

The Call
Of Ezekiel:
Themes of
His Ministry

by

Jeffrey S. Tunncliff

TRS 603 – Prophecy in Israel

Rev. Christopher Begg

December 15, 2005

I. Introduction

Interest in the study of the Book of Ezekiel has risen dramatically in the twentieth century. Prior to that the book was considered one literary unit.¹ Since 1900 there has been much discussion ranging from the authorship of the book to the psychological condition of the prophet Ezekiel. In 1924, Holscher attributed only 177 of the 1,235 verses as original to Ezekiel. He believed that Ezekiel wrote in poetic forms. Therefore none of the prose was original. In 1934, Torrey said that the entire book was third century fiction while a year later Smith argued that the book was written by a Northern Israelite before the Exile and edited by Ezekiel to fit the situation. Since 1950, scholarship has returned to attributing most of the Book of Ezekiel as original to the prophet himself.² Boadt sees it as likely that the book is completed prior to 540 B.C. as the book's description of the second temple does not correspond to what was actually built.³

So why should anyone wish to study the call of Ezekiel today? Odell writes

In his commentary on Ezekiel, Jean Calvin asserted that the opening chapters of Ezekiel were fundamental to understanding the rest of his book. What was important was not only the time at which Ezekiel received his call but also the manner in which "God stirred him up".⁴

Thus, this study examines the call of Ezekiel in order to understand the book as a whole.

II. Historical Background

In order to understand Ezekiel's call, we must first review the historical situation in which his call arose. Ezekiel received his prophetic call in the fifth year of the Babylonian Exile,

¹ Robert R. Wilson, "Prophecy in Crisis: The Call of Ezekiel," *Interpretation* 38 no. 2 (1984): 18.

² Lawrence Boadt, C.S.P., "Ezekiel" in the *New Jerome Biblical Commentary*. Eds. Raymond Brown, S.S., Joseph A. Fitzmyer, S.J. and Roland E. Murphy, O.Carm. (Englewood Cliffs, NY: Prentice Hall. 1990), 306. Lawrence Boadt, C.S.P., "A New Look at the Book of Ezekiel," *The Bible Today* 34 (Jan-Feb 1999), 4.

³ Boadt, "A New Look at the Book of Ezekiel," 7.

⁴ Margaret S. Odell, "You are What You Eat: Ezekiel and the Scroll," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 117/2 (1998), 229.

593 B.C. The first of the Exiles were taken from the Southern Kingdom in Jerusalem in 598 B.C.⁵ The northern kingdom of Israel had already fallen in 721 B.C. to Assyria. Those removed in exile thought all was lost when they were removed from Jerusalem where God dwelt. God would not be present with them in Babylon.

As with most of the prophets, we actually know little about the person Ezekiel. Never is he mentioned outside the Book of Ezekiel. Even his own writings tell us little about him. As Klein states, “The prophetic message is to be found in the received text, not in the biography of the text.”⁶ Ezekiel does not write to tell us stories about himself but to deliver stories for God.⁷ He sees himself merely as an instrument. Yet, the message of any prophet generally is not divinely dictated by God. God gives the prophet a message and allows the prophet to determine the words to speak to the people. Thus, it is important to know what we can about the prophets.

So what do we know about Ezekiel? As stated above, he received his call in 593 B.C.⁸ The last dating in the book is 571 B.C.⁹ Only the elite were among the 10,000 first deported to Babylon in 598 B.C.¹⁰ Since Ezekiel was among the first group of Exiles, we can surmise that he was a member of the elite class.¹¹ Ezekiel 1:3 tells us that he was a priest.¹² Since he was a priest, Ezekiel would have grown up very familiar with the sights and sounds of the temple.¹³ Wilson states that is likely that he would have been a member of the Zadokite priests who were

⁵ Boadt, “A New Look at the Book of Ezekiel,” 4-5.

⁶ Ralph W. Klein, *Ezekiel: the Prophet and His Message* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1988), 3.

⁷ Boadt, “A New Look at the Book of Ezekiel,” 6-7.

⁸ Ezekiel 1:2.

⁹ Ezekiel 29:17

¹⁰ John W. Miller, *Meet the Prophets: A Beginner's Guide to the Books of the Biblical Prophets-Their Meaning Then and Now*,” (New York: Paulist Press, 1987) 178.

¹¹ Ronald Clements, *Ezekiel*, (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1996), 5.

¹² Miller, *Meet the Prophets*, 183. Both the New American Bible and the Revised Standard Version translate the verse with Ezekiel as the priest. There is some argument that it may have been his father who was the priest.

¹³ Clements, *Ezekiel*, 13.

the ruling priests in Jerusalem since the days of Solomon.¹⁴ Lastly, since Ezekiel refers to the death of his wife in chapter 24, we know he must have been married. Since there is no mention of the marriage, Clements concludes that he must have been married prior to his call in 593 B.C.¹⁵

It is only in verses 1:3 and 24:24 that the name of Ezekiel is ever used. The name Ezekiel is a compound from two Hebrews words. “El” is the word for God and “hasak” means to strength so “Ezekiel” means “Gods strengthens”.¹⁶ Klein states that on ninety-three other times Ezekiel is referred to as “son of man” or mortal.¹⁷ Bullock sees this “title” as indicative to see Ezekiel as “singularly identified” with the people he prophesized to it.¹⁸ In such places as 3:11, the Exiles are referred to as your people, again making Ezekiel part of the group.¹⁹

III. Structure and Literary Form of the Call Narrative

In order to examine the call narrative in the Book of Ezekiel we should first examine the overall structure of the book and the literary forms within the call narrative. The first question to ask is who is the intended audience of the book. Wilson states since the purpose of the message is to warn them of the judgment that the audience is clearly the Exiles.²⁰

The Book of Ezekiel is generally divided into three principle sections. Chapters 1-24 form a series of judgment oracles. Chapters 25-32 are a series of oracles against foreign nations, and the final chapters 33-48 present the future hope of salvation and restoration of Jerusalem.²¹

¹⁴ Wilson, “Prophecy in Crisis,” 121.

¹⁵ Clements, *Ezekiel*, 1. Klein, *Ezekiel: the Prophet*, 5.

¹⁶ Miller, *Meet the Prophets*, 183. Klein, *Ezekiel: the Prophet*, 3.

¹⁷ Klein, *Ezekiel: the Prophet*, 15.

¹⁸ C. Hassell Bullock, “Ezekiel, Bridge Between the Testaments,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 25/1 (March 1982): 28.

¹⁹ Klein, *Ezekiel: the Prophet*, 16.

²⁰ Wilson, “Prophecy in Crisis,” 121.

²¹ Henry McKeating, *Ezekiel*, Old Testament Guides, (Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993), 15.

The divisions of the book are determined by one principle event. The destruction of Jerusalem. The siege and destruction occur during the time period of chapters 24-32.²²

Hals sees the Book of Ezekiel as a prophetic book of typical structure but with a priestly orientation.²³ Yet Miller sees Ezekiel as different from most other prophetic books as it is comprised mainly of first-person reports.²⁴ Wilson sees the heavy use of allegory, vision reports, and symbolic actions as rare in prophetic speech.²⁵ Also considered uncharacteristic of prophetic texts, McKeating sees Ezekiel as mostly prose rather than poetry. McKeating further describes the prose as rhetorical, wordy, and repetitive like the priestly authors.²⁶

The Call Narrative is generally considered to include all of chapters 1-3. There are some who end the call at 3:15 because the Parable of the Watchman, in 3:15-27, is seen as an editorial addition. Wilson states that most scholars see 1:1-3:15 as a singular literary unit while noting there are some editorial additions.²⁷

It is useful to subdivide the section according to the actions occurring in each passage. Generally, the call narrative is divided into four sections. Boadt lays out the following structure

1:1-1:28 – The Vision of God in Babylon
1:28b-3:11 – The Call of the Prophet
3:12-3:21 – Commission as Watchman
3:21-3:27 – The Prophet Constrained²⁸

Clements divides the structure differently. He sees chapter 2 as a report of Ezekiel resisting the call but being overcome by the spirit. He then sees 3:1-15 as the act of commissioning where

²² Miller, *Meet the Prophets*, 180.

²³ Roland M. Hals, *Ezekiel, The Forms of Old Testament Literature Volume XIX*, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1989), 4-5.

²⁴ Miller, *Meet the Prophets*, 178.

²⁵ Wilson, "Prophecy in Crisis," 117-118. See also C. Hassell Bullock, "Ezekiel, Bridge Between the Testaments," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 25/1 (March 1982): 25.

²⁶ McKeating, *Ezekiel*, 16-17.

²⁷ Wilson, "Prophecy in Crisis," 120.

²⁸ Boadt, "Ezekiel," 311.

the content of his preaching is received in symbolic visionary form.²⁹ With either of these, 1:1-1:3 serves as an introduction and to provide a setting for the vision narrative.³⁰ Hals then refers to 1:4-1:28a as a “vision report” with 1:28b-3:11 serving as a “vocation account”.³¹

The two major works studying the genre of chapters 1-3 are from Habel and Zimmerli.³² In his study, Habel seeks to develop a standard form for the prophetic call. He begins with a study of Moses and Gideon to develop his form. He then shows how Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel and 2 Isaiah all follow the same structure.³³ Habel’s literary structure consists of six elements as follows. They are the Divine Confrontation, the Introductory Word, Commission, the Objection, the Reassurance, and the Sign³⁴ Habel admits that the call of Ezekiel is missing the fourth element, the objection, in an explicit form.³⁵ Habel attempts to locate this in verses 2:6 and 2:8. He sees these verses as God’s response to the objection that Ezekiel never gets to vocalize.

Both Odell and Phinney find this explanation of the lack of an objection as inadequate. They instead look beyond the first three chapters for the objection. They find it in chapters 4-5, which we will discuss later but for now let us look at the genre of those chapters. Odell groups chapters 1-5 as one literary unit and sees 3:15-5:17 in the one genre of symbolic acts. Odell believes that since there are two different genres, others do not see them as one unit.³⁶ For a standard form for symbolic actions we turn to Hals. He develops the form as having three

²⁹ Clements, *Ezekiel*, 10.

³⁰ Hals, *Ezekiel*, 11.

³¹ Hals, *Ezekiel*, 15.

³² Odell, “You are What You Eat,” 231.

³³ N.C. Habel, “The Form and Significance of the Call Narratives,” *Zeitschrift Fur Die Alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 77 (1965), 316.

³⁴ Habel, “The Form and Significance,” 298.

³⁵ Habel, “The Form and Significance,” 313.

³⁶ Odell, “You are What You Eat,” 229-230.

components. First is God's instruction to do the action. Secondly is the report of the execution of the act and finally are words of interpretation to explain the act.³⁷

Now, having examined the structure, forms, and genres of Ezekiel chapters 1-5 we turn to our study of the passage.

IV. The Call Narrative and Symbolic Actions, Exegesis of Chapters 1-5

Ezekiel 1:1-3 provides a setting of time and place for the vision. The opening verse, "In the thirtieth year"³⁸ provides the first point of scholarly discussion. The general consensus now is that this refers to Ezekiel's age. In 1:3, he is identified as "the priest Ezekiel". At the age of thirty, the trainee would become a priest.³⁹ Ezekiel would have been anticipating this day all his life. However, now he is not at the temple he cannot perform the duties of priest.

As verse 1 continues, we are told that Ezekiel received his call vision on the banks of the Chebar River in Babylon as one of the Exiles. The exact location is unknown to us⁴⁰ but what is important is that Ezekiel is not in Jerusalem and yet God appears to him.

In Ezekiel 1:2 states this vision call occurred in the fifth year of King Jehoiachin's exile. This places it in the year 593 B.C. In 1:3, we hear that the word of the Lord *came to* Ezekiel and the hand of the Lord rested upon Ezekiel. This is God's initiative.⁴¹ The message always comes on the initiative of God not the prophet. Thus Ezekiel fits this criterion of a prophet.

The vision in 1:4-28 is essential to the call of Ezekiel. The Exiles would have felt that since they had been removed from Jerusalem they were no longer under God's protection. God dwelt in the temple. So, now they were beyond his reach. The vision serves to tell them God is

³⁷ Hals, *Ezekiel*, 30.

³⁸ All biblical citations are taken from *the New American Bible. The New American Bible*, St. Joseph's Edition, New York, Catholic Book Publishing Co., 1992.

³⁹ Odell, "You are What You Eat," 238-239. Bullock, "Ezekiel, Bridge," 24. Miller, *Meet the Prophets*, 185.

⁴⁰ Klein, *Ezekiel: the Prophet*, 6.

⁴¹ Clements, *Ezekiel*, 11.

present among them even in Babylon. When Jerusalem is destroyed God will still dwell among them.⁴²

For us today, as we look at the imagery of the vision, we may find it difficult to understand the images presented but for the Exiles it would have been clearer. Klein presents a discussion of how the imagery of Ezekiel's visions has parallel imagery in Babylonian Art.⁴³ More importantly for the Israelites is Boadt's comparison of such things as a parallel between the wings of the animals and the Ark of the Covenant.⁴⁴ There are several parallels with earlier Old Testament imagery that the Exiles would have been familiar with.

In 1:4, the vision begins with the approach of a storm wind from the North and clouds of flashing fire. Storms are a common occurrence in Old Testament theophanies and Near East Babylon. Boadt refers to Psalms 18 and 97 that speak of God appearing in clouds and darkness with power. The fact that the storm comes from the North would be understood on a physical level in that the storms in Babylon frequently came from the North but Boadt writes that more importantly, the North is the mythical home of God.⁴⁵ Of course, fire is a common form of theophany with the most well known being the story of the burning bush.⁴⁶

The next image described in the vision (1:5-14) is the four faces of the animals. While uncommon to us, Wilson says the Exiles would have recognized this imagery from Israelite tradition.⁴⁷ Witherup states that the four beings in the vision represent the guardians around God's throne.⁴⁸ The four faces were human, a bull as the king of domestic animals, a lion as

⁴² Boadt, "Ezekiel," 310.

⁴³ Klein, *Ezekiel: the Prophet*, 18-24.

⁴⁴ Boadt, "Ezekiel," 310.

⁴⁵ Boadt, "Ezekiel," 310.

⁴⁶ Exodus 3:1-22, esp, verse 2-5. Other theophanies involving fire would include Psalm 29 and Psalm 97.

⁴⁷ Wilson, "Prophecy in Crisis," 124.

⁴⁸ Witherup, "Apocalyptic Imagery," 12.

king of the wild animals, and an eagle as supreme among the birds.⁴⁹ Klein hypothesizes that the animals may serve to protect God from contamination with an unclean world. As he further states, as each animal is supreme in their own realm, thus God is supreme.⁵⁰ Through the image of strength demonstrated by the animals, God is a divine warrior who stands ready to defend his people even in Babylon.⁵¹ 1:11 depicts the wings of each animal touching the wings of the next. This image is found in 1 Kings 6:27 that describes the cherubim that stood over the ark.⁵²

1:15-18 is the description of the many wheels of the chariot. In fact, Keel argues that the wheels present a shift in the basic thought of the vision.⁵³ It is not just a throne Ezekiel is describing but a divine chariot.⁵⁴ Klein agrees, stating the wheels give it the mobility⁵⁵ to be a chariot and thus creating the image of divine warrior. The wheels give it the mobility to go wherever the spirit wished.⁵⁶

In 1:22-23, Ezekiel describes the firmament over the heads of the animals separating them from what is above. This is another parallel of Israelite tradition from the cosmology in the Book of Genesis 1:6. The firmament divides the earthly kingdom from the heavenly.⁵⁷

It is here, starting with 1:26, that we see Ezekiel's description of God. Clements states it is here that Ezekiel becomes hesitant.⁵⁸ As Clements states how do you describe God? This is why throughout the vision, Klein says Ezekiel speaks in terms of the "likeness of" x.⁵⁹ For Ezekiel, it is never quite adequate to describe the imagery in human terms. As Boadt states, it is

⁴⁹ Klein, *Ezekiel: the Prophet*, 17, 25.

⁵⁰ Klein, *Ezekiel: the Prophet*, 21.

⁵¹ Witherup, "Apocalyptic Imagery," 12.

⁵² Boadt, "Ezekiel," 310. See also Exodus 25:10-12 for a description of the cherubim on the ark.

⁵³ Klein, *Ezekiel: the Prophet*, 18.

⁵⁴ Boadt, "Ezekiel," 310.

⁵⁵ Klein, *Ezekiel: the Prophet*, 23.

⁵⁶ Ezekiel 1:20.

⁵⁷ Boadt, "Ezekiel," 310-311. Klein, *Ezekiel: the Prophet*, 23.

⁵⁸ Clements, *Ezekiel*, 12.

⁵⁹ Klein, *Ezekiel: the Prophet*, 25.

like the physical image but the images are always connected with images of the glory of God such as the image of fire and brightness discussed above.⁶⁰

Klein finds “no iconographic ties to Jerusalem” but the vision serves its purpose nonetheless.⁶¹ While I have attempted to describe the imagery of the vision, Clements writes the vision is not completely or satisfactorily explained but the point is accomplished.⁶² In 1:15, the divine chariot actually touches the ground in Babylon. This is what tells the Exiles that God is present with them in Babylon.⁶³ This is what makes the vision essential to the call of Ezekiel. As Hals states, the vision exists for the call of the messenger. The people must know God is present in Babylon before they can accept *any* prophet in this foreign land.⁶⁴

1:28b serves both as an end to the vision and a beginning to his “call”. Ezekiel reacts to the vision in the same way as he will later to four other divine appearances and in what may be the only appropriate way to respond to the divine presence; he falls prone on his face.⁶⁵ In 2:1, Ezekiel receives a command from God to stand up. As Wilson says, he is only able to do this when the spirit enters him.⁶⁶ In other call narratives there is fear on the part of the prophet and Ezekiel is no exception. The spirit here serves as a sign that God will give Ezekiel the strength he needs.⁶⁷

In 2:3-5, God begins to give Ezekiel his mission. God is sending Ezekiel to the “rebellious house” of Israel.⁶⁸ It is their rebellious nature that has earned them the judgment for exile that Ezekiel will explain to them as God’s prophet. While Boadt says the call begins with

⁶⁰ Boadt, “Ezekiel,” 311.

⁶¹ Klein, *Ezekiel: the Prophet*, 23.

⁶² Clements, *Ezekiel*, 11.

⁶³ Wilson, “Prophecy in Crisis,” 125. Klein, *Ezekiel: the Prophet*, 23.

⁶⁴ Hals, *Ezekiel*, 10. Clements, *Ezekiel*, 9. As such, Klein believes the vision implies a lot to Ezekiel’s authority. Klein, *Ezekiel: the Prophet*, 16.

⁶⁵ Klein, *Ezekiel: the Prophet*, 26. The other occasions of divine appearances include 3:23, 9:8, 43:3, and 44:4.

⁶⁶ Wilson, “Prophecy in Crisis,” 126.

⁶⁷ Clements, *Ezekiel*, 16.

⁶⁸ According to McKeating the term “rebellious house” is unique to Ezekiel. McKeating, *Ezekiel*, 17.

1:28b and ends in 3:8-11 where the Israelites are described, it is this statement in 2:3 that Boadt sees forming a circle with the end of the call in 3:8-11.⁶⁹

After describing Ezekiel's mission, in 2:6-8 God gives Ezekiel assurance for his mission as long as he obeys God's command. As 2:8b concludes we begin to hear the story of the eating of the scroll that many see as central to Ezekiel's call. As the scroll is presented to him, it is unrolled so that he may see what is written on it; words of lamentation and woe. Then Ezekiel eats the scroll and finds it tastes sweet like honey. After he eats the scroll, his mission to go to the house of Israel is repeated. He is told it will not be easy as the Israelites will not want to listen but he must do so anyway.

There is differing opinion on the significance of the eating of the scroll. Greenberg believes it is about obedience, doing as God has commanded him and that it has nothing to do with taking the message into his heart.⁷⁰ Odell agrees this is not the point where Ezekiel received the divine word to preach.⁷¹ She sees the scroll as the judgment upon the people that Ezekiel takes upon himself as the priests take upon themselves the sin of the people in Leviticus 8-9.⁷² Davis believes that the eating of the scroll indicates that Ezekiel's prophecy is to include writing.⁷³ However, modern thought centers on that the eating of the scroll is indeed the reception of the message to preach.⁷⁴

⁶⁹ Boadt, "Ezekiel," 311.

⁷⁰ Odell, "You are What You Eat," 243.

⁷¹ Odell, "You are What You Eat," 242.

⁷² Odell, "You are What You Eat," 244.

⁷³ McKeating, *Ezekiel*, 24.

⁷⁴ Odell, "You are What You Eat," 241. There is considerable discussion on the relationship of Ezekiel's eating of the scroll to Jeremiah 15:16. Wilson, "Prophecy in Crisis", 127. Miller agrees that Jeremiah's scroll may have been known to Ezekiel. Miller, *Meet the Prophets*, 188. However, Holladay writes an article on this subject and concludes that it is unlikely that Ezekiel would have seen any written document concerning Jeremiah's scroll but rather that he may have indeed met Jeremiah in Jerusalem before being exiled. William Holladay, "Had Ezekiel Known Jeremiah Personally," *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 63, (2001): 31-34.

For Hals, who sees the Call Narrative as ending at 3:15, the last portion (3:11-15) serves as a conclusion to the call narrative.⁷⁵ In this thinking 3:11 then becomes the decisive order to go to the Exiles to proclaim God's message. It is the same spirit who in 2:1-2 lifted him up that lifts him up here in verse 12 and verse 14.⁷⁶ Ezekiel acts according to God's will. The section ends with Ezekiel in a stupor for seven days.⁷⁷

The next section, 3:16-21, is known as the Parable of the Watchman.⁷⁸ Most scholars see this passage, as well as 3:22-27, *in this position* as an editorial addition. Miller argues from the position that it is strange that Ezekiel receives a second call just seven days after his original call. Miller turns to 3:25 and the command for Ezekiel to shut himself in his house when he has not even started his mission yet.⁷⁹ Despite the agreement that it is an addition, there are differing opinions on what is the proper position of the passage. Wilson argues that many scholars it is taken from the Parable of the Watchman that is found in chapter 33, with some text taken from chapter 18.⁸⁰ In chapter 33, the parable serves as a transition from the oracles against the foreign nations in chapters 24-32 to the pronouncement of hope in chapters 33 and following.⁸¹ Klein agrees that the parable is the same in chapters 3 and 33. However, he does see a difference in the message. In 3:16-21, the Parable of the Watchman serves as a private revelation to Ezekiel but in chapter 33, it is a public revelation to the people, confirming the call of the prophet.⁸²

Assuming Klein's position, what is the point of the private revelation to Ezekiel?

⁷⁵ Hals, *Ezekiel*, 21-22.

⁷⁶ Klein, *Ezekiel: the Prophet*, 27.

⁷⁷ Stupor is Miller's word. Miller, *Meet the Prophets*, 188. NAB – distraught. RSV says overwhelmed.

⁷⁸ According to Boadt, the concept of the prophet as a watchman would not be new to the Israelites. Previous occurrences include Isaiah 21:6 and Hos 9:8. Boadt, "Ezekiel," 311.

⁷⁹ Miller, *Meet the Prophets*, 182. Klein, *Ezekiel: the Prophet*, 28.

⁸⁰ Wilson, "Prophecy in Crisis," 128.

⁸¹ William Brownlee, "Ezekiel's Parable of the Watchman and the Editing of Ezekiel," *Vetus Testamentum* 28 no. 4, 398-399.

⁸² Klein, *Ezekiel: the Prophet*, 29.

Brownlee believes the parable is vital to Ezekiel's sense of mission.⁸³ Klein sees the role of the watchman as one who warns the people of what is coming and nothing more.⁸⁴ Certainly, as Clements says, this matches the role of a prophet.⁸⁵ As Wilson argues, these verses tell Ezekiel that as long as he warns the people, the role of a prophet and a watchman, what is coming then he has fulfilled his call and is free from sin. If he fails to warn them, then he is guilty of assisting them in their own sins.⁸⁶

In verses 3:22-27, we find the beginning of Ezekiel's dumbness, which will continue until chapter 24, and the destruction of Jerusalem.⁸⁷ Yet, as Wilson writes, this is the time period of the delivery of most of the oracles. Wilson argues that as such we cannot take Ezekiel's dumbness literally but rather as a limitation on his prophetic activity. Klein agrees that the dumbness should not be taken literally but rather as to say that Ezekiel only speaks when God gives him the words.⁸⁸

This brings to conclusion what is typically defined as the complete call narrative of Ezekiel. We now return to Habel's literary form of the Call Narrative discussed above to examine how it applies to the call of Ezekiel. Habel provides the following breakdown

1. Divine Confrontation – 1:1-28
2. Introductory Word – 1:28b – 2:2
3. Commission – 2:3-5
4. Objection – *Implied* 2:6 and 2:8
5. Reassurance – 2:6-7
6. Sign – 2:8-3:11

⁸³ Brownlee, "Ezekiel's Parable," 392.

⁸⁴ Klein, *Ezekiel: the Prophet*, 31.

⁸⁵ Clements, *Ezekiel*, 18.

⁸⁶ Wilson, "Prophecy in Crisis," 129.

⁸⁷ Brownlee, "Ezekiel's Parable," 396.

⁸⁸ Wilson, "Prophecy in Crisis," 117, 129. Klein, *Ezekiel: the Prophet*, 9.

Thus, Habel is able to find all the elements of the call narrative.⁸⁹ The vision of chapter one describes Ezekiel's personal encounter with God that changes his attitude. The introductory word in turn provides necessary background for establishing a personal relationship between God and the prophet. In the commissioning, Ezekiel receives his mission to go to the Exiles. We will pass by the objection for a moment. Ezekiel receives assurance from God that he will assist him in his fears and the sign, in this case the eating of the scroll, is the confirmation that indeed this is a mission from God.⁹⁰

Returning to the objection, Habel attempts to argue that in 2:6 and 2:8 God is giving his assurance that he will be with Ezekiel against an objection from Ezekiel that we never see.⁹¹ When we are talking about the literary form of a text how can we talk about an objection that is not there. This is the question to which Phinney and Odell try to respond. To find an objection Phinney turns to 4:14 and Odell includes from 3:15-5:17 to present her case.

Why is it so important that we find an objection? As Phinney argues, if there is no objection then the people would doubt if he is actually a prophet.⁹² At this point, nothing Ezekiel has said has been fulfilled.⁹³ Phinney believes 4:14 is an editorial addition to demonstrate that Ezekiel is in two-way community with God but Ezekiel himself made the addition.⁹⁴

Phinney believes Ezekiel did not object during the original call narrative because he was overcome by the glory of God and thus unable to object. Ezekiel has had time to recover and

⁸⁹ Habel, "The Form and Significance," 313.

⁹⁰ Habel, "The Form and Significance," 317-319.

⁹¹ Habel, "The Form and Significance," 313.

⁹² D. Nathan Phinney, "The Prophetic Objection in Ezekiel IV 14 and It's Relation to Ezekiel's Call," *Vetus Testamentum* 55 no. 1 (2005): 83.

⁹³ Phinney, "The Prophetic Objection," 86.

⁹⁴ Phinney, "The Prophetic Objection," 82, 86.

now presented with a command contrary to his priestly teaching, he objects.⁹⁵ Phinney continues by stating that 4:14 satisfies all three of Habel's criteria for an objection. First, it is brief, less than once sentence. It has an objection introduced by an ejaculatory clause and the objection is unique to the prophet.⁹⁶ Phinney admits there are two problems. First, does the context really represent an objection or simply an adherence to the purity laws. Secondly, the verse is not within the call narrative.⁹⁷ I find these two problems as significant enough to say that 4:14 is not an objection proper to the call but rather is simply an objection to a particular divine command. Jeremiah raises several issues in chapters 11-20 but these are not considered part of his call narrative. I see little reason to consider 4:14 any different.

While stating that most scholars believe the call narrative ends in 3:15, Odell argues that chapters 1-5 are one complete literary unit because 1:1-3:15 do not include all the elements to complete the call narrative. In addition to this, there is no introductory formula at 3:16 to present it as a new literary unit.⁹⁸

Odell furthers her argument by stating that if chapters four and five form a separate literary unit of symbolic acts then they are lacking in their standard form. She uses Fohrer's standard form for symbolic acts consisting of three parts. First is the instruction to the prophet to perform the act followed by a report of the act being executed. Finally, is a report of the response of the people. Odell finds both of the last two missing in 3:16-5:17 and thus says these are not standard form symbolic acts. She further argues that 4:3 is not a symbolic act but instead is the sign appropriate to the call narrative.⁹⁹

⁹⁵ Phinney, "The Prophetic Objection," 77, 83.

⁹⁶ Phinney, "The Prophetic Objection," 76.

⁹⁷ Phinney, "The Prophetic Objection," 78.

⁹⁸ Odell, "You are What You Eat," 230-231.

⁹⁹ Odell, "You are What You Eat," 232-233.

Odell ultimately argues that in fact that Ezekiel does not undergo an instantaneous transformation into a prophet. Rather what we are reading here is Ezekiel's process of shedding his priestly identity before taking on his prophetic identity.¹⁰⁰ The shedding of his priestly identity is evidenced by such things as the cutting of his hair.¹⁰¹ Thus, Odell believes chapters 1-5 represent a transition period for Ezekiel. Odell believes that since this transitional period is unique to Ezekiel we are kept from noticing it as we try to fit him into the standard form.¹⁰²

While her argument against chapters four and five as symbolic acts is strong, I have difficulty in accepting Odell's overall argument. The first reason is the same as my objection to Phinney, this types of issues could be force read into other prophets. For instance, since Jeremiah continually objects is he forever in a transitional state? Where is the shedding of his priestly identity? However, there is another objection I would raise to both Phinney and Odell. It is true that the standard call narrative includes an objection. Yet, throughout his book, Ezekiel never objects. He simply does the will of God. Therefore, if the call narrative is indicative of the themes presented throughout the book, why should we expect to find an objection? Thus, I would conclude that the call of Ezekiel ends in 3:27, noting this would leave unexplained why the symbolic actions of chapters four and five do not fit the standard form.

V. From the Call to the Rest of Ezekiel

Thus, accepting the call as 1:1-3:27, what can we conclude that the call tells us about the Book of Ezekiel as a whole? Both Boadt and Miller present their own set of themes evident in the call. Boadt presents his four themes as the presence of the divine glory in the Exile, the call

¹⁰⁰ Odell, "You are What You Eat," 234.

¹⁰¹ Odell, "You are What You Eat," 247.

¹⁰² Odell, "You are What You Eat," 236.

to be a watchman, the accountability of each person for what they have done, and the power of God to act even when people do not listen.¹⁰³

Miller offers his four themes as the *destruction of Jerusalem* for its apostasy, the future of the Israelites beyond *judgment, hope*, and God's sovereign *purpose* in all of this.¹⁰⁴ I find Miller's themes as more representative of the purpose of Ezekiel's message. God does not appoint Ezekiel as a prophet simply to condemn the people. Rather, the point is to explain to the people why it is necessary for them to be punished and show there is still hope. In 3:5-7, God tells Ezekiel to prophesize even though the people will not listen. Wilson says why would it be worthwhile to tell the people why they are to be punished unless God still has hope for some to repent.¹⁰⁵ It is the hope and knowledge of God's purpose that provides meaning for Ezekiel's mission.

Likewise, as I stated above, Ezekiel does not contain an explicit objection to God's call. Klein finds this true throughout the book when he writes, "Almost without exception throughout the book Ezekiel passed on the divine word with no personal comment or elaboration of his own."¹⁰⁶ Wilson goes so far as to describe Ezekiel as devoid of free will because he always does as God commands without comment.¹⁰⁷ For Klein, this is what leads us into Ezekiel's frequent use of the messenger formula. It is used twice in the call narrative alone. Klein states that almost every pericope in Ezekiel begins with the messenger formula.¹⁰⁸ This connects to the recognition statement that is used to end many of the oracles where God says he does the act so that the people may know his is the Lord. This is part of God's sovereign purpose. .¹⁰⁹

¹⁰³ Boadt, "Ezekiel," 310.

¹⁰⁴ Miller, *Meet the Prophets*, 192-196.

¹⁰⁵ Wilson, "Prophecy in Crisis," 128.

¹⁰⁶ Klein, *Ezekiel: the Prophet*, 15.

¹⁰⁷ Wilson, "Prophecy in Crisis," 126.

¹⁰⁸ Ezekiel 2:4; 3:11. Klein, *Ezekiel: the Prophet*, 4, 15.

¹⁰⁹ Bullock finds this in 7:4 and 7:27. Bullock, "Ezekiel, Bridge," 26. Boadt, "Ezekiel," 308.

Generally, in the first twenty-four chapters Ezekiel speaks mainly in terms of judgment and then after the fall of Jerusalem the message focuses on *hope*. It is this heavy focus on a judgment that cannot be changed but for which there is *hope* afterwards that leads Hals to describe Ezekiel as a bridge between prophecy and apocalyptic form.¹¹⁰

The people saw the Exile as a stage of judgment. They were removed from the Holy Land because of their sins. As Reiss states while Jeremiah tells the people in Jerusalem that they are being punished for their ethical misbehavior, Ezekiel says it is for their ritual misbehavior, idolatry.¹¹¹ God dwelt in the Temple and to be separated from him was a most serious punishment.¹¹² The sin for which they are being punished is their idolatry.¹¹³ Their sinfulness has earned them the designation as a “rebellious house” that Klein finds used no less than ten times in the book.¹¹⁴

Yet, as stated above, the judgment is not the end-all. As McKeating states there are two foci, judgment and the fact that the judgment is survivable. McKeating goes so far as to say that God intends for the people to survive the judgment.¹¹⁵

Clements sees a major part of Ezekiel’s role as to bring that hope. He writes

Only someone brought up, like Ezekiel, as a priest in Jerusalem could hope to translate and reinterpret this spiritual map of the world for a large community of people who had been uprooted from their spiritual home.”¹¹⁶

Thus, Ezekiel’s priesthood becomes an essential part of his ministry as a prophet. Bakon states that Ezekiel’s combination of priest and prophet is instrumental to his recognition of what was

¹¹⁰ Hals, *Ezekiel*, 4. Witherup sees the call vision as providing an understanding of Ezekiel as an apocalyptic visionary as this type of vision is more common for a visionary than for a prophet. Ronald D. Witherup, S.S., “Apocalyptic Imagery in the Book of Ezekiel,” *The Bible Today* 37 (Jan-Feb 1999), 10.

¹¹¹ Moshe Reiss, “Jeremiah, The Suffering Prophet, and Ezekiel, the Visionary,” *Jewish Bible Quarterly* 32 no. 4 (2004). 233.

¹¹² Wilson, “Prophecy in Crisis,” 121-122.

¹¹³ Reiss, “Jeremiah,” 236.

¹¹⁴ Ezek 2:5-8; 3:9; 3:26-27; 12:2; 12:3, 12:9; 12:25; 17:12; 24:3; 44:6. Klein, *Ezekiel: the Prophet*, 16.

¹¹⁵ McKeating, *Ezekiel*, 77. See also Clements, *Ezekiel*, 9.

¹¹⁶ Clements, *Ezekiel*, 14.

going on.¹¹⁷ Miller believes it is only when we appreciate the deep rootedness of Ezekiel's priesthood that we can appreciate its influence in his writing. For instance the language used by Ezekiel using the phrase "glory of Yahweh" is indicative of his priesthood.¹¹⁸

Thus, we conclude that as his call is essential to his message so is his priesthood to understanding the message. Odell argues for the removal of Ezekiel's priestly identity. Yet, even she makes reference to how his priestly identity influences his message in chapters one to five.

¹¹⁷ Shimon Bakon, "Ezekiel the Sentinel," *Jewish Bible Quarterly* 32 no. 4 (2004): 260.

¹¹⁸ Miller, *Meet the Prophets*, 185-186.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Bakon, Shimon, "Ezekiel the Sentinel," *Jewish Bible Quarterly* 32 no. 4 (2004): 259-265.
- Boadt, Lawrence C.S.P., "Ezekiel" in the *New Jerome Biblical Commentary*. Eds. Raymond Brown, S.S., Joseph A. Fitzmyer, S.J. and Roland E. Murphy, O.Carm. (Englewood Cliffs, NY: Prentice Hall. 1990).
- , "A New Look at the Book of Ezekiel," *The Bible Today* 34 (Jan-Feb 1999): 4-9.
- Brownlee, William, "Ezekiel's Parable of the Watchman and the Editing of Ezekiel," *Vetus Testamentum* 28 no. 4: 392-408.
- Bullock, C. Hassell, "Ezekiel, Bridge Between the Testaments," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 25/1 (March 1982): 23-31.
- Clements, Ronald E., *Ezekiel*, (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1996).
- Habel, N. C., "The Form and Significance of the Call Narratives," *Zeitschrift Fur Die Alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 77 (1965): 297-323.
- Hals, Ronald M. *Ezekiel*, The Forms of Old Testament Literature Volume XIX, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1989).
- Holladay, William, "Had Ezekiel Known Jeremiah Personally," *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 63, (2001): 31-34.
- Klein, Ralph W., *Ezekiel: the Prophet and His Message* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1988).
- McKeating, Henry, *Ezekiel*, Old Testament Guides, (Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993).
- Miller, John W., *Meet the Prophets: A Beginner's Guide to the Books of the Biblical Prophets- Their Meaning Then and Now*, (New York: Paulist Press, 1987).
- Odell, Margaret S., "You are What You Eat: Ezekiel and the Scroll," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 117/2 (1998): 229-248.
- Phinney, D. Nathan, "The Prophetic Objection in Ezekiel IV 14 and It's Relation to Ezekiel's Call," *Vetus Testamentum* 55 no. 1 (2005): 75-88.
- Reiss, Moshe, "Jeremiah, The Suffering Prophet, and Ezekiel, the Visionary," *Jewish Bible Quarterly* 32 no. 4 (2004) 233-238.

Wilson, Robert R., "Prophecy in Crisis: The Call of Ezekiel," *Interpretation* 38 no. 2 (1984): 117-130.

Witherup, Ronald D. S.S., "Apocalyptic Imagery in the Book of Ezekiel," *The Bible Today* 37 (Jan-Feb 1999): 10-17.

Ezekiel began his prophetic ministry at age 30 (Eze. 1:1). Jews forbade the reading of Ezekiel before age 30 (John Gill). Timeline of Events of Ezekiel's Life. 597 - Second deportation to Babylon; Jehoiachin taken captive (2 Ki. 24:10-16). The theme of Ezekiel is God's sovereignty over human affairs. He has an eternal purpose, and He is working all things toward that purpose. We see this theme in the vision of God's throne on the chariot of the cherubims (Eze. 1). This is the throne of the universe. It is a revelation of God in His glory and power and sovereignty over all nations and events. The vision was part of Ezekiel's call (Eze. 1-3). God wanted Ezekiel to see Him high and lifted up on the throne of the universe. Isaiah had the same type of vision (Isa. 6). In his later poems, after his language simplified greatly, Ezekiel expresses being tired of lofty, complicated, and non-direct language: "I am tired / of irony and paradoxes . . . of the bird in the hand / and the two in the bush / of poetry direct and oblique / of statement plain or symbolic / of doctrine or dogma" (157). Ezekiel's poetry turns in the later part of his career towards directness and succinctness. Ezekiel returns to the theme of memory again and again throughout the Collected Poems. The speaker calls upon them and asks them to "shelter" those who live in the city: "men / Sleepless or drugged with dreams / Whose working hours / Drained of power / Flow towards futility" (20). Thus, the speaker calls upon nature to help with an issue that affects a certain collective and bring meaning to their life.