suggesting that these acts were good examples of "prophetic street theatre", but holds to his argument that these acts may never have happened before a live audience, but served a literary purpose to his readers.

positions of authorship in the book of Ezekiel: “So diverse were they that almost the only thing about Ezekiel on which scholars appeared to be agreed was that the book did not bear the stamp of a single mind.”

Most scholars tend to agree on the fact that the book of Ezekiel bears, to a great extent (given later redactions), the legacy of the priest Ezekiel who was among the exiles from 597 BCE (first deportation) up until and after 586 BCE. This deportation included king Jehoiachin and a group of Zadokite priests. Vawter and Hoppe (1991:11) go as far as to say that there is “no doubt there was a prophet Ezekiel. This prophet was active from the time of the first deportation to Babylon.” The real problem that arises is one that the book creates itself. It is a problem of location. This problem of location has led scholars to seek alternative means of understanding the historical prophet. In Ezekiel 1:3; 3:15 and 3:24 the author makes it clear that Ezekiel is called to be a prophet to the exilic community. We are not sure of any travels between Babylon and Jerusalem, but it is clear that Ezekiel has an intimate knowledge of the city and of what was happening in the city. Also many of his oracles are occupied with the city and its inhabitants. A hypothesis of Ezekiel being active in Jerusalem between 597 and 586 BCE and then in Babylon fails to hold its own. This again reduces Ezekiel to partly a fictional character.

The many later redactions that run deep and throughout this book explain this “dual locality” of the prophet. A later redactor, with hindsight, can easily describe the death of Pelatiah, the son of Benaiah, in Jerusalem at the very same time that Ezekiel was prophesying against the temple. It is not necessary to come up with some hypothesis of clairvoyance or to dilute this prophet to a literary figure (Vawter & Hoppe 1991:12).

It is then my assumption that Ezekiel was a historical figure captured and taken into exile in 597 BCE and that his location was in Babylon as he and the book

claim. On this matter Scheffler (2008:173) agrees. For him the book of Ezekiel, apart from later redactions, can be accredited to the famous exilic prophet and Zadokite priest that bears its name.

### **3.4 The composition and final form of the book Ezekiel**

In general the authorship and composition of the book was not widely challenged for many centuries. Cooper (1994:31-32) gives six reasons:

- As a unit the book is well-organized and balanced, and flows without any uneasy breaks from chapters 1-48.
- There is uniformity in language and style. This is usually the characteristic of a book with a single author. At least forty-seven phrases have been identified that recur throughout the book.
- The book is autobiographical in nature and uses the first person singular (except 1:3, 24:24) throughout. Books like Jeremiah, Amos, Hosea and Zechariah combine first and third person.
- The prophecies are chronological and at least fourteen of them are dated prophecies.
- The book has a structural balance. For example there is a difference in prophecies prior to the news of Jerusalem's fall (Ez 33:21) and those that followed. The first half contains many prophecies of judgment and concludes with the fall of Jerusalem, while the second half of the book contains prophecies of hope and encouragement and concludes with the realization of a "new Jerusalem".
- Finally there seems to be consensus that the character and personality of the prophet remains the same throughout the book.



Cooper (1994:34) further holds that although the evidence of editorial overworking is indisputable, that does not change the basic content and plan of the book.

Zimmerli (1979:70) suggested that we have two types of texts in the book. On the one hand you have the original kernel. This he calls the "*Grundtext*". This may have been written or even edited by the prophet himself. Nevertheless he does not feel that Ezekiel was the person who was responsible for the final composition of the book. In his opinion the material was continually reworked and supplemented by a school of disciples that had its origin in Ezekiel's house. This part of the material he calls the "*Nachinterpretation*". The meticulous care with which this extant material was arranged attests to the loyalty that these later redactors must have had to the prophet himself. For Greenberg (1983:134)<sup>29</sup>, the other big contributor to the Ezekiel studies, the book is a product of a single mind and his conclusion is straightforward when he announces: "I could find nothing on the book of Ezekiel that necessitates supposing another hand than that of a prophet of the sixth century."

It might be fair to say that these positions that have been discussed above and the many others that agree or disagree with either one of them have effectively over the last fifty years cancelled each other out. Leaving the critical view almost as it had been at the turn of the nineteenth century! Cooper (1994:36-37) feels that the work that has been done more recently on the language of Ezekiel also confirms the book as predominantly the work of the prophet Ezekiel himself. These latest contributions that Cooper refers to showed with the help of a detailed analysis that the language of Ezekiel was typical of a language in transition, having characteristics of early biblical Hebrew and some influences of Aramaic. This transition in language patterns also suggests that the book was a

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<sup>29</sup> Both the contributions of Zimmerli and Greenberg have been stated in chapter 2 as some of the major contributions of the last fifty years of Ezekiel studies.

product of the sixth century BCE when Ezekiel performed his ministry. It was in this time that the Hebrew language of the book Ezekiel started its transition.

The balanced conclusion on this has to be an “and” rather than an “either or” approach. With this I mean, that rather than suggesting that the book has been the work of one person, *or* suggesting that the book was a composition of many contributors, this study will assume the following: That the book of Ezekiel is largely the work of the prophet himself *and* that of later exilic editors. On this position there is agreement amongst many scholars. Among them are: Blenkinsopp (1990), Cooper (1994), Dillard and Longman (1994), and Mein (2001).

The final composition of the book has to be understood the way all prophetic books are understood. Prophecies were in general spoken and heard by the audience and not written and then read by the readers. Literary accounts of prophecies were always something that happened later in much the same way as happened with the Gospel accounts of the New Testament prophet we know as Jesus. For Vawter and Hoppe (1991:5-10) this is also true of Ezekiel. The literary work of the book followed after the actual performance of the prophet himself. Those who wrote it down elaborated and expanded on the original words of the prophet. This left us with the original words of Ezekiel and a complex intertwining of other material in and around it. Again the work of Walter Zimmerli cannot be denied. He (1979:69-77) suggests three stages on how the book took shape:

***First stage:*** Oral stage. From his calling (2:2) till the vision of the new temple (40:4) Ezekiel received orders from YHWH to speak his words. This is detectable in the form of his prophecies. The rhythm and the form were meant for the ear and not the eye. These more rhythmic parts of the book are still evident. It was only in chapter 43:11 that Ezekiel was told by YHWH to write his words down.

His oral communications happened many times in his own home (8:1; 11:25; 14:1; 20:1) where many of the leaders came to visit him.

**Second stage:** Writing stage. The prophet himself to a lesser extent than his disciples, started to write down these words. It is assumed that a school of disciples met in his home to meditate on his words and to write them down. These disciples added commentary and elaborated on some of the themes. Ezekiel 16:1-63<sup>30</sup> is an example of this with verses 44-58 and 59-63 being later additions. These additions did strengthen the original theme, but also adapted it to new realities.

**Third stage:** This was a longer and more tedious stage, where the editors tried to unify the different units with each other. They started by using catch phrases to unify certain units. For example, phrases like “oath” and “covenant” in 16:59 were used to unify it with chapter 17 where the same catch phrases (17:11-21) appear. Some units were moved in between previous units because they shared the same theme. Chapter 17:1-22 and 19:1-14 was a unit but was split up with the addition of 18:1-32. The chapters 17 and 19 units deal with judgment while chapter 18 explains how one’s choices bring about one’s own judgment. In this stage the visions were arranged in a manner where every vision was followed by a symbolic act. Another example of this late redaction was the addition of a sixth prophecy against Egypt in chapter 29:17-21 and another to move these oracles to the perfect number of seven. Finally, this stage was also responsible for the dating of many of the prophecies to create a chronological flow to the book. The prophet himself might have been involved with this redaction up until 573 BCE, but the final product was completed by his “prophetic school” more or less by the time of the inauguration of the new temple in 515 BCE.

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<sup>30</sup> Ezekiel 16:1-63 will be studied in depth in the next chapter.

It is difficult to ignore the conclusions of Zimmerli. What is true: His work and benchmark study on the book of Ezekiel was done in such detail that returning to an era that is “pre-Zimmerli” is almost unimaginable.

Another observation needs to be raised. It is the book in its current form that needs study and hermeneutical interpretation. When modern-day communicators are asked to communicate from an Old Testament perspective and in particular with the help of the imaginings of Ezekiel, it is the text in its current form that becomes relevant.

Finally, this thesis tries to build a theory for imagining in a changing modern-day reality from the communications of the prophet Ezekiel. It will look at his words and the effect his words had on his audience during exile. For this reason a good understanding of the theology of the book is necessary.

### **3.5 The theological themes of the book**

The theology of Ezekiel finds its roots in the reality of the exile. It was a time when the faith of Israel was in crisis. A period where the monarchy had failed them and the exilic experience compounded this tragic time in Judah’s history. Over a period stretching from 597 BCE up until 515 BCE the theological themes of the book takes shape, but also evolved and changed. According to Scheffler (2008:174-176) the message of Ezekiel must be understood in four phases. These phases were:

- The time of the first deportation (597-586 BCE). During this phase Ezekiel was mainly a prophet of doom, trying to make it clear that they were experiencing judgment that they brought upon themselves. Unlike his contemporary Jeremiah, who condemned the moral and ethical decay,

- Ezekiel felt strongly that the ignoring of, and the things that went wrong in their worship, (the things that happened at the temple) were the main reason for their dilemma. In this his priestly influence was evident.
- A pivotal point (mentioned earlier) is evident in the attitude of the prophet after the news that Jerusalem had fallen (586 BCE) and that any hope of rescue had died with some of its inhabitants. His attitude changed from one of judgment, to one of sympathy. It might have something to do with the death of his wife and the fact that his fate depended now solely on his fellow exiles. Nevertheless the prophet's messages now started to qualify YHWH's people for salvation and redemption. Important to note here is that this salvation has now moved to the level of the individual. Further, as part of YHWH's global preparation to save them, the prophet starts to deliver oracles against other nations. These nations were Ammon, Moab, Edom, Philistia, Tyre, Sidon and Egypt (Ez 25-32).
  - By 571 BCE the mood amongst the exiles reached a low point. During this period the prophet more openly and directly started to communicate salvation and liberation. He sees himself as the "watchman" (Ez 33:1-20) and YHWH being the shepherd (34:1-31) that will look after his people. The rise and restoration of the people is depicted by the vision in "the valley of the dry bones" (37:1-14) and the unification of the former Southern and Northern Kingdom in verses 15-28.
  - In the final phase (Ez 40-48) of the book, Ezekiel starts to give the blueprint for this new community that is soon to come out of exile back into their homeland. In this new reality there will be a new vision, a new temple, a new cult and a new land. A new community that functions autonomously from the state and where the temple forms the central point. This temple will be inhabited by YHWH and the priests would play a leading role in the temple and in society. The Zadokites and the Levites would be the elected priests. The Zadokite priests would be responsible

for the more important tasks and they would be assisted by the Levites. More on this priestly influence on the Ezekiel book later.

With this as background I will now look at some of the major theological themes of the book.

The first important theological theme of the book according to Le Roux (1987:189) is *YHWH's uniqueness*. This is shown by the mighty opening vision at the beginning of the book. The prophet's words are insufficient to describe this awesome God. This God is real and has been let down by his people. On this Cooper (1994:44) agrees, as he mentions the reality of God as the first theological theme of the book. This real God is about to judge the infidelity of his people. I would add that, ***judgment, on the grounds of YHWH's uniqueness***, forms the first major theological theme of the book. One cannot sugar coat the fact that YHWH's judgment takes centre stage in the first half of the book. Vawter and Hoppe (1991:14) do not agree that YHWH's uniqueness as such is the departure point for the first theological theme of the book. To them it is the prophet's own experience of exile. He needed to make sense out of this tragedy. To him this had to be judgment from YHWH for something Israel had done. The finality of this judgment would be the destruction of the nation and the fall of the temple (cf. Drinkard 1996:163). The sins and wrongful deeds of Israel-Judah inevitably become the next major theme of the Ezekiel book. Block (1997:47-60) more or less agrees on this, but put his emphasis on the unique relationship that YHWH holds with his people: "the God that confronts the reader in this book is first and foremost the God of Israel, not only passionate about his relationship with his people but also willing to stake his reputation on their fame and fortune" (:47).

***The sins and rebellion of Israel*** were the reason for their current predicament. Vawter and Hoppe (1991:14) state that "no other prophet pronounces as

negative a verdict on all of Israel's history as does Ezekiel." The history of Israel's failure to obey and constant violation of trust is traced extensively in Chapters 16; 20 and 23. These chapters make it clear in no uncertain terms that YHWH's judgment is justified. The one who has always stayed true in the relation has been betrayed, much like a spouse that was betrayed by a string of affairs. Brueggemann (2003:194) describes this infidelity very vividly:

These are remarkable rereadings of that long history, not only because it is a history of failure, but because the relationship of YHWH and Israel is imagined as an intimate relationship that became erotic, and that in turn became obscene in ways that display all of the distortions and betrayals of which an erotic relationship is capable.

The worst of all Israel's offences were their cultic offences<sup>31</sup>. On this Ezekiel elaborates in chapters 6:13; 20:12, 24, 28 and 23:37-38. An important observation is necessary on this theme of sin and rebellion. This observation deals with the metaphor in chapter 18:2:

"What do you mean when you use this proverb concerning the land of Israel, saying: 'The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge?' As I live," says the Lord GOD, "you shall no longer use this proverb in Israel. Behold, all souls are Mine; the soul of the father as well as the soul of the son is Mine; the soul who sins shall die. "

The responsibility of the individual enjoys a new perspective in the theology of Ezekiel. For years the tradition was that the punishment for the wrongdoings of

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<sup>31</sup> Unlike his contemporaries that were mainly occupied with the sins and rebellion of the kings and that of the monarchy, Ezekiel (as a priest) was occupied with the temple and those offences of cultic nature. It will be shown later that "the mountains" become the place (high places) where they took part in detestable practices with other religious influences.

the fathers would be visited on the children. Personal accountability becomes a result of a new personal relationship with YHWH. This “new personal relationship with YHWH” becomes part of his message of hope later in the book.

Between judgment and sin on the one side as theological themes and restoration and hope becoming themes later, it would be strange if **repentance** were not also in amongst the major theological themes of the book. This call to repentance would “not stop the impending judgment, but would lay the foundation for future restoration” (Drinkard 1996:163). This repentance is also an elaboration on the theme of personal accountability that Ezekiel introduced in chapter 18. In relation to this personal accountability, the prophet sees himself as a watchman to his generation (chapters 3 and 33). He will warn them and exhort them and “those who heed his warning and act on his exhortations will be ready to live in the future that God’s power is bringing into existence” (Vawter & Hoppe 1991:15).

It is after the fall of Jerusalem that Ezekiel starts to proclaim **a new future and restoration**. The first half of the book (before the “Oracles Against the Nations” part) ends with a decisive proclamation: “I am YHWH” (Ez 24:27). For Brueggemann (2003:197) this marks a major hinge in the book. YHWH’s name has been vindicated and restored and the prophet can now turn to newness. Up to now he was only hinting at the idea of a new future and restoration. After dealing with and handing out judgment to the other nations that defiled YHWH and mistreated Israel, Ezekiel starts to proclaim salvation to Israel. Before the prophet gives a blueprint imagination of the new community back in their homeland, he uses a few remarkable passages to establish this new community. Ezekiel 34:1-10 revisits the failed monarchy and uses the metaphor of a “shepherd”. The sum total of this passage’s assessment of the kings is that the self-aggrandizing kings (shepherds) have caused the sheep (Israel) to be scattered (exile) (Brueggemann 2003:199). By 34:11 it turns to hope and the rest of the chapter explains YHWH’s willingness to be the “good shepherd”. In



chapter 36 something new is introduced that also shapes this new community. They are gathered and brought into their own land and given a new heart and the spirit of God. YHWH calls them his people and He promises to be their God (36:24-28). This however is not done for their sake or because of what they have done. It is for the sake (vindication) of YHWH's holy name (36:22, 32). This new community is firstly one of which YHWH himself is the shepherd and secondly a community that will become something on the grounds of what YHWH has done. The third passage that defines this new community is the well-known "valley of the dry bones" text in chapter 37. This metaphor has been studied extensively in the scholarly work done on Ezekiel. It will again be studied in the next chapters. It forms a critical imagination of the desolate and scattered community (Israel in Exile) that it brought together and to life by the breath of YHWH (cf. Brueggemann 2003:199-201 and Dillard & Longmann 1994:325-6).

Chapters 40-48 build on this theological theme of a new future and restoration. It contains what Le Roux (1987:193) calls a "*toekomsontwerp*" (design for the future). Le Roux explains that it imagines a new Israel with new boundaries. Seven tribes must settle in the north while the other five would settle in the south. Judah that once held an important settlement amongst the southern tribes was now moved to the north. The city of Jerusalem will grow in prominence and within its walls the temple would be central to this new community. Needless to say the monarchy and democracy that disappointed and led them into exile would be replaced by a theocracy. In this newfound theocracy and temple-centred community the priests would play an important part. Two types of priest (as mentioned earlier) would feature: The Zadokites would handle all the important cultic duties while the Levites (of less prominence) would assist them with lesser duties. There would be a ruler in this new community, but his powers would be less than that of his predecessors.

Block (1997:51-55) summarizes the theology of Ezekiel concerning the people of God under three headings: Ezekiel's perception of Israel's past, Ezekiel's perception of Israel's present, and Ezekiel's perception of Israel's future. He illustrates that Ezekiel uses the very themes that he thrashed out in the first part of the book to give them a new hope for the future. These themes would be (1) Israel as a covenant people forever; (2) the land of Canaan as their homeland and territory forever; (3) the presence of YHWH in their midst forever; (4) YHWH's commitment to his servant David forever.

A somewhat lesser covered theological theme that is found in the book of Ezekiel is that of the leaving and returning (כְּבוֹד, glory) of YHWH. This כְּבוֹד leaves the temple (9:3; 10:19 and 11:22) in many of Ezekiel's first visions, but later returns (43:4-5 and 44:4) to the temple, but also leaves the temple like a river and flows into the community (47:5-12). This phenomenon builds on the fact that YHWH is now God of all and everyone. This is a theme that is proposed by Vawter and Hoppe (1991:15) and is suggested by the formula " ... that they (or 'you') will know that I am YHWH."

Although I do not fully agree with some of the themes that Cooper (1994:45-50) suggests, especially his eschatological interpretation of Ezekiel 40-48, I agree with him that Ezekiel's theology broadly covers the following four areas: The reality of YHWH, the reality of judgment, the reality of restoration and the reality of a new redeemed future (cf. Cooper 1994:44-45). This opinion is also held by Block as suggested above, but Block does not agree with an eschatological interpretation of Ezekiel. He notes that one needs to stick with the interpretation of the prophet's own understanding of his oracles. An eschatological interpretation is therefore not likely in the mind of Ezekiel (cf. Block 1997:56). Cooper's interpretation would suggest that Ezekiel's message is largely an eschatological one. Therefore it needs to be interpreted and applied to the broader eschatological message of the Bible. According to him it then can be

interpreted according to four hermeneutical frameworks that dominate the eschatological thinking landscape. They are: Dispensational Premillennialism (Christ's second coming would mark the beginning of a visible kingdom here on earth), Historic Premillennialism (Christ's reign has already started in an invisible form and that the Old Testament prophecies are being fulfilled by the church), Postmillennialism (much like Premillennialism, but many of the prophecies of Israel pertain to the church) and Amillennialism (no thousand years, but that Christ's reign on earth is not an exclusive future event, but in the process of realization).

To me it was never the intention of a prophet like Ezekiel, trapped in exile, to tell tales of the end of the world and the second coming of the Christ. Old Testament texts were created to address the need of the immediate audience, not of those living almost three thousand years later. In no instance was the intention to help this audience figure out the permutations of the end times.

In conclusion the theology of Ezekiel spans a period of eighty-two years (597-515 BCE) and tried to make sense of the realities of exile. His prophecies advocated a theology that suggested that the exile was an instrument in the hands of YHWH to punish them for their wrongdoings. Their punishment was inevitable and those who repented would have part in the restoration process. The restoration imagined a new community that was brought about by YHWH and this community would organize themselves according to this truth.

When examining the theology of the Ezekiel book, the priestly influence is unmistakable. I will turn to this issue now because it forms a key element to understanding the theology of this book.

### **3.6 The priestly influence on the Book of Ezekiel**

There is no doubt that Ezekiel played an important role in forming the religion of Israel during a crucial transition period. Some would go as far as to call Ezekiel “the father of Judaism” claim Vawter and Hoppe (1991:16). This of course depends on the way you understand Judaism. If Judaism is the final product of ideas of radical reform that originated in the exile experience, then “yes” Ezekiel definitely had a hand in it but if Judaism is the final product of a religion that developed in the Palestine of Ezra-Nehemiah and the Chronicler, then probably not.

Ezekiel made two contributions to the “new” religion of the returning exiles: the emphasis on the Law of Holiness (Lev 17-26) and predominantly the Priestly legislation. This Priestly legislation, that formed part of the P source of the Pentateuch, caused problems for the later orthodox rabbis. Ezekiel’s central emphasis was on the reorganizing of the priesthood at the head of this community. This restored sacral community did not happen at the time of Ezra-Nehemiah and especially onwards, when the rabbi with his disciples became the centre of religious life (cf. Krugler 2009: 609-11; Vawter & Hoppe 1991:16-19).

Regardless of how it played out, we need to explore the history of the priesthood and how it may have influenced the writings of Ezekiel.

#### **3.6.1 The history of the priesthood**

The history of the priesthood is complex enough for scholars to write many chapters about. It seems that there are different streams of information that flow out of the different literature of the Old Testament. These streams are products and re-tellings of different redactors that make it difficult to truly understand the

priesthood. This excursion will try to take note of the different priesthood narratives with their different groups and will try to understand how it came that Ezekiel was a Zadokite priest and why he was an advocate of this priesthood.

The story from the ancestors up until Sinai does not often mention priests. The names of Melchizedek, Potphera and Jethro, priest of Midian, are sparsely spread throughout their stories. This was probably because the Pentateuch storytellers did not want to introduce new side characters if not needed. Only from Sinai onwards did the priests start to play a more significant role in the lives of the Israelites.

### **3.6.1.1 The Aaronide priesthood**

At Sinai YHWH entered into a covenant with his people and with this it led to the establishment of a sacred space: the tabernacle. The tabernacle was a portable sanctuary where the people would worship. For things to happen in an orderly fashion officials were appointed to oversee this worship. The first formal mention of officials that were due to officiate in this portable place of worship is in Exodus 28:1-4 where Aaron (a Levite), the brother of Moses, and his sons, Nadab, Abihu, Eleazar, and Ithamar are mentioned. This function suited Aaron seeing that he was the co-spokesperson with Moses in bringing the message of YHWH to the people. This can be regarded as the first official priesthood that did duty under the covenant of Sinai. Aaron became the high priest and it appears (Ex 29:9) that the priesthood became a dynastic role of the Aaronide family. This role also appears to be hereditary (Ex 6:23; Num 3:2) with this role passed down to Aaron's son Eleazar (cf. Duke 2003: 647; Schiffman1989:880). Many of these facts are confirmed by the Chronicler and we find in 1 Chronicles 24:1-19 an outline of the division of the priests. They all appear to be descendants of Aaron

and his sons; Nadab, Abihu, Eleazar, and Ithamar from the tribe of Levi (cf. Hayward 2006:325).

The functions of these priests were numerous but could be summarized under three main functions according to Duke (2003:652-654):

- They were custodians of the cult. They had to instruct and supervise the laws that set Israel apart as a holy community that was committed to YHWH.
- They were agents of divine blessing, holiness and purification. They were to establish and maintain the creational order of things and instruct on what was holy or common or unclean.
- They had to supervise the cult objects. The Levites could not come into direct contact with these holy objects.

However, chief among their duties was the conducting of sacrifices and the overseeing of Israel's cultic interaction with YHWH. They were the only ones that were allowed to approach the altar and to bring the sacrifices (cf. Schiffman 1989:881). It was in this area that things went wrong during the turbulent times of the kings. The people did not honour the priesthood and the cultic rituals and went to any high place to bring their sacrifices. This exposed them to syncretism and defiled their pure Yahwistic religion.

### **3.6.1.2 The Levites**

Duke (2003:647) speaks of the Levites as "lesser order of cultic functionaries" and this is clearly delineated in Exodus and Numbers. Deuteronomy fails to make a distinction between these two. According to Duke (:647-8) the Levites assisted the priests in their functions. They would mediate between the people and the

priests and the priests were sanctum to a more divine realm. The functions of the Levites were the following:

- Aiding the priest in guarding against encroachment. This meant that they had to keep the “common” people away from the holy objects in the tabernacle and later temple.
- Secondly they would help with loading and transporting of the objects of the tabernacle.
- When the temple was built most of the cultic paraphernalia was static and was no longer transported. When the temple cult was established in Jerusalem we learn from the Chronicler that they were also used as temple musicians.

The priest and the Levites all come from the tribe of Levi and were maintained by tithes of the people and were given land where they could settle (cf. Duke 2003:648; Hayward 2006:326-328).

In Judges 17-18 the Deuteronomists include into their narrative another probable history of early priesthood (cf. Krugler 2009:600). The story of the two “itinerants” may have been the earliest documentation of the origins of official priesthood. The first one was a certain Micah from the hill country of Ephraim who constructed a family shrine and then dedicated his son to be a priest. Another young man “a Levite...to live wherever he could find place” (17:7-8a) whose name was “Jonathan son of Gershom, son of Moses” (18:30), dedicated his life to serving the God of Israel in some way or the other. He went to the house of Micah in Ephraim to carry out his work. He was invited to stay and became Micah’s priest (17:8-12). He received remuneration for his work as a priest. So this Levite started to do his work as a priest. Judges 18 continues to explain how the priesthood became more official. The tribe of Dan, trying to expand their home territory, asked Jonathan at the house of Micah if they would be successful. Jonathan, the priest, told them that they indeed would succeed in

expanding their home territory. This happened and the tribe of Dan wanted him to become a priest for the whole tribe. He accepted this offer and he and his family served the tribe (18:21-31) as priests (cf. Krugler 2009:600-1). It may have been that many of the tribes may have had similar stories of how their priests came into being. Our problem is that most of the writings of the Old Testament (being written much later), only tell of an already existing centralized priesthood.

### **3.6.1.3 The Zadokites**

With the establishment of a Monarchy in Israel came a sacral reverence of the kings. They were seen, as most kings were in the Ancient Near East, as either deity or directly appointed by the gods. Therefore it was natural for the kings to be anointed by priests and to work hand in hand with the priests. Such was the case with Saul and Samuel and David and Abiathar (only survivor of Saul's slaughter in 1 Sam 22:20-23). It was during the reign of David that a new priest was introduced onto the scene. His name was Zadok. We read that David officially appointed two priests to serve him: Abiathar and Zadok (2 Sam 20:25). This did not mean that the other priestly functions (as described above) that may have existed among the other tribes stopped, but it shows that the priesthood and the monarchy moved closer together. These two priests supported David during the time of Absalom's revolt, but during the struggle for succession after David's death they parted. Abiathar<sup>32</sup> sided with Adonijah (1 Kgs 1:7) and Zadok sided with Solomon. When Solomon was anointed as king and as successor of David, Zadok became his sole priest (cf. Schiffman 1989:1235). The reign of Solomon was so glorious that it helped to establish Zadok and his descendants

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<sup>32</sup> What happened to Abiathar? Did he play a role as a priest? As was mentioned above, he was appointed with Zadok as one of David's private chaplains (1 Sam 22:2-23). We read in 1 Samuel 20:25 that David rewarded his loyalty by making him the chief priest. King Solomon banished him later to the family estate in Anathoth for his part in supporting Adonijah, Solomon's rival in the succession race. When we read Jeremiah 1:1 it appears that Jeremiah came from this line of priests in Anathoth (cf. Mordechai 1989:4). They may not have been official but they did play a role as priests.



as the only recognised priesthood in Jerusalem. They dominated the priesthood in Jerusalem from the time of Solomon (965 BCE) up until the exile in 586 BCE (cf. Blenkinsopp 1995:76-77; Grabbe 1995:44-45; Hunt 2009:952-3 and Krugler 2009:601-3).

Ezekiel came from the Zadokite line of priests and was taken captive by the Babylonians along with many of the Jerusalem officials. During his exile he became more convinced of the fact that the priesthood that was left behind, along with the monarchy, failed YHWH and the people. They were to blame for the final fall of Jerusalem and the destruction of their beloved temple. Brueggemann (2012:114) observes that Ezekiel “a prophet who likely belonged to the influential priesthood of the Jerusalem temple, viewed the life of his people through the prism of the temple and the requirement of holiness.” So when Ezekiel criticized the people of YHWH he placed particular emphasis on their sacral transgressions. Also, when he imagined a new community on the other side of exile, it consisted of a central temple with the Zadokite priests doing the important tasks and the Levites relegated to minor tasks in and around the temple. A definite “status difference” as Fecher (2004:35) observes in his article. This did not happen exactly in this way. The “sons of Zadok” broadened in the post exilic community to the “sons of Aaron”, but did hold office up and until the time of Antiochus Epiphanes and the Maccabean revolt. Many agree that the Zadokites then removed themselves from the community and were major role players in the establishment of the Qumran community (cf. Blenkinsopp 1995:83-93; Grabbe 1995:60-2; Hunt 2009:952-4; Krugler 2009:596-612; and Ramsey 1992:1034-6).

A strong priestly influence is evident in the theology of Ezekiel. Interesting to note is the observation Fecher (2004:27) makes about the word “priest” that occurs only three times in Ezekiel 1-39, but twenty-two times in chapters 40-48. The three times prior to Ezekiel 40 are 1:3 where Ezekiel is called a priest; another is

in 7:26 where he speaks of the impending disaster that will come upon the people. In these desperate times the institution of the priesthood that was so secure would not be able to give guidance. The final occurrence is in 22:26 where they are accused of profaning YHWH's shrines. The lack of reference to the word "priest" in the first part of Ezekiel is according to Fecher, enough reason to confirm the thesis of multiple redactors in Ezekiel and to argue that the priestly influence was not so strong in the development of the first part of the book. Duguid (2004:43-59) responded with an article to show that the intent of Ezekiel was "indeed to put priests in their proper place" (:43). He shows that Ezekiel shared the concerns of priesthood by teaching the "torah", showing the difference between clean and unclean and to remind them about sacrifice (:58). He makes most of these arguments from Ezekiel 40-48 that in a way strengthens the thesis of Fecher (2004). For me it is the focus of his critique that leaves clues to his priestly concerns prior to Ezekiel 40. Among other things I will try to show in the next two chapters that subjects like: high places (places of worship), covenant infidelity, and lofty shrines that hosted all the wrong cultic practices, are central to his message and that he viewed many of the dilemmas of his people from a priestly point of view and that he saw many of the possibilities of the future through the eyes of a priest. It will become evident in the next chapter that many of the accusations made against the people of YHWH had to do with the transgressions that happened in and around their places of worship. This gives us a better understanding of Ezekiel's ideology when he criticizes and imagines as a prophet. This "criticizing" and "imagining" will be explained in chapter 6 of this study, but for now "judgment prophecies" and "hope prophecies" would also explain the two words.

### 3.7 Summary

In the next two chapters I will start the exegesis of the demarcated texts in Ezekiel. It is however important, and that was the purpose of this chapter, to understand a few key elements that form my perspective on the book of Ezekiel. I summarize these elements as follows:

- The historical/rhetorical situation of the book is one of exile. Ezekiel and his fellow exiles are in Babylon. The build up from 597 until 586 BCE and the realities that followed form the background to this prophetic book. This led to attempts to make sense out of this calamity that had come upon them. The things in which they had trusted, failed them and a new reality needed to be accepted.
- Ezekiel was indeed a historical person and not a literary figure as some have suggested. He was also partly responsible for the composition of the book that bears his name and his story.
- The composition of the book went through phases and was not the work of one author. These phases have been argued and consensus was reached on the Zimmerli proposal of three stages that were finished in 515 BCE.
- The broad theology of the book can be summarized under the following headings: the reason for judgment, the new reality of personal responsibility, YHWH's salvation on the grounds of "his holy name", the hope of restoration and the establishment of a new community. The theology of Ezekiel introduces new themes to us: Personal responsibility and YHWH being the God of all nations are the most important ones.
- Ezekiel was a Zadokite priest and tried to establish a new community that was theocratic in nature where the temple was central. This central worship would be led and executed by the priestly order of the Zadokites.

## Chapter 4 Study of Selected Texts from the Book of Ezekiel Prior to the Fall of Jerusalem: The Judgment Texts

### 4.1 Introduction

Understanding the history of research and key elements of the book of Ezekiel is crucial when one attempts to study and exegete the texts. It forms the foundation for the enquiry to continue to build. In this chapter the enquiry will be into the so-called “Judgment Texts”. These texts are called so because they form part of the first half of the book that seems to be set prior to the fall of Jerusalem. The fall of Jerusalem and in particular Ezekiel 33:21 in the introductory chapter of this study have been called a “pivoting point” in the rhetoric of the book of Ezekiel. The prophecies of the book change their tenor from doom and judgment to salvation and hope. It is not possible to look into all the chapters of this first half of the Ezekiel book; therefore a selection and demarcation were necessary. This chapter will embark on a study of Ezekiel 6, 7 and 16. The selection of these particular texts was explained in the introductory chapter but in general these chapters announce judgment on Israel and give a history of Israel’s sinful past.

The study and exegesis will focus on the historical circumstances and then look at how Ezekiel communicated amidst these circumstances. After each chapter a theological summary will follow. I will not attempt to do a re-translation of the text from the Hebrew, but in order to fully understand certain phrases in certain texts, an acknowledgement and commentary of certain Hebrew words would be necessary and helpful. The enquiry would be a literary<sup>33</sup> one into the *Sitz im leben* of the audience and the communication the prophet used to respond to these realities. The exegesis will search for the metaphors and images that

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<sup>33</sup> With “literary” I mean an enquiry that consults literary works to better understand the text, but also it would be a literary one that looks at formulas, phrases and metaphors that are found in the text.

Ezekiel uses to communicate amidst the harsh reality of exile. An in-depth study of every text would also take up more space than the length of this chapter allows. This would mean that certain texts (those that aid the objectives of this study) will receive more attention than others. At the end of the chapter a summary will be given to show what was distinctive about Ezekiel's communication prior to the Fall of Jerusalem as observed in the study of these specific texts.

To aid reading, the Hebrew (Masoretic) text as well as the New International Version (NIV) Translation, will be inserted before every section of study.

## **4.2 Ezekiel 6:1-14**

### **4.2.1 Background and introduction**

Chapters 6 and 7 of Ezekiel are seen by some commentators as a unit. Both contain oracles against Israel. Chapter 6 turns its attention to the land of Israel while chapter 7 proclaims how the end is upon the people and how it would impact them. Blenkinsopp (1990:40-50) deals with these two chapters as a unit under the heading of "The Approaching Judgment". The literary nature of the two chapters differs. Chapter 6 is prose while chapter 7 is poetry. This led some scholars to conclude that chapter 7 was indeed a later addition to and elaboration of the previous chapter (cf. Joyce 2007: 93).

For Bowen (2010:30) Ezekiel 1-3 establishes the prophet's credentials, while chapters 4-5 lay out his overall message. Arriving at chapter 6 we will now learn the details of that message. This message takes on different forms and the prophet uses many metaphors (that will be explored) but his message stays the same. In the end his message is unwavering: It was Israel's sin that lead to God

punishing them. In this oracle (like in chapters 8-11) Ezekiel gives a great deal of attention to cultic issues.

#### 4.2.2 Sub-divisions of the text

Ezekiel 6 is the shortest of the three oracles that will be discussed in this chapter and not many sub-divisions are suggested. Maarsingh (1985:74-82) suggests (in Dutch) three sub-divisions: “Grondig ontwijd” (6:1-7), “De innerlike ommekeer” (6:8-10) and “Een grote woestenij” (6:11-14), while Allen (1994: 84) sees two oracles inside the fourteen verses. According to him the two messenger formulas that head up verses 1-10 and 11-14, break the unit into two oracles. The first oracle is directed against the mountains<sup>34</sup> of Israel and the second against those in the homeland. I will use Allen’s sub-division when discussing Ezekiel 6 because it is the way I too see the unit dividing.

#### 4.2.3 Exegetical analysis - Ezekiel 6:1-14

וַיְהִי דְבַר־יְהוָה אֵלַי לֵאמֹר:  
2 בֶּן־אָדָם שִׁים פְּנֶיךָ אֶל־הָרֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וְהִנְבֵּא אֲלֵיהֶם:  
3 וְאָמַרְתָּ הָרֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל שְׁמַעוּ דְבַר־אֲדֹנָי יְהוִה כֹּה־אָמַר אֲדֹנָי  
יְהוִה לְהָרִים וְלַגְּבְעוֹת לְאֶפְיָקִים (וְלַגְּאִית) [וְלַגְּאִיֹּת] הַנְּנִי  
אֲנִי מֵבִיא עֲלֵיכֶם חֶרֶב וְאִבְדֹתַי בְּמֹותֵיכֶם:  
4 וְנִשְׁמָו מִזְבְּחֹתֵיכֶם וְנִשְׁבְּרוּ חֲמֻנֵיכֶם וְהַפְּלֹתִי חֲלָלֵיכֶם  
לְפָנַי גְּלוּלֵיכֶם:  
5 וְנִתְּתִי אֶת־פְּגָרֵי בְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל לְפָנַי גְּלוּלֵיהֶם וְזָרִיתִי  
אֶת־עַצְמוֹתֵיכֶם סְבִיבוֹת מִזְבְּחֹתֵיכֶם:  
6 בְּכֹל מוֹשְׁבוֹתֵיכֶם הָעָרִים תִּחְרַבְנָה וְהַבְּמוֹת תִּישְׁמְנָה לְמַעַן  
יִחְרְבוּ וַיֵּאשְׁמוּ מִזְבְּחֹתֵיכֶם וְנִשְׁבְּרוּ וְנִשְׁבְּתוּ גְלוּלֵיכֶם

<sup>34</sup> It will be concluded later that “mountains” stands for the cultic places where the false gods were worshipped.

וּנְגַדְעוּ חֲמוּנֵיכֶם וְנִמְחוּ מַעֲשֵׂיכֶם:  
<sup>7</sup> וְנָפַל חֶלֶל בְּתוֹכְכֶם וַיִּדְעַתֶּם כִּי־אֲנִי יְהוָה:  
<sup>8</sup> וְהוֹתַרְתִּי בַהֲיוֹת לָכֶם פְּלִיטֵי חָרֵב בְּגוֹיִם בְּהַזְרוֹתֵיכֶם  
בְּאַרְצוֹת:  
<sup>9</sup> וְזָכְרוּ פְּלִיטֵיכֶם אוֹתִי בְּגוֹיִם אֲשֶׁר נִשְׁבוּ־שָׁם אֲשֶׁר נִשְׁבַּרְתִּי  
אֶת־לִבָּם הַזֹּנֶה אֲשֶׁר־סָר מֵעָלַי וְאֵת עֵינֵיהֶם הַזֹּנוֹת אַחֲרַי  
גְּלוּלֵיהֶם וְנִקְטְפוּ בַּפְּנֵיהֶם אֶל־הָרָעוֹת אֲשֶׁר עָשׂוּ לְכָל  
תוֹעֲבֹתֵיהֶם:  
<sup>10</sup> וַיִּדְעוּ כִּי־אֲנִי יְהוָה לֹא אֶל־חַנֵּם דְּבַרְתִּי לַעֲשׂוֹת לָהֶם  
הָרָעָה הַזֹּאת: פ  
<sup>11</sup> כֹּה־אָמַר אֲדֹנָי יְהוִה הִכָּה בְּכַפְףִי וְרָקַע בְּרִגְלִי וְאָמַר־אֶח  
אֵל כָּל־תוֹעֲבוֹת רָעוֹת בַּיִת יִשְׂרָאֵל אֲשֶׁר בַּחֲרַב בְּרָעַב  
וּבַדְּבַר יִפְלוּ:  
<sup>12</sup> הֲרַחֹק בְּדַבֵּר יָמוֹת וְהִקְרוֹב בַּחֲרַב יִפּוֹל וְהַנְּשָׂאֵר וְהַנְּצוֹר  
בְּרָעַב יָמוֹת וְכִלְיֹתַי חֲמַתִּי בָּם:  
<sup>13</sup> וַיִּדְעַתֶּם כִּי־אֲנִי יְהוָה בַּהֲיוֹת חֲלָלֵיהֶם בְּתוֹךְ גְּלוּלֵיהֶם  
סְבִיבוֹת מִזְבְּחוֹתֵיהֶם אֵל כָּל־גִּבְעָה רָמָה בְּכָל רֹאשֵׁי  
הַהָרִים וְתַחַת כָּל־עֵץ רַעֲנָן וְתַחַת כָּל־אֵלֶּה עֲבֹתָהּ מְקוֹם  
אֲשֶׁר נִתְנוּ־שָׁם רִיחַ נִיחַח לְכָל גְּלוּלֵיהֶם:  
<sup>14</sup> וְנָטִיתִי אֶת־יָדַי עֲלֵיהֶם וְנָתַתִּי אֶת־הָאָרֶץ שְׂמָמָה וּמְשֻׁמָּה  
מִמִּדְבַּר דְּבַלְתָּהּ בְּכָל מוֹשְׁבוֹתֵיהֶם וַיִּדְעוּ כִּי־אֲנִי יְהוָה: פ

The word of the LORD came to me: <sup>2</sup> “Son of man, set your face against the mountains of Israel; prophesy against them <sup>3</sup> and say: ‘O mountains of Israel, hear the word of the Sovereign LORD. This is what the Sovereign LORD says to the mountains and hills, to the ravines and valleys: I am about to bring a sword against you, and I will destroy your high places. <sup>4</sup> Your altars will be demolished and your incense altars will be smashed; and I will slay your people in front of your idols. <sup>5</sup> I will lay the dead bodies of the Israelites in front of their idols, and I will scatter your bones around your altars. <sup>6</sup> Wherever you live, the towns will be laid waste and the high places demolished, so that your altars will be laid waste and devastated, your idols smashed and ruined, your incense altars broken down, and what you have made wiped out. <sup>7</sup> Your people will fall slain

among you, and you will know that I am the LORD. <sup>8</sup> “But I will spare some, for some of you will escape the sword when you are scattered among the lands and nations. <sup>9</sup> Then in the nations where they have been carried captive, those who escape will remember me – how I have been grieved by their adulterous hearts, which have turned away from me, and by their eyes, which have lusted after their idols. They will loathe themselves for the evil they have done and for all their detestable practices. <sup>10</sup> And they will know that I am the LORD; I did not threaten in vain to bring this calamity on them. <sup>11</sup> “This is what the Sovereign LORD says: Strike your hands together and stamp your feet and cry out “Alas!” because of all the wicked and detestable practices of the house of Israel, for they will fall by the sword, famine and plague. <sup>12</sup> He that is far away will die of the plague, and he that is near will fall by the sword, and he that survives and is spared will die of famine. So will I spend my wrath upon them. <sup>13</sup> And they will know that I am the LORD, when their people lie slain among their idols around their altars, on every high hill and on all the mountaintops, under every spreading tree and every leafy oak – places where they offered fragrant incense to all their idols. <sup>14</sup> And I will stretch out my hand against them and make the land a desolate waste from the desert to Diblah – wherever they live. Then they will know that I am the LORD.”

**Verse 1** starts with the well-known and very distinctive Ezekiel messenger formula: **וַיְהִי דְבַר־יְהוָה אֵלַי לֵאמֹר** (“The word of the Lord came to me”). This exact phrase appears six times in Jeremiah, twice in Zechariah but is found thirty-two times<sup>35</sup> in Ezekiel! All three of the texts that were chosen to be discussed in this chapter start with this formula. Zimmerli (1982:99-110 ) calls this the “דְּבַר (word) event” that is filled with the revelation of YHWH himself. This becomes throughout the book of Ezekiel like a rhythmic response. YHWH responds to the need of the moment with his word. For Greenberg (1983:83) this is a “reporting of a revelation-experience”. A proper study of the word and this

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<sup>35</sup> Greenberg (1983:83) suggests “close to fifty” times.



“word event” will be conducted in chapter 7. This “דְּבַר” “word event” will later be crucial in trying to build a model on “imagining in a changing society”.

**Verse 2** also has a well-known phrase that forms part of the Ezekiel rhetoric. שִׁים פְּנֶיךָ (“set your face against/towards”) appears nine times in the book of Ezekiel. On the other occasions the prophet turns his face against the false prophets (13:17), against Jerusalem (21:2), against Ammon (21:2; 25:2), against Sidon (28:21), against the Pharaoh of Egypt (29:2), against the mountains of Seir (35:2) and against Gog (38:2). In verse 2 of chapter 6 it is against the mountains of Israel. Zimmerli (1979:182-3) suggests that this was a physical turning in the direction of the mountains in order to see them. He mentions the Balaam narrative to show how important it may have been for a prophet delivering an oracle or a curse to see the receivers. Balak attempted three times from different directions to direct a proper curse at Israel through the seer. It is noted that on all three occasions (Num 22:41; 23:13; 24:2) he was able to see the camp of Israel. The problem with this is that, for instance in Ezekiel 29:2, where the prophet sets his face against or towards Egypt, visual contact was not possible. For me it is more of a prophetic gesture, a sign-act that is part and parcel of the Ezekiel rhetoric. Friebel (1999) published a book that studied the sign-acts of Jeremiah and Ezekiel. He made a serious case for prophets and their nonverbal communication. He studied their communicative meanings and the rhetorical function under the “four constituent parts of the persuasion process: (a) attention, (b) comprehension, (c) acceptance, (d) retention” (:79).

Ezekiel may have physically turned towards the south-west when addressing Egypt for rhetorical purposes. As he was with his fellow exiles in Babylon Ezekiel was not able to make visual contact<sup>36</sup> with the mountains of Israel. Allen (1994:86) suggests that this may have been sarcastic as well. The exiles in the

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<sup>36</sup> I agree with Zimmerli (1979:185) that dates this chapter (apart from some later overworking) to a time between 597-587 BCE.

monotonous plains of Babylon may have longed for the grandeur and mountain areas of their homeland. Ezekiel now set his face to the mountains of Israel, but also to the hills, valleys and ravines (**verse 3**). This may have been a gesture, but it was also to let the audience know that every part of the land was under judgment. Just like the “house of Israel” meant its inhabitants, so the mountains, hills, valleys and ravines also referred to their inhabitants (cf. Vawter & Hoppe 1991:51). YHWH now brings the sword against them and he vows to destroy their “high places”. For Bodi (2009:418) “the Hebrews undoubtedly borrowed the word *במה* (‘high places’) from the Canaanites together with the idolatrous practices performed on it”. These “high places” have become, over time, the opposite of that for which their temple worship stood. After the completion of the temple, formal worship anywhere else was prohibited. Worship however still happened on these “high places”, but because it could not be controlled, they were open to the influences of the Canaanite fertility practices, which inevitably led to idolatry (Bodi 2009:418; Taylor 1969:89-90).

A brutal picture of YHWH’s judgment is given in **verses 4 and 5**. The altars and idols would be destroyed and the people would be slain in front of their dead and helpless idols. The bodies and bones of the Israelites would be scattered around the altars. Bodi’s commentary (2009:418-419) on this picture needs to be quoted:

The exposure of corpses in the open space around the altars implies an invitation to vultures and other scavenging creatures. In the Ancient Near East one finds the curse of throwing bodies out into the open as punishment for broken treaties. In the vassal treaty between the Assyrian king Esarhaddon (620-627 BCE) and Ramataya of Urakazabanu, one of the curses runs as follows: “May Ninurta, chief of the gods, fell you with swift arrow; may he fill the plain with your corpses; may he feed your flesh to the eagle and jackal.” The slain will

be denied their final rest and the cult sites will be defiled by the corpses of their former devotees.

This punishment of the Israelites was also because they broke a treaty (covenant). YHWH had to act in response to their unfaithfulness. **Verses 6-7** elaborate on the theme of destruction and judgment. Again it makes reference to the demolishing of the “high places” and the slaying of the perpetrators. For Allen (1994:87) the anger of an ex-priest that turned prophet also shows in the manner he proclaims this oracle. For Ezekiel, who had been part of a family who served for generations in the Jerusalem temple, these “high places” with their altars and wrong practices of idolatry derailed his beloved people and brought them into exile. A valid question at this stage might be as to who the prophet’s audience might be. Was it his fellow exiles, or might it be those in Judah that will still end up in exile? He uses words like “I will unleash my anger” referring to the future but also that “the end has come”. I think he is addressing the fellow exiles, but his message was meant to reach a bigger audience – especially those not yet in exile.

Verse 7b ends with the so-called recognition formula. “You will know that I am the Lord” that is abundant in the rhetoric of Ezekiel. It is repeated more than seventy times in Ezekiel alone. It is almost as if it strikes a keynote at the end of each oracle to which it is added. Zimmerli (1982:29-98)<sup>37</sup> was the first to do a proper study of this formula. He showed that this formula usually suggests the final goal and actual culmination of what is spoken by the prophet and intended by YHWH. Ever since not much has been added that was substantial to the research on this formula. Evans (2006) has done a study to show that these formulas mark the theological essence of the Ezekiel theology and that when it is read inter-textually with the recognition formulas of the Exodus book, interesting relationships are seen. He argued that a strong relationship exists between the

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<sup>37</sup> The essay *Knowledge of God According to the Book of Ezekiel* was published in 1954 in German and in English in 1982. This appeared in the book *I am Yahweh*.

book of Ezekiel and the Exodus “tradition”. This took his study into an in-depth scrutiny of the dating of certain of the sources used in Exodus. In the end he suggests that an inter-textual reading of Ezekiel with Exodus is “not only justified but even necessary” (2006:321). To return to the recognition formula in verse 7b, it does come at the end of a brutal killing spree of YHWH. The reason given for this is that the people may know that YHWH and not the idols they worship is LORD. The actions of YHWH that happen usually before these recognition formulas are to reveal knowledge of who he is. Allen (1994:88) observed: “The object of YHWH’s acts of judgment against the local shrines and those who worshipped in them is to re-establish a true awareness of the nature of YHWH.”

**Verses 8 -10** are considered by many to be a later addition that was added after the exile had run its course and restoration was in view (cf. Blenkinsopp 1990:42; Vawter & Hoppe 1991:54). It introduces almost a new experience. Up till now the inhabitants of the land would be killed and scattered in their shrines for vultures to pounce on. The prophet now alludes to exile. The idea of exile was already introduced in chapter 5 by the sign-act and the explanation of it. Instead of giving hope to those who escaped the initial killing spree, it piled on the doom (cf. Allen 1994:88-9; Blenkinsopp 1990:42; Brownlee 1986:98). For Cooper (1994:108-9) amongst this doom lies a faint glimmer of hope - that is if those who are taken captive remember (**verse 9**). In these exilic conditions those who were lucky enough to escape should remember the reason why they are there. They must remember how they have turned away from YHWH with their adulterous hearts and they must also loathe the fact that their fate was brought upon themselves with their “detestable practices”<sup>38</sup> of idolatry. This first unit of verses 1-10 ends in

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<sup>38</sup> The description “detestable practices” is found thirty times in the Old Testament. Of these thirty occurrences twenty-two are found in Ezekiel. The first time it is used is in Ezekiel 5:11 and it is tied up with the sanctuary. The people defiled the “sanctuary with their vile images and detestable practices.” Eichrodt (1986:89) makes an argument that these practices that accompanied the worship of idols become the main accusation that Ezekiel brings against them throughout the book of Ezekiel. This idol worship probably coincided with prostitution and syncretism and it angered YHWH. It was the temple that YHWH intended to use as means of communication with

**verse 10** with yet another recognition formula. This time it is to reveal that YHWH does not threaten in vain. I tend to agree that this was a later addition to the chapter because **verse 11** continues with the theme of those who die either by sword, famine or plague and does not mention the exile that is mentioned in verses 8-10.

The three forms of judgment that are mentioned in **verses 11-14** are repeated from Ezekiel 5:1-3 and 12. Verse 11 starts with the prophet being told to clap his hands and to stamp his feet and to shout out “Alas”. Clapping hands is usually associated with joy (cf. Ps 47:1; 98:8; Isa 55:12) but can according to Bowen (2010:35) “also be an expression of derision (Lam 2:15; Nah 3:19).” The shouting of “alas” is to draw attention and to convey a feeling of threat and defiance. The three instruments of punishment that the prophet suggests: sword, famine and plague, are borrowed from the preceding oracle (Ez 5). These three phrases according to Greenberg (1983:136) form part of the cultic curses in Leviticus 26:25, but the only other prophet that uses this exclusively is Jeremiah (cf. 14:12; 21:9; 27:8, 13; 29:18). He might also be borrowing from Jeremiah himself. It is not clear but Ezekiel borrows these three means of punishment to punish those that the prophet according to Block (1997:236):

... identifies [as] the objects of YHWH’s wrath in terms of three concentric circles: those afar off, that is, the scattered population; those nearby, that is, those outside the walls; and those inside the city.

It emphasizes that the destruction would be total and that no one would escape.

Again the shrines (most of the time outside and under the shades of trees) become the final resting place of their worshippers. The totality of the destruction is emphasized in verse 14 where it mentions that YHWH would stretch out his

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his people, but they now have gone too far. As Maarsingh (1985:65) put it, “voor de priester profet is zulk een ontwijding zonder meer verschrikkelijk.”

hand across the whole land: From the desert to Diblah. This Diblah was probably Riblah as some other Hebrew manuscripts suggest. Vawter and Hoppe (1991:55) suggest that this was “undoubtedly due to the scribal confusion of the Hebrew letters “d” and “r.” The desert was the southern boundary and Riblah was the place where Nebuchadnezzar (2 Kgs 25:20-21) sealed the fate of Jerusalem and Judah (cf. Allen 1994:90-1; Cooper 1994:109; Vawter & Hoppe 1991:55). Riblah was in central Syria and probably aided the prophet’s metaphor of totality. The desert in the south and Riblah to the north for Joyce (2007:92) means “from north to south with a sense of inclusive completeness”. Verse 14 ends again with the messenger formula and specifies the aim of the judgment, “That the people may know that YHWH is the LORD.” It was used in verses 7, 10, 13 and 14 and shows how the prophet and YHWH longed for these wayward people to have an intimate knowledge of YHWH.

#### **4.2.4 Theological conclusions**

At the end of this chapter I will summarize some of the key points pertaining to the objectives of this study that came out of the three chapters (Ez 6; 7; 16). However a few immediate theological observations on the prophet’s aim with this prophecy are necessary.

- The prophet definitely aims to *explain the reality of his audience’s dilemma*. The doom that is closing in on them has everything to do with their own cultic offences. The punishment for their disobedience resembles the punishment that was promised in Leviticus 26:30ff. Their disobedience was shown by the way they worshipped idols on the “high places”. These high places were discussed in the exegetical section.
- What was Ezekiel’s aim in addressing *the mountains*? The mountains could have been symbolical of these high places. Greenberg (1983:139-140) does not agree with this assumption. For him the “mountains and

ravines” are the places where battles are decided. Ezekiel setting his face to the mountains was to show that across the mountains the corpses (yet another image that frequents the chapter) of the Israelites would lie. Another explanation of mountains could be that mountains are on many occasions in the Old Testament the place from whence the messenger comes (Is 40:9; 52:7; Nah 1:15) with good or bad news. For Israel this prophecy is bad news. In Micah 6:1-2 mountains are called to be a witness against the people. A final understanding of mountains that I favour in this context is that the mountains pair up with other words to refer to the whole land – everything – ravines, mountains, hills and valleys as evident in verse 3. For me the best interpretation would be twofold: It definitely refers to “high places” where idolatry happened, but it also leaves the feeling of totality – YHWH’s judgment is all-inclusive. The prophet aims to address the whole of Israel.

- It seems as if *self-loathing* could have been another aim of the prophecy. At the end of the prophecy there should be no uncertainty as to why YHWH had to act against them. For Bowen (2010:35-36) the prophet feels that the people have lost their sense of “moral disgust” and that “although the cure seems worse than the disease, Ezekiel believes that the exile will restore the people’s moral disgust”. This is evident in the reference to those who survive this terrible ordeal. They will be sorry for what they did, but they will well and truly know that their actions have consequences.
- From this chapter it is also clear that one does not want to be on the **wrong side of YHWH**. YHWH is depicted by the prophet as impassionate towards those who displeased him. Block (1997:239) observes that “YHWH is El Qanna, ‘Impassioned God’ or sometimes translated, ‘Jealous God.’ He will not stand idly by while other gods vie for his people’s devotion and they in turn spurn his grace.”

The inclusion of this chapter for exegesis has aided the objectives of this study in the following ways:

- It shows that there is a *definite tenor of total judgment in the rhetoric* of Ezekiel that is presumably part and parcel of the first part of the book prior to the so-called “pivoting point” (fall of Jerusalem in 33:21).
- YHWH’s word that comes to the prophet is not “sugar coated” and *gives reasons for their current reality*. Their reality being in exile as part of the first group of deportees that was taken in 597 BCE.
- In this reality a *glimmer of hope is evident*. Some will be spared and they will “remember”. Those who remember that their practices of idolatry have grieved YHWH and caused their dilemma will become the audience that in the future will imagine a new hopeful future with the help of Ezekiel’s communication.

Chapter 6 indeed functions as a good introduction to chapter 7 that now builds on the theme of judgment in a more poetic manner.

### **4.3 Ezekiel 7:1-27**

#### **4.3.1 Background and introduction**

A consensus exists amongst scholars that the text of this chapter is particularly difficult. A lot of differences between the LXX and the MT are mentioned. This is compounded by the fact that the entire chapter’s literary genre is one of poetry (cf. Block 1997:241-243; Joyce 2007:93; Ruiz & Lust 2001:1060). In a poetic manner the prophet starts his prophecy with a series of “painfully intelligible oracles that reiterate essentially the same message: the end has come, disaster after disaster, behold the day, the time has come”. It starts off, after the “word formula”, by announcing the end (vv. 2-4), then proclaiming that this end would



be filled with disaster and doom (vv. 5-9), introducing the day of the Lord that is the subject of verses 10-27. This day of the Lord is not one of victory, but a day of reckoning. The day of the Lord concept was first introduced by Amos and then a few years before Ezekiel by Zephaniah's poem in his first chapter (cf. Ruiz & Lust 2001:1060). Ezekiel also states the reason for the coming of this terrible day as Israel's own doings and that "the rod" (will be argued to be the Babylonians) that would be instrumental in carrying out the judgment of this day had "blossomed" and was ready. Images of a city that is overcome and taken in by the enemy are central to this day of judgment. The people would seek peace and consolation, but there would be none. Out of this, knowledge of YHWH will grow. They will know that he will not oversee all the wrong that they as a people have done. With this as background the reading and explanation of the text now follows.

#### **4.3.2 Sub-divisions of the text**

Zimmerli (1979:201) suggests that chapter seven should be divided into two sections. The repetition of the messenger formula is evidence of this. Chapter 7 would then be divided into verses 1-4 and 5-27. Other commentators differ somewhat on this and suggest more sub-divisions of the chapter. I will go with the following subdivisions under the broader heading of *Announcements of the End upon the Land*. The first two announcements are introduced by two well-known formulas: "The word of the Lord came to me" (v. 1) and "this is what the sovereign Lord says" (v. 5) while the last announcement is introduced with the words, "the day is here". These sub-divisions are also suggested by Brownlee (1986:107-124) and Darr (2001:1164-1171):

1. First Announcement (7:1-4)
2. Second Announcement (7:5-9)

### 3. Third Announcement (7:10-27)

#### 4.3.3 Exegetical analysis - Ezekiel 7:1-27

##### 4.3.3.1 First Announcement (7:1-4)

<sup>1</sup> וַיְהִי דְבַר־יְהוָה אֵלַי לֵאמֹר:<sup>2</sup> וְאַתָּה בֶן־אָדָם פֹּה־אָמַר אֲדַנִּי  
יְהוָה לְאַדְמַת יִשְׂרָאֵל קֵץ בָּא הַקֵּץ עַל־[אַרְבַּעַת] [אַרְבַּע]  
כְּנָפוֹת הָאָרֶץ:  
<sup>3</sup> עֲתָה הַקֵּץ עָלֶיךָ וְשַׁלַּחְתִּי אִפְיִ בְךָ וְשִׁפְטִיתִיךָ כְּדַרְכֶיךָ  
וְנָתַתִּי עָלֶיךָ אֶת כָּל־תּוֹעֲבֹתֶיךָ:  
<sup>4</sup> וְלֹא־תַחֲסוּס עֵינַי עָלֶיךָ וְלֹא אֶחְמוֹל כִּי דַרְכֶיךָ עָלֶיךָ אֲתֹן  
וְתוֹעֲבוֹתֶיךָ בְּתוֹכָךָ תִּהְיוּ וַיֵּדַעְתֶּם כִּי־אֲנִי יְהוָה: פ

The word of the LORD came to me: <sup>2</sup> “Son of man, this is what the Sovereign LORD says to the land of Israel: The end! The end has come upon the four corners of the land. <sup>3</sup> The end is now upon you and I will unleash my anger against you. I will judge you according to your conduct and repay you for all your detestable practices. <sup>4</sup> I will not look on you with pity or spare you; I will surely repay you for your conduct and the detestable practices among you. Then you will know that I am the LORD.

This first announcement is neatly nestled between two formulas, the first, in **verse 1** being the well-known and very distinctive, Ezekiel messenger formula וַיְהִי דְבַר־יְהוָה אֵלַי לֵאמֹר (“The word of the Lord came to me”). The second formula is what is referred to as the “recognition formula” וַיֵּדַעְתֶּם כִּי־אֲנִי יְהוָה (“Then you will know that I am the Lord”). This also is very distinctive of Ezekiel’s rhetoric. Apart from Exodus 6:7; 10:2; 16:12; 1 Kings 20:28 and Joel 4:17, it is exclusive to Ezekiel. It is used twice in chapter 7 and on nineteen other occasions by Ezekiel. By using this rhetorically Ezekiel is setting up the case that they will know YHWH in a new way. This new way will begin with YHWH punishing them, but will open them up to know him in a new way – as Ezekiel will

later in his oracles communicate when he speaks of new hearts and a new covenant.

**Verse 2** begins with the prophecy that is addressed exclusively to the prophet. This word that comes to Ezekiel is part of a reality that he needs to face in order to make sense of this exile and to be able to give answers to his bewildered countrymen. The prophecy promptly announces the end – specifically “the end has come upon the four corners of the land”. Some commentators (Darr 2001:1165; Taylor 1969:92-3) feel that this may even be eschatological as to pertain to the whole earth – in other words that an end has come upon the four corners of the earth. Block (1997:249) explains as follows:

He declares initially that the end encompasses *the four corners of the earth*, a literary figure derived from the workshop of the clothier who spreads out his rectangular piece of cloth (cf. Deut 22:12). In Job 38:13 the earth is poetically compared to a sheet that the dawn takes hold of by the “corners” in order to shake out the wicked, like crumbs from a tablecloth. When combined with “the earth” in other contexts, it carries a universal significance with eschatological overtones. Ezekiel has hereby adapted an eschatological term for use in a non-eschatological context to emphasize the severity of the disaster that awaits the land. For Ezekiel, the end of Israel might as well be the end of the world.

I agree that a solely eschatological interpretation would make the text say things that Ezekiel did not intend. Ezekiel is trying to make his audience aware of the totality of the end, rather than announcing oracles that have eschatological implications. The translation of “land” that the NIV uses is fitting because it speaks about the land from whence these exiles came and after five years still have not returned (Clements 1996:29-30). The word ארץ appears twice in this

verse and also in verses 6; 21:30,34 and 35:5. קֵץ frequents the latter part of the book of Daniel. The word for “the end” ( קֵץ ) appears three times in this chapter and is reminiscent of Amos 8:2 where it also appears. The NIV translation of Amos 8:2 translated it with “the time is ripe” along the lines of the vision of the basket with ripe fruit the prophet was seeing. The rhetorical function of the repetition of the word is to emphasize the severity and certainty that YHWH will act. The situation is serious, it is judgment time! Blenkinsopp (1990:44-46) observes that Ezekiel 7 is a sermon based largely upon Amos 5:18-20 and 8:2-3, 9-10. Be this as it may, the message of verse 2 is loud and clear. YHWH has had enough and a theme of doom and gloom is about to follow.

The patience of YHWH has now run out and this is why **verse 3** again makes reference to “the end” and ties it up with the anger of YHWH that is about to be unleashed because of the “detestable practices” of Israel. This repetition helps Ezekiel to communicate in no uncertain terms. The anger and judgment of YHWH brings the end. This end is brought on Israel not as a result of blind fury, but as just punishment for the sins and practices of Israel. Maarsingh (1985: 84) puts it this way:

Dat dit aan Gods kant geen gril, willekeur of blinde woede is, blijkt uit de maatstaf die Hij hanteert. Hij voltrekt een vonnis dat helemaal in overeenstemming met datgene wat het volk zelf heeft gedaan, niet meer, ook niet minder. Hun gruwelen, de erge dingen die ze in ontrouw jegens God bedreven hebben, blijven voor hun verantwoordelijkheid. Wat een mens zaait zal hij ook maaien.

From this punishment there will be no reprieve. This is the theme of **verse 4**. YHWH vows to “repay” Israel for their many “detestable practices” and to top it all, the prophet makes almost an overstatement (and repeats it in v. 9) to emphasize this. He declares: “I will not look on you with pity” and this makes the

judgment final. Alexander (1988:777) observes that this repayment is that, apart from exile, the Judeans will go into exile in countries where many of these “detestable practices” are common. Almost like salt in the wounds. Verses 3 and 4 make it clear that YHWH’s action is in response to the actions of Israel. The sense that is to be made out of the tragedy of exile is that it was brought upon themselves and that it was not YHWH that has forsaken them.

#### 4.3.3.2 Second announcement (7:5-9)

<sup>5</sup> כֹּה אָמַר אֲדֹנָי יְהוִה רָעָה רָעָה אַחַת רָעָה הִנֵּה בָּאָה:  
<sup>6</sup> קֵץ בָּא בָּא הַקֵּץ הַקֵּץ אֱלֹהֵי הִנֵּה בָּאָה:  
<sup>7</sup> בָּאָה הַצְּפִירָה אֱלֹהֵי יוֹשְׁבֵי הָאָרֶץ בָּא הָעֵת קָרוֹב הַיּוֹם  
 מִהַיּוֹמָה וְלֹא־תֵדַע הָרִים:  
<sup>8</sup> עֲתָה מִקְרוֹב אֲשַׁפּוֹךְ חֲמָתִי עָלֶיךָ וְכִלִּיתִי אִפִּי בְךָ  
 וְשִׁפְטִיתִיךָ כַּדְרָכֶיךָ וְנִתְּתִי עָלֶיךָ אֶת כָּל־תּוֹעֲבוֹתֶיךָ:  
<sup>9</sup> וְלֹא־תַחֲוֶה עֵינַי וְלֹא אֲחַמּוֹל כַּדְרָכֶיךָ עָלֶיךָ אֲתֹן  
 וְתוֹעֲבוֹתֶיךָ בְּתוֹכָךָ תִּהְיוּ וַיִּדְעֻתֶם כִּי אֲנִי יְהוָה מֹכֵה:

<sup>5</sup>“This is what the Sovereign LORD says: Disaster! An unheard-of disaster is coming.<sup>6</sup> The end has come! The end has come! It has roused itself against you. It has come!<sup>7</sup> Doom has come upon you – you who dwell in the land. The time has come, the day is near; there is panic, not joy, upon the mountains.<sup>8</sup> I am about to pour out my wrath on you and spend my anger against you; I will judge you according to your conduct and repay you for all your detestable practices.<sup>9</sup> I will not look on you with pity or spare you; I will repay you in accordance with your conduct and the detestable practices among you. Then you will know that it is I the LORD who strikes the blow.

**Verses 5-9** share a lot of similarities with verses 1-4 and modern critics regard them as a parallel variant and probably the work of a later editor, either intentionally or by mistake. Only looking at the similarities may according to Darr (2001:166), strengthen this hypothesis, but when one looks at the differences it looks less plausible – these differences are different addresses to the land of Israel (v. 2) and to the inhabitants of the land (v. 7) and the language associated

with the day of YHWH is more frequent in the first oracle. Similarities and repetition of concepts in the same chapter are not strange to Hebrew poetry and prophecy. These verses then repeat the following messages in general. Firstly “the end has come” like in verses 2 and 3. Secondly YHWH’s anger will bring about “disaster” and “doom”. Thirdly the judgment is because of their “detestable practices”. Fourthly YHWH will not look on them “with pity”. Their punishment must happen and is fair due to their sins.

For Clements (1996:30) this disaster is the culmination of a series of disasters that has hit Israel ever since they began their apostasy that caused the beginning of the Assyrian exile and domination. Assyria will be replaced by a bigger enemy and there will be no time to breathe. No escape.

A distinctive difference between these two sections (7:1-4 and 5-9) is found at the end of each one. This second section ends with a type of recognition formula and differs from the first one that ends the previous sub-division. It reads in the NIV, “Then you will know that I am the LORD who strikes the blow”. Brownlee (1986:107) goes with the following translation, “that you may know that I, YHWH, cudgel” and Greenberg (1983:149) prefers “that I YHWH, strike”. This is new and disturbing language that Ezekiel uses. The root מכה (according to the NIV translation: “to smite”)<sup>39</sup> appears thirty-four times in the Hebrew Bible but is only on this occasion directly linked to the name of YHWH. A different word (נכה) also meaning “to smite” is employed in Isaiah 5:25 to bring across this “new” and up till now foreign image of YHWH who smites his own people. It reminds of the so-called “redemptive” or “revelation” names of YHWH that revealed to Israel who he was (eg. “YHWH-jireh” in Genesis 22:14 and “YHWH-nissi” in Exodus 17:15). He now shows a side of himself that is evoked and angry, “YHWH-makkeh”. Taylor’s observation (1969:93) is noteworthy:

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<sup>39</sup> “stroke” according to the 2001 *Dictionary of Classical Hebrew Volume 5* and is used in four different contexts: (1) strike a blow, (2) strike a wound, (3) to be struck by plague, and (4) slaughter and defeat.

The description of God as *I am the Lord, who smites* (v. 9) cries out for emendation by those who fail to see the grim irony in so much prophetic writing. To the hearers and readers who were used to names of God like “Jehovah-jireh” and “Jehovah-nissi” (Gen 22:14; Ex 17:15), it must have come home with tremendous force to have Him described as “Jehovah-makkeh”. The Lord who has provided and protected was about to strike.

Although a lot of repetition happens in verses 5-9 it ends powerfully and drives the reality home with shocking clarity.

#### 4.3.3.3 Third announcement (7:10-27)

<sup>10</sup> הִנֵּה הַיּוֹם הַנֶּה בָּאָה יִצְאָהּ הַצְּפֹרָה צֶיַן הַמִּטָּה פָּרַח  
הַיְדוּן:  
<sup>11</sup> הַחֲמֹס קָם לְמִטַּה־רָשָׁע לֹא־מֵהֶם וְלֹא מִהַמוֹנִים וְלֹא  
מִהֵמָּה וְלֹא־נָה בָּהֶם:  
<sup>12</sup> בָּא הָעֵת הַגִּיעַ הַיּוֹם הַקּוֹנֵה אֶל־יִשְׁמָח וְהַמוֹכֵר  
אֶל־יִתְאָבֵל כִּי חָרוֹן אֶל־כָּל־הַמוֹנֵה:  
<sup>13</sup> כִּי הַמוֹכֵר אֶל־הַמֹּכֵר לֹא יָשׁוּב וְעוֹד בַּחַיִּים חִיתָם  
כִּי־חֲזוֹן אֶל־כָּל־הַמוֹנֵה לֹא יָשׁוּב וְאִישׁ בַּעֲוֹנוֹ חִיתוֹ לֹא  
יִתְחַקֵּוּ:  
<sup>14</sup> תִּקְעוּ בַתְּקוּעַ וְהַכִּין הַכֹּל וְאִין הַלֵּךְ לְמַלְחָמָה כִּי חָרוֹנִי  
אֶל־כָּל־הַמוֹנֵה:  
<sup>15</sup> הַחֲרֵב בַּחוּץ וְהִדְבֵּר וְהִרְעַב מִבַּיִת אֲשֶׁר בַּשָּׂדֶה בַּחֲרֵב  
יָמוֹת וְאֲשֶׁר בַּעִיר רָעַב וְדָבַר יֹאכְלֵנוּ:  
<sup>16</sup> וּפְלִטוּ פְּלִיטֵיהֶם וְהָיוּ אֶל־הַהָרִים כִּי־נִי הַגֹּאֲיוֹת כָּלָם  
הַמּוֹת אִישׁ בַּעֲוֹנוֹ:  
<sup>17</sup> כָּל־הַיְדוּם תִּרְפִּינָה וְכָל־בְּרָכִים תִּלְכָּנָה מִיּוֹם:  
<sup>18</sup> וְחִגְרוּ שָׁקִים וְכִסְתֶּה אוֹתָם פְּלָצוֹת וְאֵל כָּל־פָּנִים בּוֹשָׁה  
וּבְכָל־רְאשֵׁיהֶם קָרַחַה:  
<sup>19</sup> כִּסְפָם בַּחֲצוֹת יִשְׁלִיכוּ וְזָהָבָם לְנֶדֶה יִהְיֶה כִּסְפָם וְזָהָבָם

לֹא־יִוָּכַל לְהִצִּילֵם בַּיּוֹם עֲבַרְתָּ יְהוָה נַפְשָׁם לֹא יִשְׁבְּעוּ  
 וּמַעֲיָהֶם לֹא יִמְלְאוּ כִּי־מִכְשׁוֹל עֲוֹנָם הִיָּה:  
 20 וַצְּבִי עֲדִיו לְגֵאוֹן שָׁמָּהוּ וְצִלְמֵי תוֹעֲבֹתָם שְׁקוּצֵיהֶם עָשׂוּ  
 בּוֹ עַל־כֵּן נִתְּתִיו לָהֶם לְנֹדָה:  
 21 וְנִתְּתִיו בְּיַד־הַזֹּרִים לָבוֹ וּלְרִשְׁעֵי הָאָרֶץ לְשַׁלַּל (וְחִלְלָה)  
 [וְחִלְלוּהוּ]:  
 22 וְהִסְבּוֹתִי פָּנָי מֵהֶם וְחִלְלוּ אֶת־צְפוּנֵי וּבְאוֹרְכָה פְּרִיצִים  
 וְחִלְלוּהוּ: פ  
 23 עֲשֵׂה הֲרַתּוֹק כִּי הָאָרֶץ מְלֹאָה מִשֹּׁפֵט דָּמִים וְהָעִיר  
 מְלֹאָה חֲמָס:  
 24 וְהִבֵּאתִי רָעִי גוֹיִם וַיִּרְשׁוּ אֶת־בְּתֵיהֶם וְהִשְׁבַּתִּי גֵאוֹן עֲזִים  
 וְנִחְלוּ מִקְדָּשֵׁיהֶם:  
 25 קַפְדֵּה־בָּא וּבִקְשׁוּ שָׁלוֹם וְאִין:  
 26 הוּא עַל־הוּא תְּבוּא וְשִׁמְעָה אֶל־שְׁמוּעָה תִּהְיֶה וּבִקְשׁוּ  
 חֲזוֹן מִנְבִּיא וְתוֹרָה תֵּאבֵד מִכֹּהֵן וְעֵצָה מִזִּקְנִים:  
 27 הַמֶּלֶךְ יִתְאַבֵּל וְנִשְׂיָא יִלְבַּשׁ שִׁמְמָה וַיְרִי עִם־הָאָרֶץ  
 תִּבְהַלְנָה מִדְּרָכָם אַעֲשֶׂה אוֹתָם וּבְמִשְׁפָּטֵיהֶם אֲשַׁפֵּטֵם וַיִּדְעוּ  
 כִּי־אֲנִי יְהוָה: פ

**Ezekiel 7:10-27** <sup>10</sup> “The day is here! It has come! Doom has burst forth, the rod has budded, arrogance has blossomed! <sup>11</sup> Violence has grown into a rod to punish wickedness; none of the people will be left, none of that crowd – no wealth, nothing of value. <sup>12</sup> The time has come, the day has arrived. Let not the buyer rejoice nor the seller grieve, for wrath is upon the whole crowd. <sup>13</sup> The seller will not recover the land he has sold as long as both of them live, for the vision concerning the whole crowd will not be reversed. Because of their sins, not one of them will preserve his life. <sup>14</sup> Though they blow the trumpet and get everything ready, no one will go into battle, for my wrath is upon the whole crowd. <sup>15</sup> “Outside is the sword, inside are plague and famine; those in the country will die by the sword, and those in the city will be devoured by famine and plague. <sup>16</sup> All who survive and escape will be in the mountains, moaning like doves of the valleys, each because of his sins. <sup>17</sup> Every hand will go limp, and every knee will become as weak as water. <sup>18</sup> They will put on sackcloth and be clothed with terror. Their faces



will be covered with shame and their heads will be shaved.<sup>19</sup> They will throw their silver into the streets, and their gold will be an unclean thing. Their silver and gold will not be able to save them in the day of the LORD's wrath. They will not satisfy their hunger or fill their stomachs with it, for it has made them stumble into sin.<sup>20</sup> They were proud of their beautiful jewellery and used it to make their detestable idols and vile images. Therefore I will turn these into an unclean thing for them.<sup>21</sup> I will hand it all over as plunder to foreigners and as loot to the wicked of the earth, and they will defile it.<sup>22</sup> I will turn my face away from them, and they will desecrate my treasured place; robbers will enter it and desecrate it.<sup>23</sup> "Prepare chains, because the land is full of bloodshed and the city is full of violence."<sup>24</sup> I will bring the most wicked of the nations to take possession of their houses; I will put an end to the pride of the mighty, and their sanctuaries will be desecrated.<sup>25</sup> When terror comes, they will seek peace, but there will be none.<sup>26</sup> Calamity upon calamity will come, and rumour upon rumour. They will try to get a vision from the prophet; the teaching of the law by the priest will be lost, as will the counsel of the elders.<sup>27</sup> The king will mourn, the prince will be clothed with despair, and the hands of the people of the land will tremble. I will deal with them according to their conduct, and by their own standards I will judge them. Then they will know that I am the LORD."

**Verse 10** is a powerful five-line poem emphasizing the comprehensiveness and readiness of the judgment day that has come (Alexander 1988:778):

*"The day is here  
It has come,  
doom has burst forth,  
the rod has budded,  
arrogance has blossomed."* (NIV)

For Clements (1996:30) the image relating to agriculture is fitting. People always look for the first buds to see the beginnings of new life on the trees. When it happens the next stage is anticipated. The blossoming of the trees also meant

harvest time. In this case the terrible harvest that Israel will be reaping is imminent. This poem can be difficult to explain. The question is: To whom is it referring? Is it to Israel's pride and arrogance? Or is the prophet alluding to someone else?

Most commentators agree that the rod that has grown out of the violence in **verse 11** refers to Nebuchadnezzar who has become YHWH's instrument who punishes the wickedness of the land. Babylonia has grown through violent conquests to become this new world power, therefore the expression, "violence has grown into a rod to punish wickedness ..." There are some that suggest that the "rod" in verse 10 is not the same "rod" as the one in verse 11, but there is no reason to believe that Ezekiel would part from his original metaphor (cf. Alexander 1988:777; Clements 1996:30; Maarsingh 1985:87-88). This "rod" will make sure that the judgment would be devastating and comprehensive. No people and nothing of value would be left.

**Verses 12 and 13** introduce another metaphor to show that the day has arrived and that the devastation would be massive. Land was very important in the Ancient Near East. Being predominantly an agricultural society with some livestock as well, they depended on land for their survival. Apart from trading for fresh produce that happened amongst the people, the buying and selling of land was also an integral part of their lives. When one acquired land it was a reason to rejoice, but when you lost land or even sold it, it was not that joyful an occasion. The devastation of the land will make none of these occasions memorable. No buyer would rejoice in their newly acquired possessions and no seller would grieve their losses. As Darr (2001:1166) puts it: "What matter if one increases or decreases one's estate, when the economy is certain to crash?" Verse 13 elaborates on this idea and emphasizes that neither the buyer nor the seller shall see their land again. Ezekiel, according to Greenberg (1983:150), might be hinting at the Jubilee laws of Leviticus 25:28. During the year of Jubilee

landowners who were in debt and had had to sell or pawn their land were able to get it back. Ezekiel makes it clear that this would not happen because neither buyer nor seller would be in the land of Judah seven years later. This prophetic “vision will not be reversed” (cf. Alexander 1988:778; Clements 1996:30).

**Verse 14** begins the second half of this chapter and describes the reactions of the Judeans to this *blitzkrieg* of violent judgment. They will try to defend themselves and will blow the trumpet. This image is abundant in the Old Testament. Usually it is YHWH, the *Divine Warrior* who calls his people to war and victory. On this occasion Israel is alone. Military victories are usually won with the help of allies. No one comes to join their cause and above all ... no *Divine Warrior* in their camp. His wrath is now against them. Alone and unable to defend themselves the people of Judah will now be vulnerable to the full threefold effect (**verse 15**) of this judgment. People on the outside will die by the sword, and those on the inside will be cut off and will succumb to famine and diseases. These images elaborate on the same image that is used in Ezekiel 5:16v and “the language is somewhat akin to Ezekiel 5:5 and 6:11-12” (Darr 2001:1167). Those who might be able to escape (**verse 16**) will flee to the mountains. There they will be “moaning like doves of the valley, each because of his sins.” Two observations are necessary regarding this verse. Ezekiel, like many other authors (Ps 11:1; Is 16:2; Jer 48:28), uses bird similes to paint the distress and agony of refugees who seek safety in the heights of Israel. It just shows how rich the texts are in imaginative metaphors. This I will pick up on later. The other observation is that each one thinks of his own sins. This is part of the theology of Ezekiel that introduces personal responsibility of the individual in the face of universal wickedness (cf. Alexander 1988:779; Darr 2001:1167; Eichrodt 1986:103).

In the face of these terrors they would manifest bodily symptoms that would be beyond their control. They would feel limp and weak because of the way in which

the fear has paralysed them and they would not be able to control their bladders, writes Darr (2001:1167) of **verse 17**. Greenberg (1983:152) compares this water on the knees to the Assyrian description of enemies in flight: “Their hearts beat like that of a fledgling dove chased away, they passed hot urine.” He continues that this would lead to customary mortifications (Amos 8:10; Isa 22:12; Ez 27:31) in the face of this public calamity. They would “put on sackcloth and be clothed in terror” (**verse 18**). In the same manner the shaved heads are also a sign of mourning (cf. Darr 2001:1167; Greenberg 1983:152; Maarsingh 1985:92).

**Verses 19 and 20** introduce yet another metaphor to this poetic text – the idea of precious metals. It describes its inability to buy safety and basic necessities in the face of this calamity. These precious metals were also used to make idols. Idols that weren’t able to help them now. They worshipped in disobedience of God. They threw their silver and gold in the streets because they had become “an unclean thing”. One must not forget that one of the main accusations against them was the fact that they “defiled themselves” with their cultic transgressions. The word **נִטְמָא** (can mean “menstruation” or “impurity”), used here refers to unclean bodily secretions like menstrual blood (cf. Darr 2001:1167; Greenberg 1983:152). The very things they used to buy security and make idols are now worthless and are tossed away in disgust. These two images emphasize that greed on the one hand and idolatry on the other, were the main reasons for YHWH’s judgment.

**Verses 21 and 22** make it clear that these treasures will be handed over in the hands of foreigners and YHWH will turn his face away even when they desecrate and plunder his treasured place. He will not stop them or intervene. Everything will be destroyed. Eichrodt (1986:104) observes that seeing YHWH’s face was synonymous with visiting the temple. Now as even the temple is desecrated, YHWH’s face will become hidden.

**Verses 23-27** tell of the final seizure of Jerusalem. “Chains” were prepared for their deportation and the “most wicked” of all, the Babylonians, will take their city, their houses, their temple and their pride. Maarsingh (1985) suggests that the prophet gets so involved in this prophecy that he himself gives the imperative to “prepare chains”. The people will seek peace but none will come. Even the normal channels of guidance will be blocked. The vision of the prophet, the teaching of the priest and the counsel of the elders will be lost. The objects of their security, the kings, princes and the multitudes of the land, would not be able to stop this.

This section ends with the recognition formula also cited in verse 4 and to a degree in verse 9c. These calamities (the blow that was struck according to verse 9c) will cause the proud and stubborn Judeans to acknowledge and know who their Lord is (cf. Brownlee 1986:122; Darr 2001:1168-9; Eichrodt 1986:104-105; Greenberg 1983:154-157; Taylor 1969:94-5). Clements (1996:31-2) makes an interesting observation about this recognition formula that becomes a frequently repeated theme in Ezekiel:

It reveals how clearly the prophet identifies his words as a manifestation of the active presence of God and touches a sensitive nerve. The formula declares that, whereas in the past the realm of piety and devotion such as Ezekiel and his fellow exiles knew through temple worship (Ps 46:10) was the approved path of coming to know God, now such knowledge will come through the pain of judgment.

This completes the prophet’s oracle of the destruction of the city. Ezekiel 6 announced the end of the land while Ezekiel 7 deals with the city and its inhabitants. Ezekiel 16 elaborates on the city of Jerusalem and will be our next chapter for reading and commentary, but first some immediate theological observations from the discussion of Ezekiel 7.

#### 4.3.4 Theological conclusions

Many of the themes that were developed by the prophet in the previous chapter (6) are made stronger in this poetic oracle:

- The prophet attempts, like in the previous chapter, to explain and give reasons for their situation, but also warns of more judgment that will come to the city of Jerusalem.
- Where mountains and valleys and ravines showed how the judgment of YHWH was all-inclusive of Israel, he reinforces it with the image of the end that would be coming over the four corners of the land.
- The issue of “self-loathing” is also extended with the prophet trying to make it known in no uncertain terms that the people themselves (their pride and their practices of idolatry) were to blame for the actions of YHWH.

Some additions are also made:

- According to Zimmerli (1979:213) Ezekiel shows that human blossoming – be it Israel becoming proud and arrogant or Babylon becoming that – inevitably leads to human destruction.
- The prophetic poem also shows that YHWH has ways of undermining the things that a community builds their hope on. Their precious metals became worthless (vv.19-21) and the land they so dearly loved and owned depreciated (vv. 12-13) to such an extent that neither the buyer nor the seller could rejoice (cf. Block 1997:271; Zimmerli 1979:213).
- Ezekiel also shows that YHWH is able to use anybody, even the Babylonians, for his divine purposes.

Working through this chapter aided the objectives of this study in the following ways:

- It reiterates the importance of the metaphors to the prophet and how he used them to communicate realities to his audience. These metaphors are: mountains, but in chapter 7 particularly land (v. 1), YHWH who turns his face away and shows no pity (vv. 4, 9, 22) and sword, famine and plague, rod that budded (v. 10). He calls on his audience's imagination and with poetic skills communicates his take on reality.
- Ezekiel's response to reality flows out of the "the word of the Lord" (word event) that meets the prophet.
- I also remark on the repetition that is abundant in these two chapters. It shows how Ezekiel drove the point home by repeating certain catch phrases.
- Ezekiel 7 adds to the theory that the prophet's rhetorical communication up until the "pivoting point" of Ezekiel 33:21 is predominately judgmental with few glimmers of hope and might have been an apt response to their reality. The judgment and doom upon Israel seem to be without respite.

Some of these points will be taken up later at the end of this chapter, but I will leave them for now.

## **4.4 Ezekiel 16:1-63**

### **4.4.1 Background and introduction**

This chapter is the longest in the whole book of Ezekiel and ironically follows the shortest chapter in the book. Chapter 15 comprises eight verses and deals with the same subject matter as chapter 16: Jerusalem. Ezekiel uses the image of a "useless vine" in chapter 15 to describe Jerusalem. Joyce (2007:129) calls Ezekiel a "maker of all allegories" and notes that the vine that is usually a positive

image in the Old Testament is presented as something useless. It is as if Ezekiel is setting up chapter 16 with this short chapter.

Chapter 16 is one of three chapters in Ezekiel that give with the help of metaphors a historical narrative of Israel as a nation and their relationship with YHWH. The others are chapters 20 and 23. Chapter 16, like chapter 23, uses female personification (Joyce 2007:130). In the first seven chapters of the book of Ezekiel, YHWH announced the end on the land and the city of Jerusalem. Chapters 8-11 are used by the prophet to show the abominations of Jerusalem and chapters 12-15 discourage any intercession on behalf of Jerusalem. Now in chapter 16 YHWH goes public with his case against Jerusalem (cf. Odell 2005:179).

Therefore the genre of the chapter is in the form of a court case. Usually there would be three parties involved in a court case, the plaintiff, the defendant and the judge. In this case YHWH is the plaintiff and the judge (Block 1997:460-461). The essence of this indictment against Jerusalem is communicated with “an elaborately developed metaphor of Jerusalem as YHWH’s wife” (Odell 2005:18). This wife of YHWH was likened to an orphan that was picked up by YHWH and clothed and brought to maturity. Then YHWH took this orphan and married her. This wife of YHWH becomes a harlot flaunting her beauty before the other nations and making alliances with them that angered YHWH. Although smaller units exist in the chapter, there are two main parts to this chapter according to Odell (2005:186-187). The first part is the indictment against Jerusalem that states her wrongdoings and the second part is her shameful behaviour as adulterous covenantal partner. It however ends with a glimmer of hope that suggests that this old covenant that was broken must be replaced by a new one.



Now we will look closer at some of the sub-divisions of the chapter.

#### **4.4.2 Sub-divisions of the text**

This passage can be sub-divided into smaller units. Cooper (1994: 168-179) suggests five units:

1. The Orphan who became Queen (16:1-14).
2. The Queen who became a Harlot (16:15-34).
3. The Harlot who became a Convict (16:35-43).
4. The Convict who became a Proverb (16:44-52).
5. The Convict and her Companions (16:53-63).

Wright (2001:129-155), on the other hand, suggests two main units with further sub-divisions. These sub-divisions in my opinion make commentary easy and will be used in this discussion below. The headings of the sub-divisions are also taken from his work.

#### **4.4.3 Exegetical analysis**

##### **4.4.3.1 Part One: Jerusalem - “My Fair Lady”<sup>40</sup> (16:1-43)**

Part one consists of three parts as the sub-units above suggest. The first section of verses 1-14 describes how it happened that YHWH entered into a covenantal partnership with Jerusalem.

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<sup>40</sup> The term is taken from Wright (2001:29), who took this from the musical that was based on George Bernard Shaw’s play *Pygmalion*, which tells the story of a poor flower girl from the London market who was “rescued” by a gentleman who was intent “on proving that even the least promising human material can be transformed into an apparently well-bred lady”.

The rescue: Grace and generosity (1-14)

<sup>WTT</sup> Ezekiel 16:1 וַיְהִי דְבַר־יְהוָה אֵלַי לֵאמֹר:

<sup>2</sup> בֶּן־אָדָם הוֹדַע אֶת־יְרוּשָׁלַם אֶת־תּוֹעֲבֹתֶיהָ:

<sup>3</sup> וְאָמַרְתָּ כֹּה־אָמַר אֲדֹנָי יְהוִה לְיְרוּשָׁלַם מְכַרְתִּיךָ וּמְלֹדְתִיךָ

מֵאֶרֶץ הַכְּנַעֲנִי אֲבִיךָ הָאָמֹרִי וְאָמַרְךָ חַתִּית:

<sup>4</sup> וּמוֹלְדוֹתֶיךָ בַּיּוֹם הַזֶּה לֹא־כָרַת אִתְּךָ לֹא־כָרַת שְׂרָךְ וּבָמִים לֹא־רָחַצְתָּ לְמַשְׁעֵי וְהַמְלַח לֹא הִמְלַחַת וְהַחֲתַל לֹא חֲתַלְתָּ:

<sup>5</sup> לֹא־חָסָה עֲלֶיךָ עֵין לַעֲשׂוֹת לְךָ אַחַת מֵאֵלֶּה לְחַמְלָה

עֲלֶיךָ וּתְשַׁלְּכִי אֶל־פְּנֵי הַשָּׂדֶה בְּנֹעַל נַפְשֶׁךָ בַּיּוֹם הַזֶּה הֲלֹדַת אִתְּךָ:

<sup>6</sup> וְאָעֵבֶר עֲלֶיךָ וְאֶרְאֶךָ מִתְבוֹסֶסֶת בְּדַמְיֶךָ וְאָמַר לְךָ

בְּדַמְיֶךָ חַיִּי וְאָמַר לְךָ בְּדַמְיֶךָ חַיִּי:

<sup>7</sup> רִבְבָה כְּצֶמַח הַשָּׂדֶה נַחְתִּיךָ וְתַרְבִּי וְתַגְדְּלִי וּתְבֹאִי בַּעֲדֵי

עֲדָיִים שָׂדִים נִכְנָו וְשַׁעֲרֶךָ צֶמַח וְאֵת עֵלֶם וְעֶרְיָה:

<sup>8</sup> וְאָעֵבֶר עֲלֶיךָ וְאֶרְאֶךָ וְהִנֵּה עֵתְךָ עַת דָּדִים וְאֶפְרֹשׁ כְּנָפֵי

עֲלֶיךָ וְאֶכְסֶה עֲרוֹתֶךָ וְאֶשְׁבַּע לְךָ וְאָבֹא בְּבֵרִית אִתְּךָ נָאִם

אֲדֹנָי יְהוִה וְתִהְיִי לִי:

<sup>9</sup> וְאֶרְחֶצֶךָ בַּמִּים וְאֶשְׁטֶף דַּמְיֶךָ מֵעֲלֶיךָ וְאֶסְכֵּךְ בְּשֶׁמֶן:

<sup>10</sup> וְאֶלְבִּישֶׁךָ רִקְמָה וְאֶנְעֶלְךָ תַּחַשׁ וְאֶחְבֹּשֶׁךָ בְּשֵׁשׁ וְאֶכְסֶךָ

מִשֵּׁי:

<sup>11</sup> וְאֶעֱבֶדְךָ עָדִי וְאֶתְנֶה צְמִידִים עַל־יָדֶיךָ וְרִבִּיד עַל־גְּרוֹנְךָ:

<sup>12</sup> וְאֶתֵּן נֹזֶם עַל־אֶפְךָ וְעִגְלִים עַל־אָזְנוֹךָ וְעֶטְרַת תְּפָאֶרֶת

בְּרֹאשְׁךָ:

<sup>13</sup> וְתַעֲדֵי זָהָב וְכֶסֶף וּמִלְבוּשֶׁךָ (שְׁשִׁי) [שֵׁשׁ] וְמִשֵּׁי וְרִקְמָה

סֵלֶת וְדָבֶשׁ וְשֶׁמֶן (אֶכְלָתִי) [אֶכְלָתְךָ] וְתִיכִי בַמָּאֵד מְאֹד

וְתִצְלַחֲתִי לְמִלּוּכָה:

<sup>14</sup> וַיֵּצֵא לְךָ שֵׁם בְּנוֹיִם בְּנֶפֶךָ כִּי כָלִיל הוּא בְּהַדְרִי

אֲשֶׁר־שָׁמַתִּי עֲלֶיךָ נָאִם אֲדֹנָי יְהוִה:

**Ezekiel 16:1** The word of the LORD came to me: <sup>2</sup> “Son of man, confront Jerusalem with her detestable practices <sup>3</sup>and say, ‘This is what the Sovereign LORD says to Jerusalem: Your ancestry and birth were in the land of the Canaanites; your father was an Amorite and your mother a Hittite. <sup>4</sup> On the day you were born your cord was not cut, nor were you washed with water to make you clean, nor were you rubbed with salt or wrapped in cloths. <sup>5</sup> No one looked on you with pity or had compassion enough to do any of these things for you. Rather, you were thrown out into the open field, for on the day you were born you were despised. <sup>6</sup> “‘Then I passed by and saw you kicking about in your blood, and as you lay there in your blood I said to you, “Live!” <sup>7</sup> I made you grow like a plant of the field. You grew up and developed and became the most beautiful of jewels. Your breasts were formed and your hair grew, you who were naked and bare. <sup>8</sup> “‘Later I passed by, and when I looked at you and saw that you were old enough for love, I spread the corner of my garment over you and covered your nakedness. I gave you my solemn oath and entered into a covenant with you, declares the Sovereign LORD, and you became mine. <sup>9</sup> “‘I bathed you with water and washed the blood from you and put ointments on you. <sup>10</sup> I clothed you with an embroidered dress and put leather sandals on you. I dressed you in fine linen and covered you with costly garments. <sup>11</sup> I adorned you with jewellery: I put bracelets on your arms and a necklace around your neck, <sup>12</sup>and I put a ring on your nose, earrings on your ears and a beautiful crown on your head. <sup>13</sup> So you were adorned with gold and silver; your clothes were of fine linen and costly fabric and embroidered cloth. Your food was fine flour, honey and olive oil. You became very beautiful and rose to be a queen. <sup>14</sup> And your fame spread among the nations on account of your beauty, because the splendour I had given you made your beauty perfect, declares the Sovereign LORD.

**Verse 1** again begins with the familiar messenger formula: דְּבַר־יְהוָה אֵלַי לֵאמֹר (‘The word of the Lord came to me”). It introduces the longest single prophetic message in the Book of Ezekiel. It is a prophecy that gives an account of Jerusalem’s origins and how YHWH helped her to become something of significance. Her beauty was thrown back into his face when she turned towards

other lovers like a prostitute. It ends with YHWH defending his honour by dealing with the lovers and by hinting towards a new covenant that he would bring about.

Jerusalem in **verse 2** is female and becomes a collective entity for the whole of Israel. The rhetorical address is almost forensic in its nature and takes on an indictment and sentence form. This also occurs in 22:2-16 and 20:3-31. The latter of the two mentioned passages will be discussed later, but is very similar to 16:1-43. The verbal form הוֹדִיעַ (“cause to know” or “inform”) was usually the work of the priest who communicated the rights and wrongs of the cultic doings. Even in this oracle the priestly influence of Ezekiel is obvious (cf. Allen 1994:236 and Greenberg 1983: 273-4).

**Verse 3** exploits the pagan roots (Canaanites, Hittites, and Amorites) of Israel. It was from these pagan nations that YHWH redeemed them to be his people. These nations were also Israel’s immediate neighbours.

**Verses 4-5** use a vivid metaphor when Israel’s beginnings are likened to the unwanted birth of a female child. To cut the cord, bath the newborn in salt and oil was deemed so important that the Talmudic rabbis permitted them even on the *Shabbat*. The salt was believed to toughen the skin and form the character of the child, while the immediate wrapping in cloth helps to straighten the limbs of this newborn child. Israel was not “looked on with pity”, but “thrown out into the open field”. This was accepted practice in the Ancient Near East, especially if a child was deformed or unwanted like a female child at the wrong time (cf. Greenberg 1983:274-275). This baby was dispatched while still attached to the placenta and left there to die, or as Allen (1994:237) states “by implication to await YHWH’s intervention to materialize” (cf. Cooper 1994:169; Greenberg 1983:274-5).

**Verse 6** tells of the first encounter by YHWH with this infant that was desolate and dying in her own blood. The blood reminds Allen (1994:237) of ritual

uncleanness. YHWH intervenes and rescues “this little savage” (Eichrodt 1986:205). YHWH speaks a word, “live”, and the rescue happens, much like the creation narrative of the Priestly Source (cf. Zimmerli 1979:339). “This creative command turned into fact” (Allen 1994:237) in **verse 7** as this baby starts to grow and reaches sexual maturity with the reference to breasts and hair. This maturity makes the young woman viable to be married and that is exactly what happens in **verse 8**. YHWH passes by again, but this time sees that she was “old enough for love”. The word **הַרְיִים** according to Greenberg (1983:277) points to sexual lovemaking. The root **רוד** according to Sanmartin-Ascaso (1978:143-144), means “beloved” or “darling” and denotes “a personal object of love”. He acknowledges that it can be abstractly used as “to love” or the “art of love”. In the context of the metaphor that Ezekiel is employing I could agree with Greenberg. Therefore he “spread the corner of his garment over” her. This was a ritual when a man claimed a bride (cf. Greenberg 1983:277). From now on she would only be naked before him, but covered to anybody else. YHWH then enters into a covenant with this woman. It echoes the double obligation clause of the covenant that YHWH made with Israel in Egypt. I will be yours and you will be mine (Ex 6:7). This woman (the city who has come into its own – Jerusalem) who lacked love and security is taken in by this benefactor (YHWH), and she becomes his “Fair Lady” (cf. Allen 1994:238; Eichrodt 1986:205-6; Greenberg 1983:278 and Wright 2001:129).

**Verses 9-14** show how YHWH took care of his new wife. As Allen (1994:238) puts it:

She (Jerusalem) is cleansed of her ritual and natural impurity with water and oil, to make up for the deprivation that marked her newborn state (v. 4). The one who lacked swathing bands and grew up naked, is now dressed in the best clothes, headgear and footwear ... A complete set of jewellery is lavished upon her culminating in the royal diadem ... Then the

provision of food is mentioned ... Finally Jerusalem's beauty is celebrated and lingered over in a series of clauses. Under YHWH's extravagant care she blossomed into a peerless beauty.

Jerusalem's fame spread amongst the nations. How grateful will Jerusalem be? Or is this the big betrayal that the prophet is building his rhetoric up towards?

### The response: ungrateful and unnatural (16:15-34)

This next unit deals with the response that this orphan that was turned into a queen gives to YHWH. The indictment stops at verse 23, and is followed by the judgment and the punishment, as will be shown when the verse is discussed.

15 וּתְבַטְּחִי בְיַפְיָךְ וּתְזַנֵּנִי עַל־שִׁמְךָ וּתְשַׁכְּחִי אֶת־תְּזַנּוּתִיךָ  
עַל־כָּל־עוֹבֵר לֹדִיָּהּ:  
16 וּתְקַחֲנִי מִבְּגָדֶיךָ וּתַעֲשֵׂי לִי בְּמֹת טְלָאוֹת וּתְזַנֵּנִי עֲלֵיהֶם  
לֹא בְּאוֹת וְלֹא יִהְיֶה:  
17 וּתְקַחֲנִי כְּלִי תַפְאֲרֶתְךָ מִזֹּהָבִי וּמִכֶּסֶף אֲשֶׁר נָתַתִּי לִי  
וּתַעֲשֵׂי לִי צִלְמִי זָכָר וּתְזַנֵּנִי בָּם:  
18 וּתְקַחֲנִי אֶת־בְּגָדֵי רִקְמָתְךָ וּתְכַסִּים וְשִׁמְנִי וּקְטָרְתִּי (נִתְתִּי)  
[נִתַּתְּ לִפְנֵיהֶם]:  
19 וְלַחְמִי אֲשֶׁר־נָתַתִּי לִי סֶלֶת וְשִׁמֹן וְדָבַשׁ הָאֲכַלְתִּיךָ  
וּנְתַתִּיהוּ לִפְנֵיהֶם לְרִיחַ נִיחַח וַיְהִי נֶאֱמַם אֲדָנִי יְהוָה:  
20 וּתְקַחֲנִי אֶת־בְּנֵיךָ וְאֶת־בְּנוֹתֶיךָ אֲשֶׁר יִלְדַתְּ לִי וּתְזַבְּחִים  
לָהֶם לֶאֱכֹל הַמַּעֵט (מִתְזַנְתֶּיךָ) [מִתְזַנּוּתֶיךָ]:  
21 וּתְשַׁחֲטִי אֶת־בְּנֵי וְתַתִּנִּים בְּהַעֲבִיר אוֹתָם לָהֶם:  
22 וְאֵת כָּל־תּוֹעֲבֹתֶיךָ וּתְזַנְתִּיךָ לֹא (זְכַרְתִּי) [זְכַרְתְּ] אֶת־יָמֵי  
נְעוּרֶיךָ בְּהִיוֹתְךָ עַל־מַתְּבוּסָסֶת בְּדָמְךָ הָיִיתִי:  
23 וַיְהִי אַחֲרָי כָּל־רַעְתֶּךָ אוֹי אוֹי לִי נֶאֱמַם אֲדָנִי יְהוָה:

24 ותבני לך גב ותעשי לך רמה בכל רחוב:  
 25 אל כל ראש דרך בנית רמתך ותתעבי את יפוך  
 ותפשקי את רגליך לכל עובר ותרבי את (תזנתך)  
 [תזנותך]:  
 26 ותזני אל בני מצרים שכניך גדלי בשר ותרבי את תזנתך  
 להכעיסני:  
 27 והנה נטיתי ידי עליך ואגרע חקך ואתך בנפש  
 שנאותך בנות פלשתים הנכלמות מדרךך זמה:  
 28 ותזני אל בני אשור מבלתי שבעתך ותזנים וגם לא  
 שבעת:  
 29 ותרבי את תזנותך אל ארץ פנען כשדימה וגם בזאת לא  
 שבעת:  
 30 מזה אמלה לבתך נאם אדני יהוה בעשותך את כל אלה  
 מעשה אשה זונה שלטת:  
 31 בבנותיך גבך בראש כל דרך ורמתך (עשיתי) [עשית]  
 בכל רחוב ולא (הייתי) [היית] כזונה לקלס אתני:  
 32 האשה המנאפת תחת אישה תקח את זרים:  
 33 לכל זנות ותנוגדה ואת נתת את נדניך לכל מאהביך  
 ותשחדני אותם לבוא אליך מסביב בתזנותיך:  
 34 ויהי כך הפך מן הנשים בתזנותיך ואחריו לא זונה  
 ובתך אתני ואתני לא נתן לך ותהי להפך:

15 “But you trusted in your beauty and used your fame to become a prostitute. You lavished your favours on anyone who passed by and your beauty became his. 16 You took some of your garments to make gaudy high places, where you carried on your prostitution. Such things should not happen, nor should they ever occur. 17 You also took the fine jewellery I gave you, the jewellery made of my gold and silver, and you made for yourself male idols and engaged in prostitution with them. 18 And you took your embroidered clothes to put on them, and you offered my oil and incense before them. 19 Also the food I provided for you – the fine flour, olive oil and honey I gave you to eat – you offered as fragrant incense before them. That is what happened, declares the

Sovereign LORD. <sup>20</sup> ““And you took your sons and daughters whom you bore to me and sacrificed them as food to the idols. Was your prostitution not enough? <sup>21</sup> You slaughtered my children and sacrificed them to the idols. <sup>22</sup> In all your detestable practices and your prostitution you did not remember the days of your youth, when you were naked and bare, kicking about in your blood. <sup>23</sup> ““Woe! Woe to you, declares the Sovereign LORD. In addition to all your other wickedness, <sup>24</sup>you built a mound for yourself and made a lofty shrine in every public square. <sup>25</sup> At the head of every street you built your lofty shrines and degraded your beauty, offering your body with increasing promiscuity to anyone who passed by. <sup>26</sup> You engaged in prostitution with the Egyptians, your lustful neighbours, and provoked me to anger with your increasing promiscuity. <sup>27</sup> So I stretched out my hand against you and reduced your territory; I gave you over to the greed of your enemies, the daughters of the Philistines, who were shocked by your lewd conduct. <sup>28</sup> You engaged in prostitution with the Assyrians too, because you were insatiable; and even after that, you still were not satisfied. <sup>29</sup> Then you increased your promiscuity to include Babylonia, a land of merchants, but even with this you were not satisfied. <sup>30</sup> ““How weak-willed you are, declares the Sovereign LORD, when you do all these things, acting like a brazen prostitute! <sup>31</sup> When you built your mounds at the head of every street and made your lofty shrines in every public square, you were unlike a prostitute, because you scorned payment. <sup>32</sup> ““You adulterous wife! You prefer strangers to your own husband! <sup>33</sup> Every prostitute receives a fee, but you give gifts to all your lovers, bribing them to come to you from everywhere for your illicit favours. <sup>34</sup> So in your prostitution you are the opposite of others; no one runs after you for your favours. You are the very opposite, for you give payment and none is given to you.

The actions of YHWH move now to the background, but appropriately so. The redemptive work that he has done in Jerusalem and Israel will always be the background for his harsh judgment when he is betrayed. **Verse 15** presents the sin of Israel in a short but accurate image before Ezekiel goes on to elaborate on this in the verses that follow. Correctly Zimmerli (1979:341) remarks that the chapter passes (v. 15) from the happy times, filled with the favour of YHWH, to



the unhappy time that is full of abuse. He also explains that the “gift now replaces the giver” (:342). The gifts that were so graciously lavished on Jerusalem are now being abused. The very gift that was given (her beauty) is now flaunted in the manner of a harlot. The verb זנה (to prostitute) is used twelve times in chapter 16. The same word also dominates the other history narrative of Israel in chapter 23 when Ezekiel again gives account of Israel’s wrongdoings. Commenting on this word, Erlandsson (1980:99-106) explains that its literal meaning always alluded to prostitution and harlotry and is often used in the Old Testament without comment, but is the figurative meaning that always ended up as part of many prophecies. The covenant demanded that Israel worshipped no other gods but YHWH. The covenant made their relationship with YHWH a monogamous one. When Israel, or in this case Jerusalem, became unfaithful it becomes a fitting description of her deed.

Her prosperity was soon discovered and they engaged in trade with those nations around her in ways that did not always please YHWH. Wright calls the sub-section of verses 16-22: “Israel’s religious prostitution” (2001:136-8) because the trading ended up contaminating the core of Jerusalem’s religion. It started with political alliances, but ciphured through to the core of their relationship with YHWH – their religion. This is something that did not escape the eye of the priest Ezekiel.

**Verses 16-19** give the details of how these gifts were flaunted and used to betray YHWH with other so-called lovers. Greenberg (1983:280) observes that the similarities between this scene and that of the adulteress in Proverbs 7:16 is striking. The only difference is that the adulteress in Proverbs makes a bed with “cloths and yarn from Egypt”, whereas Jerusalem’s act involves the abuse of her gifts to make shrines (v. 16) to worship other gods. For him this “harlotry” would have a double meaning: “prostitution in the cult of foreign gods”. This section is dominated by the root זנה (to prostitute), which occurs four times in verses 15-19

and six times in verses 15-22. This root is applied in 6:9 and 20:30 by Ezekiel to the worship of other gods and Allen (1994:239) feels that this is also the context in this case. To him the mention of **בְּמוֹת** (high places) in verse 16 is an early indication of this. Ezekiel also skilfully shows how the three gifts (clothes, jewellery and food) that YHWH has given in verses 10-13 are used in this cultic betrayal in verses 16-19. Also the perfumes and the oils are used in this worship. This might be a custom associated with the worship of Molech (cf. Is 57). The fact that Ezekiel was a priest first and foremost explains why he was so severe on these cultic misconducts.

The next three **verses (20-22)** are devoted to an even deeper outrage. Where up to now the “prostitution” was material in nature, it now becomes human slaughter and sacrifices. The inhabitants of Jerusalem sacrificed their own children to pagan gods. These child sacrifices are referred to by Jeremiah (7:31; 19:5 and 32:35) and was one of the practices that Josiah abolished (II Kgs 23:10) with his reforms. These practices were not permitted by the law (Deut 12:30; 18:10; Lev 18:21 and 20:1-5), and Israel succumbing to them and participating, marked a climax in their surrender to the Canaanite heathen practices. This section climaxes with the prophet accusing them of forgetting their redemption (cf. Allen 1994:239-40; Cooper 1994:171-2; Eichrodt 1986:206-207; Wright 2001:138-41). Remembering their redemption narrative was crucial to their way of life. How it came about that YHWH made them into his people was to be remembered and celebrated. The feasts of Israel were mostly given to help them remember and celebrate their origins - they would have been nothing had it not been for the intervention of YHWH. Now verse 20 states that they “did not remember”. It now becomes clear why Ezekiel described the origins of Jerusalem (Israel) in such detail at the beginning of the chapter. This adds to the hearer/reader’s dismay. One almost wants to ask in disgust: How could Jerusalem, after all that has been done for her, do such a thing? The text now moves on to the “political prostitution of Israel” in verses 23-34.

Ezekiel takes the prostitute metaphor further in **verses 23-34**, and builds it up to a scandalous affair in **verses 23-25**. Something done “in every public square” (v. 24) and “at the head of every street” (v. 25) and “offering your body with increasing promiscuity to anyone passing by (v. 25)”. Block (1997:494-495) suggests that the prophet is slowly moving away from the religious issues of idol worship to the way the city has started to look for alliances with other nations. These nations will become the subject of the next unit. Israel has always been YHWH’s own. His covenant with them prohibited them from entering into any treaty with other nations. This would mean a violation of the fact that they had to trust in YHWH and in YHWH only. He, and not the size of their army or the bulk of their allies, must bring victory to them. Ezekiel cites three instances where in this case Judah and its capital Jerusalem had entered into an alliance with other nations. The nations are referred to in the same order that Israel encountered them through their history. The first is Egypt in **verse 26**. Ever since the Assyrian domination and expansion, Israel always turned south for help from the Egyptians. It was also one of the last alliances that Judah had before Nebuchadnezzar defeated Pharaoh Nero and made Judah one of his vassal states. This was in particular high treason because it was from this nation that YHWH redeemed them at the beginning of their story and his covenant with them. The next nation (**verse 28**) that Judah “prostitutes” with is the Assyrians. “Judah’s affair with them”, according to Greenberg (1993:282), “began when Ahaz sent a ‘present’ and an offer of vassalship to Tiglath-pileser III seeking his help against an Israelite-Aramean attack (II Kgs 16:7; Is 7-8); for the next century Judah remained an Assyrian vassal.” This happened in 735 BCE. Wright (2001:142) notes that, “a lot of the national substance was indeed prostituted to secure the dubious favours of Assyria”. The prostitution with Babylon (**verse 29**) definitely started when Hezekiah foolishly showed off all the wealth and treasures of his palace when envoys from Babylon visited him (II Kgs 20:12-19 and Is 39:1-8). It is noted by most scholars that the relations that Israel and Judah pursued

with these three powerhouses were in the hope of political and military security. Isaiah preceded Ezekiel in opposing these alliances, because it in essence contradicts the promises of the covenant. Israel through these alliances broke the trust of YHWH and entered into affairs with these nations.

**Verses 30 and 31a** are for Zimmerli (1979:345) an obvious connection phrase “to a new theme by the circumstantial recapitulation of what has already been said”.

**Verses 31b-34** explain the absurdness of Jerusalem’s adultery. The normal prostitute accepts payment for her “services rendered”. This is not the case for Jerusalem. She pays with her precious belongings for her lovers and seeks them out instead of being sought after. From this account of a queen that became a harlot, the prophet now turns to the theme of judgment. The scene is set in such a way that one expects YHWH to defend his honour and past judgment (Cooper 1994:173; Eichrodt 1986:208).

### The repudiation: terrifying and terminal (16:35-43)

לְכֵן זֹנְהָ שְׁמַעִי דְבַר־יְהוָה: פ  
35  
כֹּה־אָמַר אֲדֹנָי יְהוִה יַעַן הִשְׁפַּךְ נַחֲשֶׁתְךָ וַתִּגְלֶה עֲרוֹתְךָ  
36  
בְּתִזְנוּתֶיךָ עַל־מֵאֵהֶבֶיךָ וְעַל כָּל־גְּלוּלֵי תוֹעֲבוֹתֶיךָ וְכַדְמִי  
בְּנִיךָ אֲשֶׁר נָתַתְּ לָהֶם:  
37  
לְכֵן הִנְנִי מִקְבֵּץ אֶת־כָּל־מֵאֵהֶבֶיךָ אֲשֶׁר עָרַבְתָּ עֲלֵיהֶם  
וְאֵת כָּל־אֲשֶׁר אֶהְבַּת עַל כָּל־אֲשֶׁר שָׁנֵאת וְקִבַּצְתִּי אֹתָם  
עֲלֶיךָ מִסָּבִיב וּגְלִיתִי עֲרוֹתְךָ אֱלֹהִים וְרָאוּ אֶת־כָּל־עֲרוֹתֶיךָ:  
38  
וּשְׁפַטְתִּיךָ מִשְׁפַּטֵּי נֹאפֹת וּשְׁפַכַת דָּם וּנְתִיתִיךָ דָּם חֲמָה  
וְקִנְיָאָה:  
39  
וְנָתַתִּי אוֹתְךָ בְיָדָם וְהָרְסוּ גִבְךָ וְנִתְצַו רַמְתֶּיךָ וְהִפְשִׁיטוּ

אוֹתָךְ בְּגִדֶיךָ וְלִקְחוּ כָלִי תַפְאֲרֹתֶיךָ וְהִנִּיחוּךָ עִירָם וְעָרֶיהָ:  
<sup>40</sup> וְהֵעִלוּ עָלֶיךָ קֶהֱל וְרָגְמוּ אוֹתָךְ בְּאֲבָן וּבַתְּקוּף בְּחֲרִבוֹתָם:  
<sup>41</sup> וְשָׂרְפוּ בְּתִיךָ בְּאֵשׁ וְעָשׂוּ-בָךְ שְׂפָטִים לְעֵינַי נָשִׁים רַבּוֹת  
 וְהִשְׁבַּתִּיךָ מִזִּזְנָה וְגַם-אֶתְנֶן לָא תִתְנִי-עוֹד:  
<sup>42</sup> וְהִנְחֵתִי חֲמָתִי בָךְ וְסָרָה קִנְאָתִי מִמֶּנִּי וְשָׁקַטְתִּי וְלֹא  
 אֶכְעַס עוֹד:  
<sup>43</sup> יַעַן אֲשֶׁר לֹא- (זְכַרְתִּי) [זְכַרְתָּ] אֶת-יְמֵי נְעוּרֶיךָ וַתִּרְגְּזוּ-לִי  
 בְּכָל-אֱלֹהִים וְגַם-אֲנִי הָאֵל דְּרִבְכָךְ בְּרֹאשׁ נְתַתִּי נֶאֱמַר אֲדֹנָי יְהוִה  
 וְלֹא (עָשִׂיתִי) [עָשִׂיתָ] אֶת-הַזְּמָה עַל כָּל-תּוֹעֲבֹתֶיךָ:

<sup>35</sup> “Therefore, you prostitute, hear the word of the LORD! <sup>36</sup> This is what the Sovereign LORD says: Because you poured out your wealth and exposed your nakedness in your promiscuity with your lovers, and because of all your detestable idols, and because you gave them your children’s blood, <sup>37</sup> therefore I am going to gather all your lovers, with whom you found pleasure, those you loved as well as those you hated. I will gather them against you from all around and will strip you in front of them, and they will see all your nakedness. <sup>38</sup> I will sentence you to the punishment of women who commit adultery and who shed blood; I will bring upon you the blood vengeance of my wrath and jealous anger. <sup>39</sup> Then I will hand you over to your lovers, and they will tear down your mounds and destroy your lofty shrines. They will strip you of your clothes and take your fine jewellery and leave you naked and bare. <sup>40</sup> They will bring a mob against you, who will stone you and hack you to pieces with their swords. <sup>41</sup> They will burn down your houses and inflict punishment on you in the sight of many women. I will put a stop to your prostitution, and you will no longer pay your lovers. <sup>42</sup> Then my wrath against you will subside and my jealous anger will turn away from you; I will be calm and no longer angry. <sup>43</sup> “Because you did not remember the days of your youth but enraged me with all these things, I will surely bring down on your head what you have done, declares the Sovereign LORD. Did you not add lewdness to all your other detestable practices?

The case has been stated by the prophet in the verses leading up to **verse 35**. It begins with the preposition and particle combination לְכֵן (‘‘therefore’’) and is found sixty-one times in Ezekiel, predominantly in the verses prior to Ezekiel 33:21 (pivoting point). Of the sixteen times it is employed by Ezekiel post the pivoting point, it is used seven times in chapter 36, but is never used in chapters 40-48. Zimmerli (1979:346) notes that it is a direct address and that it is a summons to pay attention and is one of the many well-known and widely used messenger formulas that we find in the prophetic corpus (cf. Allen 1994: 242). The offences of verses 15-22 and 37-42 are summarized in **verse 36**. This queen that has become a harlot has ‘‘poured out’’<sup>41</sup> on her lovers everything that was given to her. This verse however changes the sequence of the accusations beginning with the political affairs, then the cultic affairs of idol worship and culminating in horror-filled sacrificing of children.

**Verses 37-38** announce the first stage of Jerusalem’s punishment. The lovers (Egypt, Assyria, and Babylonia as will become clear in the latter part of the chapter) that were invited so openly in the previous verses now return. Also those she hated, such as the Philistines (cf. Block 1997:501). They are gathered and before them Jerusalem will be stripped naked like an adulteress. With this political embarrassment is envisioned. Adultery was a capital crime and so was murder. Jerusalem was guilty on both counts (adultery and sacrificing her children in foreign cultic practices). In this case YHWH is ‘‘both the cuckolded husband and the sovereign judge’’ (Allen 1994:242). A case can be made that this ‘‘adultery’’ also referred to the adultery that could have happened with the practices that surrounded some of these religions. This assumption stays true to the metaphor that Jerusalem was unfaithful to her covenantal partner.

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<sup>41</sup> Greenberg (1983:285-6) translated this ‘‘poured out your wealth’’ (NIV) by sticking to the sexual metaphor that is the undertone to the whole chapter thus far. He renders this text with the Akkadian use of many of these words and suggests that poured out might be translated with ‘‘your juice was poured out’’, a reference to female ‘‘distillation’’ during sexual arousal. This strengthened the theme of the seductive harlot that offered herself to her lovers. The NIV gives the alternative translation of ‘‘lust’’ as a footnote to the preferred ‘‘wealth’’ that it uses.

**Verses 39-41** deal with her former lovers and emphasize that the former lovers will become instruments that YHWH, who is both the judge and the betrayed husband, will use to punish Jerusalem. These former lovers will tear down the brothels and shrines through military power. It refers to a military invasion that will also destroy all these places of worship. This would leave Jerusalem naked and exposed, stripped of the very things (clothing and jewellery) that made her into something. Usually the public exposure and nakedness was fitting punishment for adulterers (cf. Jer 13:26; Nah 3:5)<sup>42</sup>. Adding to this a mob will stone her to death and cut her to pieces (cf. Lev 20:10; Deut 22:23). When this happens, all women spectators must take note. This violence against women is never easy to read and has over the years been the subject of many debates. The very fact that these acts are recorded in the Old Testament does not make them normative to our behaviour and we need to critically condemn them. It must however be noted that the prophet is using functional language and metaphor to emphasize a point he is trying to make – that the end will come in a brutal way. This “mob” is the word קְהָל (mob, assembly or convocation) which Greenberg (1983:287) suggests might be translated with “assemblage of armed forces”. In the restatement of this allegory in 23:24<sup>43</sup> it serves for “the people attacking Jerusalem”. In all probability, this points to the final fall of Jerusalem in 586 BCE. This final destruction will also put an end to the prostitution and the unnatural payments (the prostitute paying her clients) of Jerusalem for her harlotry (cf. Eichrodt 1986:209; Wright 2001:143; Zimmerli 1979:347). Brueggemann (2003:193) observes that this judgment is loaded with “uncontrollable passion”, that is the passion that flows out of YHWH’s love for his beloved Jerusalem. He notes: “It is remarkable that a prophetic tradition that is so preoccupied with

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<sup>42</sup> This chauvinistically brutal exposure of women is and will always be a problem of the Old Testament and those who interpret it. I therefore acknowledge it, but will refrain from trying to give answers to this problem. This was explored in an article by Maré and Serfontein in 2009. The violent nature of YHWH in the Old Testament and specifically in the book of Nahum was looked at critically.

<sup>43</sup> It is noted that many commentators (Greenberg 1983 and Wright 2001) regard Ezekiel 23:22-49 as a “restatement of the allegory” (Greenberg 1983:287) we find in Ezekiel 16:35-43.

symmetry and right ordering should articulate such elemental and seemingly uncontrollable passion.”

**Verse 42** appears to be out of place and according to Allen (1994:243) may speak from a different point in history. It seems like the end of judgment, but is not. The judgment continues however in verse 43. This “calming of anger” does not fit with the tenor thus far and that (more anger) which is to follow. Greenberg (1983:288) has called this “out of place” and hints that it was supposed to be at a different place in the dialogue to emphasize the fact that YHWH will only rest when final judgment has been executed. Zimmerli (1979:347) again has the best explanation from a redaction point of view. He shows that “a second hand (editor) has then taken up the catchwords **הַנּוּחַ** and **קִנְיָה** of the secondary in verse 38 and has introduced the idea of a calming of the divine anger”. This may be a case of careless redaction. **Verse 43** immediately takes up the theme of punishment again. It shows again the “punishment mirrors the crime” (Greenberg 1983:288). Like in verse 22 the forgetfulness of Jerusalem is the major accusation against Jerusalem. Forgetting where she came from was the cause of all the other symptoms. It was on top of forgetfulness that she added all the deeds of “lewdness” (indecent). The judgment now turns back to the ancestors of Jerusalem.

#### **4.4.3.2 Part Two: Cinderella<sup>44</sup> and the two ugly sisters (16:44-63).**

In this next section, Ezekiel not only introduces a new proverb into his allegory, but he also introduces two new characters. These characters form an integral part of the Ezekiel 23 oracle that has been noted as a “restatement of the allegory” earlier. This section can be divided into two sections. The first continues

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<sup>44</sup> Cinderella is borrowed by Wright from the old fairytale. It is a story of how the youngest and most beautiful sister ends up with the prince despite the evil efforts of her ugly elder sisters. He also acknowledges that this comparison was also hinted at by Block (1997).



to deal with judgment (vv. 44-52) and the second part (vv. 53-63) surprises us with hints of possible restoration.

### The proverb, the family and their sins (16:44-52)

44 הִנֵּה כָּל-הַמִּשְׁלַל עָלֶיךָ יִמְשַׁל לְאִמֶּךָ בְּתָהּ:  
45 בַּת-אִמֶּךָ אֵת גַּעֲלַת אִישָׁהּ וּבְנֵיהָ וְאָחוֹת אָחוֹתְךָ אֵת אֲשֶׁר  
גָּעְלוּ אֲנָשֶׁיהֶן וּבְנֵיהֶן אִמְכָן חַתִּית וְאֲבִיכָן אֲמֹרִי:  
46 וְאָחוֹתְךָ הַגְּדוּלָה שְׁמֵרוֹן הִיא וּבְנוֹתֶיהָ הַיּוֹשֶׁבֶת  
עַל-שְׂמֹאלְךָ וְאָחוֹתְךָ הַקְּטָנָה מִמֶּךָ הַיּוֹשֶׁבֶת מִיְמִינְךָ סֹדֶם  
וּבְנוֹתֶיהָ:  
47 וְלֹא בְּדַרְכֵיהֶן הִלְכֶת וּבַתּוֹעֲבוֹתֵיהֶן (עֲשִׂיתִי) [עֲשִׂיתִי]  
כַּמַּעֲט קָטַת וַתִּשְׁחַתִּי מִהֵן בְּכָל-דַּרְכֵיךָ:  
48 חַי-אֲנִי נֹאם אֲדֹנָי יְהוִה אִם-עָשִׂתָּה סֹדֶם אָחוֹתְךָ הִיא  
וּבְנוֹתֶיהָ כַּאֲשֶׁר עָשִׂית אֵת וּבְנוֹתֶיךָ:  
49 הִנֵּה-זֶה הִיא עֵוֹן סֹדֶם אָחוֹתְךָ גְּאוֹן שִׁבְעַת-לֶחֶם וְשִׁלּוֹת  
הַשֶּׁקֶט הִנֵּה לָהּ וּלְבְנוֹתֶיהָ וַיִּרְעַנִּי וְאֲבִיוֹן לֹא הִחְזִיקָה:  
50 וַתִּגְבְּהֵינָה וַתַּעֲשִׂינָה תוֹעֵבָה לְפָנַי וְאָסִיר אֶתְהֶן כַּאֲשֶׁר  
רֵאִיתִי: ס  
51 וְשְׁמֵרוֹן כַּחֲצֵי חַטָּאתֶיךָ לֹא חָטְאָה וַתִּרְבֵּי אֶת-תּוֹעֲבוֹתֶיךָ  
מִהֵנָּה וַתִּצְדֵּקִי אֶת- (אָחוֹתְךָ) [אָחוֹתֶיךָ] בְּכָל-תּוֹעֲבוֹתֶיךָ אֲשֶׁר  
(עֲשִׂיתִי) [עֲשִׂיתִי]:  
52 גַּם-אֵת שְׂאֵי כִלְמַתְךָ אֲשֶׁר פָּלַלְתָּ לְאָחוֹתְךָ בַּחַטָּאתֶיךָ  
אֲשֶׁר-הִתְעַבַּת מֵהֶן תִּצְדֵּקְנָה מִמֶּךָ וְגַם-אֵת בּוֹשֵׁי וּשְׂאֵי  
כִלְמַתְךָ בְּצַדִּיקְךָ אָחוֹתְךָ:

44 “Everyone who quotes proverbs will quote this proverb about you: “Like mother, like daughter.” 45 You are a true daughter of your mother, who despised her husband and her children; and you are a true sister of your sisters, who despised their husbands and their children. Your mother was a Hittite and your father an Amorite. 46 Your older sister was

Samaria, who lived to the north of you with her daughters; and your younger sister, who lived to the south of you with her daughters, was Sodom.<sup>47</sup> You not only walked in their ways and copied their detestable practices, but in all your ways you soon became more depraved than they.<sup>48</sup> As surely as I live, declares the Sovereign LORD, your sister Sodom and her daughters never did what you and your daughters have done.<sup>49</sup> “Now this was the sin of your sister Sodom: She and her daughters were arrogant, overfed and unconcerned; they did not help the poor and needy.<sup>50</sup> They were haughty and did detestable things before me. Therefore I did away with them as you have seen.<sup>51</sup> Samaria did not commit half the sins you did. You have done more detestable things than they, and have made your sisters seem righteous by all these things you have done.<sup>52</sup> Bear your disgrace, for you have furnished some justification for your sisters. Because your sins were more vile than theirs, they appear more righteous than you. So then, be ashamed and bear your disgrace, for you have made your sisters appear righteous.

**Verse 44** starts by referring to a proverb. A new comparison is drawn, but it is immediately personified. Therefore it does not keep us in the dark as to who is referred to here. It also moves more quickly and loses some of the pictorial narrative of the preceding metaphor. Sisters that are introduced into the story strike a false (or shall we say: not true) note. Up until now this orphan child that has become a queen and then a harlot, did not have any family. “Sisters” according to Eichrodt (1986:214) seem to be “an additional elaboration”. A link is needed to tie these motifs together. This link comes in the form of the orphan child’s heathen mother - the mother being a Hittite and the father an Amorite (v. 3). The behaviour of Jerusalem is then to be understood in this context. This heathen pedigree had to manifest somewhere and not surprisingly, manifested in the same deeds. The Canaanites were notorious for their illicit sexual and irreligious lifestyles (cf. Lev 18:25-28; Deut 12:31; 18:9,12; 20:18). The proverb “Like mother, like daughter” is then true of Jerusalem as well as her two sisters. This mother, very much like Jerusalem, did not only abandon her children, but

also her husband (**verse 45**) and so did the two sisters (cf. Allen 1994:243; Eichrodt 1986:214; Wright 2001:145-6).

**Verse 46** immediately starts to identify the sisters. The one is Samaria “to the north of you” and Sodom “the younger sister who lived to the south”. Greenberg (1983:288-9) notes that Samaria was the elder sister not because of her age, but because of her size. So is Sodom younger because of her size. Sodom no longer existed in the time of Judah. The daughters that are referred to are a term usually used collectively for the towns that form part of the area (cf. Wright 2001:146). This verse creates the idea that Jerusalem was on a level with these two “sisters” of hers, but **verse 47** makes it clear that she not only matched them in wickedness, but also surpassed them. Ezekiel is not pulling any punches when he compares Jerusalem with those the Israelites most despised (Zimmerli 1979:350).

**Verses 48-52** now expand on what was briefly expressed in 46-47. It names some of the sins of Sodom. These were nothing in comparison to the sins of Jerusalem. YHWH destroyed Sodom and threatens to do the same with Jerusalem. The word תועבה (abomination), translated in the NIV as “detestable” things that Sodom did in verse 50 might refer to the homosexuality we read about in Genesis 18 (cf. Jenson 2009:133). It is the same word that the Priestly Source uses when it condemns sexual intercourse between men in Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13. Nevertheless, it is not these sins that Ezekiel emphasizes in detail, but social sins of Sodom. Sodom was rich and did not have time for the poor. Bowen (2010:89) comments that “Sodom’s sins were not sexual ... but pride in its prosperity while failing to aid the poor and the needy”. It is on top of these types of sins that Jerusalem added religious and political sins (cf. Allen 1994:244). So is the case with Samaria. Her indiscretions were made to look minimal by the magnitude of Jerusalem’s sin. Jerusalem can almost take pride in the fact that her disgrace has made her sisters look righteous.

The surprise of restoration (16:53-63)

53 וּשְׁבַתִּי אֶת־שְׁבִיתֶהֶן אֶת־(שְׁבִית) [שְׁבוֹת] סֹדֶם וּבְנוֹתֶיהָ  
וְאֶת־(שְׁבִית) [שְׁבוֹת] שְׁמֶרוֹן וּבְנוֹתֶיהָ (וּשְׁבִית) [וּשְׁבוֹת]  
שְׁבִיתֶיךָ בְּתוֹכָהֶנָּה:  
54 לְמַעַן תִּשְׂאִי כְּלִמְתְּךָ וְנִכְלַמְתְּ מִכָּל אֲשֶׁר עָשִׂית בְּנַחֲמֶיךָ  
אִתָּן:  
55 וְאַחֲוִיתֶיךָ סֹדֶם וּבְנוֹתֶיהָ תִּשְׁבְּנָן לְקִדְמָתָן וּשְׁמֶרוֹן וּבְנוֹתֶיהָ  
תִּשְׁבְּנָן לְקִדְמָתָן וְאֶת־וּבְנוֹתֶיךָ תִּשְׁבִּינָה לְקִדְמָתְכֶן:  
56 וְלֹא הִיְתָה סֹדֶם אַחֲוִיתֶיךָ לְשִׁמוּעָה בְּפִיךָ בַּיּוֹם גְּאוּנֶיךָ:  
  
57 בְּטָרֶם תִּגְּלֶה רַעַתְךָ כְּמוֹ עֵת חֲרַפְתָּ בְּנוֹת־אֲרָם  
וְכָל־סְבִיבוֹתֶיהָ בְּנוֹת פְּלִשְׁתִּים הַשְּׂאֲטוֹת אוֹתְךָ מִסְּבִיב:  
58 אֶת־זַמְתְּךָ וְאֶת־תוֹעֲבוֹתֶיךָ אֵת נִשְׂאֲתִים נָאִם יְהוָה: ס  
59 כִּי כֹה אָמַר אֲדֹנָי יְהוִה (וְעָשִׂית) [וְעָשִׂיתִן] אוֹתְךָ כַּאֲשֶׁר  
עָשִׂית אֲשֶׁר־בְּזִית אֱלֹה לְהַפֵּר בְּרִית:  
60 וְזָכַרְתִּי אֲנִי אֶת־בְּרִיתִי אוֹתְךָ בַּיּוֹם נִעֲוִיךָ וְהִקְמוֹתִי לְךָ  
בְּרִית עוֹלָם:  
61 וְזָכַרְתָּ אֶת־דְּרָכֶיךָ וְנִכְלַמְתָּ בְּקִחְתְּךָ אֶת־אַחֲוִיתֶיךָ  
הַגְּדֹלוֹת מִמֶּנּוּ אֶל־הַקְּטָנוֹת מִמֶּנּוּ וְנָתַתִּי אֶתְהֶן לְךָ לְבָנוֹת  
וְלֹא מִבְּרִיתְךָ:  
62 וְהִקְמוֹתִי אֲנִי אֶת־בְּרִיתִי אִתְּךָ וַיִּדְעַת כִּי־אֲנִי יְהוָה:  
63 לְמַעַן תִּזְכְּרִי וּבִשְׁתִּי וְלֹא יִהְיֶה־לְךָ עוֹד פֶּתַח־חֹן פֶּה מִפְּנֵי  
כְּלִמְתְּךָ בְּכַפְרֵי־לְךָ לְכָל־אֲשֶׁר עָשִׂית נָאִם אֲדֹנָי יְהוִה: ס

53 ““However, I will restore the fortunes of Sodom and her daughters and of Samaria and her daughters, and your fortunes along with them, 54 so that you may bear your disgrace and be ashamed of all you have done in giving them comfort. 55 And your sisters, Sodom with her daughters and Samaria with her daughters, will return to what they were before; and you and your daughters will return to what you were before. 56 You would not even

mention your sister Sodom in the day of your pride, <sup>57</sup>before your wickedness was uncovered. Even so, you are now scorned by the daughters of Edom and all her neighbours and the daughters of the Philistines – all those around you who despise you. <sup>58</sup> You will bear the consequences of your lewdness and your detestable practices, declares the LORD. <sup>59</sup> ““This is what the Sovereign LORD says: I will deal with you as you deserve, because you have despised my oath by breaking the covenant. <sup>60</sup> Yet I will remember the covenant I made with you in the days of your youth, and I will establish an everlasting covenant with you. <sup>61</sup> Then you will remember your ways and be ashamed when you receive your sisters, both those who are older than you and those who are younger. I will give them to you as daughters, but not on the basis of my covenant with you. <sup>62</sup> So I will establish my covenant with you, and you will know that I am the LORD. <sup>63</sup> Then, when I make atonement for you for all you have done, you will remember and be ashamed and never again open your mouth because of your humiliation, declares the Sovereign LORD.””

This final part of the message surprises us with glimmers of hope. **Verses 53-54** turn to a positive future of restoration for Sodom, for Samaria and almost as an afterthought, for Jerusalem as well (Allen 1994:245). Zimmerli (1979:351) makes an interesting point when he notes that the final assertion of verse 54 should not be overlooked:

... Jerusalem will also receive favour, so that it may come to an acceptance of the disgrace that has come upon it and humble itself in the recognition of the peculiar “consolation” which this means for Sodom and Samaria ... Paradoxically it means that the one who sinned more than Sodom and Samaria defends these two sisters before God’s judgment of the world and effects their rehabilitation.

In other words, when Jerusalem sees these two nations restored, it must always serve as a reminder that their restoration was because of the multitude of

Jerusalem's sins. The many transgressions of Jerusalem made these two "sisters" of her eligible for restoration.

**Verses 55-58** cover and elaborate on the same idea. This is according to Allen (1994:245) for reasons of emphatic reiteration. Jerusalem was very guilty and was quick to throw stones while living in a glasshouse herself. This gloating was a thing of the past now that she had suffered Sodom's fate. Allen (:245) also comments on verse 57 as follows:

The verbal ridicule and contempt shown to Jerusalem by her neighbors, the cities of Edom and Philistia, is not the subject of a message of consolation to the Judeans, as in 25:12-17, but simply just desserts. Like an ex-boxer whose broken nose and cauliflower ears remain to give away his former profession, they would take back to the land as scars regret and contrition for the radical sinfulness that marked their past.

Zimmerli (1979:351) asks whether this section (vv. 55-58) may have derived from a different hand than that of verses 44-53. To him the content of these two sections is too similar to imply a different author. This section also contains what he calls a "turning point". Fortunes are being restored and serve as an introduction to the final part of the chapter that deals with future hope. This hope seems to be founded on the covenant.

**Verses 59-63** deal with the covenant and are introduced by the usual formula (כִּי כֹה אָמַר אֲדַבֵּר יְהוָה) that marks many of Ezekiel's prophetic utterances. To be precise, Ezekiel uses this formula almost exclusively. He employs it ten times, while Isaiah uses it twice (30:15; 52:4) and Amos once (5:3). The whole metaphor up to now (cf. vv. 8-13) was that of marriage and that of infidelity (cf. vv. 15-31). Marriage is a covenant. The unfaithfulness of the wife cannot be

denied by the husband and YHWH emphasizes this now. Jerusalem deserved the way that YHWH dealt with her. Despite the inevitability of YHWH's actions, he will also remember the covenant he made with her, something that Jerusalem was accused of not doing in verse 22. He will remember the former covenant that was broken by Jerusalem and will make a new one. This covenant will also be to Judah a reminder of her past and the graciousness of YHWH. He will also give Sodom and Samaria and those who depended on them to be subordinates in their land (cf. Allen 1995:246; Cooper 1994:178; Eichrodt 1986:216). The emphasis in the last two verses falls on what YHWH will do. He will remember the covenant and will establish it anew. This will help Jerusalem to always remember her shame and the atonement that was made on her behalf.

#### **4.4.4 Theological conclusions**

Traditionally this chapter did not evoke a lot of theological inspiration from the Christian and Jewish traditions. No portion of Ezekiel 16 appears in any Christian lectionary and Jewish tradition does not allow for this chapter to be used in any liturgy. In this case "ignorance is not bliss; readers ignore this text at their own peril" (Bowen 2010:91). This chapter serves like a monument that is constructed to commemorate a horror that took place such as the little church that serves at "Ground Zero" in Manhattan as museum for the Twin Tower tragedy or a Holocaust-museum. It is indeed a historical remembrance of Israel's past and lessons must be learned from it. Therefore theological observations are possible:

- The prophet uses three metaphors to tell of the past of Jerusalem. He starts with an orphan to emphasize the fact that had it not been for the mercies shown by YHWH, this city would not have been. YHWH clothes this orphan and takes her in. This saves her from a certain non-existence. The theological point that the prophet is making is that

it was not because Jerusalem was something special that she was chosen, but because YHWH was someone special.

- Before the second metaphor that describes Jerusalem's past is introduced, the prophet introduces a larger thematic metaphor that forms the background to all the accusations that are made by the plaintiff (as was mentioned in the beginning of the exegetical analysis) in this court case. The marriage metaphor. YHWH "spread the corner of his garment over" her. This was a ritual when a man claimed a bride (cf. Greenberg 1983:277). From now on she would only be naked before him, but covered to anybody else. Against this backdrop the prophet can now show how the city was unfaithful and betrayed YHWH, like an unfaithful wife. This also allows for the covenant to easily fit into Ezekiel's communication later without introducing a totally new image in his communication. Marriage was like a covenant agreement that people entered into.
- This leads to the second metaphor that describes the city's history: A Queen. All the things that YHWH lavishes on this city truly make her beautiful and feared as a queen. This is something that the reader cannot anticipate when he sees the orphan lying abandoned. This again shows how Jerusalem was made into something out of nothing all because of YHWH's clemencies.
- The third metaphor that explains Jerusalem's past is that of a prostitute or harlot. She enters into adulterous relationships with other nations and defiles her religion with other non YHWH cultic practices and makes alliances with partners of which YHWH did not approve. This is likened to adultery that is the biggest shame that a woman can bring on her husband. YHWH is depicted as the betrayed covenant partner.
- These three metaphors succeed in telling the historical narrative that lead up to the exile. It sets the scene in such a way that judgment by YHWH is anticipated and understood.



- Finally this disgraced marriage is given a glimmer of hope with the mention of a new covenant that YHWH would establish. The fact that Jerusalem become something, ended up somewhere (exile) and might hope for something in the future is all based on the fact that YHWH is someone other than any other god. It almost paves the way for later prophecies and makes it clear that for any restoration, Israel must look toward YHWH.

Working through this chapter aided the objectives of this study in three ways:

Firstly it showed that Ezekiel continues to use powerful metaphors to communicate his message. Secondly the skilled manner of the prophet's communication points to a probable "creation" or "crafting time". By this I mean that he had to take time to almost create his communication skilfully by using these metaphors in such a powerful manner. In my opinion it could not have been spur of the moment and random thoughts that he strung together. Finally it showed how important historical narrative is in the telling and re-telling of stories. He invoked their imaginations by using the familiar narrative of their redemption to criticize their actions and to explain their predicament.

#### **4.5 Observations on Ezekiel's communication from the studied texts**

All the above texts reflect a time prior to the news that Jerusalem had fallen. The prophet Ezekiel was among the first group of exiles taken to Babylon. To them everything they had known had changed and everything that had given them security in the past had let them down. For Ezekiel being a "priest turned prophet", this reality was particularly difficult to understand. His whole life up until now was built on the fact that worship of YHWH was done in the temple in Jerusalem. On this cultic unchangeable he built his life and found his security. So

did many of his fellow exiles. Suddenly a new reality defined their lives and Ezekiel being called afresh to be a prophet, needs to explain why this may have happened. As one of the leaders of the community, they looked to him for answers, because the things they were used to and trusted in had failed them. It is with this as backdrop that the observations below are made.

#### 4.5.1 Phrases and formulas

- The rhetoric of the studied texts and the rest of the book are loaded with phrases and formulas that are repeated and are many times unique to Ezekiel. *Firstly*, all three of the studied chapters start with the well-known and very distinctive Ezekiel messenger formula: **וַיְהִי דְבַר יְהוָה אֵלַי לֵאמֹר** (“The word of the Lord came to me”). This exact phrase appears six times in Jeremiah, twice in Zechariah but is found thirty-two times in Ezekiel! This formula becomes like a response. Every community that is religious in nature asks questions of their gods in times of calamity. Israel is no different. YHWH is expected to respond to the circumstances. At least he must give reasons to help them make sense of it all. He does, but this happens through the prophet who now becomes the messenger that delivers the word from YHWH. Their God responds to the need of the moment with his word. It was mentioned in 4.2.2 that Zimmerli (1982:99-110) calls this the “דְּבַר (word) event”. A revelation that the prophet receives amidst a crisis. This event is filled with the revelation of YHWH himself. This becomes throughout the book of Ezekiel like a rhythmic response to the need that the people have for answers and directions. For Greenberg (1983:83) this is a “reporting of a revelation-experience”. This revelation-experience becomes crucial for Ezekiel as the leader of the moment. He needs his words and answers to come from this experience. This first observation makes it clear that the Ezekiel rhetoric starts with a “word event” that was needed in response to a new reality.

- The *second* frequent formula that was found in the studied texts is the recognition formula, “You will know that I am the Lord” (כִּי־אֲנִי יְהוָה (וַיִּדְעֻתֶם)). This phrase/formula is abundant in the rhetoric of Ezekiel. It is repeated (in one form or another) more than seventy times in Ezekiel alone and as mentioned earlier, strikes a keynote at the end of each oracle to which it is added. In most of the cases where it appears in the studied texts, knowledge of YHWH flows out of his judgments. When other texts outside the book of Ezekiel employ this phrase, knowledge of YHWH is attained by being a benefactor of YHWH’s deeds. For example: being liberated from oppressing circumstances (Ex 6:7, 7:5, 17, 10:2, 14:4, 8, 29:46), provision from YHWH of some sort (Ex 16:12, Deut 29:6), enemies given into Israel’s hands (I Kgs 20:13, 28, Is 49:23) and honour or riches bestowed (Is 45:3). When this phrase is used in Ezekiel and especially the texts prior to the now called “pivoting point” (Ez 33:21), knowledge flows from being on the receiving end of YHWH’s judgment. For example: Being slain by sword, famine or plague (Ez 6:7, 13, 11:10, 12:16), when dealt with according to their detestable practices (Ez 6:10, 7:4, 24, 11:12, 15:7), or when the land is made desolate and the towns and buildings are destroyed (Ez 6:14, 12:20, 13:14) and when they are scattered among the nations (Ez 12:15, 22:16). All these curses and judgments serve to bring about knowledge of who YHWH is. It must be said that even though this formula in the texts prior to the “pivoting point” are predominantly linked to judgment, there are also, be it few, glimmers of hope built in. The people of YHWH will know him when he establishes his new covenant with them when they are at the end of their rope (Ez 16:62) and when he brings them back from exile (Ez 20:38, 42). In general this formula’s rhetorical function prior to the “pivoting point” appears to be linked with judgment. This judgment is a response to the many detestable practices and the ways in which Jerusalem and Judah have been unfaithful to YHWH. Pain and judgment have become the only means by which this straying nation

can now know YHWH. It is clear that Ezekiel uses this phrase and what is linked to it when he tries to give reasons for the reality in which these exiles find themselves and to warn them about the inevitable fall of their beloved city, Jerusalem.

- Thirdly the phrase, “*according to your conduct*”, or different varieties of the same phrase, was found often in the studied texts. Especially in chapter 7 (vv. 3, 7, 8 and 9). The wrath of YHWH is justified due to their wrongdoings. In trying to make sense of the reality of exile Ezekiel is saying that the punishment fits the crime and that the people have only themselves to blame for their circumstances.

#### **4.5.2 Words and metaphors of doom**

- The rhetoric of the studied texts was loaded with powerful words and metaphors that announced doom to the unfaithful people of YHWH. The first one that is encountered is “*the sword*” (Ez 6:3). The sword metaphor starts in chapter 5 when Ezekiel performs a sign-act as part of his prophecy. He shaves his head and beard and divides the hair into thirds. One third must be burned inside the city, the other scattered around the city and chopped with the sword and the last third must be scattered by the wind. This of course is a metaphor of how Jerusalem and its inhabitants will die either in the city, or cut down by the sword outside the city or scattered and hunted down while they flee. The sword is then in verse 12 combined with *famine and plague*. This threefold means of destruction is employed frequently by Ezekiel (6:11, 7:15, 12:16, 14:21) in his prophecies to show how Judah would be judged and made to pay for their deeds. It shows the total doom and destruction of the onslaught by the Babylonians.

- *Scattered corpses and dead bodies* are often used directly or implied when he paints his picture of doom. It was encountered in the studied texts (Ez 6:4, 8, 13, 7:15), but also in Ezekiel 11:6-7. The finality of this doom was so intense that Ezekiel might be implying that his audience may count themselves lucky to have escaped death.
- A concentration of the words “the end” in the early parts of chapter 7 are also words that strengthen the theme of doom and gloom that was encountered in the rhetoric of the studied texts. This “end” reminds of the day of the Lord that is evident in other prophecies (Is 13:6, 9 Ez 13.5, 30:3, Joel 1:15. 2:1, 11, 3:14, Amos 5:18, 5:20, Obad 1:15, Zeph 1:7, 14). A feeling of helplessness accompanies these words.
- Another picture that Ezekiel employs to elaborate on the theme of doom and calamity is *the absence of YHWH*. Judah has always known YHWH to be there for them, but in the studied text it is implied, by different means, that YHWH chooses not to be available. He turns his face away (Ez 7:22), and shows no pity (Ez 7:4, 9, 8:18, 9:10) after he has been the one that showed pity (Ez 16:5, 20:17) on Israel in their early history. He is also absent in battle (Ez 6:14). These images add to the feeling of doom in the texts.

#### **4.5.3 Words and metaphors of unfaithfulness**

A final grouping of words and metaphors that was found in Ezekiel’s communication deals with the practices of unfaithfulness that led to his audience’s fate.

- Early in chapter 6 the words “*high places*” (Ez 6:3, 6:6 also in 16:16) were encountered. These high places are in other instances called “lofty shrines” (Ez 16:25, 31, 39) or mountain shrines (Ez 18:6, 11, 15, 22:9), but all refer to the places outside the city that are removed from the temple and as discussed in 4.2.2 as a place where the worshippers were easily seduced to the practices of idolatry. Ezekiel being a priest was extremely harsh about these places of worship and as discussed in 4.2.2 names these places as the breeding ground of Judah’s unfaithfulness. The things that happened here are usually described as “detestable practices” and appeared often in the studied texts (Ez 6:9, 11, 7:3, 4, 8, 9, 16:2, 22, 43, 47, 58).
- Like many other prophets before and after him Ezekiel uses the *prostitute metaphor* to describe the unfaithfulness of his audience and their fellow countrymen. Especially in chapter 16 Jerusalem was likened to an orphan who became a queen and ended up being a harlot that engaged in acts of idolatry and adulterous treaties with other nations. Nations from whom YHWH rescued her (Egypt) and nations that would in the end turn against her. She was not only paid to do these deeds, but paid to be involved in these acts of unfaithfulness. This after everything YHWH had done. It is this image in particular that makes the reader expect YHWH to defend his honour.

#### **4.5.4 The depiction of YHWH**

- YHWH is depicted in chapters 6 and 7 as the judge that judged according to the deeds of the people. He looks away and abandons them in the same way they abandoned him. In chapter 16 as the betrayed covenantal partner that has to respond. His response is brutal

and all-inclusive – her (Jerusalem) allies are turned against her and used as instruments of destruction and judgment.

- YHWH has had enough and his anger is painted over the canvas of this text. For instance in the beginning of chapter 16 the tender side of YHWH is experienced. He shows mercy to an infant and clothes and lavishes gifts on the object of his love – Jerusalem. As the betrayal unfolds he becomes angry and violent in his actions.
- He does all this to show how committed he is to the covenant. Therefore the prophet does not hesitate to end the chapter by speaking of the reestablishment of the covenant and the fact that YHWH will make atonement for them.
- YHWH cares enough to make his thoughts known through the prophet. Many of these thoughts come in “word” (דְּבַר) moments.
- The text shows that he has patience, but that his patience also runs out.
- In the end YHWH does not give up on his people.

#### **4.6 Summary**

Three chapters have been studied. They all are prophecies that form part of the first half of the book. It is set in a reality that Ezekiel and his fellow exiles are struggling to come to terms with. Amidst these realities Ezekiel responds with a word from YHWH. This is not a word of comfort, but a word of judgment and resentment. Jerusalem and the people of the land are ridiculed for their unfaithfulness. They have turned away from YHWH and made themselves guilty of idolatry. They are likened to an unfaithful queen who has forgotten her king who has made her into something out of nothing. Instead she chooses to flaunt herself and her possessions before other lovers (nations) like a harlot.

Ezekiel's message in the studied texts was that the people of YHWH brought this new reality of exile upon themselves and that YHWH's response was a fitting one. No indications, apart from Ezekiel 16:60-63, are given of any reprieve. Ezekiel 16:60-63 speaks about a new covenant. But that is only possible if YHWH himself establishes it, seeing that the previous one was broken by his people's unfaithfulness.

Two important observations are necessary here. These observations will be used later on to construct a possible process of imagining in a changing society.

- The first is the importance of having a "*reality check*". The communication of Ezekiel that has been studied helps the people in exile to examine themselves and to totally accept their current reality and the role they played in it. Before they could receive a new reality created by the imagination of their prophets (some would say "poets"), they needed to accept their current reality and relinquish their old world in which they failed dismally. In Brueggemann's words (1985:4): "Judah had two tasks in this crisis of life and faith. It had to let go of the old world of king and temple that God had now taken from it. It had to receive from God's hand a new world which it did not believe possible and which was not the one it would have preferred or chosen."
- The second observation is that: to accept the current reality, to relinquish the old and to imagine something new, a "word event" is needed. This "*word event*" must be where the word of YHWH comes to the prophet and becomes relevant to the need of the moment. This will be looked at in chapter 7. The communication of Ezekiel's judgment text that was under scrutiny in this chapter succeeded in both the abovementioned observations.

The next chapter will look at selected prophecies that appear in chapters that reflect a setting after the fall of Jerusalem. These are prophecies that try to



imagine a new world and that are, according to general consensus, more hopeful and positive.

## **Chapter 5 Study of Selected Texts from the Book of Ezekiel, Post the Fall of Jerusalem: Imaginations of Hope**

### **5.1 Introduction**

A new reality arose when Ezekiel received the news that Jerusalem had fallen. He again needed to create metaphors to help his audience imagine. To enable them to eventually receive something new it inevitably had to start with imagining it. In the oracles that will follow a totally new reality is imagined. As was mentioned towards the end of chapter 4, this chapter will study texts that are set after the news that the prophet receives in Ezekiel 33:21-22:

In the twelfth year of our exile, in the tenth month on the fifth day, a man who had escaped from Jerusalem came to me and said, "The city has fallen!" Now the evening before the man arrived, the hand of the LORD was upon me, and he opened my mouth before the man came to me in the morning. So my mouth was opened and I was no longer silent.

This is a fulfilment of Ezekiel 24:26 and the news this fugitive brings confirms that Jerusalem and everything it has stood for has fallen. It also marks according to Greenberg (1983:681-2) a "turning point in the prophet's relation to his society" and has been called a pivoting point thus far in this study. From here on it is apparent that the tenor of the prophecies changes. This may prompt us to ask a logical question: Could this be the same prophet? The first part of the book (as was seen when some of the texts were studied in the previous chapter) is filled with prophecies of doom and gloom. Ezekiel now starts to give prophecies of hope. This hope and futuristic utopia culminates in chapters 40-48 where an almost fairytale picture of a redeemed nation, the temple and the city of God is painted. This chapter however will stay clear of these chapters and select some

of the prophecies that follow the same form and formulas as those that were studied in chapter 4 of this study. Ezekiel 34, 36 and 37 will be studied.

As was done in the previous chapter, the Hebrew and NIV texts are inserted to aid reading.

## **5.2 Ezekiel 34**

### **5.2.1 Background and introduction**

Chapter 34 of Ezekiel is an important pivoting chapter in the book and is called by some commentators the introduction to the “Ezekiel gospel”. Henceforth the prophet speaks frequently of YHWH’s plans of rescue and restoration (cf. Darr 2001:1461). Whether all the material of this second part of the Ezekiel book was the work of a single author was discussed in chapter 2. Most scholars now accept that the final parts of the larger of prophetic books, that tend to be more hopeful, were worked over by later redactors (cf. Clements 1996:146-154), but for Joyce (2007) enough stylistic and theme similarities exist between the first group of oracles and those that followed the pivoting point to suggest Ezekiel’s involvement. He observes (2007:195-6):

Certain stylistic aspects of chapters 34-37 do in fact suggest authorship by Ezekiel. The vocabulary and motifs of the chapters exhibit numerous features characteristic of what appear to be “primary” material of the book. For example the address “mortal” (e.g. 34:2; 35:2; 36:17; 37:11), reference to YHWH’s wrath and jealousy (36:5-6, 18; cf. 5:13; 8:18), and the placing of words in the mouths of interlocutors (35:10; 36:20, 35; 37:11; cf. 12:22; 18:2) ... But we can be confident that in these restoration chapters we are

dealing with a new message of Ezekiel, couched in language forged by the prophet himself.

I strongly agree with this because Ezekiel is the only larger prophetic book that specifically states that the prophet himself is communicating. His dumbness leaves him (cf. 33:22b) soon after the news of Jerusalem and its fate.

An important theological theme is evident in both parts of Ezekiel's book. In the first half of the book, YHWH acts because his name has been violated and in the latter part of the book he restores for "the sake of his holy name" (Brueggemann 2003: 200; Joyce 2009:195). It is also important not to forget the numerous occurrences of the different messenger formulas that have been established in the previous chapter as distinctive of the Ezekiel prophecies. In conclusion, this study will stay with the position taken in previous chapters that at least the kernel of these oracles of hope can be attributed to the same Ezekiel who communicated in the first half of the book.

As an introduction to chapter 34 Bowen (2010:209-210) notes that the preceding chapters have reflected on traumatic experiences, but from now on restoration and hope as a recovery from that trauma become the new reflection. She states (:210) that "a new genre is introduced in these chapters, the prophecy of salvation, which announces good news". Plans are put into place to stop the trauma from reoccurring again. In chapter 34 a new leader is put into place (vv.1-16) and a new covenant is made (vv. 17-31). Ezekiel again uses a metaphor to communicate his message. On this occasion it is a well-known one: Sheep and shepherds. Cooper (1994:298-299) speaks of figurative messages that are firstly directed to the leaders of Israel as shepherds (vv. 1-16) and secondly to the people as sheep (vv.17-24) and lastly a literal message to the people (vv. 25-31).

Although more divisions of the text will be suggested below, the chapter comprises three movements: First the leaders are ridiculed for their bad “shepherding”, secondly YHWH promises to take care of them and to become their shepherd and finally he makes a new covenant of peace with them.

## 5.2.2 Sub-divisions of the text

Ezekiel 34 will be divided into five sub-divisions. These sub-divisions<sup>45</sup> are chosen because the content structurally builds on each one almost like the tiers of a pavilion:

1. Indictment of the Shepherds (34:1-6)
2. Judgment of the Shepherds (34:7-10)
3. Gathering of the Flock (34:11-16)
4. YHWH’s Rule for the Sake of the Flock (34:17-24)
5. The Covenant of Peace (34:25-31)

## 5.2.3 Exegetical analysis

### 5.2.3.1 Indictment of the shepherds (34:1-6)

וַיְהִי דְבַר־יְהוָה אֵלַי לֵאמֹר:<sup>2</sup> בֶּן־אָדָם הַנִּבְאָ עַל־רֹעֵי  
יִשְׂרָאֵל הַנִּבְאָ וְאָמַרְתָּ אֲלֵיהֶם לְרֹעִים כֹּה אָמַר אֲדֹנָי יְהוִה  
הוּא רֹעֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל אֲשֶׁר הָיוּ רֹעִים אוֹתָם הֲלוֹא הֲצִאֵן יֹרְעוּ  
הָרֹעִים:  
<sup>3</sup> אֶת־הַחֶלֶב תֹּאכְלוּ וְאֶת־הַצֶּמֶר תִּלְבְּשׁוּ הַבְּרִיָּאָה תִּזְבְּחוּ  
הֲצִאֵן לֹא תִרְעוּ:  
<sup>4</sup> אֶת־הַנְּחֹלֹת לֹא תִזְקְתֶם וְאֶת־הַחֹלֶה לֹא־רַפֵּאתֶם  
וְלִנְשֻׁבְרֹת לֹא תִבְשְׂתֶם וְאֶת־הַנְּדָחַת לֹא תִשָּׁבְתֶם

<sup>45</sup> Subdivisions used are also proposed by Odell (2005:424-440) and Ruiz and Lust (2001:1242-3).

וְאֵת־הָאֲבֹדֹת לֹא בִקְשַׁתֶּם וּבְחִזְקָה רָדִיתֶם אֹתָם וּבִפְרֹד:  
 5 וְתַפּוּצִינָה מִבְּלֵי רֵעָה וְתַהֲיִינָה לְאֹכְלָהּ לְכָל־חַיַּת הַשָּׂדֶה  
 וְתַפּוּצִינָה:  
 6 יִשְׁגּוּ צֹאנִי בְּכָל־הַהָרִים וְעַל כָּל־גִּבְעָה רָמָה וְעַל כָּל־פְּנֵי  
 הָאָרֶץ נִפְצוּ צֹאנֵי וְאֵין דּוֹרֵשׁ וְאֵין מִבְקֵשׁ:

The word of the LORD came to me: <sup>2</sup> “Son of man, prophesy against the shepherds of Israel; prophesy and say to them: ‘This is what the Sovereign LORD says: Woe to the shepherds of Israel who only take care of themselves! Should not shepherds take care of the flock? <sup>3</sup> You eat the curds, clothe yourselves with the wool and slaughter the choice animals, but you do not take care of the flock. <sup>4</sup> You have not strengthened the weak or healed the sick or bound up the injured. You have not brought back the strays or searched for the lost. You have ruled them harshly and brutally. <sup>5</sup> So they were scattered because there was no shepherd, and when they were scattered they became food for all the wild animals. <sup>6</sup> My sheep wandered over all the mountains and on every high hill. They were scattered over the whole earth, and no one searched or looked for them.

**Verse 1** starts with the well-known “word formula”. This was dealt with in the previous chapter, but it is noteworthy to mention that this phrase appears in all three of the chapters of the texts that were selected for discussion in this chapter.

**Verse 2** turns its attention to the people who are addressed by the prophet. They are “the shepherds of Israel”<sup>46</sup>. One of the commonly known accepted interpretations of this phrase was that it referred to the leadership class of Judah (Alexander 1988:911; Greenberg 1997:694-5). They dismally failed the people when they needed leadership most. There are others (Darr 2001:1463; Odell 2005: 424; Ruiz & Lust 2001:1243) that argue that the term “shepherd” in the

<sup>46</sup> On this matter Wright (2001:275) observes that in most cases “shepherd” refers to kings but that in some cases the title “shepherd” is “commonplace for both kings and gods in the ancient Near East”. The appointed king usually stood as the protector of those he was appointed over by the gods. Block (1997:280-281) also agrees with this and quotes from “The Code of Hammurabi” to show that most Babylonian kings used this pastoral metaphor to describe their roles. However there is other biblical evidence that this metaphor points to leaders in general as well (cf. Jer 25:34). In the case of Ezekiel 34, the fact that the prophet makes reference to “the fat sheep” (the ruling class and the leaders) makes the use of kings for this shepherd metaphor much more plausible.

ancient Near East was also associated with the king. Rulers from Egypt as well as Babylon were called “shepherds”. Arguments on both sides will continue, even though I think that it does not matter that much in the reading of the prophecy. Be it the king(s) of Israel in general, or the last king specifically, or the leadership class of Judah, it all refers to leadership in general which was the cause of the situation they found themselves in. These shepherds can also, as will be seen later, refer to the kings such as Nebuchadnezzar that held them captive. Verse 2 continues to explain the reason why these “shepherds” were addressed. They as leaders only thought of themselves and of their material gain. They fed themselves and not the flock. This verse ends in a rhetorical question that reminds them of their purpose as caretakers: “Should not shepherds take care of the flock?”

Odell (2005: 427) suggests that these accusations against the shepherds intensify in **verse 3**. They are accused of not only neglecting the flock, but they are eating the fat, clothing themselves with the wool and slaughtering the flock. In effect they were stealing from YHWH because the fat belongs to the Lord (Lev 3:16). To Darr (2001:1463) Israel’s leaders were guilty of three sins of commission and one of omission. They committed sins against the flock (eating the fat, stealing the wool and slaughtering them), but also omitted the most important responsibility of a shepherd, that is to tend to the flock. Joyce (2009:196) warns against “detailed allegorizing” of these deeds, but suggests that it is safe to assume that these leaders were guilty of self-indulgence and violence. While indulging themselves, they ruled with violence and brutality over their followers. Ezekiel uses **verse 4** to stipulate the important functions of “pastoral care” (Joyce 2009: 196). As shepherds (pastors) of their flock they were supposed to “strengthen the weak”, “heal the sick”, “bind up the injured” and “seek the lost”. All duties that are difficult to perform when you only look out for yourself. All this according to Zimmerli (1979:215) struck a sharp contrast with

the type of pastoral care that YHWH will offer later in the chapter. It is as if the wrong of these shepherds set the scene for him to be the ultimate shepherd.

The legacy that is left by this neglect forms the core of **verses 5 and 6**. The flock becomes scattered and being scattered without a shepherd made them easy prey to all kinds of wild animals. It is obvious that this metaphor alludes to the exile of YHWH's people as new kings (shepherds), such as Nebuchadnezzar, preyed on them. Without a shepherd the sheep wandered on the mountains and the high hills. They were scattered over the whole earth and nobody looked for them. According to Zimmerli (1983:215) these were the “bitter fruit of bad shepherding”. New kings (shepherds) didn't treat them any better. In fact they became food for them (v. 11). The “mountains” and the “high hills” show the unity it forms with the earlier prophecies as it reminds of the prophecies studied in Ezekiel 6, 7 and 16 that condemned Israel for practicing idolatry on the “high places” (6:3, 6, 13; 16:16) and cursed them out to the “mountains” (6:2, 3; 7:7, 16).

### 5.2.3.2 The judgment of the shepherds (34:7-10)

<sup>7</sup> לְכֵן רְעִים שְׁמְעוּ אֶת־דְּבַר יְהוָה:  
<sup>8</sup> חִי־אֲנִי נֶאֱמַר אֲדֹנָי יְהוִה אִם־לֹא יֵעַן הָיִיתִי־צֹאֵן לְבָז  
וְתַהֲיִינָה צֹאֵן לְאֹכְלָהּ לְכָל־חַיַּת הַשָּׂדֶה מֵאֵין רֵעָה  
וְלֹא־דָרְשׁוּ רֵעִי אֶת־צֹאֵן וַיִּרְעוּ הָרְעִים אוֹתָם וְאֶת־צֹאֵן  
לֹא רָעוּ: ס  
<sup>9</sup> לְכֵן הָרְעִים שְׁמְעוּ דְבַר־יְהוָה:  
<sup>10</sup> כֹּה־אָמַר אֲדֹנָי יְהוִה הִנְנִי אֶל־הָרְעִים וְדִרְשְׁתִּי אֶת־צֹאֵן  
מִיָּדָם וְהַשְׁבֵּתִים מִרְעוֹת צֹאֵן וְלֹא־יִרְעוּ עוֹד הָרְעִים אוֹתָם  
וְהַצִּלְתִּי צֹאֵן מִפִּיָּהֶם וְלֹא־תִהְיֶינָה לָהֶם לְאֹכְלָהּ: ס

<sup>7</sup> “Therefore, you shepherds, hear the word of the LORD: <sup>8</sup> As surely as I live, declares the Sovereign LORD, because my flock lacks a shepherd and so has been plundered and



has become food for all the wild animals, and because my shepherds did not search for my flock but cared for themselves rather than for my flock,<sup>9</sup> therefore, O shepherds, hear the word of the LORD:<sup>10</sup> This is what the Sovereign LORD says: I am against the shepherds and will hold them accountable for my flock. I will remove them from tending the flock so that the shepherds can no longer feed themselves. I will rescue my flock from their mouths, and it will no longer be food for them.

**Verses 7-9** contain the transgressions of these bad shepherds and are nestled between the two formulas, “hear the word of the Lord”. It emphasizes the oath that YHWH now makes in **verse 10** to call to accountability these leader(s) who have neglected his people and lead them astray. YHWH promises three actions: he will “hold accountable”, he “will remove them from tending flock” and he will “rescue” his flock. The “frequent repetition of the first person pronoun stresses YHWH’s ownership of the flock” (Odell 2005:427). This is one of the first indications of the tenor change that happens in these prophecies. In the previous chapters studied it seemed as if YHWH despised these people who broke their covenant with him. Now he appears to be more affectionate towards them. It is also noteworthy that the judgment that is passed on the shepherds is in the third person and not directly to the shepherds. This could have been Ezekiel’s exilic audience. This third person address can also mean that YHWH now turns his attention to the king of Babylon (who has become their new shepherd) being called to answer for the deeds of horror he committed against YHWH’s flock. This for me makes an easier reading.

### 5.2.3.3 Gathering of the flock (34:11-16)

כִּי כֹה אָמַר אֲדֹנָי יְהוִה הַנְּנִי־אֲנִי וְדַרְשֵׁתִי אֶת־צֹאֲנִי  
וּבְקִרְתִּים:

<sup>12</sup> כְּבִקְרַת רֹעֵה עָדְרוּ בְיוֹם־הַיּוֹתוֹ בְּחוֹךְ־צֹאֲנוֹ נִפְרָשׁוֹת כִּן  
אֲבַקֵּר אֶת־צֹאֲנִי וְהִצַּלְתִּי אֹתָהֶם מִכָּל־הַמְּקוֹמוֹת אֲשֶׁר נִפְצְאוּ

שֵׁם בַּיּוֹם עֲנֵן וְעָרַפֶּל:  
<sup>13</sup> וְהוֹצֵאתִים מִן־הָעַמִּים וְקִבַּצְתִּים מִן־הָאָרְצוֹת וְהִבִּיאֹתִים  
אֶל־אֲדָמָתָם וְרֵעֵיתִים אֶל־הָרִי יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּאִפְיָקִים וּבְכָל  
מוֹשְׁבֵי הָאָרֶץ:  
<sup>14</sup> בְּמִרְעֵה־טוֹב אֶרְעֶה אֹתָם וּבְהָרֵי מְרוֹם־יִשְׂרָאֵל יִהְיֶה נוֹהֵם  
שֵׁם תִּרְבְּצֶנָה בְּנוֹה טוֹב וּמִרְעֵה שָׁמֶן תִּרְעִינָה אֶל־הָרִי  
יִשְׂרָאֵל:  
<sup>15</sup> אֲנִי אֶרְעֶה צֹאנִי וְאֲנִי אֲרַבִּיצֵם נֶאֱמַר אֲדֹנָי יְהוִה:  
<sup>16</sup> אֶת־הָאֲבֵדוֹת אֲבַקֵּשׁ וְאֶת־הַנִּדְחֹת אֲשִׁיב וְלִנְשֹׁבֵרֵת אֲחַבֵּשׁ  
וְאֶת־הַחֹלְהָ אֲחַזֵּק וְאֶת־הַשְּׂמֵנָה וְאֶת־הַחֹזֶקֶה אֲשַׁמֵּד אֶרְעֶנָה  
בְּמִשְׁפָּט:

<sup>11</sup> “For this is what the Sovereign LORD says: I myself will search for my sheep and look after them. <sup>12</sup> As a shepherd looks after his scattered flock when he is with them, so will I look after my sheep. I will rescue them from all the places where they were scattered on a day of clouds and darkness. <sup>13</sup> I will bring them out from the nations and gather them from the countries, and I will bring them into their own land. I will pasture them on the mountains of Israel, in the ravines and in all the settlements in the land. <sup>14</sup> I will tend them in a good pasture, and the mountain heights of Israel will be their grazing land. There they will lie down in good grazing land, and there they will feed in a rich pasture on the mountains of Israel. <sup>15</sup> I myself will tend my sheep and have them lie down, declares the Sovereign LORD. <sup>16</sup> I will search for the lost and bring back the strays. I will bind up the injured and strengthen the weak, but the sleek and the strong I will destroy. I will shepherd the flock with justice.

**Verses 11-16** are dominated by the things that YHWH promises. These promises start with an oath formula: “For this is what the Sovereign Lord says” and are filled with intentions that set out to rectify the way the flock has been mistreated by their previous shepherds. As one reads through the verses, YHWH’s treatment of his flock becomes like an “antithesis of the kings’ former irresponsible shepherding” (Darr 2001:1465), in particular the mistreatments explained in verses 4-6. These contrasts show how YHWH himself now enters the fray. His flock will no longer be handled by mediators, but by him. The table below as also suggested by Greenberg (1997:706)<sup>47</sup> shows this:

<sup>47</sup> This is also noted by Darr (2001:1466).

<b>Shepherds' neglect</b> (read backwards from verse 6)	<b>YHWH's reversal</b> (read as normal from verse 11)
6. None cared or searched for the flock flock scattered over the whole face of the earth flock scattered on the mountains	11. Will care for and take stock of the flock 12-13a. gathered the scattered from all lands 13b-14. pasture them on the mountains of Israel, tend them in good pasture
5. they became food 4. Ruled over harshly and brutally	15. I will have them lie down I myself will tend them
4. Didn't search for the lost or recover the stray or bind up the injured Didn't heal the sick nor strengthen the weak	16. will search for the lost recover the strays bandage the injured strengthen the weak

Verse 16a forms part of the contrasts that were illustrated in the table above, but **verse 16b** is somewhat problematic because the action of destroying some of the flock (the sleek and the strong) doesn't fit into the sequence of restoration and tending. Darr (2001:1466-7) proposes a copyist error in the original text. He shows that in two other Hebrew manuscripts the word אֲשַׁמֵּד ("I will destroy") can be read as "I will watch over" if the ך at the end of the word is mistaken for a ך. So if one emends the MT accordingly the reading fits with the theme of the whole sub-section. This continues the series of short and positive descriptions on how YHWH will shepherd them. I would rather retain the MT reading and understand this as a link to the sub-unit that will follow (v. 17-22). In this next section YHWH promises to mediate between the strong and oppressive members of the flock. Zimmerli (1983:217) also argues this and suggests that it forms a link to the next section where a theme of divine judgment is built. It

therefore starts to develop on the theme that will be taken up in the next section (cf. Joyce 2009:197).

#### 5.2.3.4 YHWH's rule for the sake of the flock (34:17-24)

17 וְאַתְּנָה צֹאֲנֵי כֹה אָמַר אֲדֹנָי יְהוִה הַנְּנִי שֹׁפֵט בֵּין־שֵׁה  
לְשֵׁה לְאֵילִים וְלַעֲתוּדִים:  
18 הַמַּעֲט מִכֶּם הַמְרַעֵה הַטּוֹב תִּרְעוּ וַיִּתֵּר מְרַעֲיֶכֶם תִּרְמָסוּ  
בְּרַגְלֵיכֶם וּמִשְׁקַע־מַיִם תִּשְׁתּוּ וְאֵת הַנּוֹתְרִים בְּרַגְלֵיכֶם  
תִּרְפְּשׁוּן:  
19 וְצֹאֲנֵי מִרְמָס רַגְלֵיכֶם תִּרְעִינָה וּמִרְפֵּשׁ רַגְלֵיכֶם תִּשְׁתִּינָה: ס  
20 לָכֵן כֹּה אָמַר אֲדֹנָי יְהוִה אֱלֹהֵם הַנְּנִי־אֲנִי וְשֹׁפֵטֹתִי  
בֵּין־שֵׁה בְרִיָּה וּבֵין שֵׁה רָזָה:  
21 יַעַן בְּצַד וּבְכַתֵּף תִּהְדָּפוּ וּבְקַרְנֵיכֶם תִּנְגְּחוּ כָּל־הַנְּחַלּוֹת  
עַד אֲשֶׁר הִפְּצוּתֶם אֹתָנָה אֶל־הַחוּצָה:  
22 וְהוֹשַׁעְתִּי לְצֹאֲנֵי וְלֹא־תִהְיֶינָה עוֹד לְבַז וְשֹׁפֵטֹתִי בֵּין שֵׁה  
לְשֵׁה:

17 “As for you, my flock, this is what the Sovereign LORD says: I will judge between one sheep and another, and between rams and goats. 18 Is it not enough for you to feed on the good pasture? Must you also trample the rest of your pasture with your feet? Is it not enough for you to drink clear water? Must you also muddy the rest with your feet? 19 Must my flock feed on what you have trampled and drink what you have muddied with your feet? 20 “Therefore this is what the Sovereign LORD says to them: See, I myself will judge between the fat sheep and the lean sheep. 21 Because you shove with flank and shoulder, butting all the weak sheep with your horns until you have driven them away, 22 I will save my flock, and they will no longer be plundered. I will judge between one sheep and another.

The focus of the shepherd now turns to his flock in verses 17-22. “As for you, my flock” indicates that YHWH is now addressing his own people. He starts **verse 17** with a messenger formula that he is about to arbitrate between the sheep. The reasons why this judgment is passed are given in a string of accusations (**verses 18-21**) that the so-called “fat sheep” have committed against the lean sheep. They have trampled the pasture, muddied their feet and the drinking water, shoved with their flanks and butted the weak sheep with their horns. One can

presume that YHWH's actions are to bring the conflict that was among the sheep to an end (cf. Darr 2001:1468). Two audiences are suggested by Odell (2005:428) for this sub-unit. These audiences are differentiated between in verse 17. The judgment is "between one sheep and another and between rams and goats". They are probably the two audiences that were assumed in the commentary of verses 7-10. One might refer to the leaders of Israel and the other to the leaders who took them into exile. This distinction is a bit presumptuous and not necessary to aid the reading of the text. The message that the prophet is trying to bring across is not that of a dual judgment. It is rather a theme of YHWH, like a good shepherd, who looks out for all the members of his flock. As he said in verse 15c, "I will shepherd the flock with justice." Alexander (1988:913) agrees when he sums these verses up as YHWH who delivers "Israel from all distress, whether poor leadership or from the predatory nations". For Zimmerli (1983:218) also, "the statement here too is not the punishment of the wicked", (whoever they may be), "but the proclamation of deliverance for those who have hitherto been oppressed". The essence is therefore apparent in verse 22: "I will save my flock, and they will no longer be plundered."

The promises of **verses 23 and 24** are that they will get the leadership that they so missed in the recent past and they will again be part of YHWH's chosen people. The appointment of this "one shepherd, my servant David" sounds out of place and appears somewhat problematic. What could this mean? Will David be raised or re-incarnated in some way or another? This was highly unlikely. I think that David becomes a metaphor for a unified Israel where YHWH rules with the help of his appointed leader. Zimmerli (1983:219-220) meticulously makes the following observations on these two verses. Firstly on the question of authenticity he rules that, "there is no compelling reason for denying the origin of the verses to Ezekiel". The point that the prophet is trying to make is that a new single ruler will rule over his people who were once divided prior to the exile. These verses also supply a seamless transition to the last theme of this prophecy that mainly

deals with the establishment of a new covenant. He further notes that a future Davidic dynasty is a metaphor that Ezekiel again later employs in 37:15. It also refers to YHWH's one shepherd David. Other Old Testament references to this future Davidic dynasty are found in Hosea 3:5 and closer to Ezekiel in Jeremiah 30:9.

I summarize the comments of Odell (2005:1469-70) as to why Ezekiel's audience would not be surprised to hear the name of David in this prophecy:

- The ancient reader has read Ezekiel 17 where it speaks of the failures of the kings and the future restoration of a Davidic dynasty. Different imagery is used by the prophet, but the message is the same.
- The reader probably knows Jeremiah 23:1-6, which likewise exhibits both shepherd/flock metaphors and the same sequence.
- David as shepherd and future ruler fits traditionally perfectly into their understanding of a perfect future. The stories of David the shepherd boy and David the great king and conqueror are well-known amongst Ezekiel's audience.

This “David as ruler and shepherd” image fits like a glove as this prophecy starts to draw to an end and culminates in the promise of a covenant of peace.

### 5.2.3.5 The covenant of peace (34:25-31)

וְהִקְמֹתִי עֲלֵיהֶם רֹעָה אֶחָד וְרֹעָה אֶתְחֶן אֶת עֲבָדַי דְּוֹד  
הוּא יִרְעֶה אֹתָם וְהוֹאִיְהִיָּה לָהֶן לְרֹעֶה:<sup>23</sup>  
וְאֲנִי יְהוָה אֱהִיָּה לָהֶם לֵאלֹהִים וְעֲבָדַי דְּוֹד נָשִׂיא בְּתוֹכָם<sup>24</sup>  
אֲנִי יְהוָה דְּבַרְתִּי:  
וְכָרַתִּי לָהֶם בְּרִית שְׁלוֹם וְהִשְׁבַּתִּי חַיַּה־רֹעָה מִן־הָאָרֶץ<sup>25</sup>  
וְיָשְׁבוּ בַּמִּדְבָּר לְבֹשֶׁת וְיִשְׁנוּ בִּיעָרִים:  
וְנָתַתִּי אוֹתָם וּסְבִיבוֹת גְּבַעְתִּי בְרָכָה וְהוֹרַדְתִּי הַגֶּשֶׁם<sup>26</sup>  
בְּעֵתוֹ גִּשְׁמֵי בְרָכָה יִהְיוּ:

27 וְנָתַן עֵץ הַשִּׁדְדָה אֶת־פָּרִיָו וְהָאָרֶץ תִּתֵּן יְבוּלָהּ וְהָיוּ  
 עַל־אֲדָמָתָם לְבָטָח וַיִּדְעוּ כִּי־אֲנִי יְהוָה בְּשִׁבְרֵי אֶת־מִטּוֹת  
 עֲלֵם וְהִצַּלְתִּים מִיַּד הָעֹבְדִים בָּהֶם:  
 28 וְלֹא־יִהְיוּ עוֹד בְּזוֹ לַגּוֹיִם וְחַיַּת הָאָרֶץ לֹא תֹאכְלֵם וַיֵּשְׁבוּ  
 לְבָטָח וְאֵין מִחְרִיד:  
 29 וְהִקְמַתִי לָהֶם מִטַּע לֶשֶׁם וְלֹא־יִהְיוּ עוֹד אֶסְפֵי רֶעִב  
 בָּאָרֶץ וְלֹא־יִשְׁאוּ עוֹד כְּלִמַּת הַגּוֹיִם:  
 30 וַיִּדְעוּ כִּי אֲנִי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵיהֶם אַתֶּם וְהִמָּה עִמִּי בַּיִת  
 יִשְׂרָאֵל נָאִם אֲדַנִּי יְהוָה:  
 31 וְאַתֶּן צֹאֵן אֲנִי צֹאֵן מִרְעִיתִי אֲדָם אַתֶּם אֲנִי אֱלֹהֵיכֶם נָאִם  
 אֲדַנִּי יְהוָה: פ

23 I will place over them one shepherd, my servant David, and he will tend them; he will tend them and be their shepherd. 24 I the LORD will be their God, and my servant David will be prince among them. I the LORD have spoken. 25 “I will make a covenant of peace with them and rid the land of wild beasts so that they may live in the desert and sleep in the forests in safety. 26 I will bless them and the places surrounding my hill. I will send down showers in season; there will be showers of blessing. 27 The trees of the field will yield their fruit and the ground will yield its crops; the people will be secure in their land. They will know that I am the LORD, when I break the bars of their yoke and rescue them from the hands of those who enslaved them. 28 They will no longer be plundered by the nations, nor will wild animals devour them. They will live in safety, and no one will make them afraid. 29 I will provide for them a land renowned for its crops, and they will no longer be victims of famine in the land or bear the scorn of the nations. 30 Then they will know that I, the LORD their God, am with them and that they, the house of Israel, are my people, declares the Sovereign LORD. 31 You my sheep, the sheep of my pasture, are people, and I am your God, declares the Sovereign LORD.”

**Verse 25** starts the final part (vs. 25-31) of this prophecy. YHWH promises a future covenant with his people. This would be a בְּרִית שְׁלוֹם (a covenant of peace) and the attending blessings of this covenant are then described. Firstly an ultimate removal of foreign nations (“wild beasts”) is promised. Secondly YHWH

would bless the land with abundance of produce. Also would there be complete security. Fourthly this will bring knowledge that YHWH is truly their God and finally the Mosaic formula of relationship and ownership between YHWH and his people and the people and YHWH will be evident (cf. Alexander 1988:914). According to Odell (2005:1471) we find here one of the best descriptions of Israel's understanding of the word שָׁלוֹם (peace). It speaks of more than just the absence of adversity, but of "a wholeness, harmony, and fulfilment, humans at peace with their environment and with God".

Several links can be presumed to other texts in the Old Testament. The first one is suggested by Zimmerli (1983:220), when he notes that YHWH has already promised his future covenant with them in the preceding prophecies of doom where he hinted at this at the end of Ezekiel 16:60. In prophecies that follow Ezekiel 34 there is also reference to this covenant of peace (cf. 37:26). For Odell (2005:429-430) the blessings of this covenant of peace closely resemble the promised blessings of Leviticus 26:3-14, but with a difference. The condition of the Leviticus covenant was obedience; this new covenant of peace was made solely by YHWH and his faithfulness. As the prophet starts to end his prophecy with the recognition formula ("and you will know ...") the first glimmers of a restored society are thus imagined. He will now elaborate on this society in chapters to come. **Verse 31** returns to the shepherd metaphor and ties it up with the well-known covenant declaration: "You will be my people and I will be your God" (Darr 2001:1473).

#### **5.2.4 Theological conclusions**

At the end of this chapter I will summarize some of the key points pertaining to the objectives of this study that came out of the three chapters (Ez 34; 36; 37)



above, however a few immediate theological observations on the prophet's aim with this prophecy are necessary.

- Ezekiel *softens the tenor* of his prophecies from here on to the end of the chapter. This is apparent in the metaphors he uses to communicate his message. In the chapters studied in chapter 4 (namely: Ezekiel 6, 7, 16) the imagery was mountains, the end of the land, and his people compared to a harlot that prostituted with other nations. In these chapters he introduces a *sheep and shepherd metaphor*. This immediately is softer on the ear. It entices the listener to hear something different and more hopeful.
- *YHWH* becomes the one who *comes to the rescue of his people (sheep)*. They were led astray by leaders who had failed them. *YHWH* sets out to rectify this by becoming their shepherd who supplies the shelter and nourishment they so desperately need. In the prophecies (discussed in the previous chapter) prior to this point this is not the case. They are filled with judgment and *YHWH* in particular is the judge and the avenger.
- The *allusion to David* being their new leader is also important to observe. David has always symbolized prosperity, unity as a nation and true *YHWH* worship. The prophet gets the attention of his listeners by giving them something familiar like David in order to imagine something new even in their dire situation.
- The *covenant of peace* that was briefly mentioned at the end of chapter 16 is now fully revealed. This covenant is only possible now that *YHWH* has chosen to come to their rescue. The previous covenant hinged on the obedience of Israel and their ability to be faithful. This new covenant is based solely on *YHWH's* faithfulness.

## 5.3 Ezekiel 36:16-38

### 5.3.1 Background and introduction

Verses 1-15 of chapter 36 are regarded by most scholars as forming a unit with chapter 35. Chapter 34 announces the return of Israel to their own land where YHWH will feed them on the mountains. A more natural reading would encourage the reader to handle Ezekiel 35:1-37:14 as a larger unit dealing with the complete restoration of the land. Firstly YHWH will prepare the land by dealing with the oppressors (35:1-15) then encourage the “mountains of Israel” (36:1-15) and finally he will restore the land (36:16-37:14). This is also suggested by Alexander (1998:915-925) and Odell (2005:436).

It is obvious according to Bowen (2010:217) that Ezekiel 35 turns attention to the mountains and land that were the subject of Ezekiel 6 and 7 discussed in the previous chapter and 36:1-15 now “intentionally reverses the land’s destruction”. It ends with a promise (verse 15) that “no longer will I make you hear the taunts of the nations, and no longer will you suffer the scorn of the peoples or cause your nation to fall, declares the Sovereign Lord.” (Ez 36:15). Such a huge unit would take up a lot of space in this study. Therefore a sub-unit out of this larger unit will be looked at. This sub-unit is introduced in 36:16 by the “word event formula” and deals with Israel’s restoration to their land. It builds on the conclusion of the previous messages of the larger unit that promised the removal of foreign oppressors and the preparation of the land of Canaan for YHWH’s people to return. Odell (2005:436) warns that “isolating oracles may result in a misreading of the texts”, but this will not happen if one builds on the previous part of the unit as a background to the oracle that follows the “word event formula” in Ezekiel 36:16. It has also been mentioned on several occasions earlier that the “word event” will be crucial to the objectives of this study.

### 5.3.2 Sub-divisions of the text

The new unit (36:16-38) that will be the object of study for the following section begins with another word formula and ends with a recognition formula in verse 38. I am aware that up till now most of the texts selected were complete chapters and that this section will start its exegetical analysis with verse 16 of the chapter. This is done for the following reasons:

- The chapter is divided into two themes that make this division probable. The second part distinguishes itself from the previous verses by taking up a new theme. The first fifteen verses are addressed to the mountains and the hills and the ravines. They are told that they will be inhabited and fruitful again. From verse 16 onwards YHWH explains how his redemption will personally play out and gives the reason for this redemption: “For the sake of my holy name” (v. 22). For Jenson (2009:275) this second part of chapter 36 follows a pattern that is evident in other passages of Ezekiel as well. It starts with the prophet being addressed (vv. 16-21); in this case he is given a review of Israel’s past, in her land and in Babylon as exiles.
- It starts with the messenger formula “the word of the Lord came to me” (v. 16) and ends with the formula “then they will know that I am the Lord” (v. 38).

Darr (2001:1488-1496) suggests four sub-divisions for this particular unit (36:16-38). I will use her suggestion because it makes reading easier thematically. The different themes and movements of the prophecy are properly divided. She discusses the unit under the heading “YHWH redeems Israel for the sake of the Divine Name” and the following divisions are used:

1. Israel’s Sins and their Consequences for God (36:16-22)
2. I will bring you into your own land (36:22-32)

3. "Like the Garden of Eden" (36:33-36)
4. Israel's Population Explosion (36:37-38)

### 5.3.3 Exegetical analysis

#### 5.3.3.1 Israel's sins and their consequences for God (36:16-21)

וַיְהִי דְבַר־יְהוָה אֵלַי לֵאמֹר:<sup>16</sup>

בֶּן־אָדָם בֵּית יִשְׂרָאֵל יֹשְׁבִים עַל־אֲדָמָתָם וַיִּטְמְאוּ אוֹתָהּ<sup>17</sup>

בְּדַרְכָּם וּבַעֲלִילוֹתָם כַּטְּמֵאת הַנְּדָה הִיְתָה דַרְכָּם לִפְנָי:

וְאֲשַׁפֵּךְ חֲמָתִי עֲלֵיהֶם עַל־הַדָּם אֲשֶׁר־שָׁפְכוּ עַל־הָאָרֶץ<sup>18</sup>

וּבַגְּלוּלֵיהֶם טְמְאוּהָ:

וְאֶפְיֵץ אֹתָם בַּגּוֹיִם וַיִּזְרוּ בָאֲרָצוֹת כְּדַרְכָּם וּכְעִלּוֹתָם<sup>19</sup>

שֹׁפְטֵתִים:

וַיָּבֹאוּ אֶל־הַגּוֹיִם אֲשֶׁר־בָּאוּ שָׁם וַיַּחֲלִלוּ אֶת־שֵׁם קְדוֹשִׁי<sup>20</sup>

בְּאֵמֹר לָהֶם עִם־יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵי וּמֵאֲרָצוֹ יֵצְאוּ:

וְאֶחְמַל עַל־שֵׁם קְדוֹשִׁי אֲשֶׁר חָלְלוּהוּ בֵּית יִשְׂרָאֵל בַּגּוֹיִם<sup>21</sup>

אֲשֶׁר־בָּאוּ שָׁמָּה: ם

<sup>16</sup> Again the word of the LORD came to me: <sup>17</sup> "Son of man, when the people of Israel were living in their own land, they defiled it by their conduct and their actions. Their conduct was like a woman's monthly uncleanness in my sight. <sup>18</sup> So I poured out my wrath on them because they had shed blood in the land and because they had defiled it with their idols. <sup>19</sup> I dispersed them among the nations, and they were scattered through the countries; I judged them according to their conduct and their actions. <sup>20</sup> And wherever they went among the nations they profaned my holy name, for it was said of them, 'These are the LORD's people, and yet they had to leave his land.' <sup>21</sup> I had concern for my holy name, which the house of Israel profaned among the nations where they had gone.

**Verse 16** starts with the "word event" messenger formula and according to Joyce (2009:203) begins a new section that is "cast in a narrative form, first reviewing

the past and then looking at the imminent future.” **Verse 17** states the accusation of how Israel has defiled their land by their conduct and practices. These practices are likened to the uncleanness of a woman in her period of menstruation. This was not new to the Ezekiel rhetoric as it is used in 7:19, 18:6 and 22:10. According to the Torah a woman was unclean during this period but also contagious. Her impurity could be contracted by those who touched her, her bed or her chair (Lev 12:2-5; 15:19-30). Ezekiel’s priestly influence is again apparent in this verse. The deeds and actions of Israel are usually seen in relation to cultic uncleanness. Darr (2001: 1488) observes that “menstruation itself was no moral offence; and women were not expected to experience guilt or shame on account of it”. She finds the answer in the fact that menstrual imagery could also be used to describe violent bloodshed and/or an impure action that disgusts (Lam 1:9; Ezra 9:11). The menstrual impurity analogy functions to show how Israel’s defiling conduct has led to the defilement of God’s land (cf. Darr 2001:1488). Zimmerli (1983:246) simply interprets this imagery as “the uncleanness of their way of life before YHWH”.

This lead to YHWH pouring out his wrath upon them as stated in **verse 18**. This we find in numerous other Ezekiel references (7:8, 9:8, 14:19, 20:8, 13, 21, 22:22, 30:15). This wrath was a direct result of two actions of Israel. They “shed blood in the land and because they had defiled it with their idols”. The term that Ezekiel uses here for idols is one of his favourites: גִּלְיֹתָם (idols). It is used as a mocking polemic against them according to Alexander (1988:921), and may refer to “dung”. Nevertheless, these ethical and cultic offences had lead to them being “dispersed (**verse 19**) among the nations”. Ezekiel’s theology of individual responsibility is perceptible here. Also the important theme of judgment according to the deeds performed. Up until now the verses leading to **verse 20** had served to lead us to the specific point that this oracle was trying to make. The name of YHWH has been “profaned”. Zimmerli (1983:246) points out that “the name appears in verses 21-24 like a personal being capable of suffering.”

What they went through has brought shame upon the name of YHWH. Being his people and now dispersed in other countries they become an embarrassment to the holy name of YHWH! This statement is difficult to understand as YHWH himself did the scattering. Now he is complaining that the scattering has caused his name to be profaned. This probably serves as an interlude to the real point this oracle is trying to make: YHWH acts to vindicate his name and not on behalf of the merit of a nation. Restoration is an act that is solely initiated by him and completed by him out of his own motivation. In this case it is his “holy name”. **Verse 21** reiterates this point.

### 5.3.3.2 I will bring you into your own land (36:22-32)

<sup>22</sup> לָכֵן אָמַר לְבֵית־יִשְׂרָאֵל כֹּה אָמַר אֲדֹנָי יְהוִה לֹא  
לְמַעַנְכֶם אֲנִי עֹשֶׂה בַּיַּת יִשְׂרָאֵל כִּי אִם־לְשֵׁם־קְדוֹשִׁי אֲשֶׁר  
חָלַלְתֶּם בְּגוֹיִם אֲשֶׁר־בְּאַתֶּם שֵׁם:  
<sup>23</sup> וְקִדְשְׁתִּי אֶת־שְׁמִי הַגָּדוֹל הַמְּחַלָּל בְּגוֹיִם אֲשֶׁר חָלַלְתֶּם  
בְּתוֹכָם וַיִּדְעוּ הַגּוֹיִם כִּי־אֲנִי יְהוִה נָאִם אֲדֹנָי יְהוִה  
בְּהַקְדְּשִׁי בְּכֶם לְעֵינֵיהֶם:  
<sup>24</sup> וְלִקְחֹתִי אֶתְכֶם מִן־הַגּוֹיִם וּקְבַצְתִּי אֶתְכֶם מִכָּל־הָאֲרָצוֹת  
וְהִבֵּאתִי אֶתְכֶם אֶל־אֲדֹמְתְכֶם:  
<sup>25</sup> וַיִּזְרַקְתִּי עֲלֵיכֶם מִיַּם טְהוֹרִים וְטַהַרְתֶּם מִכָּל טְמֵאוֹתֵיכֶם  
וּמִכָּל־גִּלּוּלֵיכֶם אֲטַהֵר אֶתְכֶם:  
<sup>26</sup> וְנָתַתִּי לָכֶם לֵב חָדָשׁ וְרוּחַ חֲדָשָׁה אֶתֶן בְּקִרְבְּכֶם וְהִסְרֹתִי  
אֶת־לֵב הָאֵבֶן מִבְּשָׂרְכֶם וְנָתַתִּי לָכֶם לֵב בָּשָׂר:  
<sup>27</sup> וְאֶת־רוּחִי אֶתֶן בְּקִרְבְּכֶם וְעָשִׂיתִי אֵת אֲשֶׁר־בְּחַקִּי תֵּלְכוּ  
וּמִשְׁפָּטֵי תִשְׁמְרוּ וְעָשִׂיתֶם:  
<sup>28</sup> וַיִּשְׁבַּתֶּם בְּאֶרֶץ אֲשֶׁר נָתַתִּי לְאַבְתִּיכֶם וְהֵייתֶם לִי לְעָם  
וְאֲנִכִּי אֶהְיֶה לָכֶם לֵאלֹהִים:  
<sup>29</sup> וְהוֹשַׁעְתִּי אֶתְכֶם מִכָּל טְמֵאוֹתֵיכֶם וּקְרָאתִי אֶל־הַדָּגָן  
וְהִרְבִּיתִי אֹתוֹ וְלֹא־אֶתֶן עֲלֵיכֶם רָעָב:  
<sup>30</sup> וְהִרְבִּיתִי אֶת־פְּרֵי הָעֵץ וְתִנּוּבַת הַשָּׂדֶה לְמַעַן אֲשֶׁר לֹא  
תִקְחוּ עוֹד חֲרִפַּת רָעָב בְּגוֹיִם:

<sup>31</sup> וּזְכַרְתֶּם אֶת־דַּרְכֵיכֶם הָרְעִים וּמַעַלְלֵיכֶם אֲשֶׁר לֹא־טוֹבִים  
 וּנְקַטְתֶּם בְּפָנֵיכֶם עַל עֲוֹנֹתֵיכֶם וְעַל תּוֹעֲבוֹתֵיכֶם:  
<sup>32</sup> לֹא לְמַעַנְכֶם אֲנִי־עֹשֶׂה נְאֻם אֲדֹנָי יְהוִה יוֹדַע לְכֶם בּוֹשׁוּ  
 וְהִכְלַמּוּ מִדַּרְכֵיכֶם בַּיִת יִשְׂרָאֵל: ׀

<sup>22</sup> “Therefore say to the house of Israel, ‘This is what the Sovereign LORD says: It is not for your sake, O house of Israel, that I am going to do these things, but for the sake of my holy name, which you have profaned among the nations where you have gone.

<sup>23</sup> I will show the holiness of my great name, which has been profaned among the nations, the name you have profaned among them. Then the nations will know that I am the LORD, declares the Sovereign LORD, when I show myself holy through you before their eyes. <sup>24</sup> “For I will take you out of the nations; I will gather you from all the countries and bring you back into your own land. <sup>25</sup> I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your impurities and from all your idols. <sup>26</sup> I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. <sup>27</sup> And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws. <sup>28</sup> You will live in the land I gave your forefathers; you will be my people, and I will be your God. <sup>29</sup> I will save you from all your uncleanness. I will call for the grain and make it plentiful and will not bring famine upon you. <sup>30</sup> I will increase the fruit of the trees and the crops of the field, so that you will no longer suffer disgrace among the nations because of famine. <sup>31</sup> Then you will remember your evil ways and wicked deeds, and you will loathe yourselves for your sins and detestable practices. <sup>32</sup> I want you to know that I am not doing this for your sake, declares the Sovereign LORD. Be ashamed and disgraced for your conduct, O house of Israel!

With this background Ezekiel is now giving a direct word to the house of Israel in **verse 22**. YHWH confirms that his restoration acts will be done for his name’s sake. This is new and causes Brueggemann (2003:200) to observe:

In some other traditions, especially Hosea and Jeremiah, such newness from YHWH is rooted in Yahweh's compassion for and fidelity to Israel. But not here! Here the newness is "not for your sake", that is, not because YHWH loves Israel. Rather in this tradition, YHWH is preoccupied with Yahweh's own self and Yahweh's reputation among the nations. Thus Yahweh's actions are designed only to enhance YHWH and, if we may say so, to appeal to Yahweh's vanity. The rescue of Israel is a happy by-product of Yahweh's self-vindication. This leading to a new Yahwistic grounding for Israel's future, a hope rooted not in love but in holiness.

There are also those who suggest that "his holy name" can also mean "Israel", seeing that one of the characteristics of a covenant lies in the unifying of names:

Eerder lezen we echter dat Gods optreden "omwille van mijn heilige naam" ook betekent "omwille van Israël", aan wie Hij zijn naam heeft bekendgemaakt. Het lot van de een is nauw verbonden met dat van de ander (Ruiz & Lust 2001:1244).

To me, the importance of this statement reiterates the "divine initiative" (cf. Joyce 2009:204) rather than the so-called "vanity" of YHWH. Up until now Israel has been dealt with according to their ways, but now restoration would come not because of their deeds, but from YHWH.

**Verse 23** constructs on the same theme and ends with the recognition formula. The circle will be completed when the nations see how he has restored his name by changing the fate of his people. This will bring about knowledge of his sovereignty amongst them, consequently redeeming his name. Israel and her behaviour have been the reason for his name being "profaned", but have now



become the means by which YHWH restores his name. Their restoration in the end leads to the restoration of his name (cf. Darr 2001:1490-1; Joyce 2009:204; Odell 2005:442).

**Verses 24-30** start to describe the restorative plan of YHWH and verse 24 in no uncertain terms promises a return. The restoration will also entail a homecoming to their beloved land. For Darr (2001:1491) Ezekiel is proposing a new exodus, something that was alluded to in Chapter 20 as well. In chapter 20 however this exodus was launched by “an enraged deity and followed by the judging and purging of rebels in the wilderness prior to the survivors return to their homeland. Now, Ezekiel says nothing of that fearsome desert encounter. Everything he describes is intended to glorify God’s reputation.”

Alexander (1988:921-922) suggests a “four step restoration plan”<sup>48</sup>. Firstly, as mentioned above YHWH will remove the people from among the other nations where they have been scattered and bring them back to their land.

Secondly, he would cleanse them from their sin and idolatry that defiled them. The sprinkling with “clean water” of verse 25 refers to the ceremonial cleansing (cf. Ex 12:22; Lev 14-4-7, 49:53; Ps 51:7). For Zimmerli (1983:249), this cleansing must be seen as a ritual act that was for cultic cleansing. It was their cultic offences that angered YHWH most. This cleansing would bring about a new covenant.

Thirdly, the new covenant would mean that the people would receive a new heart and spirit (**verses 26-27**). This is hinted at on many occasions by Ezekiel and on occasion by Joel (cf. Ez 11:19-20, 18:31, 37:14, 39:29; Joel 2:28-29). Joyce (2009:204) writes the following on this matter: “The heart” must be seen “as the locus of the moral will and as the symbol of inner reality as distinct from mere

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<sup>48</sup> I will use Alexander’s four steps but will bring in the opinions of other commentators as I go along.

outward appearance. The new spirit in verse 26 refers to the renewal of the moral will.” This heart would enable them to live God’s way. The spirit (רוּחַ) that they receive in **verse 27** from YHWH is different. It refers to the same spirit that inspired kings, judges and prophets. This רוּחַ will enable them to live in this new manner.

Fourthly, this cleansed Israel “would return permanently (vs. 28-30) to a productive and plentiful land that would be more than ‘flowing with milk and honey’”. This is according to Joyce (2009:206) a passage that speaks about the renewal of the covenant and leans on the traditions of the promise that was given to their ancestors. Although the word “covenant” is not used, the ending of “you will be my people and I will be your God” (v. 28b) confirms this. The changes of their inner renewal will also lead to changes in the land. This connection between internal conditions and external conditions becomes a common theme of post exilic prophecies according to Zimmerli (1983:249)<sup>49</sup>. Alexander (1988:921) also notes that this restoration plan shares many similarities with Moses’ restatement of the Mosaic covenant on the plains of Moab (Deut 29:1-30:10).

This new state of abundance will make the people remember their transgressions and will “loathe” themselves for their “sins and detestable practices” (**verse 31**). It will be a gentle reminder from Ezekiel that they cannot forget their unfaithful past. In **verse 32** the prophet again makes it clear that restoration is not on their account, but directly from YHWH. “This passionate rejection of all self-glorification and of ‘possession’ in terms of election dominates the whole oracle, which therefore even in its closing imperative does not summon it’s hearers to jubilation and rejoicing in response to God’s activity, but to shameful repentance” (Zimmerli 1983:250). This is different from Jeremiah<sup>50</sup> who permits “a glimpse of

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<sup>49</sup> He mentions the prophet Haggai and notes (:249) that “deliverance from uncleanness is linked with abundant growth of corn and removal of famine”.

<sup>50</sup> **Jeremiah 33:10-11** <sup>10</sup> "This is what the LORD says: 'You say about this place, "It is a desolate waste, without men or animals." Yet in the towns of Judah and the streets of Jerusalem that are

human joy and thanksgiving and even of divine love for Israel” (Darr 2001:1492). It is reminiscent of other passages appearing earlier in the book of Ezekiel (6:9, 16:61-63) where the people of YHWH must remember their shame even though they have been restored. Israel must never forget her sinful past!

### 5.3.3.3 “Like the Garden of Eden” (36:33-36)

כֹּה אָמַר אֲדֹנָי יְהוִה בַּיּוֹם טָהַרְתִּי אֶתְכֶם מִכָּל עֲוֹנוֹתֵיכֶם  
וְהוֹשַׁבְתִּי אֶת־הָעָרִים וְנִבְנְוּ הַחֲרָבוֹת:  
וְהָאָרֶץ הַנְּשֻׁמָּה תַעֲבֹד תַּחַת אֲשֶׁר הִיְתָה שְׁמֹמָה לְעֵינַי  
כֹּל־עוֹבֵר:  
וְאָמְרוּ הָאָרֶץ הַלְזוּ הַנְּשֻׁמָּה הִיְתָה כְּגַן־עֵדֶן וְהָעָרִים  
הַחֲרָבוֹת וְהַנְּשֻׁמּוֹת וְהַנְּהָרְסוֹת בְּצוּרוֹת יִשְׁבּוּ:  
וְיָדְעוּ הַגּוֹיִם אֲשֶׁר יִשְׁאַרוּ סְבִיבוֹתֵיכֶם כִּי אֲנִי יְהוָה  
בְּנִיתִי הַנְּהָרְסוֹת נִטַּעְתִּי הַנְּשֻׁמָּה אֲנִי יְהוָה דִּבַּרְתִּי וְעָשִׂיתִי: ס

<sup>33</sup> “This is what the Sovereign LORD says: On the day I cleanse you from all your sins, I will resettle your towns, and the ruins will be rebuilt. <sup>34</sup> The desolate land will be cultivated instead of lying desolate in the sight of all who pass through it. <sup>35</sup> They will say, “This land that was laid waste has become like the garden of Eden; the cities that were lying in ruins, desolate and destroyed, are now fortified and inhabited.” <sup>36</sup> Then the nations around you that remain will know that I the LORD have rebuilt what was destroyed and have replanted what was desolate. I the LORD have spoken, and I will do it.’

“On the day I cleanse you” follows the messenger formula in **verse 33** and links this section with the previous one. The root for “cleanse” (טהר) is the same as the one that appeared three times in verse 25. The towns will be populated and the ruins rebuilt and the land will be tilled (**verse 34**). This is a total reversal of

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deserted, inhabited by neither men nor animals, there will be heard once more <sup>11</sup> the sounds of joy and gladness, the voices of bride and bridegroom, and the voices of those who bring thank offerings to the house of the LORD, saying, "Give thanks to the LORD Almighty, for the LORD is good; his love endures forever." For I will restore the fortunes of the land as they were before,' says the LORD.

YHWH's punishment that frequents the chapters referred to in chapter 4 of this study and those that had the same message (cf. Darr 2001:1493; Zimmerli 1983:250). The effects of YHWH's restoration (**verse 35**) would be so big that the land would be a paradise. The phrase "like the garden of Eden", describes this new reality (Alexander 1988:923). It also acknowledges that the misconception expressed in verse 20<sup>51</sup> by the nations will be "corrected by the powerful initiative of the holy God, YHWH" (Joyce 2009:206). They not only have land back, but they have land that is "like the garden of Eden".

#### 5.3.3.4 Israel's population explosion (36:37-38)

כָּה אָמַר יְהוָה אֲדַנִּי יְהוָה עוֹד זֹאת אֶדְרֹשׁ לְבֵית־יִשְׂרָאֵל<sup>37</sup>  
 לַעֲשׂוֹת לָהֶם אֲרֵבָה אֶתֶם כְּצֹאן אֲדָם:  
 כְּצֹאן קִדְשִׁים כְּצֹאן יְרוּשָׁלַם בְּמוֹעֲדֶיהָ כֵּן תִּהְיֶינָה<sup>38</sup>  
 הָעָרִים הַחֲרוּבוֹת מִלְּאוֹת צֹאן אֲדָם וַיִּדְעוּ כִּי־אֲנִי יְהוָה: ס

<sup>37</sup> "This is what the Sovereign LORD says: Once again I will yield to the plea of the house of Israel and do this for them: I will make their people as numerous as sheep,<sup>38</sup> as numerous as the flocks for offerings at Jerusalem during her appointed feasts. So will the ruined cities be filled with flocks of people. Then they will know that I am the LORD."

The shepherd metaphor reappears in **verses 37 and 38** to end this unit. The reappearance of this metaphor is more proof for some that Ezekiel 34-36 can be read as a continuous literary unit. Unlike the preceding verses that dealt with the restoration of the land, these last two verses anticipate the restoration of the covenantal relationship. YHWH appears to entertain the petitions of his people again. For Darr (2001:1494) this is an astonishing announcement, "heretofore in

<sup>51</sup> **Ezekiel 36:20** <sup>20</sup> And wherever they went among the nations they profaned my holy name, for it was said of them, "These are the LORD's people, and yet they had to leave his land."

the scroll, God has absolutely refused 'to be inquired' by Israel's elders (14:3; 20:3, 30; see also 8:18)." In this new future, the ban is lifted and he will now listen to their petition. The action he took on behalf of his name was not the final step in restoring them. It was the start that was necessary to restore them, but he was now ready to listen to them again (cf. Odell 2005:442-3). It also speaks of the population explosion that will be experienced. They would be as numerous as the flocks of sheep that filled the streets of Jerusalem during feast times. This could also allude to the restoration of their cultic rituals.

This unit ends (as so often in Ezekiel) with the recognition formula. This confirms that the most important consequence of the restoration would be the spreading of the knowledge of YHWH throughout the world.

#### **5.3.4 Theological conclusions**

- The uniquely Ezekiel message of *Individual Responsibility* forms the introduction to the above oracle. He starts his oracle by remembering the wrongdoings of Israel and shows that they were judged according to their own deeds.
- This is then juxtaposed against another new piece of Ezekiel theology. Although they are blamed for their circumstances, they will not be restored by their own good deeds and fidelity. *YHWH's name* has been defiled by their infidelity. He therefore will act solely to vindicate his own name. Their salvation will only be a by-product.
- As the restoration plan unfolds, strong comparisons with the *Exodus narrative* are evident. They will be taken out of the oppression and a *new covenant* (much like the one at Sinai and also mentioned in Ezekiel 34) will be made with them. Two important aspects of this covenant are: the giving of a new heart (much like the Israelites from Egypt needed to lose

their slave mentality) and the means of staying true. This means would be his spirit.

- Ezekiel uses the *shepherd* metaphor from Ezekiel 34 to show the unity of the two oracles and the seriousness of the restoration plan.

## 5.4 Ezekiel 37

### 5.4.1 Background and Introduction

The vision of “The Valley of the Dry Bones” is truly Ezekiel’s most famous passage and as Darr (2001:1497) remarks, is used by both Jews and Christians<sup>52</sup> in certain “signal periods when it is read liturgically”. The restoration passages that started in Ezekiel 34-36 are now brought to a climax by these two final sub-units in chapter 37. Both are metaphorical in nature, but the first one (vv. 1-14) is a vision<sup>53</sup> while the latter one (vv. 15-28) is an oracle. The first unit can be divided into two smaller units. They are the vision (vv. 1-10) and the interpretation (vv. 11-14). This view is also held by Darr (2001:1497-1504) and Joyce (2009:208-9). Verses 18-28 contain an oracle that starts in verse 18 with the messenger formula (yet again). These two units, although different in genre, contain the same message of restoration. The dead nation without hope and a future will arise and come to life by the workings of YHWH’s spirit.

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<sup>52</sup> “It accompanies the Torah reading, Exodus 33:12-34:26, on the Sabbath of Passover week. The Revised Common Lectionary associates it with the fifth Sunday in Lent (year A), the Easter vigil (years A, B and C), and Pentecost (year B)” Darr (2001:1497).

<sup>53</sup> Ezekiel has four major visionary experiences as a prophet. This one is the third and also the shortest of the four. The others are found in 1:1-3, 8:1-11:25 and 40:1-48:35 (cf. Darr 2001:1497).

## 5.4.2 Exegetical analysis

### 5.4.2.1 The Vision of the Dry Bones (37:1-10)

Ezekiel 37:1 WTT הִיָּתָה עָלַי יַד־יְהוָה וַיּוֹצֵאֵנִי בְרוּחַ יְהוָה וַיְנִיחֵנִי בְּתוֹךְ הַבְּקָעָה וְהִיא מְלֵאָה עֲצָמוֹת:  
2 וְהֵעֵבִירֵנִי עֲלֵיהֶם סָבִיב סָבִיב וְהִנֵּה רַבּוֹת מְאֹד עַל־פְּנֵי הַבְּקָעָה וְהִנֵּה יִבְשׁוֹת מְאֹד:  
3 וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלַי בֶּן־אָדָם הֲתַחְיֶינָה הָעֲצָמוֹת הָאֵלֶּה וַאֲמַר אֲדֹנָי יְהוִה אַתָּה יָדַעְתָּ:  
4 וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלַי הִנְבֵּא עַל־הָעֲצָמוֹת הָאֵלֶּה וְאָמַרְתָּ אֲלֵיהֶם הָעֲצָמוֹת הַיִּבְשׁוֹת שְׁמְעוּ דְבַר־יְהוָה:  
5 כֹּה אָמַר אֲדֹנָי יְהוִה לָעֲצָמוֹת הָאֵלֶּה הִנֵּה אֲנִי מֵבִיא בְכֶם רוּחַ וְחַיִּיתֶם:  
6 וְנָתַתִּי עֲלֵיכֶם גְּדִים וְהֵעַלְתִּי עֲלֵיכֶם בָּשָׂר וְקָרַמְתִּי עֲלֵיכֶם עוֹר וְנָתַתִּי בְכֶם רוּחַ וְחַיִּיתֶם וַיִּדְעַתֶּם כִּי־אֲנִי יְהוָה:  
7 וְנִבְאִיתִי כַּאֲשֶׁר צִוִּיתִי וַיְהִי־קוֹל כַּהֲנֻבְאִי וְהִנֵּה־רֶעַשׁ וַתִּקְרְבוּ עֲצָמוֹת עִצִּים אֶל־עֲצָמוֹ:  
8 וַרְאִיתִי וְהִנֵּה־עֲלֵיהֶם גְּדִים וּבָשָׂר עָלָה וַיִּקְרָם עֲלֵיהֶם עוֹר מִלְמַעְלָה וְרוּחַ אֵין בָּהֶם:  
9 וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלַי הִנְבֵּא אֶל־הַרוּחַ הִנְבֵּא בֶן־אָדָם וְאָמַרְתָּ אֶל־הַרוּחַ כֹּה־אָמַר אֲדֹנָי יְהוִה מֵאַרְבַּע רוּחוֹת בָּאֵי הַרוּחַ וּפָתִי בִהְרוּגִים הָאֵלֶּה וַיַּחְיּוּ:  
10 וְהִנְבְּאִיתִי כַּאֲשֶׁר צִוִּיתִי וַתָּבוֹא בָהֶם הַרוּחַ וַיַּחְיּוּ וַיַּעֲמֵדוּ עַל־רַגְלֵיהֶם חִל גְּדוֹל מְאֹד־מְאֹד: ס

<sup>NIV</sup> **Ezekiel 37:1** The hand of the LORD was upon me, and he brought me out by the Spirit of the LORD and set me in the middle of a valley; it was full of bones. <sup>2</sup> He led me back and forth among them, and I saw a great many bones on the floor of the valley, bones that were very dry. <sup>3</sup> He asked me, “Son of man, can these bones live?” I said, “O Sovereign LORD, you alone know.” <sup>4</sup> Then he said to me, “Prophecy to these bones and say to them, ‘Dry bones, hear the word of the LORD!’ <sup>5</sup> This is what the Sovereign LORD says to these bones: I will make breath enter you, and you will come to life. <sup>6</sup> I will attach

tendons to you and make flesh come upon you and cover you with skin; I will put breath in you, and you will come to life. Then you will know that I am the LORD.”<sup>7</sup> So I prophesied as I was commanded. And as I was prophesying, there was a noise, a rattling sound, and the bones came together, bone to bone.<sup>8</sup> I looked, and tendons and flesh appeared on them and skin covered them, but there was no breath in them.<sup>9</sup> Then he said to me, “Prophesy to the breath; prophesy, son of man, and say to it, ‘This is what the Sovereign LORD says: Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe into these slain, that they may live.’”<sup>10</sup> So I prophesied as he commanded me, and breath entered them; they came to life and stood up on their feet – a vast army.

**Verse 1a** starts by stating that the hand of the Lord was upon Ezekiel. This same phrase appears in the other visions of Ezekiel mentioned earlier and appears in the same form in 40:1 that introduces the great vision of the future temple. On both occasions this is followed by an action of the Spirit of YHWH. In this particular instance the spirit “brought him out and set” him “in the middle of a valley”. Brownlee (1986:94) observes as follows:

This vision focuses on the work of רִיחַ and it begins with the term, “the hand of YHWH” or “רִיחַ of YHWH”. The work of רִיחַ opens the visionary formula, carries the entire narration and ends in future salvific restoration.

It also appears that the prophet may have experienced a “trance-like state” of “spirit possession” (Darr 2001:1499). In chapter 37 it is not only the word event that creates imagination of possibilities, but the spirit (רִיחַ) causes it to happen. This will be explored later in chapter 7.



The valley that Ezekiel now finds himself in is filled with dry bones. For Odell (2005:453-4) this reminds of a battlefield where the dead bodies of those that had been defeated lay open to scavengers without having a proper burial. For him this may refer to those that were defeated and killed by Nebuchadnezzar in his final siege. Block (1998) and Darr (2001:1499) add to this and note that if one keeps in mind that the later sub-unit deals with the unification of Judah and Israel it can also be the bodies of both states that were defeated, including those that fell 130 years earlier to Assyrians. One must not forget the metaphorical function of this imagery. For me this is more figurative in nature. It is the hope and the future of Judah and Israel that lie scattered like dead and dry bones incapable of ever living again. This hopelessness is expressed in verse 11 “Our bones are dried up and our hope is gone; we are cut off”. When these bones become a unified army in the latter part of the chapter, this image aids the writer’s intent when it helps to show that no situation is beyond YHWH to redeem. It is an image that attempts to express that there is hope for even the most hopeless of all situations. Therefore, the image that Ezekiel tries to communicate is more important than the “whom” he might be referring to.

**Verses 1b and 2** describe this valley. Ezekiel was “led back and forth among” the bones that lay scattered on the floor. These bones were many and the magnitude of this death scene compounds the desperate situation. The dryness of these bones shows that the deceased have been long dead which makes the situation even more desperate. For Alexander (1988:924) this vision is classic apocalyptic literature. Apocalyptic literature was normally composed during times when the recipients were experiencing difficult and oppressive times. This apocalyptic vision is used by Ezekiel to show how God would restore Israel. He continues to argue that apocalyptic literature has simple two-fold forms that are both apparent in chapter 37: “(1) The setting of the vision in which the recipient and the geographical location are identified, and (2) the vision *per se* with its divine interpretation” (Alexander 1988:1924). This opinion is somewhat

contradicted by Odell (2005:454) who sees this whole vision as a narrative that describes a symbolic act that Ezekiel performs after he had a trance or seizure of some sort. He agrees with Alexander that the valley may very well be the same one that was the scene for his first symbolic act, and shares the opinion of Darr (2001:1499) that these bones were the end result of Judah as well as Israel's rebellion that was ended by the Babylonians and the Assyrians (130 years earlier) respectively. Personally I prefer the interpretation that these bones are his audience. They are the ones who are dead and without hope. It makes no sense for the prophet who has been called to his audience to see visions of people that are long dead. Nor is it plausible for him to bring the dead back to life. The focus of the chapters leading up to chapter 37 was hope and restoration for those people in exile.

The rest of the vision can be divided into two parts from here on to the end of the chapter. First the prophet recounts what he saw and did about it in verses 3-10 and then he closes the vision with the interpretation of it in verses 11-14. The first part starts with the question in **verse 3**, "Son of man can these bones live?" to which Ezekiel replied, "O, Sovereign Lord, You alone know." Ezekiel's admission has two sides to it:

The admission of the powerlessness of man, who, faced with such an irrefutable victory on death's part, is incapable of saying anything about the possibility of life for these bones; at the same time, however, the knowledge that he is replying to the God whose abilities are not curtailed by man's lack of abilities (Zimmerli 1983:260).

In summary this is an admission then of both human failure and of divine possibilities. Ezekiel's answer is for Joyce (2009:208) a typical Ezekiel answer

that is rooted in the prophet's "radical theocentricity, and unusually presents YHWH as the subject of the knowing".

In **verses 4-6** the prophet, who has been a spectator up until now, is given a prophecy. The prophecy starts with the personification of these bones, that reflects the fact that these bones represent people (most probably the exiles), then followed by the recognition formula ("Thus says the Lord God") and then announces their impending revivification (Darr 2001:1499; Joyce 2009:208). Darr (2001:1499) comments on this prophecy by showing the process that YHWH will follow to revive his people. It needs to be quoted directly:

This end will be accomplished through a four-fold process. First, God will lay sinews upon them, binding bone to bone. Second, Yahweh will cause flesh to come upon them. Third, skin will cover the flesh. This sequencing of events reverses the process by which bodies decompose. Finally, God will infuse them with breath (or "spirit"). As a consequence of these procedures, the bones will live; more importantly, the Lord's larger purpose will be accomplished: the revived people will know and acknowledge who Yahweh is.

Ezekiel delivers this prophecy in **verse 7** and by doing this he is "transformed from being a spokesman of human impotence to a spokesman of divine omnipotence" (Zimmerli 1983:260). For me this happens because of the word of YHWH in his mouth. This was a theme that was commented on in the previous chapter on numerous occasions. The prophet's words create a rattle. This rattle may have been the bones that started to move and came together (cf. Zimmerli 1983:261) or it was the earth that moved as part of a theophanic event (cf. Odell 2005:454). In the New Testament when the author of the book Matthew describes the resurrection of Jesus' death, he combines it with an earthquake (cf. Mt 27:51-52). This may, according to Odell (2005:454), be the way that Ezekiel

37 was understood by the early New Testament authors. One nevertheless gets the impression that YHWH has appeared amongst these dry bones. These bones came together (**verse 8**) attached by tendons and skin covered them but they were without breath (life). This may appear to be then an incomplete prophecy that leaves the bones together but still dead, but for Zimmerli it is a deliberate stylistic desire to expand. This missing “breath” will “re-appear under a new powerfully spoken word” (1983:261). It may also be influenced by the creation narrative in Genesis 2:7 where the creation of man is also a two-fold process. This leads the sub-unit into the second command to prophesy and the result of the second prophecy (**verses 9-10**).

In verse 9 the prophet is told to prophesy unto “the breath” to come from the “four winds ... and breathe in these slain, that they may live”. In verse 9 the רִיחַ is understood to be wind, but in the interpretation that follows (verse 14), it is explained as the spirit of YHWH. The prophecy that is directed at “the slain” again leads many to believe that these dry bones were indeed representative of those who fell to the Babylonians (cf. Joyce 2009:209; Zimmerli 1983:262). It might be better to stay with the metaphor of the hopes and dreams of Judah that are dead like bones as the relevant interpretation. It is not that plausible that Ezekiel would hint that those who died 150 years earlier would be resurrected. It is rather the future Judah and Israel that would become a mighty army again filled with hope for the future that he is envisioning. On this matter Alexander (1988:925) agrees that, “the recovery of the bones to form bodies pictured Israel’s ultimate national restoration (vv. 4-8). Breath (wind or Spirit) entering these restored bodies portrayed spiritual renewal (vv.9-10)”.

#### 5.4.2.2 Disputation, interpretation, and salvation<sup>54</sup> (37:11-14)

11 וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלַי בֶּן־אָדָם הָעֲצָמוֹת הָאֵלֶּה כָּל־בַּיִת יִשְׂרָאֵל  
הַמָּוָה הֵנָּה אֹמְרִים יִבְשׁוּ עֲצָמוֹתַיִנוּ וְאִבְדָּה תְּקוּתָנוּ נִגְזַרְנוּ  
לָנוּ:  
12 לָכֵן הִנְבֵּא וְאָמַרְתָּ אֲלֵיהֶם כֹּה־אָמַר אֲדֹנָי יְהוִה הֵנָּה אָנֹכִי  
פֹתַח אֶת־קְבֻרֹתֵיכֶם וְהֵעֵלִיתִי אֶתְכֶם מִקְבְּרוֹתֵיכֶם עַמִּי  
וְהִבֵּאתִי אֶתְכֶם אֶל־אֶרֶץ יִשְׂרָאֵל: ׀  
13 וַיִּדְעֻתֶם כִּי־אֲנִי יְהוָה בְּפִתְחֵי אֶת־קְבֻרֹתֵיכֶם וּבְהֵעֵלוֹתִי  
אֶתְכֶם מִקְבְּרוֹתֵיכֶם עַמִּי:  
14 וְנָתַתִּי רוּחִי בְכֶם וְחַיִּיתֶם וְהִנַּחֲתִי אֶתְכֶם עַל־אֶרְצְתְּכֶם  
וַיִּדְעֻתֶם כִּי־אֲנִי יְהוָה דִּבַּרְתִּי וְעָשִׂיתִי נְאֻם־יְהוָה: פ

<sup>11</sup> Then he said to me: “Son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel. They say, ‘Our bones are dried up and our hope is gone; we are cut off.’ <sup>12</sup> Therefore prophesy and say to them: ‘This is what the Sovereign LORD says: O my people, I am going to open your graves and bring you up from them; I will bring you back to the land of Israel. <sup>13</sup> Then you, my people, will know that I am the LORD, when I open your graves and bring you up from them. <sup>14</sup> I will put my Spirit in you and you will live, and I will settle you in your own land. Then you will know that I the LORD have spoken, and I have done it, declares the LORD.’”

**Verse 11** plays an important role in explaining the meaning of the vision and also to introduce the dialogue that will follow. The identification of these bones as “the whole house of Israel” clears up the confusion of a probable resurrection of the dead. Joyce (2009:209) who stayed with the prophecy and who did not run ahead by including the possibility of those who died at the hands of the Babylonians also agrees that Ezekiel identifies these bodies as “his living contemporaries, thereby excluding any notion of a literal resurrection from the dead”. The army now speaks for the first time and clarifies the metaphor. The dry bones are indeed their hope that died with them going into exile. It is important to

<sup>54</sup> Borrowed from Darr (2001:1500).

observe that here, just as in Ezekiel 36:10, the whole house of Israel is the subject. They are the former northern kingdom of Israel that fell to the Assyrians in 721BCE and the people in the southern kingdom of Judah that are now exiles in Babylon. Their desperate situation is verbalized in a “three line lament”. In the Hebrew three lines consisting of two words each and all ending with the same sound creates a mournful sound (cf. Darr 2001:1501; Zimmerli 1983:262).

*Our bones are dried up  
and our hope is lost  
we are cut off completely*

This summarizes the despondency of the prophet’s fellow exiles. Darr (2001:1501) makes an interesting observation that the first line of the lament was probably the exiles’ response to the vision in verses 1-10. They identified with the metaphor as if to say, “Yes, we are the dead bones! It is our hopes that are lost.” This shows how the prophet with his vision gave images to the people to express what they felt. This is important when a community is experiencing change and hardship. Their poets, prophets and communicators need to supply the images (imaginings) that help them to understand the reality and to look forward to a better future.

In terminology that reminds of the exodus out of Egypt (cf. Odell 2005:455) **verse 12** promises that YHWH would bring them out of their graves and back into their land. These “graves” again bring to the fore the argument of resurrection, but it is sounder to stay with the metaphor as it has now unfolded and not to look for deeper meanings. The bones and the graves are two different metaphors alluding to the same situation of hopelessness. The exiles, locked in graves of hopelessness, will be brought out into their own land. Darr (2001:1502) agrees, “here as in verses 1-10, the prophet wields the power of metaphor to persuade his audience, and his readers, to accept a new perception of their reality.” **Verse**

13 begins with a recognition formula and **verse 14** ends this unit with yet another recognition formula. This knowledge of their God will come from a two-fold restoration. He first will restore them physically in their land and second, he will put his Spirit in them and restore them spiritually keeping with the new covenant and the message delivered in chapter 36 (v.14; 22-32) and the prophecy that is to follow in chapter 37:15-28 (cf. Alexander 1988:925).

#### 5.4.2.3 The two sticks (37:15-28)

15 וַיְהִי דְבַר־יְהוָה אֵלַי לֵאמֹר:  
16 וְאַתָּה בֶן־אָדָם קַח־לָךְ עֵץ אֶחָד וּכְתֹב עָלָיו לַיהוָה וּלְבְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל (חֲבֵרֹו) וּלְקַח עֵץ אֶחָד וּכְתֹב עָלָיו לְיוֹסֵף עֵץ אֶפְרַיִם וְכָל־בֵּית יִשְׂרָאֵל (חֲבֵרֹו):  
17 וְקָרַב אֲתֶם אֶחָד אֶל־אֶחָד לָךְ לְעֵץ אֶחָד וְהָיוּ לְאַחַדִּים בְּיַדְךָ:  
18 וְכֹאשֶׁר יֹאמְרוּ אֵלֶיךָ בְּנֵי עַמּוּךָ לֵאמֹר הֲלוֹא־תִגִּיד לָנוּ מַה־אֱלֹה לָךְ:  
19 דַּבֵּר אֲלֵיהֶם כֹּה־אָמַר אֲדַנִּי יְהוָה הִנֵּה אֲנִי לִקַּח אֶת־עֵץ יוֹסֵף אֲשֶׁר בְּיַד־אֶפְרַיִם וּשְׂבַטֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל (חֲבֵרֹו) וְנָתַתִּי אוֹתָם עָלָיו אֶת־עֵץ יְהוּדָה וְעָשִׂיתָם לְעֵץ אֶחָד וְהָיוּ אֶחָד בְּיַדִּי:  
20 וְהָיוּ הָעֵצִים אֲשֶׁר־תִּכְתֹּב עֲלֵיהֶם בְּיַדְךָ לְעֵינֵיהֶם:  
21 וְדַבֵּר אֲלֵיהֶם כֹּה־אָמַר אֲדַנִּי יְהוָה הִנֵּה אֲנִי לִקַּח אֶת־בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל מִבֵּין הַגּוֹיִם אֲשֶׁר הִלְכוּ־שָׁם וְקִבַצְתִּי אֹתָם מִסְּבִיב וְהִבֵּאתִי אוֹתָם אֶל־אֲדָמָתָם:  
22 וְעָשִׂיתִי אֹתָם לְגוֹי אֶחָד בְּאֶרֶץ בְּהָרֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וּמֶלֶךְ אֶחָד יִהְיֶה לְכֹלָם לְמֶלֶךְ וְלֹא (יִהְיֶה־) [יְהוּדָה] עוֹד לְשְׁנֵי גוֹיִם וְלֹא יִחַצּוּ עוֹד לְשְׁתֵּי מַמְלָכוֹת עוֹד:  
23 וְלֹא יִטְמְאוּ עוֹד בְּגִלוּלֵיהֶם וּבִשְׁקוּצֵיהֶם וּבְכֹל פְּשָׁעֵיהֶם וְהוֹשַׁעְתִּי אֹתָם מִכָּל מוֹשְׁבֹתֵיהֶם אֲשֶׁר חָטְאוּ בָהֶם וְטָהַרְתִּי אוֹתָם וְהִיִּדְלִי לָעַם וְאֲנִי אֶהְיֶה לָהֶם לְאֱלֹהִים:

24 וְעַבְדֵי דָוִד מִלֶּךְ עֲלֵיהֶם וְרוּעֵה אַחַד יִהְיֶה לְכֻלָּם  
 וּבְמִשְׁפָּטַי יֵלְכוּ וְחֻקְתִּי יִשְׁמְרוּ וְעָשׂוּ אוֹתָם:  
 25 וַיָּשְׁבוּ עַל־הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר נָתַתִּי לְעַבְדֵי לְיַעֲקֹב אֲשֶׁר  
 יֵשְׁבוּ־בָהּ אֲבוֹתֵיכֶם וַיָּשְׁבוּ עָלֶיהָ הַמָּה וּבְנֵיהֶם וּבְנֵי בְנֵיהֶם  
 עַד־עוֹלָם וְדָוִד עַבְדִּי נָשִׂא לָהֶם לְעוֹלָם:  
 26 וְכָרַתִּי לָהֶם בְּרִית שְׁלוֹם בְּרִית עוֹלָם יִהְיֶה אוֹתָם  
 וְנָתַתִּים וְהִרְבִּיתִי אוֹתָם וְנָתַתִּי אֶת־מִקְדָּשִׁי בְּתוֹכָם לְעוֹלָם:  
 27 וְהָיָה מִשְׁפָּנִי עֲלֵיהֶם וְהָיִיתִי לָהֶם לְאֱלֹהִים וְהָמָּה יִהְיוּ־לִי  
 לְעָם:  
 28 וַיִּרְעוּ הַגּוֹיִם כִּי אֲנִי יְהוָה מְקַדֵּשׁ אֶת־יִשְׂרָאֵל בַּהֲיוֹת  
 מִקְדָּשִׁי בְּתוֹכָם לְעוֹלָם: ס

<sup>15</sup> The word of the LORD came to me: <sup>16</sup> “Son of man, take a stick of wood and write on it, ‘Belonging to Judah and the Israelites associated with him.’ Then take another stick of wood, and write on it, ‘Ephraim’s stick, belonging to Joseph and all the house of Israel associated with him.’ <sup>17</sup> Join them together into one stick so that they will become one in your hand. <sup>18</sup> “When your countrymen ask you, ‘Won’t you tell us what you mean by this?’ <sup>19</sup> say to them, ‘This is what the Sovereign LORD says: I am going to take the stick of Joseph – which is in Ephraim’s hand – and of the Israelite tribes associated with him, and join it to Judah’s stick, making them a single stick of wood, and they will become one in my hand.’ <sup>20</sup> Hold before their eyes the sticks you have written on <sup>21</sup> and say to them, ‘This is what the Sovereign LORD says: I will take the Israelites out of the nations where they have gone. I will gather them from all around and bring them back into their own land. <sup>22</sup> I will make them one nation in the land, on the mountains of Israel. There will be one king over all of them and they will never again be two nations or be divided into two kingdoms. <sup>23</sup> They will no longer defile themselves with their idols and vile images or with any of their offences, for I will save them from all their sinful backsliding, and I will cleanse them. They will be my people, and I will be their God. <sup>24</sup> “My servant David will be king over them, and they will all have one shepherd. They will follow my laws and be careful to keep my decrees. <sup>25</sup> They will live in the land I gave to my servant Jacob, the land where your fathers lived. They and their children and their children’s children will live there forever, and David my servant will be their prince forever. <sup>26</sup> I



will make a covenant of peace with them; it will be an everlasting covenant. I will establish them and increase their numbers, and I will put my sanctuary among them forever.<sup>27</sup> My dwelling place will be with them; I will be their God, and they will be my people.<sup>28</sup> Then the nations will know that I the LORD make Israel holy, when my sanctuary is among them forever.”

This final section of chapter 37 is a culmination of all the prophecies of hope which started in chapter 34. In a yet again metaphorical manner Ezekiel skilfully introduces a new metaphor (“two sticks”) and brings together many of the images he employed in the preceding oracles, leaving no question as to the outcome of YHWH’s restoration plan.

Ruiz and Lust (2001:1247) divide this end of chapter 37 into three parts:

Het driedelige slot van hfst. 37 volgt logisch uit het visioen van verdroogte beenderen. Het eerste deel omvat een symbolische handeling plus uitlegt (vv. 15-19.22); het tweede is een orakel over de terugkeer uit de ballingschap en de ene koning (vv. 21.23-25); het laatste orakel heeft betrekking op het heiligdom (vv. 26-28).

**Verse 15** again starts with the “messenger (word) formula” or “word event” as discussed in 4.5.1 and goes straight into another sign act where the prophet is asked to take two sticks in his hand, each representing one of the divided kingdoms of Judah and Israel respectively. He must write on the one, “belonging to Judah” and on the other one “Ephraim’s stick belonging to Joseph and the house of Israel”. Then YHWH commands him to join the sticks together (**verses 16-17**). This would prompt his fellow countrymen to ask the meaning of this act (**verse 18**) and open up the opportunity to communicate a further aspect of the future hope of the restoration plan of YHWH. The interpretation (**verses 19-21**) is obvious, and signals a coming together of the southern kingdom of Judah and of

the northern kingdom of Israel. Zimmerli (1983:275) reminds that verse 19 must not be overlooked, because it contains a divine promise, set amongst this interpretation. This unification was never recorded in the prophecies of Amos nor Hosea and Isaiah, according to Ruiz and Lust (2001:1247) they only speak vaguely about it. They note that the issue became somewhat relevant in the time of Jeremiah (who hinted about it in 3:11-14; 30; 31) when Assyria started to deteriorate and King Josiah was on the throne in Jerusalem. In this prophecy of Ezekiel this issue is part of the future hope. YHWH will not only bring the people out of their exile and into their land, but he will also gather and unify them. The whole house of Israel and Judah was scattered across Babylon and the former Assyrian empire for approximately 150 years. **Verse 21** echoes the promise of the previous oracle in 36:24. Zimmerli (1983:275) notes that this verse recurs here almost literally but is transposed into the third person plural. This opens the door for the prophet to visit some of the themes of hope that were promised in the previous oracles. This extended promise of restoration unifies the themes of chapters 34-36 and ends with the covenant formula, “they shall be my people, and I will be their God” (cf. Odell 2005:456).

**Verse 22** starts with the theme of unification and promises that they would be “one nation in the land and the mountains of Israel”. It is important to note that the prophet’s first prophecies in chapters 6, 7 (discussed in the previous chapter of this study) and later in chapter 35 were also addressed to the mountains and the land of Israel. One gets the feeling that Ezekiel is now bringing together all the images he used thus far to end his communication in a crescendo. This “one nation” would have one king. This was also part of the prophecy in 34:23 where the Lord’s servant David would be the “one shepherd” that would tend to them. This is again mentioned in verses 24 and 25. In **verse 23** the inner renewal is addressed by bringing up the by now well-covered topic of idolatry that dominated his earlier rhetoric. These idols and the practices associated with them (7:20; 11:18, 21; 20:7, 30) would be something of the past as YHWH would

deliver them (34:22; 36:29) and purify (36:25) them (cf. Zimmerli 1983:275). It ends with the covenant formula. The “servant David” that is to become the “one shepherd” and “one king” is now brought (**verse 24**) into this “hope crescendo”. For Joyce (2009:211) this refers to “a member of the Davidic house rather than to David himself” returning. The utopia that is described in **verses 24-26** unfolds in four areas: (1) They will have a lasting dwelling place for them, their children and their children, (2) “David’s rule” will also last forever, (3) an “everlasting covenant” will be established and (4) “forever”, this being the pinnacle of this promise, YHWH’s sanctuary would again be central to their being (cf. Zimmerli 1983:276). From verse 26 through **to verse 28** the prophet sees the restored community gathered around the sanctuary (cf. Joyce 2009:211). It is easy to identify the highlights of this prophecy for Israel. They would have an “everlasting covenant” with YHWH, the community would be established after years of uncertainty and they would increase in numbers. The sanctuary of YHWH would be central and the core essence of the covenant would be reached. This would lead to the nations acknowledging YHWH as Lord by revering Israel as a nation because YHWH had selected them, saved them and blessed them. Ezekiel, the priest turned prophet, has successfully put the temple and the covenant central to Israel’s life as a new restored community.

#### 5.4.3 Theological conclusions

- The first observation comes from the answer that the prophet gives when YHWH asks him about the possibility of life for the dry bones. He answers: “O, Sovereign Lord, You alone know”. This emphasizes the fact that Israel is incapable of rescuing themselves unless there is *divine intervention* from YHWH.
- The *metaphor* that the prophet uses, gives *expression* to the despondency that Israel is experiencing. It is in dire situations that communicators need

to give images to their audience that grasp the reality. In the words of the business researcher and writer Jim Collins (2001:65) companies that are struggling need to “confront the brutal facts” in order to go forward. The dry and dead bone metaphor does exactly that.

- *A two-fold restoration leads to knowledge of God.* The restoration process is nestled between two recognition formulas and is two-fold. Firstly they are restored to their land and secondly they are spiritually restored.
- The prophet ends this prophecy by *drawing together all the different metaphors and images* he used thus far: one king (David), no more idolatry, restoring them in their land, an exodus and a new covenant. It is as though it has run full circle and that the people of YHWH can again imagine him being their God and they can be his people in a community where the temple is central.

## **5.5 Observations on Ezekiel’s communication from the studied texts**

As was established earlier, the texts that were studied in this chapter were all set after the news that Jerusalem was besieged by the Babylonians. The news of the fall of the beloved city (Ez 33:21) reached Ezekiel while he and some of his fellow Judeans were already in exile. This verse containing the news has been called a pivoting point in the communication process of the prophet Ezekiel. Up until this news, his prophecies were filled with doom and gloom. They contained accusations that tried to explain the situation they found themselves in. In the build-up to this verse Ezekiel showed how Israel’s infidelity was to blame for her own situation and that YHWH had no choice but to act and punish them accordingly. It was obvious from the theological conclusions of each separate oracle that the tenor of the oracles that were delivered prior to the pivoting point were filled with judgment, but those delivered after the pivoting point were softer and contained metaphors of hope. Before I summarize and compare the two

groups of oracles (pre and post the fall of Jerusalem) in the form of a table just the following observations:

### **5.5.1 Phrases and formulas**

- The “messenger formula” (“the word of the Lord came to me”) appears in all three of the studied texts (Ez 34:1, 36:16, and 37:15). This matter was elaborated on in paragraph 4.5.1.
- The same is the case with the “recognition formula” (“and you will know that I am the Lord”). This is found in Ezekiel 34:27, 30; 36:23, 36, 38; 37,6 13, 14, and 28.

### **5.5.2 Words and metaphors of hope**

- The land and the mountains that were so criticized in Ezekiel 6 and 7 now become the good pasture where the the sheep are well looked after (cf. Ez 34).
- In 6:5 and 13 the dead bodies and bones are scattered as a result of their “destestable practices” of idolatry. Now they are raised up into a unified army filled with hope (cf. Ez 37).
- The metaphor of “scattering flock” (Ez 6:5, 8; 34:5, 6; 36:19) is now replaced with the metaphor of “gathering the flock” (Ez 34:15; 36:24; 37:21).
- “The end has come” (cf. Ez 7) is replaced with “newness”, a “new covenant” (Ez 34:25; 37:26). This newness speaks of a future commitment from YHWH.

### 5.5.3 The depiction of YHWH

- YHWH deals with his people according to their deeds in the “texts of doom” (chapter 4), but in the texts studied in this chapter he motivates his own actions. He reacts and restores for the sake of his name.
- In the first group of oracles YHWH was absent. The reasons for his absence were spelt out, but in oracles studied in this chapter YHWH is present as a shepherd (Ez 34:11, 15, 20, and 30), as new covenant partner (Ez 36:26) and he also promises to make his dwelling place with them (Ez 37:27).

The following table which summarizes most of the observations that were made from the different texts is helpful:

<b>Prior Ezekiel 33:21</b> <b>Texts studied in Chapter 4</b>	<b>After Ezekiel 33:21</b> <b>Texts studied in Chapter 5</b>	<b>Observations</b>
<p><b><u>1<sup>st</sup> reality:</u></b></p> <p>The confusion of those leaders and elite that were taken in the first exile (597 BCE) and the growing threat of Babylon while the kings in Jerusalem struggled with resistance and scrambled for allies.</p>	<p><b><u>2<sup>nd</sup> reality:</u></b></p> <p>The finality of the Babylonian invasion of Jerusalem (587 BCE), the destruction and the hopelessness.</p>	<p>In both cases the reality supplies the backdrop to the prophet's response. The different realities needed different responses as will be shown.</p>
<p><b><u>Formulas and phrases:</u></b></p> <p><i>The word of the Lord came to me</i>  Ez 6:1, 7:1 and 16:1</p>	<p><b><u>Formulas and phrases:</u></b></p> <p><i>The word of the Lord came to me</i>  Ez 34:1, 36:16 and 37:15</p>	<p>This "word" moment is crucial to all Ezekiel's communication. In most cases the prophet's response flows out of this moment regardless of the reality. What this moment might be is not sure, but in the next chapter it will be studied more closely.</p>
<p><i>Will know that I am the Lord</i>  Ez 6:7, 10, 13, 14  7:4, 9, 29  16:62</p>	<p><i>Will know that I am the Lord</i>  Ez 34:27; 30  36:23, 36, 38  37:6, 13, 14, 28</p>	<p>The knowledge of YHWH that comes out of the first reality is based on judgment. They acknowledge him because he makes them pay for their transgressions.</p> <p>In the second reality YHWH makes himself known by taking initiative in restoring them.</p>

		The wonderful by-products of his salvation bring a new knowledge of him.
<b><u>Words and metaphors of doom:</u></b> Sword against the mountains and the ravines and the valleys (cf. Ez 6:3; 7:15-16)	<b><u>Words and metaphors of hope:</u></b> Tending to them in good pasture, and the mountains of Israel will be their grazing land (cf. Ez 34:14)	The mountains have been places of death where famine, plague and the sword were brought against it, now become good pasture and a place of safety.
Dead bodies and bones that are scattered (cf. 6:5, 13)	Scattered bones without hope becoming an army that represents the future of a unified Israel (cf. Ez 37).	In both cases there is death. The first one however is without hope and fatalistic in nature, while the second one is filled with messages of hope for the future.
Scattering of the people (flock) (cf. Ez 6:5, 8; 34:5, 6, 12; 36:19) These later chapters refer to the judgment of the first reality.	Gathering of people (flock) (cf. 34:15; 36:24; 37:21)	
The end has come (cf. Ez 7).	I will make a covenant of peace with them (cf. Ez 34:25; 37:26).	The first one is again fatalistic and without hope while the second one alludes to the prospect of starting over with a new agreement.
YHWH's people likened to a prostitute (cf. Ez 16).	YHWH's people likened to his flock (Ez 34 & 36).	These two metaphors are not exact opposites, but they do resemble opposite



		behaviours. The prostitute of chapter 16 is unfaithful and deliberate in her actions while the sheep are vulnerable and in need of help and rescue.
<b><u>Other themes that differ</u></b>		
According to your conduct (cf. Ez 7: 3, 7, 8, 9). Trying to explain the current reality as part of their own doing.	They are restored not on account of what they have done, but for the sake of YHWH's name (cf. Ez 36:22-23).	Although they should be held responsible for the mess they found themselves in, their restoration would come from outside themselves.
The absence of YHWH. He turns his face away (Ez 7:22), and shows no pity (Ez 7:4, 9, 8:18, 9:10) after he has been the one that showed pity (Ez 16:5, 20:17) on Israel in their early history. He is also absent in battle (Ez 6:14).	The presence of YHWH. In the second group of oracles that the prophet delivers it is obvious that YHWH is present. As their shepherd (cf. 34:11, 15, 20, 30), giving them a new heart (36:26), and promising that his dwelling place would be with them (37:27).	The absence or presence of YHWH amongst his people has always been part of the covenant agreements. When they were unfaithful to this covenant they bore the consequences.

## **5.6 Towards the next part of this study**

Up until now this study has progressed as follows: It has taken note of the broader issues concerning Ezekiel criticism in chapters 2 and 3. Chapters 4 and 5 have done the exegetical analysis of texts that were selected for study. Chapter 4 focused on texts prior to the news of Jerusalem's fall (pivoting point) in Ezekiel 33:21. In these texts the prophet communicated that the situation they found themselves in was due to their own infidelity. He employed different metaphors and latched onto the imagination of his audience to make sense of their reality. In this chapter (5) we looked at texts that contained oracles that the prophet communicated post the pivoting point. A definitive change in tenor, metaphor and imagination is evident. It has become obvious that the prophet used the power of his audience's imagination to bring home his message. These imaginations became their reality over time.

The next part of this study will attempt to move closer to the objectives that were set in chapter 1. It will look at how the prophet used imagination and communication to help his audience relinquish the past, accept their current reality and imagine a better future reality. The first half of the next chapter will do an excursion on "metaphor" and "imagination". The second part of the chapter will make a return to the Old Testament by looking at prophets and imagination and finally how Ezekiel used imagination. Chapter 7 will then try to find a model in Ezekiel's communication that may give an Old Testament perspective on imagining in a modern day reality.

## **Chapter 6 Metaphor, Imagination, and Prophetic Imagination**

### **6.1 Introduction**

The two previous chapters dealt with the selected texts from the book of Ezekiel and made some conclusions from them. This chapter will be excursive in nature due to the fact that it will do excursions on two words that appeared in previous chapters and that will frequent the next chapter. These words are: “metaphor” and “imagination”. The discussion on “imagination” will however take up most of the chapter due to the fact that it also features in the title of this study.

### **6.2 Metaphor**

#### **6.2.1 Metaphor in general**

There is ample reason for a serious biblical scholar to take metaphor seriously. The Bible and in particular the Old Testament are full of metaphorical references to events and God. I am well aware that the study on metaphor is vast indeed. Ever since Lakoff and Johnson’s book *Metaphors We Live By* (1980) there has been an emergence of studies on this subject matter. There are many areas in which metaphor forms an integral part. Johnson (2008:39) makes the observation in an article that philosophy is in debt to metaphor and that without metaphor there would be no philosophy. With this he means that many of the things that we theorise about are only possible to understand with the use of metaphors. This makes metaphor crucial to language and therefore it is difficult to agree with Punter (2002:12) that metaphor is a kind of decoration that only enriches language. A dictionary like Oxford (1979:686) would define a metaphor as an “application of name or descriptive term or phrase to an object or action which it is not literally applicable (e.g. a glaring error, food for thought or tower of strength)”. Lakoff and Johnson (1980:5) define it by saying that “the essence of metaphor is understanding and experiencing one kind of thing in terms of another.” Now it is the case that one metaphor leads to many other metaphorical concepts. For instance: TIME IS MONEY also implies other concepts that are metaphorical in nature like for example: you can waste time, a flat tyre can

cost you an hour, you invest time in someone, and that you don't have enough time to spare. All of these flow from the same metaphor (cf. Lakoff & Johnson 1980:7-8). This emphasises the power of metaphor. Aaron (2001:7) agrees on this and notes that any metaphor can have more than one meaning. This complicates the interpretive process, for the interpreter must have an understanding of the original person's meaning and intent. In short a metaphor would be a figure of speech whereby we speak of one thing in terms of another (cf. McMillen 2011:32).

There are different ways to see metaphor or theories of metaphor<sup>55</sup>. They are summarised by McMillen (2011:33-46) but the most important understanding of metaphor is metaphor as comparison. The goal here is to discover the common features that are shared by the two objects. For instance "man is like a wolf" would look for the characteristics that are shared by them and the meaning of the metaphor would lie in them. This can also be called a simile and according to Punter (2007:3), the most frequent use of metaphor. The conjunction "like" is usually part of this type of metaphor.

An interesting theory on metaphor and imagination is proposed in an article by Gibbs and Matlock (2008:161-176). They build on the theories of Lakoff and Johnson who proposed that our thoughts are predominantly metaphorical (cf. Lakoff & Johnson 1980:6) and concluded (Lakoff 2008:173) "metaphor is closely allied to human imagination". Metaphors indeed have the power to latch onto the imagination of people. Hylan (2011:777-796) in an article on the violent imagery in the Book of Revelation, observes (:780) that the violent content of imagery and metaphor indeed shapes the imagination of the reader or hearer. Later in this chapter I will build on this assumption when I will link metaphor and imagination in the communication of the prophet.

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<sup>55</sup> For a detailed discussion on this, see McMillen (2011:33-46).

## 6.2.2 Metaphor and the Old Testament

When we turn our attention to Biblical Studies we find that biblical scholars have two ways of dealing with metaphor. The one deals with language and the other one with subject matter. With subject matter they presume that metaphor is part of language when we speak of God who is beyond our comprehension. If it were not for metaphor we would not be able to say anything about God (cf. Aaron 2001: 9-10). The other major approach to metaphor in Biblical Studies builds on Lackoff and Johnson's theory that "views metaphor as inexorably part of speech acts, arising from our cognitive structure; that is, we are built to think metaphorically, regardless of language or context" (cf. Aaron 2001:10). Both these approaches imply that "god metaphors" are indeed needed in speech acts and in writing. For this reason we find that the prophets employed metaphor excessively in their communication<sup>56</sup> about YHWH and reality. These two are not that different, and in my opinion, are often used simultaneously by scholars. This was shown by Jindo (2009:222-243) in an article where he proposed that "cognitive investigation of biblical metaphors enables us to fathom the basic categories through which biblical writers conceived God, humans, and the world" (:222). It is through our cognitive understanding of metaphors (and may I add our imaginations) that we better understand the intent of biblical writers and the so-called "incomprehensible". The area between these two approaches is somewhat grey.

If we turn our attention to Ezekiel, our case study, we discover, as was shown in the previous two exegetical chapters, that metaphor indeed frequents his communication. Schöpflin (2005:101) makes the observation that although other writing prophets also use metaphor, they are in single verses or small clusters of verses but not as extensively as in the compositions by Ezekiel. Also, she notes that the other writing prophets vary their metaphors, whereas in the case of Ezekiel he focuses on a few basic metaphors that are repeated. With every re-occurrence they are modified and elaborated upon. His metaphors are employed in an almost "systematic fashion" and the prearrangement of these passages appears to be intentional. Her article then deals with three metaphors that the prophet uses and

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<sup>56</sup> These metaphors are at times problematic and chauvinistic in nature, as was mentioned earlier, and have recently become the subject of study and criticism. For a discussion on the problem of prophetic metaphor and criticism as it stands on this issue, see O'Brien 2008 (vii-xxi; 1-29).

she shows how the prophet repeats these in other passages and elaborates on them. They are “fire” in Ezekiel 15, “marriage” in chapter 16, and “shepherd” in chapter 34. They are repeated; “fire” in Ezekiel 21:2-4; 22:17-22; 24:3b-14; “marriage” in Ezekiel 23; and “shepherd” in Ezekiel 34 which builds on the “scattering of the flock” that was part of his earlier rhetoric. The marriage and covenant metaphor of Ezekiel 16:1-43 is the subject of an article by Day (2000:285-309) where she refutes the general assumption that the punishment of the queen (wife) that turned harlot was that for adultery. She shows that it was punishment that was more fitting to the breaking of a covenant agreement. I also preferred to stay away from the marriage and betrayed husband image and chose in chapter 4 (when discussing this passage) to refer to YHWH as a betrayed covenantal partner rather than a betrayed husband.<sup>57</sup> When Ezekiel announces new hope at the end of chapter 16 (be it only a glimmer); 34; 36; and 37, he alludes to a new covenant that will be established.

The metaphors that are used by Ezekiel in the passages that were demarcated for this study are summarised in paragraphs 4.5.2, 4.5.3 and 5.5. These metaphors did indeed appeal to the imagination of his audience, as I will show later. This may be a good access point to enter into the excursion on imagination.

### 6.3 Imagination

Sandra Levy (2008) has done a study on imagination and faith. In her study she suggests that faith and the practice of faith could be much more enhanced if the imagination is used. The insert below is from her book *Imagination and the Journey of Faith* (2008:111) where she quotes Frederick Buechner.

Imagination is perhaps as close as humans get to creating something out of nothing the way God is said to. It is a power that to one degree or another everybody has or can develop, like whistling. Like muscles, it can be strengthened through practice and exercise.

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<sup>57</sup> One has to be aware that the “betrayed husband” and “adultery” metaphors do appear in the Old Testament. For a discussion on this see O’Brien 2008 (63-76).

This section will look at the role that imagination plays in the communicating process of the prophet and how they used imagination to create pictures of the future and how these pictures can become realities. These images and imaginations in many cases were a response to a crisis or reality and in many cases the solution to the crisis. “Prophetic Imagination”<sup>58</sup> will be studied in general before returning to Ezekiel and his imaginations towards the end of the chapter. Before we proceed on to this, a few pages must be spent on imagination in general. Therefore the next section will discuss imagination under the following headings: philosophical, psychological (practical side of it) and leadership (process of vision). This will neatly lead into the subject of “prophetic imagination”, a phrase that was used by Walter Brueggemann (1978, 2001) in his book, *Prophetic imagination*.

### **6.3.1 Imagination and philosophy**

#### **6.3.1.1 Aristotle**

Philosophers from the outset were intrigued by the nature of the imagination. Many famous names in philosophy contributed their ideas on this matter. One can trace it as far back as Aristotle who expressed his thoughts on this notion he called *phantasia*. It can best be translated as “seems” or “it may appear”. According to White (1990:7-8), Aristotle believed that *phantasia* occurs in many different kinds of circumstances like looking at things from a distance that appear small, but imagining them bigger, like the sun or the moon. It also may occur when someone is sick or has fever and sees or hears things, or when in the grip of a strong emotion like love or fear. In short one could say that Aristotle believed that imagining was not possible if there were no appearances that could be seen. White (:11) explains that Aristotle held that *phantasia* differs from perception in the fact that *phantasia* always implies a previous perception. It is on this assumption that many of the thinkers post Aristotle built. They opted to call these perceptions, “ideas”, “images” or “sense-data” (cf. White 1990:13).

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<sup>58</sup> A concept referring to the images the prophet brings his audience to help them accept a reality or embrace a new one. This term will be explained in detail later in the chapter.

### **6.3.1.2 Thomas Hobbes**

The thoughts on imagination did not change a lot over a number of centuries. When one looks at the thoughts shared on imagination by the English philosopher Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679), one sees that, very much according to Aristotle, image can only be after something was sensed. The image of a horse can be called up again, although faded and not in as much detail as the first sensation, after it was seen. To him, imagination was unique in that it can create something new and imagine it out of the faded sensations of something seen before. In other words one can imagine a man and a horse separately from previous senses, but can combine these images to create something new like a centaur (horse with a man's head). Previous sensations are however needed. As was mentioned earlier, the works of Hobbes are very much built on those of Aristotle, but the fact that he was English made the works of Aristotle more available to a wider audience (cf. Duncan 2009; White 1990:14-19).

### **6.3.1.3 René Descartes**

Descartes (1596-1650) was a mathematician and important scientific thinker. Although a contemporary of Hobbes his famous slogan "I think therefore I am" introduced a more mechanical philosophy of thinking that moves away from the Aristotelian way of thinking. He proposed that the mind consisted of three faculties (White 1990:20), namely understanding, imagination and sense. To him understanding can acquire new knowledge by itself alone whereas the imagination operates only through understanding. Needless to say that understanding will come from the senses and how we perceive things (cf. Hatfield 2011)<sup>59</sup>.

### **6.3.1.4 John Locke**

Locke (1632-1704) was a British philosopher, who was also politically active. Most of his politics were characterized by his opposition to authoritarianism. He also

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<sup>59</sup> Electronic (internet) resources were consulted and therefore some of the in-texts referencing would not have page numbers. The details of the web pages and dates consulted are included in the bibliography.



contributed to the field of psychology and philosophy. He held that the mind is like a clean sheet of paper. Ideas (the word he used for the work of the imagination) are constructed out of some sensory experience or reflection of it and this would lead to more concrete knowledge being constructed. The mind employs certain objects that are at his disposal to create an understanding (Uzgalis 2010). What then would Locke's idea (if I may use this word in this paragraph) be of imagination? White (1990:27) summarizes as follows:

It is confined to complex ideas, whether these be of fixed modes and relations or of substances. Simple ideas are not fictions of our fancies. He suggests that the most usual way of getting what he calls ideas of mixed modes is by explaining names of actions we never saw, or motions we cannot see; and by enumeration and thereby as it were, setting before our imaginations all those ideas which go to the making them up. But even here, there are two restrictions. First, not all creation of complex ideas is due to imagination, since many are made for us in our perception of qualities already united in things and many are due to other faculties of the mind which he does not think of as imagination ... Secondly the imagination – or any other faculty – cannot create a complex idea whose constituents are not themselves real simple ideas.

### **6.3.1.5 George Berkeley**

Berkeley (1685-1753) is considered by many as one of the great thinkers of the early modern period. He was a brilliant critic of the works of Descartes and Locke who went before him and held that “reality consists exclusively of minds and their ideas” (Downing 2011). Up until now many scholars held that the mind was rather passive in its creation of “fantasies” or “ideas” or imaginations. Berkeley was one of the first to give more prominence to the mind's “picture making power” that “we form by compounding or dividing and also by barely representing ideas previously obtained” (White 1990: 31). He attacked Locke's idea that the imagination only represents what it has already seen by saying that when one imagines a horse, that horse is either black or brown or white. The same applies when imagining a man. The

imagination creates length, hair colour and skin colour. This made a case for the imagination's power to create to some extent that which has not yet been seen and by that a new reality. He distinguished according to White (1990:34) between ideas of sense and the imagination on the following points:

- The characteristics of ideas of sense are different from those of the imagination. Imagining a burn from a hot coal is not the same as experiencing it through the senses.
- We can choose between what we imagine or not. This is not the same with the ideas of sense. The things that stimulate our senses are compulsory for us to see or hear or feel.
- Ideas of imagination are usually vague and unclear, whereas those of the senses are more clear and permanent.
- Imaginative ideas lack steadiness, order and coherence. This is not the case with the ideas of our sense.

One can call the theories of Berkeley the Birth of the Imagination<sup>60</sup>. He emancipates the imagination as merely a function of the sensory features of the brain.

### **6.3.1.6 David Hume**

Known as a historian, an essayist Hume (1711-1776) has been regarded by many as one of the greatest philosophers that did not write in English. He shifted the thinking for understanding the human nature from metaphysics<sup>61</sup> to a more empirical study of human nature. Morris (2011) summarizes the work of Hume as follows: "the elimination of metaphysics and the establishment of an empirical experimental

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<sup>60</sup> White (1990:1-43) groups these philosophers under the heading: The Birth of the Image.

<sup>61</sup> The word metaphysics, or metaphysic, was coined by the ancient Greeks, "meta" meaning "beyond or after" and "physic" meaning "physical," therefore metaphysics meant to the Greeks "beyond or after the physical." In general study of human nature, metaphysicists looked for reasons or forces that drive behaviour that are not visible physically. It was under this discipline that influence of the mind on physical behaviour was studied by many of the philosophers and psychologists.

science of human nature". On "imagination" he had the following to say: Hume stated that feelings of love, and hate were nothing "but to perceive" and that to perceive is dependent on perceptions. On this he built by stating that perception of the human mind can be resolved into two distinct kinds: "Impressions and Ideas". For Hume an idea was "an image of a perception" (White 1990:35). White (:36) continues to say that for Hume imagination was "general mental faculty which operates with and upon the contents of our mind, that is, ideas or images, with which we are furnished in the first instance by impressions of the senses". This faculty would be unlimited in its ability to compile and mix different images to create new ones. Hume assumed that to imagine was to have images and many times rather refers to imagining as "supposing". Hume is sometimes called inconsistent when it comes to his view of imagination. He is sometimes very sceptical (true to his way of conducting science) and holds that we do not have the capacity to conjure up new images without previous impressions, but in other passages "he talks both of philosophers and of all of us imagining something or imagining something to be so which, according to him, is impossible, unknown, mysterious or improper" (White 1990:42).

### 6.3.1.7 Wittgenstein

Ludwig Wittgenstein (1889-1959) is considered by many to be one of the most influential philosophers of the twentieth century. He referred to imagination by using the German word *Vorstellungen*. The closest English synonym for this word would probably be "to pretend something for yourself". We can pretend for a moment that we are the richest man in the world or the fastest athlete. The German word for this action would be *Vorstellungen*. His ideas on imagination – to put it politely – are somewhat abstract and intentionally philosophical as this quote from one of the paragraphs of his most famous work *Philosophical investigations* (Wittgenstein 1958: 370) shows:

One ought to ask not what imaginings are or what happens when one imagines anything, but how the word "imagination" (*Vorstellungen*) is used. But that does not mean that I want to talk only about words. For the question as to the nature of the imagination is as much about the

word “imagination” as my question is. And I am only saying this question is not to be decided – neither for the person who does the imagining, nor for anyone else – by pointing; nor yet by description of the process.

However abstract this may sound, the fact of the matter is that Wittgenstein used the “word” in many citations and paragraphs. There is no doubt that he was comfortable to hold that we as humans have the capacity to call up images at will. He also on a regular basis when arguing a certain point asked his readers to “imagine” the other side of the argument to help him to emphasize his point. He differentiated between seeing and imagining. For him “imagining” was “akin to an activity” while “seeing to a receiving” (cf. White 1990:66). On this matter Wittgenstein differed from Hume who suggested that an image of sight and an image of the imagination only differed to some degree. Hume felt that a “mind image” was slightly or sometimes a lot less vivid than an “eye image” but were the same in nature. Wittgenstein believed that imagination must be properly distinguished from seeing an image with one’s eye (cf. White 1990:67).

### **6.3.1.8 Summary**

Journeying through some of the philosophical thoughts on “imagination” can be somewhat confusing to hold together in just a few pages, but let’s summarize some of the thoughts needed for this chapter.

Aristotle got the ball rolling by concluding that most of what we imagine is from what we have sensed before. On a critical level, he and many of the philosophers that followed him, held this position. Hobbes was able to make the thoughts of Aristotle available to a wider audience when he explained Aristotle’s work on this subject and very much sided with him. The mind according to them did not have the function to imagine something new unless the senses were stimulated by that something. Hobbes did however contribute that the mind was able to mix some of its previous sensations and images to create something new. This something that cannot be seen, like a centaur (horse with a man’s head), is constructed out of previous

sensations. This was a step forward in emancipating the power of the imaginations, but it was George Berkeley who made much more of the mind's "picture making power". He suggested that the mind was not as passive in the process of imagining as many might have suggested. This new faculty that was attributed to the mind was somewhat short lived when thinkers (empirical in nature) like Hume suggested again that imagination were "but to perceive" and that these perceptions were categorized as "impressions" and "ideas". To Hume imagining was nothing more than supposing. Wittgenstein however made a case for the more active imagination when he suggested that seeing and imagining are two different functions of the brain. The one (seeing) was just more vivid and real than the other (imagining).

Personally I would side with the thoughts of Berkeley and Wittgenstein and hold that our power to imagine is relative, but not limited, to our senses. For example, if I were to read a novel that is set in Cape Town (my home town), I would employ and conjure up a lot more known images to imagine the setting of most of the scenes in the book. This would not be the case when I read a novel that is set in say Oslo, a city I have never been to. I would actively construct my realities and imaginations of the different scenery with the help of the author and the images I have that I think might resemble say a building on a specific street in Oslo. It would be common sense that a resident of that street's drawing of the building would be different from mine and much closer to the real thing. This means that our imagination would be capable of imagining without stimulation of the senses, but with the use of previous impressions. It also implies that we are almost back where Hobbes left us. This may be true, but I think we are at a point where we see imagination as more "active" as opposed to a secondary function of our senses only. The real test of imagination would be in imagining new possibilities and how we are able to live out these imaginations to make the imaginable (or shall I say "unimaginable") real.

## 6.3.2 Imagination and psychology

### 6.3.2.1 Psychology in general

The thoughts on imagination in philosophy and psychology are somewhat difficult to put under separate headings due to the fact that most of the early psychological thinking was done by philosophers and would easily fit under the previous heading. It is also clear that psychologists wrestled with the same questions as their philosophical counterparts: Can the mind imagine without previous stimulation of that object – albeit that the mind can construct something new out of different materials. It is the work that psychologists do with the imagination in therapy that will receive extra attention because it somewhat aids the objectives of this study.

Psychologists as early as the late 1800s, started to publish on the subject of imagination. Stetson (1896:398) differentiated between different types of imaginations or as he put it (:410) “image-tendencies” in different stages of human development. The imagination reaches its peak through childhood up until young adulthood. This is why children can play for hours with the help of their imaginations. In the mid-life part of human development the use of images and symbols grows less and less and sometimes fades altogether. This may be the reason why people at the end of their lives dwell a lot more on the early parts of their lives than on the middle part. The early part is filled with images (cf. Stetson 1896:410-411).

In 1921 Boodin explored the difference between sensation (those things that are revealed through our senses) and imagination. To him sensations were compounded energies (1921:428) and the “hierarchy of relation patterns in the cortex, from the comparatively passive revival of past experiences to the active reconstruction of experience to meet new events” (:432), imagination. According to him the senses need to be stimulated for imagination to happen. In much the same vein but more than a decade later, Kate Gordon (1935) tried to explain imagination by differentiating between perception and imagination. For her it is obvious to distinguish between perceptions and imagination. The problem however is how to distinguish between imagination and perception. To her (1935:168) the difference can be an easy one. Perception would be an “awareness of objects present to sense” while imagination would be the “awareness of objects not present to sense”.

The relation between perception and senses seemed to be a more difficult one. She explains that perception would be how we comprehend or understand sensation. Conveniently put, perception would be the meaning that we put to the things we sense. The close relation would be evident, but she (:166) does note two differences:

- (1) The sensations are occasioned by the stimulation of special sense organs. Their qualities are always correlated with specific nerve processes and we cannot get the same qualities through different sense organs. But in perception we frequently identify a single object through several different organs.
- (2) Another difference is that the sensations, such as yellow, sweet, middle C, warm, etcetera, have an abstract and adjectival character, that is to say, they appear to us as attributes of something else, and not as independent objects. In case of perception, on the contrary, we comprehend objects, and these are often denoted by nouns.

She concludes (:185) that things perceived and things imagined “shade gradually into one another” and that our perceptual images are the constructs of our imagination.

### **6.3.2.2 How the imagination is used by psychologists**

When one turns to the more practical side of psychology one finds quite a few references to imagination, particularly in psychoanalysis where therapists would use a client/patient’s imagination as a tool to help therapy. This is also called “active imagination techniques.”<sup>62</sup>

One of the earliest examples of these would be what Greenleaf (1975:202) called the “**unconscious mind mirror**”. With this technique therapists try to use their client’s imagination to imagine a mirror. They are encouraged to share “who” they see in the

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<sup>62</sup> “Active Imagination may be taken as denominator for such therapeutic devices as: hypnotic dream imagery, directed daydreams, fantasies, role-playing, etc., whether encouraged or spontaneous.” Eric Greenleaf (1975:202).

mirror. This usually becomes a “character” that represents their problem. It could be a cynical old man with no joy at all or a little girl that appears to be a brat and has selfishness issues. By imagining this person, their problem can be less abstract and easier to get a grip on. This “mind mirror” helps the client to talk about their problem in language that was not available when the problem was out there and not named or as in this case, imagined. The next step would be to imagine with the “unconscious mind mirror” better scenarios and possibilities. Greenleaf (1975:206) concludes:

Then, as in any dialogue, we persuade, soothe, aid and argue with the other, and through our relationship, couched in the language of “spatial consciousness,” contribute, if we can, to the well-being of the other person. As therapists we exploit the metaphorical structure to communicate about our emotions and experiences and relationships, and to effect changes in these experiences. People act about a situation in ways which are like the way they talk about them.

Another well-known and more recent therapy that uses the imagination is what psychologists call “**Narrative Therapy**”. In narrative therapy the therapist focuses on the story of the person’s life and the effect that the problem has on their lives. This approach was developed in the 1980s by the Australian Michael White and his colleague David Eptson from New Zealand. It became more popular and known in North America in the 1990s after the publication of White’s book, *Narrative Means to Therapeutic Ends* (1990), which was followed by many books and articles on how this approach proved successful in the treatment of problems like anorexia, schizophrenia and ADHD (White 1990: xv-xvii).

Payne (2000:6-7) calls it the “untypical, that is, as perceived by the person. It encourages the untypical to be considered in great detail because it is through the untypical that people can escape from the dominant stories that influence their perceptions and therefore their lives.” It can also be called “re-authoring” or “re-storying” of lives. People are encouraged to see problems as part of their story and not as their story. The influences of this problem inevitably become part of the narrative. Narrative therapy aims to help people write a new story in a process



known as “telling and retelling” (cf. Payne 2000:157-172). It is here where the imagination plays a big part on the road to recovery. Combs and Freeman (1996) call it the “social construction of a preferred reality”. I would summarize the practice of narrative therapy – although much more complex – with the help of Paine (2000:10-17) in the following steps:

- The person tells her “story. These stories are usually filled with despair, frustration and sadness, with not much hope. This would be what is known as a “problem saturated description” of their lives.
- With questions the therapist would help the person to give more detail to their story and to even try and name their problem and not the symptoms of it. By naming the problem one starts to focus more. This also leads to the person feeling more in control of the problem.
- Externalising this problem is the next step. The person must see that this problem has an effect from the outside on their life story rather than existing within their life stories.
- The person is then invited to remember and imagine the times when they were able to act differently to the way the problem usually makes them act. They must remember the “unique” and positive outcomes of these times. This means that there are secondary descriptions of their life stories.
- Therapy now takes a turning point. The person is challenged to decide what story would dominate their lives. The use of therapeutic documents that summarize process or discoveries are helpful.
- If therapy continues, the aim would be to keep on re-telling the better story. This has the possibility to become the new reality. In short, by imagining a different story a new reality is created.

It is this new reality that comes out of a story re-imagined that intrigues the aims of this particular study. Could a prophet, like Ezekiel, create a new narrative for his people by completely owning their “problem saturated” reality and then re-tell a new outcome?

The practice of psychoanalysis and Old Testament studies do not often mix, but an interesting psychoanalysis and Christian tradition dialogue was struck up between Wright and Strawn (2010:149-157) when they looked at grief, hope and prophetic imagination in these two fields. The aim of the article was to allow the two fields of study to interact with each other in order to enrich both Christian theology and psychoanalysis theory. They used the work of Peter Shabad on grief and the return to hope in conjunction with the prophetic tradition as outlined by Walter Brueggemann. The Christian practice of faith does not leave room for grief and expressed anger. Therefore many people shy away from proper grief and lament. For Shabad these elements are crucial in a process that leads to the rebirth of hope. If they are absent it leads to an “incomplete mourning” that hinders any progress towards hope (cf. Wright & Strawn 2010: 151). It could almost be described as a defence mechanism against the process of losing hope where someone who grieves the loss of something does not fully accept all the ramifications of the loss. Accepting it, would mean the loss of anything that was once foundations of hope. It is on this matter where Shabad and Brueggemann cause two different disciplines to collide. Brueggemann (1985:4-7; 2001:2-5) suggests that prophetic must be imaginative because it must help people deal with the present, but must evoke feelings of expectancy and hope for the future. A more holistic approach is then suggested if these two opinions are held in dialogical tension, where psychoanalysis helps to let go of the past and thoroughly mourn a reality and prophetic imagination then to help people “live in fervent anticipation of the newness that God has promised and will surely give” (Brueggemann 2001:3).

### **6.3.2.3 Summary**

Most of the observations made on the subject of imagination by psychologists did not vary much from those made by their philosophical counterparts. Their arguments and observations dealt with the same issues people before them had tried to scrutinize; mainly can the imagination call up images that it did not at some stage receive through the senses? The conclusions were very much the same. Although the mind has the ability or faculty to fantasize and imagine, it needs stimulation

through the senses to do so. This stimulation may be very recent or far back in the past and probably not as vivid.

The uses of the imagination in psychotherapy were however revealing in nature. It became obvious that the therapists used the creative power of the imagination to help their patients to see and name their problems, to tell and re-tell their stories and by doing so they created a new reality. The dialogue between this and that of Old Testament studies made for interesting reading. It showed that the prophetic tradition of the Old Testament also used the power of their audience's imagination to move from despair to hope. This prophetic imagination process will help us to return to the aims of this study in the latter part of this chapter. Before this is done, it is necessary to look at how the study of leadership and leadership issues has dealt with the power of the imagination. It was suggested in chapter 1 that it is the leaders of today that find themselves amidst a changing reality and with no adequate answers to lead their people into it.

### **6.3.3 Imagination and leadership (process of vision)**

The subject of leadership (those who lead something) has become a popular one with writers, academics and practitioners from many different fields contributing. Before I continue I must clarify one issue that hindered my research on this matter. The contributions on leadership vary from what some may call "popular" – more out of the writers own experience and not scientific in nature – to more "scientific" where research was done following certain criteria (research methods) and with the help of different companies, individuals and groups. A writer whose work could be described as "popular" would be the motivational speaker, John Maxwell, who has flooded the bookstores with numerous titles on laws and steps concerning leadership. Although these works are very popular and very helpful to leaders, they do not carry a lot of weight in academic circles due to the lack of referencing and proper dialogue with other writers. The distinction between "popular" and "scientific" is however not that easy, because leadership studies are an area where many contributions from the "scientific" contributors are still needed. This makes the study on "leadership" a somewhat "young" field that causes the line between "scientific" and "popular" to be

somewhat unsure. This study is not one on leadership, but must ask leadership questions in order to answer some of the questions set out in chapter 1: How can Ezekiel and his communication help us to communicate (words that gives direction) in a modern day reality?

To define leadership is also difficult and definitions differ all across the spectrum. Dilts (1996:3) suggests that we distinguish between “(a) a leader, (b) leadership and (c) leading”. In this distinction a “leader” would be refined to a role that someone plays in a specific organization. It would be the function he has and that was given to him. This person may not possess leadership skills, but he is the leader. “Leadership” would be related to the person’s abilities and degree of influence while “leading” would be to use the role and the abilities to influence people in a certain way or direction. In this sense he defines leadership as “the ability to influence others toward the accomplishment of some goal.”

Most writers on leadership would agree that leadership would be the process of moving people from point A to point B in whatever field applicable. To do that, the leader must help the people to see that point B is a better “place” to be. Then when he/she gets the “buy-in” from them he/she must take them there. The ability to see and to make visible point B as a better option is what most call vision. The how to get from point A to point B would be the leader’s strategic plan. I do acknowledge that semantics may differ on these two words. Some may call point B the mission, and the process of getting there the vision. Nevertheless, Barna (1997:47) summarises as follows: “By definition, a leader has vision. What else would a leader lead people toward if not to fulfil that vision?” The truth is that leaders must be able to “see”. Koestenbaum (2002:70) calls this creativity and notes that “political and economic life is shaped by human beings who have the ability to get things done, to overcome habitual thinking and perceive objective possibilities hidden to others”. To “perceive” these options or outcomes that are not that obvious to everybody would be a process that links closely with imagination.

Koestenbaum (2002:71-72) holds that the creative process goes through five stages and I quote directly:

1. *First Insight*: Play your hunches; follow up your intuitions.
2. *Preparation*: Do your homework. Saturate yourself in the problem. Learn everything there is to know about your creativity concern. Get a very clear picture of what you wish to create.
3. *Incubation*: Trust the unconscious process<sup>63</sup>. Change your pace. Allow the unconscious to work undisturbed.
4. *Illumination*: Hope that you will get the answer, but your mind must be open and receptive to it. It is claimed that great discoveries in science<sup>64</sup> have been made through the use of this method of harnessing the unconscious for creativity.
5. *Verification*: Test your hypothesis. The worst that could happen is that it will turn out to have been a false start. You may find that, with modifications, it is a real solution to a problem that was intractable earlier. "Sleeping on it" does seem to make sense.

What is interesting is the fact that the process of vision appears to be an almost "spiritual" moment or state. Contrary to the very practical world of strategic planning, writers like Koestenbaum above, as well as Dilts (1996:25-27), see the birthing of vision as a more emotional right brain activity than an analytic one. This process usually includes imagining the outcome. Dilts (1996:86) explains this by telling the one response of a leader to the question on how they move forward and create the future in the face of uncertainties: "You certainly don't do it by trying to forecast the future. The future is much too complex and uncertain to be able to forecast. You

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<sup>63</sup> The "unconscious" is important for Koestenbaum because of the fact that the leader is always aware (conscious) of the fact that he must perform and create outcomes. He suggests that a leader needs to tap into the more intuitive side of his make-up and know that creativity does involve the unconscious. Therefore he even feels that one can "dream" your outcome or get ideas from subliminal messages from your unconscious.

<sup>64</sup> Examples are Kekule's discovery of the benzene ring, Mendeleev's discovery of the periodic table, and Descartes' invention of his famous philosophical, mathematical, and scientific method (cf. Koestenbaum 2002:72).

create it. I continually make successive approximations until I reach a point of no return.”

Creating a future seems to be the essence of leadership. We live in realities today that were created for us by leaders, be they political, social or even technological. Every reality that is created was at some stage created in the imagination of someone or some group. Stephen Covey, the business consultant, wrote about this in his book, *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People* (1989), and suggested that everything is created twice. He (1989:99) explains it by saying that a dream home of a family is first imagined and drawn up by an architect before it takes shape in reality. In the same manner, the outcomes that we desire are also first created in our minds. He holds that everything is created twice and in order to be successful one must never lose this ability. He continues (1989:100) that, “if we do not develop our self-awareness and become responsible for first creations, we empower other people and circumstances outside our circle of influence to shape much of our lives by default.” It is in this first creation that leadership and vision play a very important part. The second creation can be handled by managers on the different levels (cf. Covey 1989:101).

To summarize the discussion on leadership and imagination it has become evident that leaders must be able to see the future if they want to take people there or if they want to create it. This “seeing” of the future or “first creations” is crucial in the process of leadership and is known as vision. This process of vision needs imagination and is in most cases an intuitive and right brain function where illumination comes to the leader to see a new reality. This new reality, if the leader puts a workable plan into motion, becomes the perceptible, and over time, the current reality. None rings more true than the words of Gibbs (2005:137): “It is the imagineers that are the culture creators”.

#### **6.3.4 Imagination and Biblical Studies**

Imagination was always part and parcel of hermeneutics due to the fact that the interpreter must always use imagination to interpret a text. Gottwald (1987:1)

remarked that “adequate understanding of the Old Testament is only achieved by imaginative and disciplined study.” With this he meant that exegesis has a lot to do with the images that form when one reads a text. These images and ideas then must be tested methodologically. On this Izaak de Hulster (2010:116) suggests that “method does not restrict possibilities to be explored, but it forms and calibrates exegetical conclusions and the way they are reached”. This imaginative hermeneutical approach as suggested by de Hulster (:118-123) can have three steps:

- Firstly the reader tries to imagine how things were. Say for instance an oracle of a prophet is delivered to exiles; one would imagine a community that is desolate and forsaken. You would imagine them setting up camps close to the riverbanks where washing would hang over the branches of trees. You would see by-passers mock them and despise them. In this context the prophet would communicate doom or hope depending on his inspiration.
- Secondly the reader tries empathy as a means to better understand the texts. What would be the smell that these exiles woke up to in the morning? What would their frame of mind be? The reader then tries to have empathy with this. It helps to imagine the oracle from a much more real angle.
- A final step that can help better interpret a text is to imagine how things were not. For example they did not have a temple, they did not have family security because they did not know where all their family members ended up, and they did not feel like YHWH’s chosen people.

All these help to better interpret various texts, but this particular use of imagination is not as important to the objectives of this study. It is how the prophet imagines that intrigues this study and when one speaks of prophetic imagination one has to look at how Walter Brueggemann used the word imagination.

## 6.4 The work of Walter Brueggemann

### 6.4.1 Other uses for the word “imagination” in Brueggemann’s work

When we speak of imagination and Biblical Studies one cannot deny the work of Walter Brueggemann. He has published a vast number of books and articles where he employed different uses of the word “imagination”. As de Hulster (2010:123) puts it, “imagination seems to be one of Walter Brueggemann’s pet words in his oeuvre”. Most of Brueggemann’s work on imagination revolves around prophetic imagination, but he also used the word imagination in other contexts as well. This section will try to summarize Brueggemann’s other uses of the word “imagination” before studying “prophetic imagination”.

Brueggemann speaks of *Imaginative Remembering* as the process of remembering the past and writing it down. He presupposes that most of the Old Testament found its final form in exile. It was in exile that the people needed to remember their narratives of redemption and of failure with the proper imagination to tell the stories of their past and how it came that they landed up in exile. This viewpoint has been criticized because it challenged a lot of the historical correctness of some of the “imaginative remembering”. People can alter their memories (stories) of the past for ideological reasons (cf. Brueggemann 2003:1-13; de Hulster 2010:124). Brueggemann (2003:11) is not unaware of this criticism and responds by saying:

The interplay of human ideology sometimes of a crass kind, divine inspiration of a hidden kind, and of human imagination that may be God-given (or may not be) is an endlessly recurring feature of the text that appears in many configurations. It is that interplay of the three that requires that the text must always be reinterpreted; the traditioning process, for that reason, cannot ever be concluded, because the text is endlessly needful of new rendering.

This reinterpretation is also another area in which Brueggemann uses “imagination”. It is called: *Historical imagination*. Where the composers of the Hebrew Bible used imaginative remembering to compose their texts, the scholar who study the text



today will employ “historical imagination” to come to a better understanding of the text.

*Israel's imagination* can be found in their praise. Where the writers of texts imagined the past and prophets the future, Israel as a community used their praise as a collective imagining of their alternative world. In *Israel's praise* (1988:12-26) Brueggemann suggests that Israel imagines an alternative world in their liturgy. It is very much the same as prophetic imagination (will be discussed below) and also speaks of “world making”; by engaging in the liturgy and praise rituals they imagined what their world(s) could look like.

#### **6.4.2 Prophetic imagination**

*Prophetic imagination* is probably his most important use of the word “imagination” and with it he refers to images that the prophet sees of the future. These images are then preached or communicated to their audiences (cf. de Hulster 2010:123). They were either sombre images of the future or of the present that must help them to cope with their reality, or they can be positive and hopeful images of the future. The prophet imagines and helps his audience to imagine an alternative world. Old Testament scholars like John Collins (1998:283) reflect on the very same idea but call it “apocalyptic imagination.”<sup>65</sup>

This prophetic imagination is a two-fold process according to Brueggemann (2001:39-79). The first part would be what he calls the “*prophetic criticizing*” where the prophet with the help of imagination cuts through the numbness and self-deception that form part of his audience’s situation (Brueggemann 2001:45). The prophet does this in three ways:

- By offering symbols that can confront and end the denial and cover up of their situation. He will call up symbols from the past that were usually vehicles of

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<sup>65</sup> The word apocalyptic comes from the Greek word that is used in Revelations 1:1 and is translated “unveiling of what must soon take place”. Among texts that could be called apocalyptic are parts of Daniel, Zechariah and the Book of Revelation. The cosmic futuristic visions of Jeremiah 4:23-24, Ezekiel 47 and large parts of Second Isaiah often find themselves referred to as apocalyptic (cf. Travis 1980:27).

redemptive communication. By doing this he gives his audience handles to grasp the horror that is part of their current reality.

- To bring public expression to the fears and the terrors which are felt by everyone. Normal (analytical) language is usually not sufficient for this, but the language of metaphor helps to make these feelings more concrete. Part of this expression is to bring God's perspective to this reality. How YHWH as a passionate covenant partner sees their reality.
- To speak metaphorically but concretely about the reality. It requires anguish and passion that are not filled with anger or cheap grace. This process brings the people to mourn a funeral they do not want to admit.

In the end the prophetic criticizing will help the people to grasp their own reality that is a proper departure point for the second part of the prophetic imagination process: "*prophetic energizing*". This is the part where the prophet starts to look for glimmers of hope amidst all the negative realities. The prophet now penetrates the despair and Brueggemann (2001:63-67) suggests three actions:

- It is difficult to energize a desolate community with new images of hope. The felt reality is so real that it blocks out the possibility to see something new. The prophet must move back into the deepest memories of his community and use those symbols that have always been the basis of their hope as a community. He mines the memories of his people with the help of symbols to start to imagine an alternative future. The prophetic imagination knows that the real world has its beginning in the promises of YHWH and his covenant.
- These abovementioned "memories" will start to evoke hope and yearnings for the realization of them. The next step of the prophet would be to bring these hopes and yearnings to expression. It is difficult because the "nay-sayers" are always in the majority. Here symbols and the power of imagination are the prophet's most potent tools. He shows with the help of metaphors how, for instance exile, can be reshaped from a place of despair to the birthplace of hope.

- Finally the prophet moves from the metaphor and speaks concretely about the real newness that comes to his audience and redefines their situation. He tells of the faithfulness of YHWH and how he can change their situation like he has on so many occasions in the past. How he can bring an Israel and a Judah together in exile and make them (once dry bones) a mighty army for YHWH! This is called the language of amazement.

To end this section without critical reflection on the approaches of Brueggemann would leave it incomplete. Perdue (2005:251) calls Brueggemann a “theologian of the church” and notes that Brueggemann is more committed to theology than imagination. This inevitably labels him as less critical. The other critique that Perdue (:254) gives on Brueggemann is that he might by being “Christian” in nature, fall into the trap that many so-called Christian theologians do; to forget that Christian theology is but one interpretation of the Hebrew Bible and forget contributions from the Jewish community or the more critical schools of thought. Robert Carroll (1999:437) in a response to some of the contributors for Jeremiah studies is also critical of Brueggemann in the following areas:

- He feels that Brueggemann makes simplistic assumptions by linking the text to whatever he imagines to be transcendental. This according to Carroll borders on fundamentalism.
- He also notes like Perdue (2005) that Brueggemann only engages with the text theologically and not critically. Although he notes that this engagement is extremely good, it shows little distance between the “location of his reading and the text”.
- Finally he remarks that Brueggemann’s interpretations bind the text by making it subject to his ecclesiastical theology.

This critique is grounded, but neglects the fact that it is Brueggemann who criticised the critical approaches and pleaded for a more interpretive approach. This was referred to in chapter 1 under paragraph 1.2 where recent scholarship, according to Brueggemann (2006:29-40), has become “intensely critical, but thin on interpretation”. His approach through the latter part of his career was to rectify this.

He admitted in some of his most recent works that he is indeed a preacher and therefore a servant of the church (2007:ix) and that his aim of late was indeed to make connotations between the text and contemporary contexts (2012:1-2). His work on imagination and in particular the prophet's imaginative communication in the times of exile, is in particular relevant to the objectives of this study as will be seen in the next section where I will use his contributions to discuss Ezekiel's use of metaphor and imagination.

## **6.5 Ezekiel: Prophet of vivid imagination**

From the opening chapters of the book of Ezekiel it is apparent that this prophet does not lack in images. It is almost too much to take in when the curtains open on the book and living creatures appear like "a windstorm coming out of the North" (Ez 1:4), appearing to each have four different faces (1:10) and wheels that intersect with other wheels (1:16). These types of images are coupled with rich metaphors when the prophet communicates his message and when the curtain starts to fall on this prophetic book the new city and temple (chapters 40-48) are painted in vivid imaginary splendour!

In chapters 4 and 5 of this study, six passages of Ezekiel's communication were studied. These passages reflected communication prior to the fall of Jerusalem (Ez 6, 7 and 16) and the news of it (Ez 33:21) and communication after the fall of the city (Ez 34, 36 and 37). The conclusions were summarized in a table in paragraph 5.5 of chapter 5. These conclusions and observations will be used now to see how Ezekiel used his "prophetic imagination" to help the people accept their current reality and embrace a new hopeful future. It will be discussed under the two headings of "prophetic criticizing" and "prophetic energizing".

### 6.5.1 Ezekiel's prophetic criticizing – prior to the fall of Jerusalem

As was noted above, the “prophetic criticizing” process *firstly* helps the audience to break through the denial with the help of images out of the past that used to be part of their redemptive narrative. These images are now turned around to communicate the opposite reality:

- YHWH takes his sword against their mountains and their land (Ez 6:3; 7:15-16). On many occasions<sup>66</sup> in the past YHWH took his sword against other nations to redeem Israel or YHWH did indeed deliver Israel from the sword. Now his sword was against them. This image of prior redemption now becomes an image of fatal finality.
- The well-known image of the Lord as their shepherd that gathered them like flock and looked after them is now turned around to show how he scatters (as opposed to gather) them (cf. Ez 6:5, 8; 34:5, 6, 12; 36:19). These images were easy for them to grasp because they understood the reality of a flock that scatters due to an attack from a wild animal or neglect from the shepherd.
- Ezekiel also employs the image of YHWH turning his face away from them. He turns his face away (Ez 7:22), and shows no pity (Ez 7:4, 9, 8:18, 9:10) after he has been the one that showed pity (Ez 16:5, 20:17) on Israel in their early history. In their past when YHWH turned his face towards them it was usually a redemptive act.

**Secondly** the process of “prophetic criticizing” uses metaphors to help people come to terms with the horror of their current reality and to understand it from the perspective of YHWH who has always been a loyal and passionate covenant partner. Ezekiel 16 did this with the use of many different metaphors to help them to

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<sup>66</sup> "The enemy boasted, 'I will pursue, I will overtake them. I will divide the spoils; I will gorge myself on them. I will draw my sword and my hand will destroy them.'" **Exodus 15:9**

"My father's God was my helper; he saved me from the sword of Pharaoh." **Exodus 18:4**

"... when I sharpen my flashing sword and my hand grasps it in judgment, I will take vengeance on my adversaries and repay those who hate me." **Deuteronomy 32:41**

understand their own predicament. I will summarize the chapter and its different metaphors with the help of a table<sup>67</sup>:

Verses	Metaphor	Meaning
1-14	The <b>orphan who became a queen</b> . Ezekiel describes how Jerusalem was saved by YHWH as a baby lying in her own blood and then when she was old enough he entered into a covenant with her. He made her into a queen and everyone took notice of her splendour.	The prophet again uses redemptive narrative to get his audience's attention.
16-34	The <b>queen became a harlot</b> . The happy times are soon to pass as Jerusalem uses the very thing (her beauty) that YHWH gave her to prostitute with other nations. It is obvious that the actions of YHWH now take backstage while the prostitution and the unfaithfulness of Jerusalem take centre stage. The image of a prostitute is central and the action described with the root verb זנה (to prostitute) dominates these verses.	Jerusalem and Judah as a whole now enter into trade and partnerships with other parties (Egypt, Assyria and Babylonia) that did not please YHWH. It is these actions that are to blame for the situation they find themselves in and not YHWH who is the faithful partner of the covenant.
35-43	The <b>harlot is now the convict</b> . The verdict and the conviction are brutal. The prostitute is dealt with in the manner that is customary for any adulterous women: Stripped and humiliated before her lovers and handed over to them to do what they please and in the end	It becomes obvious that the prophet pins all the blame on Jerusalem and the exile and the imminent fall of Jerusalem would be her own fault and the

<sup>67</sup> The table is a summary of the commentary that was made and conclusions that were reached in chapter 4 under paragraph 4.4.

	to take the sword to her and kill her.	punishment justifiable.
44-52	The <b>convict who became a proverb</b> : Like mother like daughter.	In this metaphor the prophet likens Jerusalem to her Hittite mother and Amorite father. These nations were all embedded in the Canaanite religion that was known for their illicit sexual and irreligious lifestyles. It becomes clear that the sin of the city was not pleasing to YHWH and is the reason behind their horrific reality of exile.
53-63	<b>The convict and her companions</b> receive grace. This grace comes Jerusalem's way with hints of a new covenant. The metaphor up until here was very much one of marriage and unfaithfulness of one of the parties.	In this criticizing the prophet leaves a glimmer of hope. Something he can build on when he turns his prophecies towards "energizing" and hope of restoration.

Then finally the prophet will help the people to mourn the reality they find themselves in. In these cases he might speak more concretely. In the studied texts the following concrete ideas are communicated:

- He shows that the actions of YHWH were not random and without reason but that they were judged according to their "detestable practices" (Ez 6:9, 11; 7:3, 4, 8, 9; 16:2, 22, 43, 47, 58 – only in the studied texts). The things they did brought their current reality upon them.

- No one escapes the wrath of YHWH – the betrayed covenant partner. They'll either die of the plague, the sword or famine (cf. Ez 6:12; 7:15).
- The end has come and has come upon everyone and everything – the mountains and the land and the people (cf. Ez 6 & 7).
- The repeated phrase, “and they will know that I am the Lord” (Ez 6:7, 10, 13, 14; 7:4, 9, 29; 16:62) makes it clear that the imagination has gone full circle. In no uncertain terms the metaphors and the images will be their reality.

In summary the prophet succeeds in painting a picture that helps them to understand with the help of known images and to grasp with the help of metaphors and to accept with the help of phrases and formulas their current reality.

All this was set prior to the news of a destroyed Jerusalem – and with that any hope of return and a future in their homeland. In these circumstances Ezekiel used their imagination to help them deal with the whole dire situation they found themselves in.

### **6.5.2 Ezekiel's prophetic energizing – after the fall of Jerusalem**

It was observed and summarized at the end of chapter 5 with the help of a table under paragraph 5.5 that the tenor of the Ezekiel prophecies changes after the news that Jerusalem has fallen. The prophecies immediately become more hopeful and positive. It was also shown that Ezekiel employed many of the metaphors and images that he previously used, but in these cases they help the audience to imagine something more positive.

The second part of prophetic imagination is exactly this: to use images that stimulate a more positive picture of the future – a future that might become their new reality. This is known as “prophetic energizing.”

Ezekiel starts his energizing by going back to the deepest memories of his audience. This is done to awaken their imagination. He starts with the metaphor of “shepherds and sheep” (Ez 34). Their leaders (shepherds) let them down and are to blame for their situation, but YHWH will be their shepherd. He will reverse all the wrong that



was done by the neglecting shepherds and indeed lead them to green pastures. A table from chapter 5 paragraph 5.2.3.3 illustrates this:

<b>Shepherds' Neglect</b> (read backwards from verse 6)	<b>YHWH's Reversal</b> (read as normal from verse 11)
6. None cared or searched for the flock flock scattered over the whole face of the earth flock scattered on the mountains	11. Will care for and take stock of the flock 12-13a. gathered the scattered from all lands 13b-14. pasture them on the mountains of Israel, tend them in good pasture
5. They became food 4. Ruled over harshly and brutally	15. I will have them lie down I myself will tend them
4. Didn't search for the lost or recover the stray or bind up the injured Didn't heal the sick nor strengthen the weak	16. will search for the lost recover the strays bandage the injured strengthen the weak

The prophet also taps into his audience's covenant memories to energize them. In the criticizing part of Ezekiel's communication Israel was shown her unfaithfulness as a covenant partner and YHWH's faithfulness as a covenant partner. YHWH now promises to "make a new covenant of peace with them" (34:25). He will give them a new heart and his spirit in them and in the end they will be one kingdom (37:22) again with David (37:24), YHWH's faithful servant, ruling over them. They will be one nation "in the land and on the mountains of Israel". Land and mountains were the subjects of Ezekiel's address in the earlier prophecies (Ez 6 & 7).

Then before Ezekiel speaks concretely he uses his most powerful metaphor yet. This metaphor has become the one that Ezekiel is known for when people in general speak about this prophet: the valley of the dry bones (Ez 37). This metaphor climaxes with the collective outcry in verse 11: "Our bones are dried up and our hope is gone; we are cut off." With this outcry his audience is ready for the "emergence of

amazement” as Brueggemann (2001:59) calls it. From this point Ezekiel strings together many of the metaphors he has used up until now to almost kick start their futuristic expectation:

- Their graves are opened by YHWH. He puts his spirit in them and settles them in their land (37:12-14).
- The two nations will unify, have a king, and prosper (37:15-26).
- He makes an everlasting covenant of peace with them (37:26).
- They will increase in numbers (37:26).
- Finally he ends with the well-known covenant promises that remind of Leviticus 26:11-12: *“My dwelling place will be with them; I will be their God, and they will be my people. Then the nations will know that the LORD makes Israel holy, when my sanctuary is among them forever”* (Ez 37:27-28).

It becomes obvious that Ezekiel, with the help of imagination, pointed to a new reality; one that up until now was almost impossible. Now it was pictured in the minds of his audience. They could start to talk about it, hope about it and do something about it and in time this could and has become their reality. And this is in essence the power of prophetic imagination. It can create new realities.

## **6.6 Summary**

The aim of this chapter was to make a case for “Imagination”. How it works and how it is used by different disciplines to create. An excursion was taken to look at what philosophy says about imagination and how psychologists and leaders use it in their particular fields. Psychology, in particular Narrative Therapy, as well as leaders use the imagination to create a different outcome in the future: be it re-telling of a better narrative in therapy or in the process of vision when a leader wants to take followers from point A to B.

The next part of the chapter dealt with Imagination in Biblical Studies and its different uses. A lengthy part was dedicated to the work of Walter Brueggemann on the idea

of Prophetic Imagination and finally the communication of Ezekiel that was studied in chapters 4 and 5 was used to see how Ezekiel used imagination in his prophecies.

The next chapter will suggest a communication model from what has been learned from interacting with the text of Ezekiel and how he communicated to his audience in their reality. This model will propose a process that is needed to communicate in unknown territory. After this model has been conceptualised it will be studied next to some of the modern-day communication models to see if Ezekiel can provide (as was set out in the objectives of this study) an Old Testament perspective on a modern-day reality.

## Chapter 7 Ezekiel's Communication Process

### 7.1 Introduction

The previous chapter looked briefly at “metaphor” and more thoroughly at “imagination”. The part on imagination studied contributions from philosophy; psychology and leadership. Then the scope was narrowed down to “Prophetic Imagination”. The prophets’ use of images to latch on to the imaginations of their audience was laid out with the help of Walter Brueggemann, who is largely credited for coining the phrase “Prophetic Imagination”<sup>68</sup>. The scope of the chapter then went even smaller and looked at Ezekiel and the images he used to generate imaginations. These conclusions came from the interaction with the texts that were studied in chapters 4 and 5. It became obvious that Ezekiel used metaphors and images to communicate in his changing society. Chapter 6, although excursive in nature, was needed because this chapter will incorporate the process of imagination into Ezekiel’s communicative response to his reality. This inclusion will build on some of the assumptions made in the previous chapter.

This chapter will set out to show that a communication process is embedded in the communication (those studied) of Ezekiel. This communication process became evident through the interacting with the texts as it was studied. An attempt will be made to argue a case that this communication process can be helpful in addressing the current-day realities outlined in chapter 1 and that it can somehow dialogue with a few current responses to the so-called current-day reality; by doing that I will try to give an Old Testament perspective and response to these problems.

In light of the above this chapter will start out by briefly visiting the problem(s) suggested in chapter 1 followed by taking note of four responses to these problems. These responses are taken from the field of Leadership- or Business- studies and Church Leadership. The bulk of the chapter will be dedicated to suggesting Ezekiel’s communication process. After each step that is suggested, a dialogue and application section will follow. The dialogue will be with the four responses that will

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<sup>68</sup> Brueggemann’s book *Prophetic Imagination* (1979) was re-published in 2001 and his latest contribution to the theme is, *The Practice of Prophetic Imagination* (2012).

be discussed below and in the application part to follow suggestions will be made as to how Ezekiel can give an Old Testament perspective to our current modern-day reality. This would mean that the book of Ezekiel would be engaged in leadership issues, a topic that was investigated by Wessels (2003) in an article entitled: “Engaging the book of Haggai in leadership issues”. He showed that the times of Haggai were times of resettling and reconstructing and that leadership was needed from the prophet. In the article he (2003: 769-773) suggests (from current leadership material) three stages of leadership: (a) Vision, (b) Getting people on board (buying into the vision), and (c) Strategy. He then dialogued these stages with the text of Haggai (:773):

If one thinks of strategy to get people to buy into the vision and then act upon their decision, then Haggai makes interesting reading material.

The strategy he followed can be structured in the following way:

- Creating an understanding of current realities in the society in Judah.
- Creating a need for change.
- Casting a vision of an envisaged future for the people of Judah.
- Indicating the way forward on how the envisaged future can be reached.

In the end he holds that Haggai was to a certain extent very successful as a leader but warns (:781) not to “idealise biblical leadership figures and try to imitate their styles of doing” due to the fact that their leadership models were very contextual. He settles that this should not dishearten us to critically engage the cases of leadership that we find in the biblical narratives (cf. Wessels 2003:781). To a large degree this is exactly what this study is trying to accomplish but it would try to go a step further by suggesting answers for modern-day realities.

## 7.2 Outdated maps

It was suggested in chapter 1 that society as a whole is experiencing a fundamental and widespread change. There is a shift from our modernistic way of thinking to something new. Some academics are afraid to name this, but others are bold enough to refer to it as post-modern (Niemandt 2007:25-26 and Sweet 1999:39) and others, not as bold, simply speak of an “emergent” way of thinking or an “in-between time” (Roxburgh 2010:28). Nevertheless, this has become our reality.

Different metaphors are used to describe this reality: Some call it a tsunami (Sweet 1999) and others refer to it as a perfect storm (Joubert 2007). The bottom line is that leaders are struggling to chart these new waters and to lead with confidence and clarity. Weideman (2009) showed in a study, in which he conducted seven focus groups with church leaders from different provinces and different cultures in South Africa, that they feel almost helpless and overwhelmed to face the challenges that this “huidige tydvak” (current time frame) poses to them. Their experiences were summarised (2009:108) as follows:

Die belewenis dat vinnige veranderings (oor 'n wye spektrum van die samelewing) groot druk op die interne en eksterne kapasiteit en hulpbronne van gemeenteleiers plaas. Baie van die gemeenteleiers beleef toenemende emosionele-uitputting en -nood as gevolg van hedendaagse eise wat gevoelens van moedeloosheid, eensaamheid en ook skuld by hulle veroorsaak.<sup>69</sup>

This unfamiliar territory leaves many leaders looking at the maps that guided them in the past, but as Roxburgh (2010:9) suggests, these maps are outdated and not able to navigate in this new reality. He argues that maps don't disappear when our reality changes; they stay and continue to shape our habits (:11). The challenge would be

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<sup>69</sup> An English translation of this would be the following: *The experience is that the rapid changes (over a broad spectrum of society) exert huge pressure on the internal and external capacity and resources of church leaders. Many of these leaders experience a growing sense of emotional burnout and emotional need, due to the current-day demands that leave them with feelings of discouragement, loneliness and guilt.*

to become “map-makers”. With the use of the maps we inherited, we should make new maps (:16).

This reality of “outdated maps” does have striking similarities with the Ezekiel story of exile. Ezekiel and his audience found themselves in new realities. First they were in exile with the hope of some rescue from Jerusalem and then their hopes were shattered when they received the news that the city had fallen. With this came the finality of the Babylonian exile. Old maps proved to be inadequate and the prophet had to, with the use of old maps (memories and images), create new maps that consisted of images of hope.

In the end all these realities boil down to the leader or communicator’s ability to lead change and paint a picture of a preferable future. On this matter (I believe) Ezekiel and his proposed communication process will have something to say. But before this is proposed and argued, let us take a look at some recent responses or models for leading change that were conceptualised in response to leading in a changing environment.

In the next section I will briefly look at four different responses that are claiming to offer help to leaders to chart these unfamiliar waters and to communicate change. I will try and refer to them as responses rather than models. They are responses that try to suggest answers on how to lead in a changing society or how to bring about change. I chose these four responses because they contribute to the same theme, but from different fields of study and with different objectives. They are chosen from fields of study that range from business and organizational, leadership and change management, and the field of practical theology<sup>70</sup>. The relevance of their selection will be elaborated on below. They are:

- The “change equation” of Beckhard and Harris (1987). Although conceptualised in 1983, it remains one of the most popular tools that leaders use to facilitate change. This response on how to bring change is one of the first ones that was conceptualised and it seemed to stick. I found reference to

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<sup>70</sup> Many theses from the field of practical theology are presented to respond to the rapid change in our modern-day society. I mentioned some of them in chapter 1. I will use Weideman’s response because it is recent and pertains to a study that was done in the church denomination of which I am a part.

their work in many other works.<sup>71</sup> For me it makes sense to look at non-church, non-theological contributions to this matter.

- John Kotter's "Eight-Stage Process of Creating Major Change" (1996). When the subject of change comes under discussion, the name of John Kotter and his contributions to the matter are usually mentioned. Including his work makes this section more exhaustive. The landscape of Organizational Change abounds with his influence and references to his work<sup>72</sup>.
- Roxburgh's "Missional Map-Making" (2010). Roxburgh is known for his writings on the problems that church leadership experiences in leading in a new environment.<sup>73</sup> Roxburgh suggests that a good understanding of our inherited maps and an ear for the stories of our pioneers are necessary for the making of new maps. This seems to have interesting correlations with Ezekiel. He also writes of "maps" and in his case "outdated maps" that supplement its similarities with Ezekiel and their situation.
- Weideman's "Ideation Recreation Circle" (2009). This response was chosen for three reasons: Firstly for the recentness (2009) of his study. Secondly because his research followed a phenomenological<sup>74</sup> approach and was not based solely on assumptions. Finally because it was done in a South African context among leaders that admitted that they find the challenges of the modern time frame daunting and overwhelming. These reasons made his

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<sup>71</sup> Pritchard (1992:75) refers to it as a "useful formula" when dealing with change. Dannemiller, James and Tolchinsky (1999:207) observe that this equation was adopted by the Ford Motor Company as part of their Whole-Scale campaign when they tried to move their "management culture from 'command and control' to a more participative style". In this case they called it the "Change Formula". Cummings (2004:23-41) in an article entitled "Organization development and change" also uses and builds on this equation.

<sup>72</sup> John Kotter has written six articles for the *Harvard Business Review*. These articles have sold more reprints than any other writer that wrote for this journal over the last twenty years. He produced book sales of over 2 million and orders for his books on change are in the top 1% on Amazon.com (cf. Biech 2010:98-101).

Jaap Boonstra (2004) from the University of Amsterdam edited a book entitled *Dynamics of Organizational Change and Learning*. Of the twenty articles included thirteen references are made to Kotter's work on organizational change.

<sup>73</sup> He also contributed to this matter in 2005 with a book entitled, *The Sky is Falling!?! Leaders Lost in Translation*.

<sup>74</sup> With "phenomenological" I mean that it was done with the help of focus groups that responded to a question. These responses helped in identifying a phenomenon that formed the focus of his study. His question (I translate and paraphrase) for these focus groups was: "What are your experiences concerning the demands of leading a church in the current time frame?"



model an eligible one to engage into dialogue with the Old Testament and Ezekiel's process in particular. Some similarities, as will be shown later, are evident between his "Ideation Recreation Circle" and that of Ezekiel's communication process.

### **7.3 Four suggested responses**

The aim of this next section is predominately to state the model as it is proposed. Later in the chapter I will indeed interact critically with all these responses when I dialogue the response of Ezekiel with these responses.

#### **7.3.1 The change equation: Beckhard and Harris**

Beckhard and Harris (1987:25) contributed the following equation as a response on how to manage and bring about change:

$$C = (ABD) > X$$

In this equation C = change, A = level of dissatisfaction with the current reality, B = clear picture of a desired state, D = the practical steps towards this desired state, and X = the cost of change.

Based on this model the assumption would be: for a leader to bring about change his followers must be well and truly aware of their current reality and that it is not a preferred state. They must know what they want and where the leader is planning to take them. This place needs to be painted in a clear and attractive way. When combined with practical steps to take them there, it becomes bigger than the price that they will have to pay for this change (cf. Beckhard & Harris 1987:25-27). I will show later that this response lacks in the area of communication and that some process of communication is needed to make (ABD) more real.

### **7.3.2 John Kotter's "Eight –Stage Process of Creating Major Change"**

In his book, *Leading change* (1996:33-147) John Kotter suggests eight stages for creating major change:

1. Establishing a sense of urgency – begin by examining the market you're in and the competitive realities. Look at opportunities and threats. Know where you are and what your realities are.
2. Creating a guiding coalition – putting together a team with enough power to lead the change.
3. Developing a vision and a strategy.
4. Communicating the change vision – using every vehicle possible to communicate the vision. This process also requires the guiding coalition to role model the behaviour expected.
5. Empowering broad-based action – this stage aims to get rid of obstacles and encourages risk taking and non-traditional ideas, activities, and actions.
6. Generating short-term wins – plan for visible improvements in performance. These improvements could be called "wins" and must be recognised and communicated.
7. Consolidating gains and producing more change – as the process gains momentum the leader can bring in more changes on more levels. This could realise in the hiring, promotion and development of people that played their part to bring about the change.
8. Anchoring new approaches in the culture – make sure you articulate the relation between the changes and the newly found success. Make it part of the company's culture.

### 7.3.3 Roxburgh's "Missional Map-Making"

Roxburgh (2010:31) speaks of an "in-between place" where we need to lead from. In this space "we're moving back and forth across a social and intellectual landscape that is both familiar and alien". As was mentioned earlier he feels that the maps that leaders have are outdated and that new "map-makers" need to come forward. He makes a few observations before proposing important components for the process of creating new maps:

- We cannot develop new maps without the appreciation of the maps that shaped our landscape and brought us to this place. Jumping forward into a so-called "post-modern" or "emergent" culture without understanding where you come from, will lead to attempts to shape the new world with the tools and paradigms of the old one. The proper understanding of reality as it is becomes crucial. Facing "brutal facts" as Jim Collins (2001:65) calls it, may not be easy, but will help with addressing the challenges of the current reality.
- The new maps must emerge through our engagement with the biblical narrative. The Exodus narrative, where slaves can imagine a new land filled with milk and honey and the narrative of the Exile, where displaced people can imagine a homecoming, must form the basis of our new hope. According to Roxburgh one must accept the invitation to revisit the biblical narrative in order to reshape our imagination and thereby our future.
- New maps are made on the journey and not prior to the journey. The mapping must be done "in pencil" due to the volatility of the journey. This is somewhat different to strategic planning as we know it, Roxburgh (:74) suggests.
- The maps that are suggested are not always what commonsense suggests and are many times "out of the box" solutions.

Roxburgh's components for the map-making process are: *Firstly* one must cultivate one's own core identity in this changed environment. The leader of the church must establish who he/she is and who they are as a church. *Secondly* the leader must

lead the church to a place where they can cultivate parallel cultures. It is on a cultural level that the church must become visible. Community involvement must be high up on the agenda. The new environment does not take kindly to patronising from the church and its leaders. *Finally*, partnerships must be formed between local communities, neighbourhoods and local churches in this map-making process.

### **7.3.4 Weideman's "Ideation Recreation Circle"**

Weideman's (2009:182-204) research in the area of practical theology, and in particular church leadership, suggests the following steps<sup>75</sup> as response or framework as he puts it, to help church leaders in particular to cope with the demands of the "huidige tydvak" (current time frame). In an interview with him (02/11/2011) he mentioned that his research is included in a programme that will be implemented shortly in his denomination (one of the largest church denominations in South Africa) as part of a "Pastors' Professional Development" (PPD). This makes his response particularly relevant for dialogue with this study.

- Step one: Observing – Leaders must become more aware of the reality that they find themselves in. He/she must be more conscious of the transitions and changes that are happening in his/her leadership environment and to state the reality and understand it.
- Step two: Start to engage with this reality by returning to the roots. In this case these roots are: Christian narratives, values, traditions and principles of leadership.
- Step three: Dialogue is proposed. Leaders cannot stand alone and must enter into conversations with other leaders to understand the reality they find themselves in. Others can help to name and identify the challenges. Once named they can be confronted.
- Step four: Letting go – The process of relinquishing the things that are known and comfortable in order to receive or confront something new. The

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<sup>75</sup> Note that it is translated from its original Afrikaans to English and there might be other preferences on the wording of certain concepts.

old maps must be called “old” so that the need for new ones can become more urgent.

- Step five: Leaders need to try and understand what the congregation and community around them experience. In many cases leaders are trying to lead where leadership is not needed and help where help is not asked for. The leader must fully submerge in his/her culture to understand their felt needs, whether they are disillusionment or insecurity.
- Step six: Imagining – A phase of imagining new possibilities in the context of the current reality. The leader should ask questions like “what if” and dream of creative ways to address the needs.
- Step seven: Adjustments are to be made without compromising the core values. It is a known fact that successful and relevant companies over the years managed to make adjustments to their vision and products without compromising their core values.
- Step eight: Understanding the new “way of thinking” that emerged from this process and endeavour to build on it as a new paradigm.

This in Weideman’s opinion would be a response that could help church leaders address the challenges of the current-day reality. It will help them to strategize a plan of action that would be a new map that can take leaders and followers forward into uncharted territory. I think that Weideman’s response might be lacking in two areas. The first one would be that church can become (and in many cases is) a sub-culture that sometimes engages with issues and problems that are irrelevant to the broader community. If a church starts to influence its community’s values and culture by being relevant to their needs, this response of Weideman can make a contribution to the so-called “modern-day reality” that this study is suggesting as backdrop to any relevant communication process. The other area where his response might be lacking is in the area of communication. Many of the steps that are suggested by Weideman are personal in nature and pertain to the leader. There is no suggestion of communication. I will elaborate on this later when I juxtapose it with Ezekiel’s communication process.

The abovementioned responses all deal with different aspects of facing and responding to realities. Ezekiel responded to his reality with communication. It is this communication method that will form the crux of the next section.

#### 7.4 Ezekiel's communication process

In the Old Testament it was customary that people turned to their prophets in times of desperation. They needed words of explanation and comfort from their oracles. This is classically illustrated by the actions of the eager and desperate last king of Judah, Zedekiah, who secretly sent for the prophet Jeremiah:

Then King Zedekiah sent for him and had him brought to the palace, where he asked him privately, "Is there any word from the Lord?" (Jer 37:17)

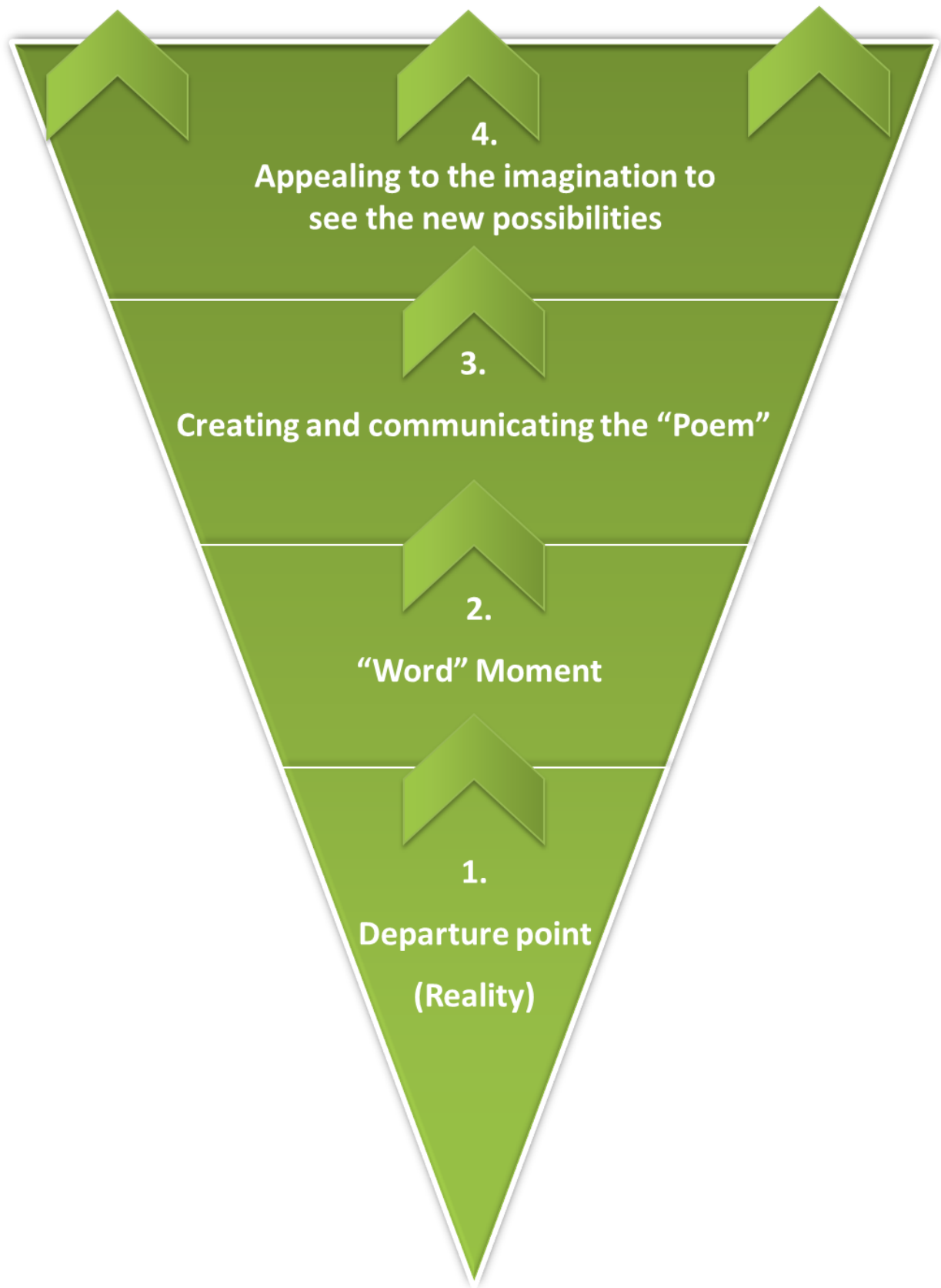
The prophetic utterances of the prophets were in many ways the direction that the people and their leaders needed in difficult times. Ezekiel had several visits from the elders of his community (cf. Ez 8:1; 14:1; 20:1). They came for his words – his communication. These words and communication were claimed to be the words of YHWH.

A process of communication was evident in the way Ezekiel communicated to his audience. I will summarise it broadly and then embark on the detail of the process:

It appears that his communication *firstly* starts with the reality: the place they find themselves in. In this reality the prophet *secondly* receives a word that he claims has much higher authority. These are the words of YHWH. This happens in what Zimmerli (see paragraph 2.3.2.2) calls a "*dabar moment*". *Thirdly*, out of this moment flows communication. This communication is poetic in nature and is filled with metaphors and images. It is either critical or energising in its nature. It appears that there may be a time span between the "*dabar moment*" and the actual communication. In this time the prophet crafts his communication, or as it shall be called, his "poem". *Fourthly*, this communication – due to its rich imagery – latches onto the imaginations of the audience and helps them own, accept and understand,

but also to dream. This dream in time becomes their new reality. This emphasizes the idea that prophets do not necessarily predict the future but seed it with poetry and images.

The figure below will aid in guiding the discussion of the proposed communication model. The outline of this next section will immediately after each step take up the dialogue with the proposed responses and also suggest the possible Old Testament perspective on the modern-day reality. This would aid reading and make the application while the discussion is still fresh in the memory.



*Fig 7.1 Ezekiel's communication process*



## 7.4.1 Step one (departure point)<sup>76</sup>

### 7.4.1.1 The reality of exile

It was established in chapters 3, 4 and 5 of this study that the first exile of 597 and final exile of 587 were the reality of Ezekiel and his communication. Mein (2001:1) calls it a period of “unparalleled crisis for the Jewish people, as successive Babylonian invasions left Judah devastated and Jerusalem in ruins”. To this reality the book of Ezekiel can almost be seen as a commentary that tries to explain the subsequent exile as a result of the people’s moral failure.

The book of Ezekiel itself puts the prophet among a first deportation of exiles that were taken by Nebuchadnezzar in 597 BCE. These exiles were taken from the elite of Jerusalem. The Zadokite priests that Ezekiel was part of were also taken with this group. Although this assumption has been challenged on many occasions<sup>77</sup> it appears to hold firm as the most probable location for the prophet Ezekiel. Although Jews were found in three different locations during Ezekiel’s tenure as prophet, his primary audience was the community of Jews in Babylon (cf. Block 1997:4-5). Without reconstructing the exilic conditions, one can easily cite some of the realities that these people experienced:

- Ezekiel, at the age of thirty<sup>78</sup>, finds himself away from the temple where he so hoped to serve as a priest. The book starts by stating that this priest Ezekiel was thirty. Thirty was the year that he was supposed to start serving as a priest according to Numbers 4:30. Many of his own hopes and dreams were scattered. In this reality he receives the call to be a prophet (cf. Ez 2:3-5).

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<sup>76</sup> For the purpose of the process this first point is called a step, but is rather a point from where the communication departs: a birthplace for the communication that is to follow.

<sup>77</sup> It was Holscher who in 1924 opened a new discussion on the authorship of Ezekiel that started some of the opposing views on the matter of Ezekiel’s location. Up until then a consensus prevailed that the book showed the mark of one single author. Holscher attributed only 147 of the 1273 verses in Ezekiel to the original prophet. This critical handling of Ezekiel sparked a range of critical responses to the research on this book. Many of these were of the opinion that Ezekiel was either a pseudo author who used Ezekiel as a literary figure. Without a doubt this posed questions about the prophet’s location. Especially Torrey (1930) found Ezekiel’s consistent focus on Jerusalem as a problem for placing the prophet in exile. These theories have however been rejected of late by scholars like Zimmerli (1979) and Greenberg (1983) (cf. McKeating 1993:30-61; Mein 2001:40-53).

<sup>78</sup> “Since no proposal that dates ‘thirtieth year’ from the exile of Jehoiachin is completely satisfying, the explanation of Origen long ago remains the most likely: the *terminus a quo* is the year of the prophet’s own birth” (cf. Block 1997:82). Blenkinsopp (1990:16-17) is also a proponent of this view.

- There was a sense of bewilderment and displacement that was part of their reality, because they had been removed from their homes and families were probably divided and torn apart<sup>79</sup>. They probably left behind family, social status and material possessions. They must have seen people killed during the siege and feared for their own lives (cf. Renz 1999:45).
- They also exchanged their homeland with its mountains and cooler climate for the flat and hot lowlands of Babylon (cf. Renz 1999:45).
- Certain things failed them: the monarchy and its leaders failed them and to a degree they felt that YHWH let them down as well. The latter would be something that the prophet would address in detail to show them that it was not YHWH that let them down, but their own covenant infidelity.
- Many things that gave them security were stripped away from them. Their temple and the cultic practices that surrounded it gave them security; this was now far away and in danger of being destroyed.
- A new culture and new language were also part of their new reality. This made them feel even more dejected and lost.

Many things can probably be added to this list but it is noteworthy to mention that there are those that argue that the conditions in exile were not all bad and that many of the Judeans quickly adapted to these new circumstances<sup>80</sup>. Jeremiah (29:4-7) encouraged those who went into exile to engage in the culture and life of the foreign country. Nevertheless to find oneself in a new country and culture against your will, taken there by your country's archenemy must have been a reality that was more disruptive than stable.

This abovementioned reality forms the backdrop of Ezekiel's communication and therefore becomes his departure point.

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<sup>79</sup> "There is some confusion about how many people were actually deported. The 10 000 captives of 2 Kings 24:14 is contradicted by the 7 000 men of valour and 1 000 craftsmen and smiths of verse 16" (cf. Mein 2001:55). Jeremiah 52:28 makes the numbers even more discrepant by referring to 3 023. On this matter one can agree with Robert Carroll (1986:869) "such discrepancies are better not harmonized but accepted as evidence for the lack of definitive evidence available to the editors of the biblical stories".

<sup>80</sup> Mein (2001:66-73) notes that these exiles were neither prisoners nor slaves and were allowed some personal freedom to roam round and organise some sort of a community.

#### 7.4.1.2 Possible dialogue with the other responses

It is evident in most of the models – be it change or leadership models – that perceived reality becomes the breeding ground for the need for change or new direction.

- In the Change Equation of Beckhard and Harris –  $C = (ABD) \times X$  – A stands for the level of dissatisfaction with the current reality. There is no doubt that the exiles must have experienced some level of dissatisfaction with their current reality.
- Kotter (1996:35-49) speaks of a “sense of urgency” that comes from knowing your market, your competition and the reality you find yourself in.
- Roxburgh (2010:9-11) admits that our reality is: not being able to chart the new landscape that we (in his case religious institutions) find ourselves in. The problem of sitting with old maps where new ones are required.
- In Weideman’s Ideation Circle it is necessary for the leader to make observations of the changes that happen in his/her leadership environment. Good observation will help in understanding the reality (cf. 2009:204).

Ezekiel is therefore no different and the prophet opens his book by stating his reality:

“... while I was among the exiles by the Kebar river...” (Ez 1:1)

The conclusion must then be: for relevant communication to follow a good understanding of your own and your audience’s, reality is needed. This would be the logical first step in Ezekiel’s communication process (cf. Figure 7:1).

### 7.4.1.3 Perspective on modern-day realities

What would the perspective be that this Old Testament book brings to our modern-day reality? The communicator who faces a new reality must be part of the reality. He needs to carry the reality like a burden. In some cases prophecies are referred to as “oracles”. The word **נִשְׁבַּע** is used in some prophecies and is usually translated with the word “oracle”.<sup>81</sup> Verhoef (2006:19), when commenting on this word in Nahum 1:1, suggests that this word could also be translated with “burden” and implies that the communicator of the oracle carries a heavy burden that needs to be communicated. Ezekiel uses this word once (24:25), but in a different context and with a different meaning but the idea is important: the reality must lay a burden on the communicator to which he must respond with a word/oracle/prophecy.

It is realities that create the vacuums in our modern-day society. In this vacuum uncertainty abounds and leadership is needed. There are two options as Sweet (1999) so rightly puts it in the sub-title of his book *Soulsunami, “Sink or Swim in New Millennium Culture”*. The communicator can hide away or deny the reality or he/she can embrace it like Ezekiel and begin the process of communication. In this process the next step would be to respond to the reality. In Ezekiel’s case he responded with a word. This word(s) was/were several prophecies that were filled with vivid images and graphic metaphors. His words accused, they explained, they refreshed the memory, they warned, they suggested, and they hoped. In the end they started to create something new.

The next step in Ezekiel’s communication process that was detected from reading the texts is what appears to be “a word event”. This “word event” will be conceptualised in the next section of this chapter.

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<sup>81</sup> For a more detailed discussion of this concept, see Floyd, MH. (2002). The **נִשְׁבַּע** (massa’) as a Type of Prophetic Book. *JBL* 121, 3, 401-422.

## 7.4.2 Step 2 – The “word event”

### 7.4.2.1 The “word event” in general and in Ezekiel

It was observed on several occasions when the texts were studied that most of Ezekiel’s prophecies start with or have somewhere at the outset the following phrase: **וַיְהִי דְבַר־יְהוָה אֵלַי לֵאמֹר**, translated as “the word of the Lord came to me”. A closer study of the Ezekiel prophecies revealed thirty-two occurrences of this phrase. It was noted earlier that Greenberg (1983:83) suggests more than fifty occurrences of this phrase. Although found in Jeremiah (six times) and in Zechariah (twice) this phrase is very distinctive to Ezekiel’s communication. Zimmerli (1982:99-110) calls this the “דבר (word) event” that is filled with the revelation of YHWH himself. This becomes throughout the book of Ezekiel like a rhythmic response. YHWH responds to the need of the moment with his word.

The question would be as to what lies behind this phrase? What happens in this moment? Does the prophet have some divine revelation or is this the so-called “spiritual trance” that makes them experience messages from gods. Blenkinsopp (1983:41-42) deals with the issue of ecstasy when he discusses the social location of the prophet. To him prophets (biblical and other religions) do experience these trances to enhance their ability to receive a divine message. Certain stimulants like music, drums, self-laceration, and drugs are used to obtain this state. This state would then indicate some sort of a possession and therefore the possibility of divine intervention and divine messages being received. There are those who argue that biblical prophets receive this state by being possessed by the spirit of YHWH. Robson (2006:28-34) writes on this “word event” and makes two observations: He firstly observes that the word event is closely linked to YHWH and shows how the phrase “word of YHWH” appears 225 times in the Old Testament and secondly he argues that in Ezekiel it is also linked with the “spirit of YHWH”. Wilson (1980:145) as far back as the early eighties held the position that there was a close correlation between spirit possession and this “word” that the prophet receives. This was the case in particularly the Ephraimite tradition (:135-145). It is however noticeable that

only Ezekiel connects his experiences of inspiration to the spirit of YHWH (Ez 11:5), for the rest, spiritual ecstasy or inspiration by the spirit are seen as foolish and not appropriate. Mowinckel (2002:85)<sup>82</sup> cites Hosea 9:7b: “The prophet is a fool, the man of the spirit is mad”, and shows that most of the spirit activities of the prophets were not seen in a good light. “The older reforming prophets rejected the idea of inspiration in the form of possession by YHWH’s spirit” (:85). He argues that the inspiration of the prophets came when they withdrew from society<sup>83</sup> and allowed the word of YHWH to come to them (:88-89).

This opens the important discussion on the “word moment”. What then is the prophet’s conception of YHWH’s word? Mowinckel (2002:90) notes that:

A word in general did not mean to the ancient Israelite what we understand by a mere word. The word is active, and filled with the speaker’s “mental content”; his feelings, thoughts and will issue a word, which is also an act. YHWH’s word is also an action. It is a real active force, a potency that YHWH can “send forth” and that can “descend upon” a people with devastating effect (Isa 9:7).<sup>84</sup>

The fact of the matter is that Ezekiel frequently uses the phrase “and the word of the Lord came to me”. Maybe it can be argued that the prophet just uses this phrase to give more authority to his own words or the words that he perceived as may have come from YHWH. Robson (2006:29) agrees with this. To him this is also a “call to attention formula” that the prophet employs to authenticate his communication. The LXX translate the Hebrew word דבר with two different Greek words: “logos” and “rhema”. In the Historical Books of the Old Testament the translators preferred “logos” but in the prophetic books “rhema” dominates almost eightfold. The word “rhema” is better understood as “utterance” (cf. Brown1967:1087). If “utterance” is more often implied in the prophetic books, it opens the discussion even further. Does

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<sup>82</sup> I am aware that Sigmund Mowinckel passed away a long time ago, but the publication I studied was published in 2002, *The Spirit and the Word*, and was edited by KC Hansen in honour of Mowinckel.

<sup>83</sup> “I did not sit in the company of merry makers, nor did I rejoice; I sat alone, because your hand was upon me, for you had filled me with indignation.” Jeremiah 15:17

<sup>84</sup> “... so is my word that goes forth from my mouth; it shall not return empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and prosper in things for which I sent it.” Isaiah 55:10-11

the prophet receive a direct and audible utterance from YHWH? On two occasions (Ez 14:1; 20:1) the elders are present during this “word event” that Ezekiel experiences. They sit in front of Ezekiel when it happens, but the prophet still needs to communicate it to them. To me this indicates that the “word event” happens privately. If it happened publicly the need for prophetic utterance would not be needed. Robson (2006:34) and Ellens (2000:1386) agree on this. Ellens (2000:1386) does make the observation that many times this word is “metaphoric” in nature. This was evident in the communication of Ezekiel that I observed. The prophet received his messages in the form of metaphors that he communicated along with some well-known messenger-, recognition-, and word-formulas.

Meier (2009:53-54) tries to understand the manner of the revelation of this “word” that comes to the prophet. He feels that the fact that there is a “lack of interest” in most prophetic literature to define this, points to the fact that we are indeed dealing with a tradition where “congenial dialogue” between God and the prophet was supposed. Important for this study is the fact that Meier (2009:59) notes that a change happens in the book of Ezekiel. The revelation of YHWH is much more theophanic in nature. The dialogue also becomes less evident and the prophet on many occasions seems to be on the receiving end of a word, without being able to respond to YHWH. The prophet’s response must be his communication with his audience.

Brueggemann (2007:9-16) offers three modes of explanation for the word that is “other than one’s own”:

1. It comes from a good and strong sense of calling. The prophet is thoroughly aware of the fact that there is a divine “impingement”<sup>85</sup> on their lives. Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel all allow for an elaborate narrative of their calling and how YHWH promised to be with them in everything they will do. This would also include communicating. The prophet’s words would be YHWH’s words as well.

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<sup>85</sup> The word “impingement” is used by Brueggemann (2007).

2. There is this claim that the prophets had access to some form of divine counsel (cf. Jer 23:18; 22). In other words they somehow have this experience of standing amongst the gods and receive from them their words.
3. Finally, the messenger formula, “thus saith the Lord” is more evidence that the prophet claims to receive words that are other than his own.

For me this “word event” can be a little bit of both: The prophet can receive a dream, vision or impingement from YHWH, but he also listens with his own ears and understanding. He speaks out of his own knowledge of how YHWH would respond as well. This is illustrated in the introductory verses of the book of Jeremiah:

*The words of Jeremiah son of Hilkiah, one of the priests at Anathoth in the territory of Benjamin. The word of the Lord came to him in the thirteenth year of the reign of Josiah son of Amon king of Judah (Jer 1:1-2).*

Brueggemann (2007:14-15) makes a good argument for the fact that most prophetic utterances are deeply grounded in tradition and in particular the tradition of Deuteronomy. Mowinckel (2002:94) also makes this point to a degree when he argues that many of the prophets’ convictions concerning the word of YHWH came from them “knowing” YHWH’s nature and mode of actions that are governed by moral norms; in most cases revolving around the covenant agreements.

In the light of this one can argue that Ezekiel’s experience of this “word event” was on the one hand an experience he had with YHWH: this could be a realization of something or a sense of inspiration. On the other hand this “word event” was also a realization of truth that was in him due to his knowledge of YHWH. The words of the prophet and the “word of the Lord” are combined to create a response to a specific reality. Ezekiel, more than any other prophet, authenticates his words by connecting them to the words of YHWH. It became obvious when the selected texts of Ezekiel were studied that a “word event” preceded his communication (cf. Ez 6:1; 7:1; 16:1; 34:1; 36:16; 37:15).



#### 7.4.2.2 Possible dialogue with the other responses

If one compares this “word event in Ezekiel” to the four responses that are being used to dialogue with, one finds that this specific moment is somewhat unique to the prophets and specifically to Ezekiel. The uniqueness lies in the presumed inspiration that forms part of this moment. Neither Beckhard and Harris, nor Kotter, nor Weideman refer to a moment where inspiration from somewhere (or someone) is brought into the equation to respond to the reality. In most cases a picture of a vision of the future is supposed, but there is no indication as to where it may come from or from what it may be seeded. Beckhard and Harris put a B in their equation that is a “clear picture of a desired state”, and John Kotter’s step 3 suggests that a vision and strategy must be formulated. Roxburgh (2010:36-37) does have a suggestion that may have correlations with Ezekiel’s “word event”. He suggests that an engagement with the biblical narrative is needed to help with the emergence of new maps. This may be the part where the prophet makes assumptions based on his knowledge of YHWH and by engaging in the biblical narrative one can certainly learn something about YHWH and the way He operates and functions. Weideman shares the same idea when he suggests that a “return to the roots” is needed to respond to the current-day reality. The roots according to him would be Christian (biblical) narratives, values and traditions and principles. He does suggest a process he calls “retreat and personal devotion” that can help the leader to better connect with these roots (cf. Weideman 2009:190-194). This again is the same as the second part of the “word event” where the prophet makes an assumption based on knowledge and tradition. Weideman does not suggest a moment of inspiration that might be the same as Ezekiel’s first part of the “word event”. In this dialogue Ezekiel’s “word event” seems unique in suggesting two possible components as was mentioned earlier: A sense of inspiration from YHWH and assumptions based on “knowledge” of YHWH.

### 7.4.2.3 Perspective on modern-day realities

How would the modern-day communicator experience this “word event”? In some Christian traditions it is taken as a given that inspiration from God is part of the communicating process. Every time a pastor/priest or Christian communicator approaches a podium it is assumed by the audience that what he/she has got to say will be words more than his/her own. Brueggemann (2007:13) tries to explain this “words other than one’s own” by acknowledging that “some direct, personal intimate impingement of God” on the preacher is a prerequisite for effective preaching. He notes however that a correlation exists between what this inspiration is and the preacher’s own traditions (mainly rooted in the text of the Bible) and take on reality.

I would suggest that a few possible actions, as seen from the text of Ezekiel and Old Testament prophetic tradition, might bring about this “word event” that is so crucial in communicating:

- Firstly a good take on reality is needed to be in a space where this “word” can be received. If the communicator is out of touch with the realities his audience are facing, his communication will be irrelevant.
- Secondly it appears that solitude plays a part in receiving this word.<sup>86</sup> It appears that the prophets either withdrew<sup>87</sup> themselves for a time or moved themselves to a place where they could be comfortable to receive “the word” from YHWH (cf. 1 Kgs 19:12-13; Jer 15:17b; Hab 2:1 Ez 9:8). In the modern context this would mean to quiet the many voices that form part of our everyday lives. Some traditions would suggest prayer and others contemplation; nevertheless in these moments a communicator might find the inspiration or creation of an idea or thought that may be his own or might be “other than his own”.

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<sup>86</sup> Prophets in general operated much more peripherally than other institutions or traditions like for instance scribes and priests. This allowed them to criticise the economic and social policy of the monarchy independently as agents of YHWH, but also supplied them with ample solitude (cf. Van Heerden 1991:207-208).

<sup>87</sup> This is also seen in the life of Jesus in the New Testament who came as a prophet and claimed to speak “words” he received from God (cf. Mark 1:12-13, 35; 6:31, 46; 9:2; 14:32).

- Finally a good knowledge of God and the biblical traditions may also aid this moment. It was shown earlier that the prophets drew from their knowledge of YHWH and from the traditions they stood in. A good modern day communicator must then firstly be rooted in the biblical narratives<sup>88</sup>. He must have respect and knowledge for the biblical text and be able to move to it from the modern-day reality and from it to the reality. Secondly he must have some relational knowledge of God. This may be the same type of interpretation that Goldingay (2011:43) calls “believing criticism”.<sup>89</sup> This type of interpretation of the text according to him (:50) “enthuse(s) over the way the Spirit inspires imaginative leaps in the use of scripture that may give words significance”. This may be a point of dispute because many claim that this is not possible, but it is claimed in most Christian traditions that this is possible to some degree or less.

This “word” or inspiration moment is the beginning of the prophet’s response to the reality. After this has happened the prophet enters the next step. He creates his communication material or as laid out in the steps: He creates a poem.

### **7.4.3 Step 3 – Creating and communicating the poem**

#### **7.4.3.1 Ezekiel: Talented poet**

A next step in the communication of Ezekiel is surely the delivery of this “word” that he received. I would like to argue that this communication is twofold in nature and that before the prophet goes public with his message and communicates it, he takes time to create his message or as it shall be called: his poem. We are not sure when or how this happens but it is evident, as was shown in the final remarks of chapters 4

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<sup>88</sup> Goldingay (2011:258) notes that the prophets used narratives to make theological statements about God. The prophets built their communication on these narratives.

<sup>89</sup> *Believing criticism* believes that everything in the Bible is indeed true, but that not everything that the church and scholars teach about it is always true. Goldingay (2011:46) notes that none of the questions that were asked in the nineteenth century have been solved and that interpretation to stay relevant needs to focus on what can be known and applied from the text rather than focussing on “questions that run into the sand”.

and 5 that the choice of imagery and metaphors was not accidental, but chosen for a specific reason to communicate something. It is hard to believe that this communication was spontaneous; “spur of the moment” responses or that they were an autonomic response to some divine inspiration. With autonomic response I refer to the belief that Bible writers wrote or spoke while they were totally under the influence of some divine power; a belief that is held in many conservative Christian circles.<sup>90</sup>

The interaction with the text of Ezekiel that was demarcated for this study confirmed this: apart from the fact that the whole of Ezekiel 7 is in the form of poetry, the other texts studied were filled with images, metaphors and sign-acts. All these are part and parcel of poetic literature. If one thinks of the powerful metaphor of Jerusalem – as an orphan turned queen turned harlot – in Ezekiel 16, one cannot but conclude that the prophet had to take time to prepare this oracle. He had to think about how it would flow and how it would best communicate the “word” that he felt was needed as a response to his audience’s reality at that moment. On the other hand, if you have to speak life into the hopeless exilic community, what better way than to speak of a “valley of dry bones” that at one stage confesses their own hopelessness (Ez 37:1-14)? What better way than to bring them together and to life due to the spirit that moves through them? For these poetic forms of communication to take place the prophet (or dare we say poet) must take time to prepare the poem and indeed be a poet of some sort.

This statement probably needs some elaboration. Robert Carroll (1996:25-31) in a response to a paper by Auld (1996) made the following statement: “the individuals traditionally known as prophets should not be regarded as prophets but require a different description. They were certainly poets, probably intellectuals, and possibly ideologues” (:25). He observes that the usually open and hostile attack of the prophets on the social institutions is more likened to poets than prophets. We find

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<sup>90</sup> I am aware of the debate in Prophetic Studies that deals with the question of prophet as “social phenomenon or a literary one” (cf. Nissinen 2009:106). They argue that in the past the prophet was too easily seen as the writer of the material as well (cf. Wessels 2009:216-217). Scholars like Edelmann (2009) and Ben Zvi (2009) are proponents of the view that many literatures originated in the “second temple period” at the hands of “literati”. These literati would then be far removed from the original producer of the oracles, but also clothed with ideology (Ben Zvi 2009:24-25).

throughout history that it is the artists in general who question and challenge the social structures. Carroll (:27-28) holds that the original prophets were poets, but that the process of redaction transformed them into conventional prophets. In support of his notion he quotes Max Weber who called the prophets “demagogues and pamphleteers” who through their poems suggested the need for social change.

Ezekiel the prophet/poet (as presented to us in the book of Ezekiel) then communicates his poem – sometimes in a poetic structure and manner, (cf. Ez 7:1-27; 17:1-9; 19:1-14; 21:8-17, 28-32; 27:1-36; 28: 11-19; 29:3-7; 30:1-6; 31:1-9; and 32:1-32), on other occasions with the use of vivid imagery as suggested in a previous paragraph or with the help of sign-acts (cf. Ez 3:22-27 / 24:25-27 / 33:21-22; chapters 4-5; 6:11-12; 12:1-16, 17-20; 21:11-29; 24:15-24; 37:15-28) that help to illustrate his message. His communication then challenges the reality or as Brueggemann (1989:3) articulates, “poets that speak against a prose world” and with “prose world” he refers to the organized and settled reality that the audience find themselves in. It becomes daring speech that is dramatic and alternative – alternative to the current reality – and assaults the imagination.

In the studied chapters of Ezekiel, the prophet showed the exiles the impending doom due to their own deeds (Ez 6, 7, and 16), but also the possibility of salvation (Ez 34, 36, and 37) on account of YHWH’s goodness. This was shown at the end of chapters 4, 5 and 6 of this study.

#### **7.4.3.2 Possible dialogue with the other responses**

For any audience that needs to move through change or to a new reality it is crucial to see a picture of this change or reality. This picture gets painted by the communication of the leaders. In many companies, Non Profit Organisations and churches this is articulated in the vision- or mission-statement. This is usually a paragraph or slogan that reminds the reader of what they are about and what they want to achieve.

Beckhard and Harris (1977:25-27) in their “change equation” make the “D” of their equation “the practical steps towards this desired state”. This assumes that these steps were created or strategized at some stage: very much the same as the way the prophet takes time to create and communicate his “word” in a poetic manner.

Kotter’s “Eight-Stage Process of Creating Major Change” includes two steps that very much resemble what was stated about the prophet in the previous sub-section. He suggests as a third step: Developing a vision and strategy, and as a fourth step: Communicating the change vision (1996:85). Now this communication according to him must use every vehicle possible to communicate the vision. Kotter (1996:91-93) suggests that metaphors must be used to communicate as well. He (:92) gives the following example of how a metaphor can better communicate a vision:

*Version #1: We need to retain the advantages of economies of great scale and yet become much less bureaucratic and slow in decision making in order to help ourselves retain and win customers in a very tough business environment (thirty-nine words).*

*Version #2: We need to become less like an elephant and more like a customer-friendly *Tyrannosaurus rex* (sixteen words).*

The first step would definitely resemble how the prophet took time to prepare his oracle and the second steps reminds of how Ezekiel used “every vehicle possible” (poems, metaphors, sign-acts, and imagination) to communicate his message.

The “Missional Map-Making” of Roxburgh does not allow for a dialogue on this step of Ezekiel’s communication process.

Steps three and five of Weideman’s “Ideation Circles” indicate means of possible dialogue with Ezekiel’s process. These steps suggest that the leader engage in conversations with other leaders to gather information on their reality and on ways to respond to it. Also, they need to submerge themselves in their culture to become relevant in their leadership. He does not suggest any ways on how the leader is to

communicate his/her insights or plans. On this point one might feel that his response has deficiencies. If a leader has made some discoveries that will help his/her followers to change or respond to realities, he/she needs to be able to communicate this and communicate it in such a manner that it moves the audience to some sort of action. Many of his (Weideman's) suggested steps happen in a vacuum and one is not sure how they would play out publicly. In my opinion this is crucial and part of our modern-day reality. Our poets, preachers, communicators and leaders only respond by pointing to the problem and do not tell of ways through these uncharted territories.

#### **7.4.3.3 Perspective on modern-day realities**

Ezekiel's process suggests that after the prophet received his message ("word event") a next step was to sit down and take time to best prepare a piece of communication (communique) that would get the audience's attention and also latch on to their imaginations. When this communication happens (as was studied in the extracted chapters from Ezekiel) it is filled with poetry, metaphors, images, and sign-acts. I showed in chapter 6 how psychologists use imagination to help their patients understand their stories and to create new stories on their way to recovery and how Ezekiel did the same with the use of prophetic imagination. This brings interesting perspectives to the modern-day communicator.

It firstly suggests preparation. If the communicator (or leader, or preacher) claims to have received a "word other than his/her own", time must be set aside to prepare a communique that will engage the audience.

Secondly, this "piece of communication" could be called anything from a "talk" to the more traditional sermon, but it must be a response to the reality (step 1 of Ezekiel's process) and it must be a "word" that responds to this reality (step 2 of the process).

Thirdly rhetorical devices like poetry, images, metaphors and sign-acts must be included to help the audience remember and understand the communication. Sandra Levy (2008:50-65) advocates the fact that an audience can easily meet God and his revelation to a specific reality through poetry. She then shows through poems by RS

Thomas, Wendell Berry, Denise Levertov, and WH Auden how a poet uses themes like silence, faith, doubt, and misery to communicate something of the faith journey and interaction with God. This would mean that the communicator can use the many poems (even the visual arts as she also suggests) that are at our disposal as a tool to communicate. John Ortberg, a modern-day communicator, used the famous “Creation of Adam” fresco by Michelangelo to illustrate God’s actions of love toward mankind and mankind’s reluctance to respond. In the painting God appears to be determined to reach out and be with the person he created while Adam only has to lift his finger to touch his creator (cf. Ortberg 2005:13-14). This image helps to communicate a truth. Communicators have used jars filled with stones, water bottles, poems, songs, and recently clip from movies, to help them communicate and turn their piece of communication into a relevant modern-day poem. This step requires time and creativity but can be helpful to an audience that find themselves in a fast changing and highly challenging environment.

#### **7.4.4 Step 4 – Appealing to the imagination to see the new possibilities**

##### **7.4.4.1 Ezekiel’s use of the imagination**

This point was illustrated in chapter 6 under paragraph 6.4 where it was shown that Ezekiel’s prophetic imagination was divided into two types of imagining. The first type was the so-called “prophetic criticizing” that formed part of the chapters studied prior to the fall of Jerusalem (Ez 6,7, and 16) and the other part was called “prophetic energizing” and was taken from his prophecies after the fall of Jerusalem (Ez 34, 36, and 37). I will therefore not discuss it in full here, but only include a summary to aid the dialogue that will follow.



<b>Ezekiel 6, 7 and 16<sup>91</sup></b>	
<b>Metaphor or image</b>	<b>Imagination appeal</b>
Sword	YHWH has now turned against them
Mountains and land	totality
Scattering of flock	No leadership and no protection
YHWH turning his face away	Disappointment of YHWH as betrayed partner and seriousness of the situation
Orphan who became queen who became a harlot	The actions of affection by YHWH are thrown back into his face. Their deeds are the ultimate betrayal.
<b>Words or phrases</b>	<b>Imagination appeal</b>
Detestable practices	YHWH's actions were justified
Covenant	The infidelity is played against YHWH's loyalty towards the covenant
End has come	Finality
They will know that I am the Lord	The imagination has gone full circle and a realization of their reality and the part they played in creating it
<b>Ezekiel 34, 36, and 37<sup>92</sup></b>	
<b>Metaphor or image</b>	<b>Imagination appeal</b>
YHWH as their shepherd	He juxtaposes the leaders' neglect against YHWH's care and protection
Covenant	A new covenant where they will act as faithful covenant partners and have a faithful servant (like David) ruling over them
Land and mountains	Where it was previously used to proclaim the judgment in its totality it is now used to show the salvation in its totality.
Dry bones that become an army	They are depleted of hope and

<sup>91</sup> For a detailed discussion see paragraphs 4.5 and 6.4.1.

<sup>92</sup> For a detailed discussion of this see paragraphs 5.5 and 6.4.2.

	expectation and truly defeated but they come together as an army with expectation
Graves open	Their dead and dried up hopes will come to life
the two sticks	Two nations becoming one
<b>Words or phrases</b>	<b>Imagination appeal</b>
I will be their God, and they will be my people	Again the imagination's circle is completed and their expectations are at their fullest

It was argued previously that Ezekiel used his words, metaphors and images to appeal to his audience's imaginations to help them in the first instance understand their reality and in the second place to help them embrace future possibilities. How this dialogues with current responses and what perspective this gives to the modern-day communicator will be the subject of the next section.

#### 7.4.4.2 Possible dialogue with other responses

In the "change equation" of Beckhard and Harris (1987:25-26) ABD becomes bigger than X, which is the cost of change. Now ABD together represent the following as was explained earlier: A = level of dissatisfaction with current reality, B = the clear picture of the desired state, and D = the practical steps towards this desired state. ABD is mostly an imagined entity because the desired state needs to be imagined and the steps are not yet taken, but exist in the imagination of the audience. This imagined state according to the equation becomes more powerful than the natural inclination to resist change and the price tag that comes with change (represented by X in the equation). It shows the importance of imagination in bringing about change. I think that the vital process of communication is not properly included in the Beckhard and Harris equation. Communication is only implied, but not stated. I think that the weight of (ABD) could exponentially be multiplied if one would add communication.

In Kotter's model we do not find a reference to imagination. If one reads between the lines, one can assume that the vision step is definitely imaginative and that the communication of this change vision where it "uses every vehicle possible" also latches onto the imaginations of the audience. He (1996:117-121) is practical in suggesting that small victories that are acknowledged and celebrated pave the way to the final product that can be adopted as the new culture.

No correlation was found between Roxburgh's Map-Making and imagination other than that we can start to imagine the journey once we are in possession of a relevant map. What I must observe is that Roxburgh skilfully uses a map as a fitting metaphor to help the reader identify with the problem he is addressing. This identification inevitably happens through our imaginations.

Finally Weideman does mention imagination in a phase where he suggests that the leader imagines new possibilities in the context of his/her current reality. He suggests that questions like "what if" and "say we would" enhance this process (cf. 2009:204). On this the leader then makes adjustments and endeavours to build on as a new paradigm. As was mentioned earlier, this process does not allow for interaction with the followers or an audience as the Ezekiel process suggests.

#### **7.4.4.3 Perspective on modern-day realities**

Earlier this year Walter Brueggemann (2012) set out once again to revisit the subject of "prophetic imagination" and tried to show the credible connection that can be seen between the prophetic utterances of the Old Testament prophets and the practice of "prophetic preaching". He (2012:2) proposes that:

Prophetic proclamation is an attempt to imagine the world as though YHWH were a real character and an effective agent in the world ... The key term in my thesis is "imagine", that is, to utter, entertain, describe, and construe a world other than the one that manifests in front to us ...

Thus prophetic imagination is one that contradicts the taken-for-granted world around us.

Communicating becomes the staging of two narratives against each other: the reality and the possibility. In the end YHWH's account would be more normative and one that must be imagined (cf. Brueggemann 2012:2-4). On the issue of narratives Eslinger (1995:141-152) shows how important narratives are in creating images for the imagination. He notes (:144-145) that images allow us to focus on a particular aspect of what we experience and that they can serve to provide new insights. One only has to refer back to the powerful narrative of Ezekiel 16 of the orphan that becomes a queen and then a harlot, or the narrative of the valley of the dry bones to understand that this was true in Ezekiel's case. With a narrative you open up some human truth that lies beneath, even beyond, the everyday norm. You skilfully re-view and re-order the world around you with this story. Levy (2008:52) warns that "mental gaps" can be "created by the artist pushing metaphor or symbol into new realms of meaning". This is not a problem for me because application is always a personal event and the so-called "mental gap" needs to be filled with one's own interpretation, thus making the metaphor more personal and more powerful.

What would Ezekiel's perspective then be on imagining in a changing society? It would be that we must communicate with stories and metaphors that dare to imagine something different, meaningful and significant: Something different to the current reality, something meaningful to our knowledge of God and significant to our needs. It would also suggest that some of our communication must be "open-ended" allowing for personal application and imagining: It must allow the audience to create their own map through their reality with the help of familiar metaphors. Some examples (perspectives) from the Ezekiel text:

- When Ezekiel's audience were in the wrong, he called it was. (Ez 6, 7 and 16). Use the power of metaphor to help them imagine the seriousness of the problem – be it "sword", "harlot" or the "end over the mountains".
- When there is a sense of disconnectedness and aimlessness, liken them to sheep that have been misled and scattered by their shepherds and leaders,

but daringly challenge the reality with a new one: YHWH who will be their shepherd and will look after them (cf. Ez 34).

- If the hopes of everyone are dried up like bones and the cohesion of the group scattered like dry bones all over a valley, challenge it with an image of these bones that are a mighty army filled with the spirit of YHWH.

The images that the audience are suggested to imagine speak of new possibilities. These new possibilities are in actual fact at first “impossibilities”. Brueggemann (2012:101-104) makes an interesting point when he argues that the prophets (Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel) used the “covenantal theology of Sinai and Deuteronomy” to explain the loss that their audiences were experiencing. When they obeyed, blessings abided, but when they did not obey, they experienced curse – or in their case loss and exile. He then notes that when the prophets had to imagine new possibilities that seemed impossible, they borrowed from a different narrative: the creation material (Isa 45:18-19; Jer 32:17) and the barrenness story of their patriarchs. All their women (Sarai, Rebecca and Rachel), who would become the mothers of the nation, had the word “barren” at some stage attached to their names (cf. Gen 11:30; 25:21; 29:31). In each of these generations the “impossible” happens when God works a miracle and keeps the promise of a nation alive.

Modern-day communicators and leaders can therefore turn to the many Old Testament narratives and, as was shown in this study, to Ezekiel to find the evidence of this “possibility” when we confront our modern-day reality. The prophet with his daring utterances believed that YHWH would work the impossible yet again and the communicator can do the same, but with more boldness due to the many more traditions available to him/her. These daring utterances of the communicator help the audience to imagine despite the situation they find themselves in. This imagination is then the seeded beginnings of a new reality. By this communication the prophet/poet/communicator creates the future rather than predicting it.

## 7.5 Summary

This chapter made an attempt to show that a communication process can be seen in the texts of Ezekiel that were studied and that this communication process can give a perspective on imagining in a changing society. It was done by alluding to four modern-day responses to leading in a changing society. These responses were summarized. Then four steps that seem evident from Ezekiel's communication were suggested. They were 1. Departure point – The reality of Exile, 2. The "word moment", 3. Creating and Communicating the Poem, and 4. Appeal to the imagination to see the new possibilities. These steps were immediately compared with what possible correlation there may be with the so-called "modern-day responses". These comparisons showed that Ezekiel indeed can make a contribution to those who want to lead and communicate in a changing modern-day society. This Old Testament book brings an interesting perspective that is relevant and, as was shown, in some instances more thorough than modern-day responses. By bringing the communication process of Ezekiel into dialogue with four more recent responses on change and leadership, it became evident, in my opinion, that Ezekiel's communication process not only contributed to the dialogue but in some cases showed itself as more thorough in the aim to address the problem that was laid out in chapter 1. I am aware though that the creators of these four responses probably did not have the same objectives as mine, but also tried to respond to a reality with a process or in some cases a model. For the purpose of this study the dialogue with these responses helped to test Ezekiel's communicative response against relevant and recent responses.

## Chapter 8 Conclusions

### 8.1 Introduction

The journey that this study undertook incorporated different facets. These facets were tied together in the previous chapter that suggested that Ezekiel's communication process may indeed be helpful in supplying a perspective on a current, or as it was called, modern-day reality. The aim of this final chapter is to give a summary of the problem, explain and show the strategy that was used to study this problem anew, and to show the main conclusions of the research.

### 8.2 Research problem addressed

The problem as outlined in chapter 1 dealt with change. Church leaders in particular found themselves in a totally new environment, unable to lead effectively. This new environment was defined as a shift in worldview and showed that there was a transition or a change that was taking place. This change was from a world where modernistic paradigms dominated education, science and leadership into an uncertain era where especially leadership struggled. It was also mentioned that the country of South Africa changed significantly in terms of government philosophy and how this new philosophy played out in practice. In South Africa people are challenged with new realities of change every day. The church leader in his communicative function must give direction and help the congregation (followers) to live in these times. It is this responsibility that many church leaders described as overwhelming and emotionally draining (see paragraph 1.6.3 & 1.6.4).

It was then anticipated that the exilic prophet Ezekiel and his audience may have experienced some of the same disillusionment we are facing today. The prophet along with his audience had a rapid change in their landscape with the exile of 597 BCE and then the final exile in 586 BCE that ended with the fall of Jerusalem. With this reality Ezekiel and his audience found themselves in another country as exiles and suddenly in a new reality that may also have left them without answers. Amidst these realities the prophet had to communicate and help his audience understand

their reality and accept responsibility for it and also to imagine new possibilities for their future.

The research question was then formulated as the following:

**Can the imaginative response of Ezekiel's communication supply an Old Testament perspective that is relevant to the challenges of modern-day realities?**

This inevitably opened up further questions that needed attention like:

**How does Ezekiel in his communication go about facing their devastating reality? Can this leave clues (even create a process) about how to imagine in a changing modern-day reality? Can his approach be relevant for leaders in the church to communicate, edify and imagine anew?**

**Can a text like Ezekiel provide a perspective on the crucial function of leader and change agent that a church leader must play?**

It was also noted in chapter 1 that most scholarly contributions to the field of Old Testament were strongly critical but struggled on the interpretation side in the sense of relevance for leaders that communicate in today's reality. Much of the critical work that is done on Old Testament texts struggles to make them relevant to the communicative efforts of leaders in the church. This means, as stated in chapter 1, that a "bridge" that may be "too far to cross" exists between the Old Testament and the practical issues with which leaders struggle. The study therefore set out to respond to this problem by engaging the text of Ezekiel with the modern-day reality of communicating in a changing environment.



### **8.3 Strategy employed to address the stated problem anew**

Methodologically one could say that the means of study has its roots in Rhetorical Criticism and Historical Criticism; at least the first part of the enquiry. This first part supposed that there is (1) a real historical situation to which the prophet must strategically respond with (2) his communication. This communication is filled with metaphors that (3) borrow from, but also shape the audience's theology. It creates an effect on their immediate perception of reality and their future hope.

Therefore the strategy to study this problem anew unfolded in the following manner:

1. The study set out and started with the text of Ezekiel. Before any exegetical analysis was done it took notice of how the landscape of Ezekiel studies changed over the past hundred years and noted the current state in Ezekiel criticism. This was done in chapter 2.
2. Then a view of key elements that form part of Ezekiel studies and our understanding of the rhetorical situation was studied and proposed. These included the historical background of the prophecies in the book of Ezekiel, the quest for the historical prophet, the composition and final form of the book, the theological themes of the book, and the priestly influence on the book.
3. This supplied the background for the exegetical analysis. Chapters 4 and 5 consisted mainly of a study of the demarcated texts in Ezekiel; they were Ezekiel 6; 7; 16; 34; 36:16-38; 37. Special attention was given to the metaphors, images, words and phrases, and formulas that Ezekiel used to communicate his message.
4. Finally an attempt was made to look for a process of communication that Ezekiel used to respond to his reality. This process was then brought into dialogue with current responses that are suggested on how to lead in a changing reality. This dialogue helped to test the communication process of Ezekiel on whether it may be viable to supply an Old Testament perspective in a changing modern-day reality.

## 8.4 Main conclusions

Generally speaking the research question was answered as it became evident that Ezekiel had a communicative response to his changing reality that helped his audience to imagine reality as well as possibility beyond reality. This communicative response had a definite process. The proposal is that this process can be used to help leaders and change agents in the church environment to imagine and communicate more relevantly.

To summarise the conclusions briefly the following came to the fore:

- Ezekiel's response to their reality was indeed rhetorical. With this I mean that it became clear that he responded with persuasive communication to their reality. Even when the reality changed from partial destruction (597 BCE) to total destruction in 586 BCE, his response was always rhetorical.
- This rhetorical response (communication) was filled with metaphors that were introduced, reiterated, and ended with well-known formulas. These formulas included word formulas, messenger formulas and recognition formulas. The formulas gave authority to his communication and the metaphors appealed to the audience's imagination and made his communication a lot more persuasive.
- A process could be seen on how the prophet went about to communicate. This process started with: (1) the reality of exile. Ezekiel by no means "sugar coated" this reality to his audience. He communicated that they were to blame for this and that they received a fitting judgment for their unfaithfulness. (2) A "word" moment. This word moment was crucial to this study as it became clear that the prophet received some "word" from YHWH that responded to their reality. It was however difficult to define this moment. The danger was that one would become too fundamental in assuming that YHWH would speak directly into this situation or too mystical in leaving this "word" moment to be labelled mystic and unfathomable. The answer came by concluding that this word moment comprised two parts. This "word event" was on the one hand an experience he had with YHWH: this could be a realization of something or a

sense of inspiration. On the other hand this “word event” was also a realization of truth that was in him due to his knowledge of YHWH. The words of the prophet and the “word of the Lord” are combined to create a response to a specific reality. (3) The “word” that was received by the prophet needed to be communicated. For the prophet to do this I suggested that time was taken by the prophet to create his communicate or his poem, as was argued in chapter 7. This implied a lapse of time between the initial “word” moment and the actual communication. The result of this preparation by the prophet was that he was able to fill his communicate with images and metaphors that would latch on to the imaginations of his audience. Once imagined it (4) opened up new possibilities. The audience begin to hope for and expect a better future. This in a sense means that the prophet creates the future by anticipating it through the power of imagination. This was contradictory to the conservative belief that the prophet predicts the future but does not play a part in it.

- This process of Ezekiel stood its ground as fitting response to modern-day change challenges, as was outlined in the beginning of the study, when it was juxtaposed against some recent responses to coping with and bringing about change in our current-day realities. Although it was not the intention (see paragraph 7.5) of these more recent responses to be dialogued with an Old Testament text like Ezekiel, it made interesting reading. In many cases the process of Ezekiel was able to bring new and extra perspectives to the dialogues.
- Finally this study concluded that the communication process of Ezekiel can provide a perspective on the crucial function of leader and the role church leaders as change agents must play.

I am aware that no study or research can be exhaustive and this study was no exception. It may have shortcomings in the following areas:

- It could be criticized for not being “critical” enough with regards to the current trends that dominate Old Testament and especially “Prophetic Studies”. These trends were taken note of in this study but this study chose to deal with the text as it is found in the book of Ezekiel that is presented to us; it assumed that the prophet received most of the communication that is found

in the text studied and that he indeed communicated it to an exilic audience. A post exilic reworking is indeed a probability, but researchers are still unclear as to the extent of this reworking of later redactors.

- The aim of this research was not to analyse the text in every minute detail, but to gain insight in the way the prophet has communicated to this audience. The focus therefore was on the devices (metaphor etc.) he employed in achieving this. The exegetical analysis however proved to be more than adequate to establish the conclusions that were necessary to build on in chapters 6 and 7.
- Another area that may show some shortcomings is in the conceptualizing of certain moments in Ezekiel's Communication process. The "word" moment as well as the "creating of the poem" steps are difficult to determine from the texts. The study had to lean on the research and conclusions of others to establish them.

In spite of the mentioned shortcomings, I am still convinced that I have succeeded in proposing a workable model to address the research question.

## **8.5 Themes for further research**

This study has contributed to one of the problems that challenge *Biblical Criticism* and *Old Testament Studies*. How could Old Testament Studies provide insights in the fields that are more practical in nature and closer to the church leader (that once studied theology) in his or her church, but finds them ever more irrelevant to his current reality? The communication process and imaginings of Ezekiel can indeed be relevant and helpful to this leader. By saying this I propose that this study can prompt further research in this area in particular; contributions that can build a bridge between the practice of leadership and Old Testament studies.

Possible themes for further research would then be the following:

- Looking at prophetic texts as communicate that can be transported and made relevant to current-day situations.

- Looking with the help of Rhetorical Criticism at some of the methods, metaphors and language nuances that the prophets used to strengthen their message.
- How could leaders change their function to address their challenges; in much the same way as Ezekiel changes from priest to prophet to be relevant in his situation? This could challenge leadership styles and models as well as the structures to which we have become accustomed.

These types of themes will all contribute to this area that respected scholars like Brueggemann and Goldingay are starting to explore in an attempt to close the rapidly changing divide that is growing between Old Testament Studies and the church environment.

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