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# THE ROLE OF REPENTANCE IN THE BOOK OF EZEKIEL: A SECOND CHANCE FOR THE SECOND GENERATION

## Abstract

It has become common to describe the book of Ezekiel as radically theocentric. Whilst this is a helpful concept, in the case of human repentance some scholars have taken it to the extreme, lapsing into total theocentricity and excluding the role that the book of Ezekiel gives to human agents. An integrated reading of Ezek 14, 18, 33, and 40 along with the “new heart and new soul” texts (Ezek 11:14-21; 18:30-32; 36:23b-38) that is attentive to allusions to the exodus tradition and the centrality of the land demonstrates that human repentance plays an integral role in marking out YHWH’s future community. This future community is explicitly correlated with the second generation of the exodus, another community who passed through divine judgment in the wilderness so that they could inhabit the land promised by YHWH. Ezekiel’s second exodus is entirely motivated by YHWH’s reputation and instigated solely by divine choice; but, Ezekiel envisions the accomplishment of this purpose through the process of human repentance. Human agency, exercised to demonstrate faith in YHWH despite various trials, is the means through which the purpose of glorifying YHWH is achieved.

Since the publication of Paul Joyce’s *Divine Initiative and Human Response in Ezekiel* it has become increasingly more common to describe the book of Ezekiel as radically theocentric.<sup>1</sup> That is to say, Ezekiel foregrounds YHWH’s reputation as the prime motivating factor for all that YHWH, the book’s central protagonist, does. The accuracy and utility of this statement is borne out by its popularity amongst scholars. But, Joyce’s emphasis, despite its positive contribution, runs the risk of overshadowing the role of other agents in the book. In this way it is burdened with a problem that all statements of emphasis face: over time what begins as a healthy counterweight to a prevailing view can itself become so dominant that it

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<sup>1</sup> Paul M. Joyce, *Divine Initiative and Human Response in Ezekiel* (JSOTSup 51; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1989), 89-105; for a critique of Joyce’s view see Jacqueline Lapsley, *Can These Bones Live? The Problem of the Moral Self in the Book of Ezekiel* (BZAW 301; Berlin: de Gruyter, 2000), 28-31.

obscures other important features. I believe that Joyce's well-founded stress on divine agency in Ezekiel has, in some cases, lapsed into total theocentricity, unintentionally eclipsing the role of human action in the book.

The role of repentance in the book of Ezekiel is one place where scholarly emphasis on radical theocentricity has pushed the pendulum to its apex. '[R]epentance,' Joyce remarks, 'is never the ground for a new beginning.'<sup>2</sup> Elsewhere he suggests that the book tells the exiled community that '[t]here is indeed to be a future but it is undeserved and depends solely on YHWH.'<sup>3</sup> Andrew Mein closely follows this position, concluding that 'YHWH restores Israel for his own sake alone, and irrespective of the repentance of the people.'<sup>4</sup> Joyce and Mein formulate their position mainly through an exegesis of Ezek 14, 18, and 33 that focuses on the issue of communal or generational responsibility. This is, to be sure, a relevant and important lens through which to interrogate the material, but it has influenced their reading of these passages to such an extent that it appears to have obscured the role of human response within Ezekiel.

At the same time, scholars who retain a role for human repentance have concentrated upon the exodus imagery in the book. Whilst it is certainly true that Ezekiel appeals to the exodus tradition in order to substantiate hope for the Babylonian exiles—a position that I hope to bolster here—the book does not make an undifferentiated appeal to the exodus narrative. Rather, the texts that detail the role of human repentance establish a connection specifically between the faithful Babylonian exiles and the second generation of the exodus narrative. Ezekiel characterizes the behavior that YHWH desires from the exiles by analogy to the faithfulness modeled by Caleb and Joshua, pillars of the community who represent what it means to persevere through the trials they experience amongst an otherwise rebellious community.

In what follows, I shall argue that a balanced and integrated reading of Ezek 14, 18, 33, and 20 that is attentive to their use of the disputation speech genre, allusions to the exodus tradition, and the importance of the land in the book of Ezekiel demonstrates that human repentance plays an integral role in marking out the community that YHWH will return to the land. This restoration is, as Joyce and Mein suggest, entirely motivated by YHWH's reputation and instigated solely by divine choice; but, it is achieved through human agency

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<sup>2</sup> Paul M. Joyce, 'Ezekiel and Moral Transformation,' in *Transforming Visions: Transformations of Text, Tradition, and Theology in Ezekiel* (eds. William A. Tooman and Michael A. Lyons; PTMS; Eugene, Ore.: Pickwick, 2010), 149.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 148.

that consists of a faithful community in Babylon rejecting idolatry and embracing YHWH in order to mark themselves out as the participants in a second exodus that will culminate with them worshipping YHWH in the land of promise.

### *1. YHWH's Principles for Acceptance into the Future Community*

The four passages discussed in this section make either an explicit or implicit statement about the behavior YHWH desires from the exiles. According to the dates given in the book of Ezekiel, each of the relevant passages is delivered prior to the fall of Jerusalem in 587 B.C.E.,<sup>5</sup> when the exiles' belief system would have been entirely destabilized. This is one reason why the passages rely upon ancient legal formulations, espousing principles for behavior in this well established form in order to explain how the faithful, future community of YHWH would distinguish themselves from the lingering dissidents in the exile. But these texts do not comprise an abstract legal code: the passages are remarkably paraenetic, encouraging the audience to identify themselves with the second generation of the exodus that departed from the unfaithfulness of its parents and received the blessing of life in YHWH's land. Just as that generation emerged from a purifying judgment to inhabit the promised land, so a generation would emerge from the Babylonian exile, purified by divine judgment, to re-inhabit the land.

#### *(a) Ezek 14:12-23*

Ezekiel 14:12-23 is one of the well-known 'test case' passages in Ezekiel. Invoking the paradigmatic ancient figures of Noah, Daniel, and Job,<sup>6</sup> a quasi-legal framework is used to 'lay down a general principle according to which Yahweh deals with any land which sins against him.'<sup>7</sup> That principle—'even if Noah, Daniel, and Job, these three, were in it, they would save only their own lives by their righteousness' (Ezek 14:14)—is treated as a well-accepted reality by the text; indeed, the entire logic of the passage assumes this principle is in

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<sup>4</sup> Andrew Mein, *Ezekiel and the Ethics of Exile* (OTM; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 239.

<sup>5</sup> Walther Zimmerli, *A Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Ezekiel, Chapters 1–24* (Hermeneia; transl. Ronald E. Clements; Minneapolis, Minn.: Fortress, 1979), 9-10; R. E. Clements, 'The Chronology of Redaction in Ez 1–24,' in *Ezekiel and His Book: Textual and Literary Criticism and their Interrelation* (ed. J. Lust; BETL 74; Leuven: Peeters, 1986), 283-94.

<sup>6</sup> On the identity of these three figures see: Harold H. P. Dressler, 'The Identification of the Ugaritic DNIL with the Daniel of Ezekiel,' *VT* 29 (1979): 153-61; John Day, 'The Daniel of Ugarit and Ezekiel and the Hero of the Book of Daniel,' *VT* 30 (1980): 174-84; Baruch Margalit, 'Interpreting the Story of Aqht: A Reply to H. H. P. Dressler,' *VT* 29 (1979), pp. 152-61,' *VT* 30 (1980): 361-65; Harold H. P. Dressler, 'Reading and Interpreting the Aqht Text: A Rejoinder to Drs J. Day and B. Margalit,' *VT* 34 (1984): 78-82.

<sup>7</sup> Joyce, *Divine Initiative*, 70.

force and that now YHWH ‘asserts that this old principle is to be operated with unprecedented rigour.’<sup>8</sup> Both Greenberg and Block have noted the concern for the fate of ‘sons and daughters’ (Ezek 14:16, 18, 20) and, on this basis, suggest the message was addressed to an exilic audience worried about the fate of their children who still remained in Jerusalem.<sup>9</sup> This is hypothetical but historically plausible, and it suggests an urgency to the question that matches the forcefulness of its tone. As a corollary to that *Sitz in der Literatur*, commentators have often explored the relationship of Ezek 14:12-23 to Gen 18:22-33,<sup>10</sup> Abraham’s intercession on behalf of Sodom and, among its inhabitants, his nephew Lot.

However, there is a strong argument that a more relevant analogy lies within the exodus tradition.<sup>11</sup> All three test cases are subsumed under the opening summary of YHWH’s action: ‘I stretch out my hand against it [a land] in order to break its staff of bread...’ (Ezek 14:13). The outstretched hand, a familiar biblical image, is shared by Ezekiel, Exodus,<sup>12</sup> and Deuteronomy, where it frequently describes YHWH’s power displayed in bringing the Israelites out of Egypt.<sup>13</sup> The image of YHWH breaking the ‘staff of bread’ (מַטֵּה-לֶחֶם) is always associated with Egypt, and in Ezekiel it correlates to the curses specified in Lev 26:26.<sup>14</sup> The test cases also employ the verbal root נָצַל to describe the potential outcome of righteous behavior. Although this verb is common, it is closely associated with the exodus and features prominently in Exod 6:6, the central statement of the exodus tradition.<sup>15</sup> Aside from these positive associations with the exodus tradition, there is evidence that was Ezekiel hostile towards the patriarchal tradition: the possibility of a positive allusion to Abraham is problematized by the harsh rejection of an explicit attempt to do so in Ezek 33:23-29.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 72.

<sup>9</sup> Moshe Greenberg, *Ezekiel 1–20: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (AB 22; Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday & Co, 1983), 261; Daniel I. Block, *The Book of Ezekiel: Chapters 1–24* (NICOT; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1997), 442.

<sup>10</sup> Greenberg, *Ezekiel 1–20*, 261; Block, *Ezekiel 1–24*, 449; Paul M. Joyce, *Ezekiel: A Commentary* (LHBOTS 482; London: T & T Clark International, 2007), 127.

<sup>11</sup> On the importance of the exodus tradition to the book of Ezekiel, see Corrine Patton, “‘I Myself Gave Them Laws that Were Not Good’: Ezekiel 20 and the Exodus Traditions.” *JSOT* 69 (1996): 73-90.; cf. Risa Levitt Kohn, *A New Heart and a New Soul: Ezekiel, the Exile and the Torah* (JSOTSup 358; London: Sheffield Academic Press, 2002).

<sup>12</sup> Exod 7:5; 8:13 [ET 17]; Ezek 6:14; 14:9, 13; 16:27; 25:7, 13, 16; 35:3.

<sup>13</sup> Deut 4:34; 5:15; 7:19; 11:2; 26:8. Cf. Ezek 20:33-34.

<sup>14</sup> Levitt Kohn, *A New Heart and a New Soul*, 68, item 10.6; Michael A. Lyons, *From Law to Prophecy, From Law to Prophecy: Ezekiel's Use of the Holiness Code* (LHBOTS 507; New York: T & T Clark, 2009), 72.

<sup>15</sup> Exod 6:2-8 is further connected to Ezekiel (particularly Ezek 20) through its use of the “lifted hand” formula (נָצַל יָדוֹ).

<sup>16</sup> On this passage see: John Van Seters, ‘Confessional Reformulation in the Exilic Period.’ *VT* 22 (1972): 448-59; Thomas Römer, *Israels Väter: Untersuchungen zur Väterthematik im Deuteronomium und in der deuteronomistischen Tradition* (OBO 99; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1990); idem.,

Indeed, the triad of Noah, Daniel, and Job—three non-Israelite paragons of righteousness from the patriarchal age—may provide an alternate to the triad of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, a circle of questionable value for Ezekiel. A positive allusion to Caleb and Joshua, by contrast, is consistent with Ezekiel’s concern to present Egypt as the place of Israel’s origin and the exodus as their legitimate ancestry.

Caleb and Joshua play a parallel role in Num 14 to Noah, Daniel, and Job in Ezek 14: through their faith in YHWH, Caleb and Joshua are spared without any indication they might prevent YHWH’s punishment of others. The parallel is, most likely, between Ezek 14:12-23 and Num 14:26-38, one portion of the priestly version of the spy narrative,<sup>17</sup> in which Caleb and Joshua are singled out as the only faithful members of the first exodus generation who will survive to inhabit the promised land while the rest of the first exodus generation experiences a *lex talionis* judgment, receiving the very punishment from which they think they can flee.

The model provided by Caleb and Joshua proves beneficial for interpreting Ezek 14:21-23, the application of the preceding casuistic principles. These verses declare that the arrival of survivors from Jerusalem is not an indication of the righteousness of those individuals. Rather, these escapees (פְּלִטָה), brought to Babylon against their wishes, play the role of the faithless spies: their conduct, when seen by the exiles, indicates the depth of Jerusalem’s depravity. In conjunction with this feature it is essential to understand the meaning of the phrase וְנִהְמוּ אֶתְכֶם at the beginning of v. 23. Ellen Davis argues convincingly that ‘the phrase denotes a profound alteration of feeling, understanding, or intention about something; that is, it denotes a change of mind, either divine or human.’<sup>18</sup> YHWH’s relationship with Jerusalem, characterized by its idolatrous rebellion,<sup>19</sup> is over.<sup>20</sup>

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‘Deuteronomy in Search of Origins’ in *Reconsidering Israel and Judah: Recent Studies on the Deuteronomistic History* (eds. Gary N. Knoppers and J. Gordon McConville; Sources for Biblical and Theological Study 8; Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 2000), 112-38.

<sup>17</sup> On the sources in the spy narrative see Martin Noth, *Numbers* (OTL; Chatham: SCM Press Ltd, 1968), 97-112 and Baruch Levine, *Numbers 1–20: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (AB 4A; New York: Doubleday & Co, 1993), 347-9.

<sup>18</sup> Ellen F. Davis, “‘And Pharaoh Will Change His Mind’ (Ezekiel 32:31): Dismantling Mythical Discourse,” in *Theological Exegesis: Essays in Honor of Brevard S. Childs* (eds. Christopher R. Seitz and Kathryn Greene-McCreight; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1999), 234.

<sup>19</sup> Despite not explicitly mentioning idolatry as the sin of those spared, this is certainly part of, if not the entirety of, their guilt. First, the entire section from Ezek 8:1 to 23:49 is characterized by idolatry as the primary sin of Israel (Thomas Renz, *The Rhetorical Function of the Book of Ezekiel* [VTSup 76; Leiden: Brill, 2002], 191-2). Second, within Ezek 14:12-23, describing the rebellious behavior as לְמַעַל-מַעַל suggests idolatry (cf. 15:8; 17:20; 18:24; 20:27; 39:26). Finally, the further account of the rebellious acts as וְאֵת-עַלְלֹתֵיכֶם (cf. Ezek 20:43-44) also intimates that idolatry is in view here.

<sup>20</sup> In his extensive discussion of the narrative structure of Numbers, Won Lee has described this

The function of its survivors is not as a remnant from whom YHWH will start again but rather, by analogy to the spies in Num 14, to bring the exiles' choice into stark relief: side with the faithless who have rejected YHWH and join them in forfeiting their opportunity to inhabit the land, or trust in YHWH, despite the challenges that presents, and mark oneself off as a part of the community who, like Caleb and Joshua, will see and know the land in the future. Thomas Renz has encapsulated this dynamic:

It is the thrust of this passage [Ezek 14:12-23], and indeed of the first part of the book of Ezekiel, that the exiles are not supposed to show solidarity with the wicked inhabitants of Jerusalem, but rather to dissociate themselves from them... The crucial argument of the book of Ezekiel is that Old Israel will not simply evolve into new Israel; the decision of the exilic community to become this New Israel is also a decision to regard Old Israel as 'dead.'<sup>21</sup>

Coming under one divine word formula (Ezek 14:1), the entirety of ch. 14 can be considered together.<sup>22</sup> Thus, the prophetic call to repentance (14:6-8)—a command to abandon the idolatry that characterizes the peoples' rebellion—serves the same function as Caleb's and Joshua's protest to the people and against the faithless spies (Num 14:5-9). Whereas the spy narrative declares that the defining issue for the community is whether or not it believes in YHWH's power to deliver the land into their hands, Ezekiel defines the exiles' posture to idol worship as the issue that will mark out who is and is not part of YHWH's future community. This explains why the call to repentance ends with a combination of the Holiness Code's<sup>23</sup> familiar excommunication formula and the recognition formula 'I will cut him off from my people and you will know that I am YHWH' (Ezek 14:8): those who retain their idols will literally be purged from the community (cf. Ezek 20:38), forfeiting their chance to inhabit the land but coming to recognize YHWH in the process.

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dynamic in Num 13–14 well: “Yahweh’s positive relationship to the Exodus generation is broken completely by the judgment of their death. The entire Exodus generation, which includes Moses and Aaron and yet excludes Caleb and Joshua, must die in the wilderness and not enter the promised land. Yahweh’s relationship with Israel as a nation will be continued, but Yahweh’s relationship with the Exodus generation is over” (Won W. Lee, *Punishment and Forgiveness in Israel's Migratory Campaign* [Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2003], 234).

<sup>21</sup> Renz, *The Rhetorical Function*, 192.

<sup>22</sup> Renz, *The Rhetorical Function*, 72-82; Margaret S. Odell, *Ezekiel* (Smith & Helwys Bible Commentary; Macon, Ga.: Smith & Helwys, 2005), 157-71.

<sup>23</sup> Hereafter, H.

(b) Ezek 18:1-32

Walter Brueggemann captures well the analogy between Caleb and the exiles in Ezek 18:

For both the wanderers of the old tradition and the exiles of the sixth century, for both Caleb and the contemporaries of Ezekiel, coping with a situation of landlessness is possible because of a new orientation which permits one to trust the promises. As Ezekiel calls for repentance (18:31), so Caleb is the one who repents (Num 14:6) and positions himself to receive the promise.<sup>24</sup>

Albeit helpful, the thematic resonance Brueggemann recognizes needs further attention in order to appreciate the full power of the relationship between Num 14 and Ezek 18.

Ezekiel 18 is a complex disputation speech<sup>25</sup> that offers the reverse perspective to Ezek 14:12-23: whereas the latter passage expressed the concern of parents for children, the former addresses the concern of a child about the consequences of their parents' behavior. This passage also employs the case law format: after patently denying the accuracy of the opening quotation, the prophet asserts the proper understanding of YHWH's principles for judgment through a three-fold scenario employing a hypothetical righteous grandfather, rebellious father, and righteous son (vv. 5-18). The use of three individuals has prompted many scholars to identify Ezek 18 as the clearest statement of individual responsibility in the Hebrew Bible.<sup>26</sup> That view has rightfully come under increasing scrutiny by scholars who have argued that the passage neither offers the first statement of individual responsibility in the Hebrew Bible nor disregards the importance of communal responsibility.<sup>27</sup> In either event, the chapter continues on to address two further complaints about YHWH's conduct, finishing with an emphatic call for the people to repent and 'get yourselves a new heart and a new spirit!' (Ezek 18:31)<sup>28</sup>

This long passage is introduced with a proverb (משל) familiar to both ancient and modern audiences: 'The parents have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge' (Ezek 18:2; cf. Jer 31:29; Lam 5:7). The text is ambiguous as to whether the quotation

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<sup>24</sup> Walter Brueggemann, *The Land: Place as Gift, Promise, and Challenge in Biblical Faith* (OBT; Minneapolis, Minn.: Fortress Press, 1977), 37-8.

<sup>25</sup> Adrian Graffy, *A Prophet Confronts His People: The Disputation Speech in the Prophets* (AnBib 104; Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1984), 58-64. Block also provides a thorough discussion of the disputation structure of this passage (Block, *Ezekiel 1-24*, 554-89).

<sup>26</sup> For details see discussions in Joyce, *Ezekiel*, 139-40, and idem., *Divine Initiative*, 35-55.

<sup>27</sup> See the discussions in Joyce (ibid., 35-60) and Mein, *Ezekiel and the Ethics of Exile*, 177-215.

<sup>28</sup> On the unity of the chapter see: Zimmerli, *Ezekiel*, 374; Leslie C. Allen, *Ezekiel 1-19* (WBC 28; Dallas, Tex.: Word Books, 1994), 268-69; and Joel S Kaminsky, *Corporate Responsibility in the Hebrew Bible* (JSOTSup 196; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995), 161.

is uttered ‘in Israel,’<sup>29</sup> thus by the non-exiles, or ‘concerning Israel,’<sup>30</sup> hence by the exiles. Many scholars appeal to Jer 31:29 as evidence for the currency of the proverb in Judah, and thus the ‘in Israel’ translation. This parallel, however, is often considered a late addition to Jeremiah and McKane goes so far as to suggest it is dependent on Ezek 18:2.<sup>31</sup> In view of that uncertainty, Jer 31:29 cannot support either interpretation on its own. The best hope for clarification is Ezekiel’s use of similar phrases elsewhere in the book:

בְּיָדָם מִהַחֲמֹשֶׁל תִּזְהָ לָכֶם עַל־אֲדָמַת יִשְׂרָאֵל לֵאמֹר	Ezek 12:22a
מִהַחֲמֹשֶׁל לָכֶם אַתֶּם מִשְׁלִים אֶת־הַחֲמֹשֶׁל תִּזְהָ עַל־אֲדָמַת יִשְׂרָאֵל לֵאמֹר	Ezek 18:2a
בְּיָדָם יִשְׁבִּי הַחֲרָבוֹת הָאֵלֶּה עַל־אֲדָמַת יִשְׂרָאֵל אֹמְרִים לֵאמֹר	Ezek 33:24aα

The similarity between these statements is obvious and, unless impossible, one should seek a single meaning across them. Since Ezek 12:22a and 18:2a are unclear, the best evidence is the unambiguous attribution of the quotation in Ezek 33:24aα to the non-exiles. This idea is further supported by the repetition of ‘eating on the mountains’ (18:6, 11, 15) as an evaluative criterion, a feature that Greenberg argues is ‘an offense peculiar to those living in the homeland.’<sup>32</sup> Thus, the interpretation ‘in the land of Israel’ is to be preferred in each case.<sup>33</sup> Even though the non-exiles generate the basis for the disputation, it is clear that the content of the oracle was meant for the exiles.<sup>34</sup> Ronald Hals offers an astute summary of the attitude this quotation expresses:

Their use of the proverb is defensive, a way of excusing themselves from responsibility, and probably a preparation for an assimilation into their environment which would end in apostasy. That what they do next does not matter is defended by the claim that what they had done in the past did not matter.<sup>35</sup>

The subsequent section, beginning at Ezek 18:19, questions the premise set forth in vv. 1-18. However, the source of the quotation has changed: as Joyce argues, the exiles

<sup>29</sup> Zimmerli, *Ezekiel 1–24*, 377-8; Greenberg, *Ezekiel 1-20*, 327.

<sup>30</sup> Joyce, *Divine Initiative*, 43; idem., *Ezekiel*, 140; Allen, *Ezekiel 1–19*, 269.

<sup>31</sup> William McKane, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Jeremiah* (2 vols; ICC; Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1986), 2:815; cf. Kaminsky, *Corporate Responsibility in the Hebrew Bible*, 159.

<sup>32</sup> Greenberg, *Ezekiel 1-20*, 343.

<sup>33</sup> One should, nonetheless, note the wisdom in Kaminsky’s evaluation: ‘I see no reason why we cannot assume that Ezekiel was poetically ambiguous in order to allow his message to reach the widest possible audience’ (Kaminsky, *Corporate Responsibility in the Hebrew Bible*, 155, note 41).

<sup>34</sup> Zimmerli, *Ezekiel 1–24*, 377-8; Mein, *Ezekiel and the Ethics of Exile*, 179.

<sup>35</sup> Ronald M. Hals, *Ezekiel* (FOTL 19; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1989), 126.

(identified as *בית ישראל* at v. 25) now voice their disapproval of the principle that each generation suffers for its own sin. Why? ‘Ezekiel’s hearers imagine themselves,’ writes Joyce, ‘to be the righteous sons of wicked fathers. The words put into their mouths in v. 19 express their objection to the verdict Ezekiel has recorded in this third test-case: they are righteous and yet suffering, so Ezekiel must be mistaken.’<sup>36</sup> Upon further consideration of the non-exiles’ logic, the exiles find a basis through which they can attempt to sustain their own innocence. YHWH is, to say the least, unconvinced, reasserting in a brief summary the principle of generational responsibility that explains the exiles’ guilt. The response goes on, however, to detail the possibility of repentance, about which Leslie Allen remarks: ‘for the prophet, the survivors of the 587 catastrophe were a bad lot... nor were the 597 hostages any better (cf. 20:30-31)... So an implicit appeal to this largely wicked generation is given the prior place in this new counterthesis, which is elaborated in v 22.’<sup>37</sup> The final rejoinder from the exiles comes at v. 25. Their attempt to plead innocence thwarted by the prophet’s response, they now simply state their dismay: YHWH is not acting fairly. Lest the focus of the present discussion on the call to repent cause the larger emphasis that YHWH’s judgment is wholly justified slip from view, it is important to note that the immediate response is to point out the serious error of this statement. Following this, YHWH once more asserts the possibility of repentance, but in this case the rationale is expanded to indicate that it is only those who repent (*שׁוּבוּ*) that will live.

What is the benefit of repentance as presented in Ezek 18? Is it, in any way, analogous to what Caleb and Joshua experience? That is, does Ezek 18 offer the exiles hope that, like Caleb and Joshua, they shall live on after the death of the rebellious exiles so that they may inhabit the promised land? Mein framed the question thus:

It would appear, then, that the call to repentance does have two functions. Not only does it serve to bolster Ezekiel’s argument that his audience should accept responsibility for the disaster that has befallen them, it also expresses a genuine desire that they should amend their lives and return to YHWH. What remains unclear is the value of repentance: what would repentance do for the people who repent?<sup>38</sup>

Mein suggests that ‘it looks as if repentance will bring blessing in exile rather than a return from exile,’<sup>39</sup> a situation made possible by YHWH’s decision to be a ‘sanctuary for a little

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<sup>36</sup> Joyce, *Divine Initiative*, 47.

<sup>37</sup> Allen, *Ezekiel 1–19*, 277-78.

<sup>38</sup> Mein, *Ezekiel and the Ethics of Exile*, 208.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 211.

while' for the exiles (Ezek 11:16). There is little reason to disagree with Mein here; but, it seems that one can go further. Indeed, Mein himself notes that Allen has pushed for seeing a broader interpretation of what Ezek 18 supports.<sup>40</sup> Allen argues:

A coming event of relative but serious judgment was to constitute a divine roadblock that need pose no fear for the persistent righteous but would bar the apostate, including the idolater and the oppressor and those prophets who misused their gifts given for Israel's benefit. It is to this roadblock that the future prospect of death refers.<sup>41</sup>

Allen draws a close connection between 18:30-32 and 20:35-38, where it is explicitly stated that 'the judgment would be a screening process for eschatological return to the land.'<sup>42</sup>

Mein has objected to this connection, primarily on the basis that the land is never mentioned in Ezek 18.<sup>43</sup> True enough: the land is never named, but there are at least two strong indications that Ezek 18 does have the land in view.

First, Ezek 18 introduces YHWH's counterthesis with the 'as I live' authenticating element, which is always connected with the exodus tradition, appears in passages concerning the land, and occurs in two key passages that describe YHWH's intent to bring a faithful remnant to inhabit the promised land (Num 14:21, 28; Deut 32:40).<sup>44</sup> I have already demonstrated the importance of Num 14 for the present question; this is reinforced through the use of the 'as I live' authenticating element to affirm on oath that YHWH will spare Caleb and Joshua (Num 14:28-30) so that they may live in the land. The other parallel, Deut 32:36-42, describes the community who YHWH will place in the land as those who do not trust in powerless gods. Again adopting the 'as I live' authenticating element, YHWH swears that the adversaries of this faithful community will be slain, cleansing the land and preparing it for this faithful community to live there.

Second, Ezek 18 culminates with one of three pronouncements that the future

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<sup>40</sup> Leslie Allen makes a forceful case that it points forward to another future judgement beyond the judgement of Jerusalem: "A coming event of relative but serious judgment was to constitute a serious divine roadblock that need pose no fear for the righteous but would bar the apostate... It is to this roadblock that the future prospect of death refers." The implication, as Allen argues, is that "life" in chapter 18 must be life in the land. This is odd given that the connection between life and land is far from explicit in the text: nowhere in 18:1-32 is life defined as having anything to do with the land... Although it is true that in 20:38 YHWH promises that he will purge all Israel's rebels in the wilderness before they can enter the land, elsewhere in the book the oracles of restoration consistently present Israel's future as YHWH's unconditional gift to an undeserving people' (Ibid., 209).

<sup>41</sup> Allen, *Ezekiel 1-19*, 270.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 281.

<sup>43</sup> Mein, *Ezekiel and the Ethics of Exile*, 209.

<sup>44</sup> The full list of occurrences is: Num 14:21, 28; Deut 32:40; Isa 49:18; Ezek 5:11; 14:16, 18, 20; 16:48; 17:16, 19; 18:3; 20:3, 31; 33:11, 27; 34:8; 35:11; Zeph 2:9.

community will possess a ‘new heart and a new spirit’ (Ezek 18:31; cf. Ezek 11:19; 36:26). More attention will be given to this issue later, but at this juncture I simply observe that in the other two passages the new heart and new spirit characterizes the community who will re-inhabit the land (Ezek 11:17; 36:27). Whilst this connection remains implicit in Ezek 18, it would be rather odd if the charge to ‘make yourselves a new heart and a new spirit’ had in view an altogether different benefit.

Additionally, Ezek 18 and Num 13–14, share an emphasis on a periodization of Israelite history by generation. Thus, Renz’s observation about Ezek 18 is correct:

The solution presented in this chapter to the problem of a possible continuation of the history of Israel in spite of national failure is not to break up the nation into individuals and to continue the history of Israel through the gathering of repentant individuals, but rather to divide the nation into a community destined for destruction and one destined for transformation. The challenge to repentance uttered in this chapter goes to the exiles: The ‘father’ (Jerusalem) will surely die (v. 13), but ‘if this man has a son who sees all the sins that his father has done, considers, and does not do likewise... he shall not die for his father’s iniquity; he shall surely live’ (vv. 14, 17b).<sup>45</sup>

Renz’s strict identification of the ‘father’ figure with Jerusalem may go too far. Rather, mirroring the ambiguity about whether the text initially responds to the exiles or non-exiles, the ‘father’ might be correlated with either Jerusalem or the exiles of 597 B.C.E. Indeed, the message of Ezek 18 is that the exiles are in a transitory period between life and death and must choose the generation with which they will identify:<sup>46</sup> if they maintain their innocence, denying their culpability for the exile and the destruction of Jerusalem (vv. 19-24), they will choose solidarity with the first exodus generation who forfeited the opportunity to inhabit the land by doubting YHWH. Death shall come. However, if they accept the rebuke, confess their guilt and responsibility for their current plight (vv. 21-24, 26-28), and turn from their idolatry (cf. 20:1-31), they will equate themselves with the Caleb, Joshua, and the faithful second generation of the exodus who persevered and inhabited the land.<sup>47</sup> Life awaits.

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<sup>45</sup> Renz, *The Rhetorical Function*, 194.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 199-200. Lapsley has argued that this transitional period is from the dominant understanding of moral capability and responsibility in the Hebrew Bible to a new model crafted by Ezekiel (Lapsley, *Can These Bones Live?*, 157). Although her focus is different, her parallel conclusions reinforce the present argument.

<sup>47</sup> This is not precisely the same as Lapsley’s argument that Ezekiel’s definition of morality changes from behavioral one to a knowledge-based one, but there is significant overlap (*ibid.*, 109-57).

(c) *Ezek 33:10-20*

The third ‘test case’ concerning the exiles behavior is Ezek 33:10-20. As with Ezek 14:12-23 and 18:1-32, this section is also a disputation that includes an application of the case-law format.<sup>48</sup>

In order to understand its relevance, the place of this passage in the larger structure of Ezekiel must be established. Commentators are nearly unanimous in reading it together with 33:1-9.<sup>49</sup> Recognizing the close thematic connections to Ezek 18, many commentators also understand 33:10-20 as a reiteration of that earlier and more extensive treatment of responsibility and repentance,<sup>50</sup> serving as a resumptive repetition (*Wiederaufnahme*) for chs. 1–24, which are followed by a series of foreign nation oracles (chs. 25–32) in the final form of the book. That sense is heightened by the immediately following arrival of the messenger who announces that Jerusalem has fallen. Even in view of these considerations, Ezek 33:1-20 should be read in context with Ezek 32:17-32 for at least three reasons. First, the nearest preceding date formula comes at 32:17 and serves to set off a new section that runs through 33:20.<sup>51</sup> Second, there is a leitmotif of the sword bringing judgment that clearly connects the final oracle against Egypt (32:17-32) with the discussion of the prophet’s role as watchman (33:1-9). Although this leitmotif does not continue on into vv. 10-20, the connection of those verses with vv. 1-9 is still strong enough on other grounds to mitigate against tearing it apart from what precedes. Finally, this broader context makes greater sense of the exiles’ quotation in 33:10, a position that will be established in what follows.

The immediate issue is to assess what the opening quotation indicates about the identity of the audience and their state of mind. It is generally agreed that the exiles are the source of the quotation in Ezek 33:10. It is less clear what state of mind that quotation expresses: many understand it as the first recognition of guilt by the exiles,<sup>52</sup> but Joyce argues convincingly that it expresses displeasure with punishment they perceive as undeserved.<sup>53</sup> In either event, the main point of the quotation is its concluding inquiry, ‘how then can we live?’, which displays all the characteristics of a rhetorical question to which the audience did

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<sup>48</sup> Graffy, *A Prophet Confronts His People*, 72-78.

<sup>49</sup> Zimmerli, *Ezekiel 1–24*, 182-90; Greenberg, *Ezekiel 21–37*, 675; Block, *Ezekiel 25–48*, 244; Hals, *Ezekiel*, 233-39.

<sup>50</sup> Joyce, *Divine Initiative*, 144, note 87.

<sup>51</sup> Marvin A. Sweeney, ‘Ezekiel,’ in *The Jewish Study Bible* (eds. Adele Berlin and Marc Zvi Brettler; New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 1104; idem., ‘The Assertion of Divine Power,’ 156-72. See also Tyler D. Mayfield, *Literary Structure and Setting in Ezekiel* (FAT II/43; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010), 171-87.

<sup>52</sup> Zimmerli, *Ezekiel 25–48*, 187; Greenberg, *Ezekiel 21–37*, 673; Block, *Ezekiel 25–48*, 246; Mein, *Ezekiel and the Ethics of Exile*, 207-08.

not anticipate nor, perhaps, desire a response. The wider context provided by Ezek 32:17-32 explains the reason for concern: the exiles fear that they will be consigned to join the foreigners in the farthest reaches of *Sheol*.<sup>54</sup> YHWH's response in v. 11, in that context, is entirely sensible: upon oath God reiterates that he has no pleasure in the death of the wicked (cf. Ezek 18:23, 30-32; 14:6), a fate that can be avoided by their repentance. What follows in vv. 12-16, just as in Ezek 14:12-20 and 18:1-24, is a quasi-legal, casuistic counterthesis that details the principle of judgment YHWH will apply. The counterthesis has several echoes of Ezek 18, although it reorganizes the material in order to stress the rebellion of the exiles.<sup>55</sup> The case-law exposition matches 14:21-23 and 18:25-32 and it prompts a further objection from the people: 'the way of the Lord is not just' (33:17; cf. 18:25, 29). Against this further objection YHWH reasserts the principle that the apostate is liable to punishment and the repentant sinner will live. The meaning of 'life' here is surely similar to Ezek 18, encouraging the exiles to accept YHWH's rebuke and through their faithfulness identify themselves as part of the community that can survive the purifying judgment, here represented by the sword. As part of his argument regarding the paraenetic nature of the book of Ezekiel, Renz observes about the present passage:

The fate of Jerusalem has been decided long ago, but the exiles need only to let go of the claim that 'the way of Yahweh is arbitrary,' and accept that it is their own integrity which is in doubt and brings about death. The exilic community is situated between life and death and if they were to experience the death of their community, just as Jerusalem died, it would not come about because Yahweh wanted them to die, nor because the appointed 'watchman' did not warn them. The first part of the book affirms in the strongest possible terms that responsibility is with them. Yet, the readers know already from the first part of the book that Yahweh is determined to have a new Israel 'for the sake of his name.' Thus the watchman motif is not designed to describe an earlier phase of the prophet's ministry, but to encapsulate the first of the two main tasks of the book, that of dissociating the readers from behaviour that leads to disaster.<sup>56</sup>

Renz correctly identifies this dissociation, which involves repentance, as one of the book's key messages. In Ezek 33:1-20 this message is heightened through deft echoes of Deut 32, a passage that explains that YHWH will bring a purified community to dwell in the land.

The most obvious link between Ezek 33:1-20 and Deut 32 is the 'as I live' authenticating element in YHWH's oath. Both passages describe YHWH's intent to preserve a

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<sup>53</sup> Joyce, *Divine Initiative*, 144; cf. Joyce, *Ezekiel*, 191.

<sup>54</sup> Block, *Ezekiel 25-48*, 219-30; it can hardly be accidental that the list includes seven groups ((1) Egypt, (2) Assyria, (3) Elam, (4) Meshech and Tubal, (5) Edom, (6) the princes of the north, and (7) the Sidonians) then Israel. Indeed, one wonders if the compilers/editors knew the similar pattern of Amos 1-2.

<sup>55</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, 247-50.

faithful community and introduce this divine initiative with an immediately recognizable formulaic phrase. There is also the sword leitmotif that begins in Ezek 32:20 and runs into ch. 33, which is an equally important feature of the divine judgment expressed in Deut 32:39-42. The connection to the Song of Moses is intensified through the three-fold usage of the noun עוֹל for iniquity in Ezek 33:10-20. Elsewhere in Ezekiel עוֹל appears in the related passages of 3:16-21 (v. 20) and 18:1-32 (vv. 8, 24, 26).<sup>57</sup> Outside Ezekiel the term is common in Psalms and wisdom literature,<sup>58</sup> but rare in the narrative books. Significantly then, it is used in the Song of Moses (Deut 32:4-5; cf. 25:16) to describe Israelites who reject YHWH. Finally, the repeated phrase ‘to turn from his ways’<sup>59</sup> (33:9, 11) has close connections to the Deuteronomistic tradition, appearing in the programmatic passages against the northern kingdom that tie its downfall to the ‘sin of Jeroboam’ (1 Kgs 13:33; 2 Kgs 17:13).<sup>60</sup> This final shared feature suggests that idolatry, though not explicitly named as the defining act of rebellion amongst the exiles, remains the decisive issue for marking out the members of the faithful community in Babylon.

The legitimacy of these links are substantiated by the repeated statement in Ezek 33:1-20 and Deut 32:39-43 that YHWH’s judgment that cleanses the land for his community. Although it is speculative, it is possible that the judgment of the seven foreign nations in Ezek 32:17-32 precedes the statement of hope in Ezek 33 precisely in order to describe how YHWH cleanses the land in preparation for the return of a faithful community. Notwithstanding that issue, Ezek 33:10-20 fits the model suggested by Ezek 14:12-23 and 18:1-32: the repentance of the exiles marks them out as a faithful community to whom YHWH’s will grant life and with whom YHWH will associate in the future. It is to the description of that future that attention will now be given.

*(d) Ezek 20:1-31, 32-38*

Although more often grouped with the allegories about Jerusalem in Ezek 16 and 23, Ezek 20 also shows a distinct likeness to Ezek 14, 18 and 33. To begin, all four passages share the disputation speech format. It is true that Ezek 20:1-31 is somewhat different in lacking an explicit quotation attributed to the elders that approach Ezekiel, but the content of

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<sup>56</sup> Renz, *The Rhetorical Function*, 162; cf. *ibid.*, 105-06.

<sup>57</sup> The only other occurrence is in Ezek 28:18, part of the lamentation over the king of Tyre.

<sup>58</sup> Ps 7:4; 53:2; 71:4; 82:2; Job 18:21; 27:7; 29:17; 31:3; 34:10, 32; Prov 29:27.

<sup>59</sup> A phrase that consists of שׁוּב + מָנָן + הָרַב.

<sup>60</sup> Levitt Kohn, *A New Heart and a New Soul*, 92.

the passage suggests that it is a disputation. This sense is confirmed by the role of the ‘as I live’ formula (v. 3, 31), which functions as the introductory statement to YHWH’s counterthesis in a disputation speech.<sup>61</sup>

Whilst less obvious, Ezek 20 also shares the concern of Ezek 18:1-19 and 33:10-20 to present a general principle about YHWH’s relationship to Israel. Chapter 18 details the principle of generational responsibility; 33:10-20 address the role of repentance; 20:1-31 indicates that idolatry creates an insurmountable barrier between YHWH and Israel. What is more, 18:1-32, 33:10-20, and 20:1-38 follow the same three-fold pattern: present a general principle, acknowledge a further rejoinder from the audience, and then apply the general principle to answer this rejoinder. Finally, all four passages deal with the problem of idolatry. In Ezek 14:12-23 this is not mentioned explicitly, but carries over from 14:6-8 and is implied by the phrase ‘their ways and their deeds’ (אֶת־דַּרְכֵיכֶם וְאֶת־עֲלִילוֹתֵיכֶם) in v. 23.<sup>62</sup> In ch. 18 the issue of idolatry is, again, just under the surface. The final call to repentance implored the exiles to ‘cast away (הַשְׁלִיכוּ) from you all your transgressions’ (Ezek 18:31; אֶת־כָּל־פְּשָׁעֵיכֶם). The verbal root שָׁלַךְ with the people as its subject only occurs elsewhere in Ezekiel at 20:7-8, where it specifically describes casting away the idols of Egypt.<sup>63</sup> In a similar vein, the exiles concern in 33:10 is that their transgressions (פְּשָׁעֵינֵנוּ) will cause them to waste away. The noun פֶּשַׁע can apply to various types of sin, but in Ezekiel it carries a strong overtone of idolatry.<sup>64</sup> For instance, פֶּשַׁע describes those rebels who will be purged by YHWH in the wilderness at 20:38; in the context of ch. 20 it is hard to imagine that this refers to a transgression other than idolatry. That impression is corroborated by 37:23, which summarizes the pair of terms for idols (גִּלּוּלִים) and abominations (שִׁקּוּצִים) as ‘any of their transgressions’ (כָּל פְּשָׁעֵיהֶם). In sum, there is substantial evidence for linking Ezek 20 with chs. 14, 18, and 33.

I have noted the importance of the exodus tradition for each passage discussed so far, and Ezek 20 is no different.<sup>65</sup> Indeed, this chapter may represent the pinnacle of the book’s sophisticated allusions to the narratives of the Pentateuch. In vv. 1-31 the history of Israel is

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<sup>61</sup> Deut 32:1-43; Isa 49:14-21; Ezek 14:12-23; 16:44-58; 17:11-21; 18:1-32; 20:32-44; 33:10-20; 33:23-29; 35:10-15; Zeph 2:8-11.

<sup>62</sup> For instance, see Ezek 11:21 and 20:30.

<sup>63</sup> Cf. 7:19. This verbal root occurs eight times with YHWH as the subject.

<sup>64</sup> Ezek 2:3; 14:11; 18:22, 28, 30-31; 20:38; 21:29; 37:23; 39:24

<sup>65</sup> Dalit Rom-Shiloni, “Ezekiel as the Voice of the Exiles and Constructor of Exilic Ideology,” *HUCA* 76 (2005): 44; Levitt Kohn, *A New Heart and a New Soul*, 96-104.

re-written to portray its past rebellions as grievous violations of the commands laid out in H (particularly Lev 18 and 26), of which idolatry is the most contemptible. The disputation details the failures of the first and second generations of the exodus in three periods: the time in Egypt (vv. 5-9), the first exodus generation in the wilderness (vv. 10-17), and the second exodus generation in the wilderness (vv. 18-26). In each instance the people are spared total annihilation only for the purpose of preserving YHWH's reputation (vv. 9, 14, 22), underscoring the theocentric lens through which the book of Ezekiel interprets all events. This tripartite schema is yet another similarity to Ezek 18.<sup>66</sup> Indeed, its highly selective nature and stylized periodization draws attention to the passage's intent to focus its audience on not just the exodus narrative but specifically the two exodus generations.<sup>67</sup>

To appreciate the importance of these references Ezek 20 can be contrasted with Ps 106, which treats the same issues in Israel's history, albeit through a catalogue of failures whose content is rather different.<sup>68</sup> Psalm 106 is faithful to the pentateuchal account of Israel's history. For instance, it speaks about the failure of the first exodus generation (Ps 106:14-17; Ezek 20:22-26) by citing their wanton craving, jealousy of Moses, idolatry with the golden calf, and finally their despising of the land. By comparison, Ezekiel indicts the same generation for the rather vague acts of not observing YHWH's statutes or ordinances and for profaning the sabbath, a description taken directly from H's terminology for obedience.<sup>69</sup> Further, when treating the second generation of the exodus, Ps 106:32-39 details their sin at Meribah and their failures in the conquest. By contrast, Ezek 20:18-26 presents the extremely general account that this generation did not follow the statutes nor the ordinances and profaned the sabbath. This barely qualifies as a 'historical account' in comparison to Ps

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<sup>66</sup> Following Zimmerli, *Ezekiel 1-24*, 412, and Dalit Rom-Shiloni, 'Facing Destruction and Exile: Inner-Biblical Exegesis in Jeremiah and Ezekiel,' *ZAW* 117 (2005): 200-01, I attribute vv. 27-29 as a later addition. If, as several scholars argue (Greenberg, *Ezekiel 1-20*; Block, *Ezekiel 1-24.*), vv. 27-28 are original, they do not disrupt in any significant way the attempt to focus the audience on the first and second generations of the exodus. The verses seem to describe any Israelite who ever lived in the land, and in doing so create a contrast with those who are subsequently born in Babylonia. That would make the addressees from vv. 27-45 symbolically and literally the second generation in the exile, a *Sitz im Leben* that would only strengthen the present argument.

<sup>67</sup> Greenberg, 'Notes on the Influence of Tradition on Ezekiel,' *JANES* 22 (1993): 36, remarks: 'My guess is that the prophet's attitude toward the traditional was wholly utilitarian: he perceived it as he needed it. He was accustomed to use the tradition to justify and explain current life and behavior (the etiological meaning of the Mosaic traditions). History was, for him, a repository of lessons for the present age. We are therefore not to look to him for an interpretation of the narratives in any objective sense (= what they meant in their original context), but only in such a way that would serve his cause.' See also Greenberg, *Ezekiel 1-20*, 382-83 and Darr, 'Ezekiel's Justifications of God: Teaching Troubling Texts,' *JSOT* 55 (1992): 109.

<sup>68</sup> Pons noted, although he did not explore in detail, this sort of significant difference between Ezek 20 and Ps 106 despite their vast similarities (J. Pons, 'Le vocabulaire d'Ez 20. Le prophète s'oppose à la vision deutéronomiste de l'histoire,' in *Ezekiel and His Book: Textual and Literary Criticism and their Interrelation* [ed. J. Lust; BETL 74; Leuven: Peeters, 1986], 214-33).

<sup>69</sup> Lyons, *From Law to Prophecy*, 103, 185.

106, leading Greenberg to conclude Ezekiel had a ‘utilitarian’ attitude towards tradition. The so-called historical review in Ezek 20:1-31 is shaped by the book’s ideological motives: because the book of Ezekiel adopts H as its behavioral criteria, it frames the historical failures of the people as disobedience to these criteria, providing a means to stir up the exiles and to prepare them for the following call to repent, revealing the lengths to which the book went to detail the peoples’ failures and explain their path to restoration.

Ezekiel 20:32-38 make explicit what lies below the surface in Ezek 18 and 33: the call for the exiles to repent is a call for them to identify themselves as the people of YHWH and, more specifically, to appropriate the role of the second generation of the exodus.<sup>70</sup> Indeed, the similarities in language and theme between vv. 32-38 and the exodus narrative have led scholars to call this passage Ezekiel’s second exodus.<sup>71</sup> The depth of those connections are highlighted by Dalit Rom-Shiloni, who explores how Ezekiel ‘expresses his perspective on each of the two Judahite communities’<sup>72</sup>—that is for her ‘Those Who Remained’ and the ‘Exiles.’ She concludes that the preeminent statement of the book’s view about the exiles is made in Ezek 20:1-38, where the connection between the first exodus and the exiles is characterized by two ideas: a focus on the existence of YHWH’s people outside the land of Israel and YHWH’s commitment to the covenant. Rom-Shiloni concludes: ‘In Ezekiel’s prophecy of consolation (vv. 33-38) those two central lessons of the retrospective speech connect the present generation of the Exiles in Babylon to the first generations in Egypt and the desert... Accordingly, he [Ezekiel] perceives the Exiles as a direct continuation of the first generation in Egypt.’<sup>73</sup>

Although Rom-Shiloni is correct to explore the profound parallels between these groups, it is hard to accept her contention that that Ezekiel correlates the addressees of this call to repentance with the first generation of the exodus. If this is so, it is only in the most limited sense. The first exodus generation, save Caleb and Joshua, does not make it into the land; comparing the exiles with that group is out of place in Ezek 20, where re-inhabiting the land is the reason for repentance. What is more, Ezek 20:32-38 explicitly compare the exiles and the second generation of the exodus: YHWH will lead the whole community into ‘the wilderness of the peoples’ where the divine judgment is expressly compared to the time when

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<sup>70</sup> In sum, they are to know YHWH. Lapsley argues that this emphasis on knowledge is indicative of an anthropological shift caused by the exile: ‘This understanding fades by the end of Ezekiel, as a view of moral selfhood emerges in which knowledge plays the central role’ (Lapsley, *Can These Bones Live?*, 186).

<sup>71</sup> Zimmerli, *Ezekiel 1–24*, 414-15; Greenberg, *Ezekiel 1-20*, 378-82.

<sup>72</sup> Rom-Shiloni, ‘Ezekiel as the Voice,’ 20.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, 24-25; cf. Lust, ‘Ez., XX, 4-26,’ 488-527.

‘I [YHWH] judged your ancestors in the wilderness of Egypt’ (v. 36). As it was with the first exodus so it will be with the second exodus: the judgment will ‘purge the rebels from amongst you’ (v. 38), precluding this rebellious group from reaching the land. Those found faithful, by contrast, will journey onwards so that they might worship YHWH in the land (v. 40-43), just as the second generation of the exodus did.

Thus Rom-Shiloni’s proposal must at least be restricted to an appeal to Caleb and Joshua, the two members of the first exodus generation who trusted YHWH despite the challenge of the rebellious spies and, as a result, occupied the promised land. More likely, the proper correlation is with the second generation of the exodus as described in Num 14:26-38. An appeal to this generation makes far more sense: the community for whom 40 years of wandering in the desert—a relatively short-term interruption in their hopes—was determined by their parents’ disobedience but did not deter them from following YHWH and ultimately receiving the chance to inhabit the land. This is, not incidentally, the issue that Ezek 14:12-23, 18:1-32, and 33:10-20 address. Like that second generation of the exodus, the repentant among Ezekiel’s audience find themselves in Babylon and mired there for some time despite their renewed faith.<sup>74</sup> For the community that accepts its guilt, casts away idolatry, and chooses life, their charge is to live like the second generation of the exodus, persevering despite being relegated to the wilderness for 40 years<sup>75</sup> prior to finally hearing God’s call to inhabit the land.

## 2. *The Relationship Between Divine and Human Agency in Ezekiel*

The analogy between Caleb, Joshua, the second generation in the exodus, and the exiles clarifies the role of human action in YHWH’s salvific plans, and in particular it leads back to the question of whether Joyce’s notion of radical theocentricity has been stretched into an unsubstantiated total theocentricity. The former, as Joyce argues, puts YHWH in the place of primacy throughout the book and recognizes that the motivation for all the events described therein is YHWH’s reputation. This is adumbrated in Ezek 5:9, where YHWH

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<sup>74</sup> This is the inverse of H’s theology that individual guilt is punished as it occurs but also builds up to a level at which it necessitates that YHWH exile of the entire community (Jan Joosten, *People and Land in the Holiness Code: An Exegetical Study of the Ideational Framework of the Law in Leviticus 17–26* [VTSup 67; Leiden: Brill, 1996], 86-88; cf. Jacob Milgrom, *Leviticus 17–22: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* [AB 3A; New York: Doubleday, 2000], 1391-2, 1582-4).

<sup>75</sup> The suggestion that the 40 year period symbolized in Ezek 4:6 refers to the exile is rather attractive here as both a parallel to Num 13–14 and as a further way of depicting Ezekiel’s audience as the second exodus generation; cf. Zimmerli, *Ezekiel 1–24*, 168; Greenberg, *Ezekiel 1-20*, 118; Block, *Ezekiel 1–24*, 178-80.

indicates that ‘I will do among you that which I have never done, and that which I will never do anything like it again, because of your abominations,’ an allusion to occasions when YHWH’s reputation has prevented judgment upon Israel (Exod 32-34; Num 14; Deut 32). Yet, the unintended slip into total theocentricity does happen on occasion. For instance, Mein is surely in the right when he states ‘[t]he restoration of Israel to the land is seen wholly as YHWH’s action, done for his own sake not that of his people, and without any action on their part to *provoke* it.’<sup>76</sup> However, the following remark is debatable:

I have already examined repentance in Ezekiel and, I hope, demonstrated that while it does play a part in the prophet’s vision, it does not enter into YHWH’s relationship with the land of Israel. YHWH desires repentance and right behaviour from his people, but this operates only at the level of the exiled community. *Neither individual nor communal repentance is seen to be the precondition for restoration.* If the limited scope of repentance is a shift away from broader communal or national notions of responsibility, then the shift to complete passivity can be seen in Ezekiel’s treatment of restoration. YHWH restores Israel for his own sake alone, and *irrespective of the repentance of the people.*<sup>77</sup>

YHWH’s unilateral decision to bring the community back from exile is not in dispute; YHWH will gather the people from Babylon at the time of his choosing and there is no indication in Ezekiel that either heartfelt remorse or genuine repentance will affect the duration of the exile. However, the conclusion that ‘[n]either individual nor communal repentance is seen to be the precondition for restoration’ is challenged by the preceding argument about how Ezek 14, 18, 33, and 20 present repentance as the marker of who will constitute the community that will emerge from YHWH’s purifying judgment in the wilderness so that they can be restored to the land.

The two passages most often put forward to defend Mein’s position are Ezek 11:14-21 and 36:23b-38. These passages include the two widely-known statements about YHWH’s provision of a new heart and a new spirit for the people. What is not recognized about these passages is that, in both cases, YHWH’s gift of the new heart and new spirit to the people is *explicitly subsequent to their return to the land.*<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> Mein, *Ezekiel and the Ethics of Exile*, 239. Emphasis added. The key idea in Mein’s sentence seems to be that the people do nothing to *provoke* this action. Within the confines of the book of Ezekiel, that is accurate.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid., 239; emphasis added. A similar idea is expressed by Renz, *The Rhetorical Function*, 176: ‘If they [the exiles] stick to their idols as their forebears did, they exclude themselves from the promise of salvation. *While this does not mean that the people have to restore themselves spiritually before they are restored physically*, physical restoration and spiritual restoration are very closely linked. Only those who participate in the spiritual restoration will participate in the physical restoration, but both will be brought about by Yahweh alone;’ emphasis added.

<sup>78</sup> Cf. Block, *Ezekiel 1–24*, 345, 350-4; Lapsley, *Can These Bones Live?*, 104.

After YHWH's assures the exiles in Babylon that God will be their 'sanctuary for a little while,' Ezek 11:17-18 states: 'Therefore, thus says Lord YHWH: "I will gather you from the peoples and I will gather you from the nations where I scattered you, and I will give you the land of Israel. When they come there they will remove all the detestable idols<sup>79</sup> and all the abominations from upon it.'" It is only then, once the people return and cleanse the land, that YHWH's benevolent gift materializes: 'Then I will give them another heart<sup>80</sup> and a new spirit I will put amongst them. I will remove their heart of stone from their flesh and give them a heart of flesh' (Ezek 11:19).

Ezekiel 36:23b-38 describes the same progression of events. YHWH will sanctify the divine name when 'I take you from the nations and I gather you from all the lands and I bring you to your ground. Then I will sprinkle you with pure water in order to purify you from all your sins and from all your idols I will cleanse you' (Ezek 36:24-25). Subsequent to re-establishing the faithful community in the land and cleansing then from iniquity, YHWH 'will give you a new heart and a new spirit I will put amongst you; I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and I will give to you a heart of flesh' (Ezek 36:26).

This careful exegesis of the 'new heart and new soul' passages can be combined with the future vision of Ezek 20:32-44 to offer an integrated view of the role of human repentance plays in Ezekiel. The logical sequence that the book of Ezekiel presents is: first, YHWH's unilateral choice, predicated upon concern for his name alone, initiates the second exodus (11:17; 36:22-24a); second, human action, specified as repentance from idolatry and faithfulness to YHWH's statutes and decrees, determines who will be part of the community that YHWH brings back to the land of Israel (20:33-38; 34:17-22; cf. 14:1-23; 18:30-32; 33:10-20); third, subsequent to their re-entry into the land (11:18; 36:24b), YHWH's free, divine act changes their heart and spirit (11:19; 36:25-27), so that, fourth, they might once again be YHWH's covenant partner (11:20; 36:28; cf. 34:30).

Mein has pointed scholars in the right direction by showing how ethics have been modified in exile due to the limitations placed on the former elites of Jerusalem.<sup>81</sup> He is also correct to note the relatively passive role the people have in Ezekiel compared with other

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<sup>79</sup> Levitt Kohn, *A New Heart and a New Soul*, 89-90.

<sup>80</sup> Reading אִתָּךְ with the LXX. Though my translation can legitimately be challenged on text critical grounds, I find it more than incidental that the only parallel to this statement is found in Num 14:24 where Caleb is said to survive YHWH's judgment precisely because he has a "different spirit" (רוּחַ אֲחֵרֶת). Even is the LXX is an error, it is plausible that the mistake was caused by the translator having Num 14 in mind, which would suggest the interpretation I am advocating has a strong basis in antiquity. Cf. Brueggemann, *The Land*, 37-8.

<sup>81</sup> Mein, *Ezekiel and the Ethics of Exile*, 177-215.

texts in the Hebrew Bible.<sup>82</sup> However, it seems that in his insistence that ‘YHWH restores Israel for his own sake alone, and *irrespective of the repentance of the people*’ misjudges the crucial role of human agents in Ezekiel’s understanding of YHWH’s plans. In the same vein, when Joyce argues that Zimmerli incorrectly interprets Ezek 18 because he ‘overlooks the fact that repentance plays no determinative part in the restoration in Ezekiel,’<sup>83</sup> he has also neglected to leave space for a concern that pervades the book of Ezekiel.

Repentance and obedience to YHWH’s commands is definitely subsidiary to the concern for YHWH’s reputation in the book of Ezekiel, but it is present and undeniably required to define the future community upon whom YHWH will bestow blessing. Perhaps the interplay between radical theocentricity and human responsibility can be characterized best in this way: the motivation for and the goal of the second exodus is solely to manifest YHWH’s holiness in the sight of the nations (Ezek 20:41); the means by which YHWH accomplishes this objective is a community of remorseful and once-again faithful worshippers who persevere through foreign oppression until their God brings them forth and settles them in their ancestral land. This maintains the crucial distinction between purpose and process without unnecessarily excluding either one. Employing the repentance of the people in the process does not, in any way, alter the purpose of venerating YHWH’s name. Nor does YHWH’s choice to preserve his reputation through the resolve of a community facing such obstacles to remain faithful diminish the renown he receives in any way.

### 3. Conclusion

I have argued that a properly balanced and integrated reading of Ezek 14, 18, 33, and 20 substantiates Joyce’s assertion that Ezekiel is a radically theocentric text while simultaneously maintaining a role for repentance in YHWH’s future plans. Perhaps it would be more accurate to speak of the required human response to YHWH’s judgment than repentance. For, as Joyce and Mein have argued, neither the repentance of the 597 B.C.E. exiles nor the 587 B.C.E. exiles will avert YHWH’s judgment upon Jerusalem and Judah. Rather, Ezek 14:12-23, 18:10-32, and 33:10-20 explain that YHWH’s future community will respond to this judgment by accepting guilt for the current predicament and demonstrating their ongoing faithfulness through rejecting idol based worship. This response leads to life

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<sup>82</sup> Mein, *Ezekiel and the Ethics of Exile*, 216-56.

<sup>83</sup> Joyce, ‘Ezekiel and Moral Transformation,’ 149-50.

(Ezek 14:14, 16, 18; 18:9, 17, 21; 32; 33:11, 15). And that life is life in the land, a view confirmed by both the three well-known 'new heart and new spirit' texts (Ezek 11:14-21; 18:30-32; 36:23b-38) and also Ezek 20:32-44, which portrays the exiles' future through an analogy to the experience of the second generation of the first exodus.

For those who will cast aside their idols and trust in YHWH, God's unilateral initiation of the second exodus will be their first step in returning to the land. The timing of this second exodus remains beyond explanation and beyond human influence in Ezekiel's world, reinforcing the inscrutable nature of God and underscoring that it is for YHWH's sake that all this will occur. Yet, the book maintains that in the wilderness YHWH will consider the repentance or recalcitrance of the exiles and, in view of it, select who will dwell in the land. Although many details remain known only to YHWH, for the book of Ezekiel it is clear that where the purpose of divine acclaim intersects with the process of human repentance the majesty of YHWH will be manifest and God's blessing will ensue.