
GANZ NOTES ON THE BOOK OF THE PROPHET EZEKIEL (6TH BCE)

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NOTES

Popular Misunderstanding. ³⁰ As for you, son of man, your people are talking about you beside the walls and in the doorways of houses. They say to one another, “Let’s go hear the latest word that comes from the LORD.” ³¹ My people come to you, gathering as a crowd and sitting in front of you to hear your words, but they will not act on them. Love songs are on their lips, but in their hearts they pursue dishonest gain. ³² For them you are only a singer* of love songs, with a pleasant voice and a clever touch. They listen to your words, but they do not obey them. ³³ But when it comes—and it is surely coming!—they shall know that there was a prophet among them. ¹

^o cf. Ez 8:1; Mt 13:22.

* *Singer*: perhaps the term indicates an entertainer whom one enjoys and then forgets.

¹ [New American Bible](#), Revised Edition. (Washington, DC: The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2011), Eze 33:30–33.

BIOGRAPHICAL DETAILS

Biographical Details - In the year 606 B.C., the Babylonians began the first of several deportations of the Jews; Daniel was in this group. In the second group (597 B.C.) was young Ezekiel, then about twenty-five years old. He was taken to Tel-abib near the ship canal Chebar (3:15). There he lived in his own house with his beloved wife (8:1; 24:16ff). Five years after Ezekiel came to Tel-abib, he was called to be a prophet of God, when he was thirty years old (592 B.C.). This was six years before the destruction of Jerusalem in 586, so while Jeremiah was ministering to the people back home, Ezekiel was preaching to the Jews of the captivity in Babylon. Like Jeremiah, Ezekiel was a priest called to be a prophet.²



The Near East at the Time of Ezekiel c. 593 BCE

Ezekiel recorded his visions and prophecies while living in the vicinity of Babylon, where he had been exiled years earlier. By Ezekiel's time, the Babylonian Empire had engulfed virtually all of the area along the eastern coast of the Mediterranean Sea and would eventually subdue even the land of Egypt, where many other Judeans had fled.³

²Wiersbe, Warren W. *Wiersbe's Expository Outlines on the Old Testament*. Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1993.

³Crossway Bibles, [The ESV Study Bible](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2008), 1498.

Their deportation in 597 BCE is described in 2 Kgs 24:14–16:

[The king of Babylon] carried away all Jerusalem, all the officials, all the warriors, ten thousand captives, all the artisans and the smiths; no one remained, except the poorest people of the land. He carried away Jehoiachin to Babylon; the king's mother, the king's wives, his officials, and the elite of the land, he took into captivity from Jerusalem to Babylon. The king of Babylon brought captive to Babylon all the men of valor, seven thousand, the artisans and the smiths, one thousand, all of them strong and fit for war. (NRSV)⁴

DID BOOK OF EZEKIEL INFLUENCE BIBLE?

What influence did the Book of Ezekiel exercise on the biblical Tradition? – “The influence of Ezekiel in subsequent Jewish and Christian tradition is somewhat ambivalent. **Outside of his book, Ezekiel is not mentioned elsewhere in the OT, and no NT writing quotes the book, though the Gospel of John and Revelation do allude to it.** Whereas modern readers tend to find the book's oracles of judgment repellent, ancient Jewish and Christian interpretations tended to draw in rich and creative ways on the book's transcendent visions of divine and human reconciliation.”⁵ And, “Moreover, despite the absence of any direct quotations of Ezekiel, **Revelation is in many respects an apocalyptic retelling of Ezekiel**, complete with the reappearance of angelic executioners, the “woman” Israel, Gog, and the transformed city of God.”⁶

NRSV New Revised Standard Version

⁴ Katheryn Pfisterer Darr, [“The Book of Ezekiel,”](#) in *New Interpreter's Bible*, ed. Leander E. Keck, vol. 6 (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1994–2004), 1075.

⁵ Margaret S. Odell, [“Ezekiel, Book Of,”](#) ed. Katharine Doob Sakenfeld, *The New Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2006–2009), 387.

⁶ Margaret S. Odell, [“Ezekiel, Book Of,”](#) ed. Katharine Doob Sakenfeld, *The New Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2006–2009), 387.

Indicate **the basic structure of the Book of Ezekiel**. Especially:

The book's three great visions of the glory of God (1, 8–11, 40–48) also argue against the traditional bipartite division of the book. Although it is well known that the visions are literarily linked to one another, interpreters do not always treat them as significant structuring elements. On the contrary, the visions do appear to delineate distinct stages in the prophet's work.⁷

Ezekiel 1-24 – the inaugural vision and the vocation of the prophet in Ezekiel 1-3, and God's eventual abandonment of Jerusalem in Ezekiel 8-11.

Even so, Ezekiel's theology is a kind of practical monotheism, since in his view there may be other gods but *no other gods that matter*. **Ezekiel's majestic vision in chap. 1**, in which the deity is enthroned upon and supported by four living beings that symbolize the totality of the created order, presents the God of Israel not simply as a mobile deity but as the God of the universe.⁸

Ezekiel 18 vs 20 – “Thus, on the one hand, Ezekiel 20 [in contrast to the teaching about repentance and taking responsibility and its effectiveness of Ezekiel 18] reviews Israelite history as a story of continual apostasy: in Egypt (vv. 5–10), in the wilderness (vv. 11–26), in the homeland, and in exile (vv. 30–44).” (Fishbane) And, “The exile is thus presented here as an inevitable corporate punishment—one whose fulfillment is predetermined, despite instances of individual righteousness.” (Fishbane) And, “If so, the purpose of Ezekiel 18 would then be to emphasize the point that individual responsibility and repentance are the people's best hope for a national renewal after the destruction. However, the fact is that the discourse in Ezekiel 20 disregards this theology of exilic hope.” (Fishbane) Finally, **“From these two texts (Ezekiel 18 and 20), one senses the powerful mood swings and theological variations in Ezekiel's prophecies.”**

Ezekiel 24-48 – “It is therefore more accurate to suggest that the theme of chapters 25–48 is the assertion of the divine will to rule over Israel and to establish its distinctiveness

⁷ Margaret S. Odell, [“Ezekiel, Book Of,”](#) ed. Katharine Doob Sakenfeld, *The New Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2006–2009), 387.

⁸ Margaret S. Odell, [“Ezekiel, Book Of,”](#) ed. Katharine Doob Sakenfeld, *The New Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2006–2009), 387.

over against the nations. In this respect, chapters 25–48 constitute the fulfillment of the divine oath in 20:33 to be Israel’s king.”⁹

Ezekiel 33 – the renewal of Ezekiel’s mission, but now, after the terrible Fall of Jerusalem, to be a ministry of hope and consolation to a shattered people in Ezekiel 33–48.

Ezekiel 43:1–12 – God’s decision to return from Exile to Jerusalem. “In connection with these oracles, it is likely that the prophet’s despair over the very possibility of Israel’s repentance from sin elicits prophecies of other **unilateral divine acts—undeserved acts of grace** that transform the wayward heart of the people (36:24–28), that revive the anguished nation and restore her to Zion (37:9–14), and that transform the rubble of Jerusalem into a Garden of Eden (36:35–36). To cap these miraculous developments, the blueprint of a new Temple is also revealed, and a new order of cultic holiness is anticipated. At this time, the divine Glory will return to the Temple and dwell amidst the cherubim (43:1–4).” (Fishbane)

WHAT IS A “PROPHET” AND “PROPHECY”

It is probably important to explain in some fashion what “prophecy” is in the Old Testament, and what a “prophet” is and does and why.

Once again, the figure of Ezekiel may hold the clue to the significance of this vision for the exiles. Though both he and they remain absent from the land, **the prophet becomes a testimony to the experience of divine presence and thereby offers that same experience to the exiles through the medium of his vision.**¹⁰ How I am understanding this insight by Odell is that while the Temple – that physical structure that stood in Jerusalem far to the West of Babylon – used to be the “location” of God’s personal Presence, now, in Exile, the prophet Ezekiel has become the “location” of God’s personal Presence.

The verb “to prophesy” in Greek (*prophēteuō*) means “to speak for or on behalf of someone.” A “prophet” is a person who does such a thing. This sense comports well with the function of many Israelite prophets. **They speak on behalf of the deity to the people, as the formula “Thus says the Lord” suggests, and, on occasion, they speak**

⁹ Margaret S. Odell, [“Ezekiel, Book Of,”](#) ed. Katharine Doob Sakenfeld, *The New Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2006–2009), 387.

¹⁰ Margaret S. Odell, [“Ezekiel, Book Of,”](#) ed. Katharine Doob Sakenfeld, *The New Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2006–2009), 387.

on behalf of an individual or the people as a whole to the deity. The term *prophet* does not, at least by dint of etymology, mean someone who *forespeaks*, i.e., someone who foretells the future, nor does it signify someone who “speaks forth,” though prophets may, indeed, speak truth to various elements in Israelite society.... The etymology of the Hebrew noun *navi* ‘ is disputed. **It may mean “someone who is called” or “someone who calls upon the gods.”** The former meaning is more likely. However, in attempting to define what prophets were in Israel and elsewhere in the ANE, one must move beyond etymology and seek a definition that comports with the behaviors of individuals known as prophets and with the literature associated with them.¹¹

All such proposals suffer from one fatal flaw. **They fail to take into account the radical diversity of those individuals known as prophets in ancient Israel.** Just as it is difficult to speak of a quintessential prophetic message, so too it is difficult to identify one model of prophetic behavior. Instead, it is appropriate to recognize the fundamental diversity in prophetic performance, as is suggested by the various Hebrew words for prophets. **Even in this diversity, however, it is appropriate to think about prophets as intermediaries, typically representing the deity to the world of humans and in ways related to but different from priests and technical diviners.**¹²

A PROPHET “IN THE MIDST”

Ezekiel’s whole ministry took place in Exile – “in the midst” – “Ezekiel’s ministry came near the end of the prophetic phenomenon in the Old Testament. He was one of the last to fill a prophetic office. **Both he and Daniel were unique in that they received their call and exercised their ministries as exiles in Babylon.** Ezekiel viewed himself as a prophet “in the midst” of the captives. **Ezekiel used the word “in the midst” or “among” 116 times, which is significantly more than that of any other Old Testament writer.**³⁵ The repeated use of this

ANE Ancient Near East

¹¹ David L. Petersen, “[Prophet, Prophecy](#),” ed. Katharine Doob Sakenfeld, *The New Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2006–2009), 623.

¹² David L. Petersen, “[Prophet, Prophecy](#),” ed. Katharine Doob Sakenfeld, *The New Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2006–2009), 624.

*³⁵ “In the midst” is the word בְּתוֹכָם. See *KHAT*, 1510–11. It is first used in 1:1 to designate his place “in the midst” of the captives in Babylon and in 3:15 as a term of identity signifying he was with them “in the midst” of their plight as captives.

term revealed the unique perspective he had of himself as a prophet in the midst of the captives and the crucial events of the exile.”¹³

EZEKIEL “SEES” WHAT OTHERS CANNOT

Concerning Ezekiel’s ability “to see” divine realities, Ezekiel 1:3 - ¹In the thirtieth year, on the fifth day of the fourth month, while I was among the exiles by the river Chebar, the heavens opened, and I saw divine visions.¹⁴ I am reminded how “seeing” anything involves *intentionality*, otherwise we are speaking about “gawking” or “gapping”. What I mean is that if one does not *know* for what one is looking, and therefore seeks to see it, or if one does not *know how* to see what one desires to see, then a person is likely never to see what is right there in front of him or her to see.

A PROPHET “DE-CONSTRUCTS” THEOLOGY

The biblical teaching is not monolithic, symmetrical – “A final feature of Ezekiel’s prophecies has long caused consternation. This concerns the many priestly and legal traditions in the Book of Ezekiel that manifestly contradict those known from the Torah. For the ancient Rabbis in particular, the priestly rules found in Ezekiel 43–48 caused considerable vexation when compared to the content of the Sinaitic revelation. According to a talmudic tradition, this matter nearly led to the withdrawal of the Book of Ezekiel from public use....” (Fishbane)

From the time that Ezekiel was commissioned as Yahweh’s prophet to the house of Israel in 593 BCE, until the fall of Jerusalem in 586 BCE, **he engaged in the harsh task of dismantling the orthodox Yahwistic theology of his day.** That theology emphasized Yahweh’s promises to the Israelites—e.g., the blessings attending the covenant forged at Sinai, God’s absolute commitment to the Davidic dynasty, and the inviolability of Jerusalem, site of Yahweh’s Temple. Such promises strengthened his fellow exiles’ resistance to Ezekiel’s relentless insistence that Yahweh had resolved utterly to destroy Judah on account of its long-lived and ongoing abominations. The end was

¹³Cooper, L. E. (2001, c1994). *Vol. 17: Ezekiel* (electronic ed.). Logos Library System; The New American Commentary (29). Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers.

¹⁴[*New American Bible*](#), Revised Edition. (Washington, DC: The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2011), Eze 1:1.

approaching. Israel's failure to honor the obligations of its covenant with Yahweh was bringing upon its own head the full weight of the covenantal curses.¹⁵

Prophets not only inherited these traditions, they also explored their implications and, in some cases, turned them upside down. One prominent example of such prophetic working with traditions involves the covenant. According to its expressions in the Pentateuch, the covenant made at Sinai and reaffirmed on the plains of Moab comprised a contract between Yahweh and Israel. That covenant involved a number of stipulations, i.e., the covenant code (Exod 20:22–23:33) or the Deuteronomic law code, by means of which Israel was supposed to live. As a party to this treaty-like agreement, Israel agreed to follow those stipulations.¹⁶

Prophets were, therefore, both conservators and innovators. They worked on the basis of prior religious traditions and revamped them in new circumstances. If Micah spoke a resounding “No” to the continuation of the Temple in Jerusalem, Isaiah spoke a firm “Yes” to the importance of a Davidic ruler on the throne. If Amos (8:2) could proclaim that “the end has come upon my people Israel,” Zechariah could speak of a time when “the remnant of this people” will possess all things (Zech 8:12).¹⁷

THE “DISSOLVING” LANGUAGE OF EZEKIEL

The exceptionally difficult language of the Ezekiel text is described by Fishbane. But perhaps the falling-apart of the Hebrew language of Ezekiel's exilic life is proving a point. The very language of the Jewish people, and its capacity to communicate truth to its people, has been damaged.

¹⁵ Katheryn Pfisterer Darr, “[The Book of Ezekiel](#),” in *New Interpreter's Bible*, ed. Leander E. Keck, vol. 6 (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1994–2004), 1075–1076.

¹⁶ David L. Petersen, “[Prophet, Prophecy](#),” ed. Katharine Doob Sakenfeld, *The New Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2006–2009), 647.

¹⁷ David L. Petersen, “[Prophet, Prophecy](#),” ed. Katharine Doob Sakenfeld, *The New Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2006–2009), 647.

I am thinking today of how often I recognize the abdication of parents/adults to be what they are and to serve the role their title gives to them. Instead, (1) they wish they were young again and spend their time trying to prove that they have still “got it”; (2) they see the mess increasingly obvious in our American society and they either make sure they stand with “the winners” (and then condescend to, or ignore, “the losers”) or teach their children how to blame others for what they all are complicit in causing; (3) they blame God for their troubles and consequently dismiss God from their concern; (4) they flatter their children and infuse in them the message that they are the young, the next generation, and it is up to *them* – their children - to make society and culture different (which is the adults’ way of avoiding what belongs to them, the adults, to do!).

In this particular case, Josiah is **eight-years old** when he ascends to the throne to rule in Judea. Obviously he had elders in his life who helped him see the importance of fundamental reform of the nation, and who helped and guided him to lead that.

The “last chance” given Judea by the young King Josiah and his reform - Josiah became king ca. 640 BCE. The need for a spiritual renewal was evidenced by the social, moral, and spiritual decadence in the Southern Kingdom that exceeded the corruption of Samaria. **The new young king set in motion many reforms he hoped would eradicate paganism and idolatry, return the people to Yahweh worship, and restore the spiritual and moral life of the nation (2 Kgs 23:1–30).... In spite of Josiah’s sincerity, the people apparently regarded the reforms as the king’s personal desires, but there was no strong public sentiment for their support.** As a result the reforms were enacted but were superficial. *Jeremiah was the first prophet who spoke out against the failure of the reform movement to produce genuine spiritual revival.* He condemned those who had not been sincere in promoting the spiritual and moral goals of the reform (see, e.g., Jer 11; 22; 27–28).^{5 18}

1. **Josiah was king of Judah from 640–609 BCE;** he was the son and successor of AMON and his mother was Jedidah daughter of Adaiah of Bozkath. Second Kings 22–23 reports that during the eighteenth year of his reign (622 BCE), **he implemented reforms based on the “book of the law,” which was found during a renovation of the Temple.** Unlike most kings of Israel and Judah who received a

⁵The exact relation of Jeremiah to the reforms of Josiah as well as the nature of the reform movement itself is a point of discussion. Some maintain that Jeremiah opposed the reform from the beginning as futile and ineffective (see Thompson, *Jeremiah*, 56–67).

¹⁸Cooper, L. E. (2001, c1994). *Vol. 17: Ezekiel* (electronic ed.). Logos Library System; The New American Commentary (20). Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers.

failing grade from the Deuteronomistic Historian (DtrH), **Josiah received unqualified praise** (2 Kgs 23:25). During the thirty-first year of his reign (609 BCE), he was killed by Pharaoh Neco at Megiddo.¹⁹

THE FOOLISH LEADERSHIP BACK IN JUDEA

Ezekiel recognized that the Judeans who remained back in Jerusalem and environs were continuing to seek to revolt from the rule of the Neo-Babylonians. This would eventually bring about the utter destruction of the Temple, creating a disaster of enormous significance for the whole people of God. Ezekiel was critical of this revolutionary activity. *So, when is it time to surrender to worldly powers?*

During this period of Ezekiel's career (593–588 B.C.E.), **there was considerable anti-Babylonian agitation in Judah.** This was concretely expressed by various attempts to form alliances in order to break up the Babylonian hegemony in the region. Something of the tensions, factionalism, and plots of revolt of this period are reflected in the Book of Jeremiah, where an alliance of states early in the reign of King Zedekiah (in 592 B.C.E.; probably encouraged by Pharaoh Psamettichus II of Egypt) tried to involve Judah in a general rebellion (Jeremiah 27–28).² The revolt was not successful, and Zedekiah was forced to reaffirm his allegiance to Nebuchadnezzar (Jer. 29:3; 51:59).²⁰

DtrH Deuteronomistic History/Historian

¹⁹ Uriah Y. Kim, "[Josiah](#)," ed. Katharine Doob Sakenfeld, *The New Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2006–2009), 405.

² Jer. 28:1 indicates the date of 592 B.C.E.; the dating of Jer. 27:1 to the beginning of the reign of Jehoiakim is impossible, given the references to Zedekiah in vv. 3, 12. The dateline is missing in the Septuagint. For the issues, see William Holladay, *Jeremiah*, Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1989), 2:112–116, with literature. For the rebellion, see Nahum M. Sarna, "The Abortive Insurrection in Zedekiah's Day (Jer. 27–29)," *EI* 14 (1978): 89*–97*.

²⁰ Michael A. Fishbane, [Haftarot](#), The JPS Bible Commentary (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 2002), 547.

RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE AS “DANGEROUS”

Ezekiel 1-3 – the power of a special manifestation or epiphany of God to Ezekiel detonates in the center of his life and permanently changes it. What St. Ignatius means by a “mystery” of the life of Christ. What Johannes Metz is speaking about when he talks of the “dangerous memory” at the center of the Christian message. Ezekiel’s transcendent experience (chapters 1-3) of the holiness of God threw into **painful contrast** for him the painful reality of the sins of the people. **The tension that any person must accept** in his or her life when God has blessed him or her with a special gift of closeness to Him.

Ezekiel is always particularly sensitive to the utter HOLINESS of God, through which the contrast to the way humans are becomes intensely obvious, and painful to feel.

EZEKIEL AND THE FIRST COMMANDMENT

Perhaps one could consider the Book of Ezekiel as an extended meditation on the meaning of the First Commandment (Exodus 20:1-3).

The Ten Commandments. ¹ Then God spoke all these words:

^{2a} I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt,^b out of the house of slavery. ³ You shall not have other gods beside me. ²¹

EZEKIEL 1-24 – DOOM IS INEVITABLE

Doom – “**The inevitability of doom** is, in fact, a recurrent theme in the prophecies of Ezekiel (Ezek. 12:21–28; 14:12–20; 21:1–7); **intercessions of mercy are utterly rejected** (9:10). It is

^a Dt 5:6–21.

^b Lv 26:13; Ps 81:11; Hos 13:4.

²¹ [*New American Bible*](#), Revised Edition. (Washington, DC: The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2011), Ex 20:1–3.

furthermore striking that, in contrast with his contemporary fellow prophet Jeremiah, Ezekiel offers no direct call for repentance throughout chapters 4–24.” (Fishbane) and, “The report of the abominations performed in Jerusalem, which Ezekiel brought to the exiles, together with the announcement of that city’s fate (see chapters 8–11), presumably serves to justify to the exiles **the inevitability of the doom to come—and therewith dashes any lingering hopes of an end to the exile before the destruction of Jerusalem.**” (Fishbane)

What is the difference between the doom that Ezekiel accepts as inevitable for the people, and a “doom” that a person from among those very people desires to happen to them all? I am thinking of the nihilists who are becoming more among us in our present American society, who have *become* the anger that they used to “have”, and who want to bring down the whole damn thing. How is this different from what readers imagine God is up to in this prophecy of “inevitable” doom? *Analogy*: think of how it is that children know that their parents love them, care about their good, when they have to suffer an “inevitable” punishment for some bad thing they, the children, did. **Fishbane**: “Just this conclusion, one may suggest, is the key reason why many of Ezekiel’s oracles of doom conclude with the phrase “that you [Israel] shall know that I am the LORD.”

Ezekiel articulates the possibility that **God can choose to abandon a religion that no longer serves His purposes**, but instead serves itself. Notice how He chooses to leave the Temple (Ezekiel 8-11), but then He also chooses, after much purification and renewal of the people, to return to Jerusalem and to its new Temple (Ezekiel 43:1-12).

GOD’S WILL TO RELATIONSHIP-POWER

What is God’s ultimate will in the Book of Ezekiel? – “Ezekiel’s understanding of divine omnipotence is as much *a will to relationship as it is a will to power*. Throughout the book, the covenant formulary “I will be their God, and they will be my people” exists as an as-yet unrealized promise (11:20; 34:31; 36:28; 37:23). **Yet Ezekiel is at pains to point out that God’s failure to make good on this covenant is not for lack of divine intention or ability.** Despite Israel’s repeated rebellions, which have continually jeopardized the divine oath, God intends to establish the bonds of the covenant (*see* COVENANT, OT AND NT). The final chapters suggest that the goal of the entire process of judgment is to fulfill the promise made to “my servant Jacob” (37:25). *The people will be brought back into the bond of the covenant,*

cleansed and given new hearts so that they may obey God's statutes, all so that God can fulfill this ancient promise."²²

The certainty that God will succeed in His purposes, even when He overrides His own rules to do so: "More than simply a collection of collections, the book exhibits dramatic movement from crisis to resolution. **The principal characters are Yahweh, Ezekiel, and the house of Israel.** The book sustains an autobiographical perspective throughout, as the prophet reports that he sees visions, sits among the exiles, is carried to worlds both defiled and cleansed, witnesses and performs unspeakable acts, and even occasionally objects to divine commands. *Yet the driving force is Yahweh, the God who refuses to abandon the ancient promises despite Israel's numerous rebellions, which technically cancels out any obligation on God's part to abide by these promises.* The so-called recognition formula, "*and they shall know that I am the Lord,*" which appears more than 70 times throughout the book, leaves no question as to the purpose of the book: to give witness to the sovereignty and power of God in such a way that Israel can have no other recourse than to submit to the divine will."²³

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GOD IN EXILE IS OMNIPOTENT (NOT BROKEN)

God in exile with His people remains utterly omnipotent – "Yet Ezekiel does not simply reassure the exiles that their national deity has taken up residence along with them in exile—indeed, such a claim would have little power to console, **since the peoples of that time were well acquainted with the notion of gods being forced into exile.** Rather, *Ezekiel declares that the God of Israel is not merely present but omnipotent,* who sends mighty empires into oblivion and is the sovereign lord even of Nebuchadnezzar (29:17–20). This display of power is not intended simply to impress; rather, it is motivated by God's intention to honor the ancient

²² Margaret S. Odell, "[Ezekiel, Book Of,](#)" ed. Katharine Doob Sakenfeld, *The New Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2006–2009), 387.

²³ Margaret S. Odell, "[Ezekiel, Book Of,](#)" ed. Katharine Doob Sakenfeld, *The New Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2006–2009), 387.

promise to settle Jacob's descendants in the land (37:25). **The notion of divine omnipotence is thus inextricably bound up with notions of Yahweh's fidelity and integrity.**"²⁴

The above insight about God's omnipotence, even in Exile, raises the question about how it can be the case that the sufferings inflicted on us, the shames foisted on us, by others with power over us, does not necessarily mean that I, the one exiled for their sordid purposes, have become powerless. **Rather, it could be that how I react to the exile imposed on me clarifies the degree and depth of my strength.** How often it turns out to be the case that those who work to exile those they don't like or who make them uncomfortable, and do exile others and work to destroy their influence (all of this behavior revealing and proving the weakness of character in those who use power in this way), end up clarifying the strength and character of those they seek to remove and erase from public notice.

²⁴ Margaret S. Odell, "[Ezekiel, Book Of](#)," ed. Katharine Doob Sakenfeld, *The New Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2006–2009), 387.