

Out of the (Model) City, Into the Fire: The Meaning of Ezek 5:3–4¹

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Ezekiel 5:1–2 contains a report of Yhwh’s command to the prophet Ezekiel to perform a symbolic action: he is to shave his head and beard, divide the hair into three parts, then subject these to three treatments (burning, striking with a sword, and scattering to the wind).² The next two verses read as follows in the MT:³

ולקחת משם מעט במספר וצרת אותם
בכנפיד: ⁴ומהם עוד תקח והשלכת
אותם אל-תוך האש ושרפת אתם באש
ממנו תצא-אש אל-כל-בית ישראל:

3 And you shall take from there a few in number, and you shall bind them in your hem.
4 And from them again you shall take, and you shall throw them to the midst of the fire, and you shall burn them in the fire. From it will go forth a fire to the entire house of Israel.

But is the reference to “binding” a positive symbol or a negative one? How do we explain why some hairs remain bound in the hem while others are burned? What is the relationship of vv. 3–4 to the preceding verses? And what is the antecedent of the pronoun “it” in v. 4b? These verses are remarkably ambiguous, and have been understood in many different ways. In this essay I will

¹ I am indebted to xxx xxx and xxx xxx for valuable comments on earlier drafts. The conclusions in this article (and any errors) remain my own.

² Where v. 2 in MT has שלשית “a third,” LXX reads “a fourth” (and has *two* references to burning) based on its understanding of v. 12, where it calculates the plague, famine, scattering, and sword as four punishments.

³ On the differences in the textual witnesses, see the discussion below.

evaluate previous interpretations, then make the following arguments: first, Ezek 5:3 does not depict protection or the preservation of a “remnant” in which hope can be located, but rather describes one punishment in a sequence of punishments (vv. 1–4a, 12). This sequence of punishments is the result of a creative reworking of earlier legal traditions. Second, Ezek 5:1–4a, 12 should be read in light of a larger group of passages in Ezekiel that share the same argument structure: a merism depicting the destruction of Jerusalem juxtaposed with a comment about survivors. This argument is not about the *possibility* of survivors, but is concerned with interpreting (and thereby controlling) the *status* and *meaning* of survivors. Third, it seems possible that Ezek 5:4b can be understood as a later redactional addition, a sentiment coordinated with other passages that constitute a critique of Israel’s monarchy (and here, of King Zedekiah in particular).

1.0 Binding and Burning: Ezek 5:3–4a in Context

While Jahn wondered how anything could be “taken” and “bound” (v. 3) if the three divided portions of shaved hair had already been used (v. 2),⁴ most commentators understood the antecedent of “from there” (משם, v. 3) to relate to the third group of hairs—the ones that the prophet was told to “scatter to the wind” (v. 2), probably after they had fallen to the ground.⁵ And

⁴ Gustav Jahn, *Das Buch Ezechiel, auf Grund der Septuaginta hergestellt. Übersetzt und kritisch erklärt* (Leipzig: Pfeiffer, 1905), 32. This objection was considered “a bit pedantic” by Johannes Herrmann (*Ezechielstudien*, BZAW 2 [Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1908], 12).

⁵ John Calvin, *Commentaries on the First Twenty Chapters of the Book of the Prophet*

most commentators have understood the command “you shall bind them in your hem” (וצרת אותם בכנפיד, v. 3) as an idiom for protection, used here to signify the removal of some of Jerusalem’s inhabitants from the city’s destruction in 587 BCE.⁶ Almost all cite 1 Sam 25:29 in

Ezekiel, vol. 1, trans. Thomas Myers (Edinburgh: T. Constable, 1849), 190; Matthew Poole, *Annotations upon the Holy Bible*, vol. 2, 4th ed. (London: Thomas Parkhurst, Jonathan Robinson, Brabazon Aylmer, John Lawrence, John Taylor, and Thomas Cockerill, 1700), on Ezek 5:3; Rudolf Smend, *Der Prophet Ezechiel*, KeH, 2d ed. (Leipzig: Hirzel, 1880), 33; Alfred Bertholet, *Das Buch Hesekiel erklärt*, KHC (Freiburg: Mohr, 1897), 30; Richard Kraetzschmar, *Das Buch Ezechiel*, HKAT (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1900), 55; Johannes Herrmann, *Ezechiel, übersetzt und erklärt*, KAT (Leipzig: Deichert, 1924), 39; G. A. Cooke, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Ezekiel*, ICC (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1936), 58; Leslie C. Allen, *Ezekiel 1–19*, WBC (Dallas: Word, 1994), 52; Ronald E. Clements, *Ezekiel* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1996), 22; Kelvin G. Friebel, *Jeremiah’s and Ezekiel’s Sign Acts: Rhetorical Non-Verbal Communication*, LHBOTS 283 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1999), 240, n. 366; Rimon Kasher, *Ezekiel 1–24*, Mikra Leyisra’el (Tel Aviv: Am Oved; Jerusalem: Magnes, 2004) [Hebrew], 205.

⁶ Calvin, *Ezekiel*, 193: “or else it signifies that very few should be safe in the midst of the destruction of the whole people, which came to pass wonderfully . . .” (*note that for Calvin, this is the second of two interpretive options; see further below*); Bertholet, *Hesekiel*, 30: “. . . in den Zipfel . . . seines Gewandes zusammenbinden; darin wären sie zwar wohlgeborgen (vgl. I Sam 25₂₉)”; Kraetzschmar, *Ezechiel*, 55–56: “. . . seines Gewandes einbinden. Sie scheinen dort sicher geborgen (I Sam 25₂₉)”; Herrmann, *Ezechiel*, 39: “Von dort, wo das dritte Drittel verstreut ist, soll der Profet eine kleine Anzahl nehmen und in seinen Gewandzipfel einbinden. Zur Erklärung

wird man 1 Sam 25, 29 heranzuziehen haben: diese kleine Zahl soll besonders bewahrt werden”; John W. Wevers, *Ezekiel*, NCB (London: Nelson, 1969), 57: “Binding a few hairs is a symbol for protection from harm”; Keith W. Carley, *The Book of the Prophet Ezekiel*, CBC (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1974), 36: “These verses alleviate the disastrous outcome of the preceding prophecy. Some exiles will be protected from harm. Tying hairs in a robe alludes to God’s care of those whom he wraps up and puts with his own treasure (1 Sam 25:29)”; Walther Zimmerli, *Ezekiel 1*, trans. Ronald E. Clements, Hermeneia (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979), 173: “This preservation of a remnant is again referred to by the device of developing an earlier metaphor into a visible event, in what appears to be a common practice with Ezekiel. . . . The antithesis: sling out = to hand over to destruction / to bind = to preserve alive, is quite clear here [viz., in 1 Sam 25:29]. . . . In Ezek 5:3, however, the image is used in a fully real sense. The action of binding is a gesture of hiding”; H. F. Fuhs, *Ezechiel 1–24*, NEchtB (Würzburg: Echter, 1984), 36: “. . . des letzten Drittels, dem nun besondere Bedeutung zukommt: Ein Teil entrinnt dem Unheil, erfährt Bewahrung. Ein Rest bleibt übrig. Zum »Einbinden in den Zipfel des Mantels« als Vorgang gnädiger Lebensbewahrung, vgl. 1 Sam 25²⁹”; Daniel I. Block, *The Book of Ezekiel: Chapters 1–24*, NICOT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 195: “his symbolic judgmental action of burning, chopping up, and scattering the hair now gives way to gracious protective care over the exiles”; Friebel, *Sign Acts*, 240: “The action was figurative as it employed the metaphorical understanding of being bound in the edge of the garment which had the positive connotation of being protected and preserved”; idem, 240, n. 368: “See 1 Sam. 25.29 for binding as a figure of protection”; Katheryn P. Darr, “The Book of Ezekiel,” in *The New Interpreter’s Bible*, vol. VI, ed. Leander E. Keck (Nashville: Abingdon, 2001), 1073–1607 (here 1151): “Verse 3 holds out hope for a few, since one binds (hides) something in the end of one’s

support of this idea. Several of these commentators see an element of divine grace in this binding; others go even further and claim that this act signifies the preservation of a remnant from which Israel will be restored.⁷

However, there are several reasons why such an interpretation is unlikely. First, those who take “you shall bind them in your hem” to refer to protection and cite 1 Sam 25:29 as support have assumed (a) that a single occurrence of a metaphor constitutes an idiom, and (b) that the locution *וצרת אותם בכנפיך* means the same thing as *צרורה בצרור החיים*.⁸ Neither of these

robe to protect it (see 1 Sam 25:29).”

⁷ Calvin, *Ezekiel*, 193: “the correction is added, that God would give some hope of favor because the people was consumed, yet so that the covenant of God might remain. Hence it was necessary that some relics should be preserved, and they had been reduced like Sodom, unless God had kept for himself a small seed. (Isa 1:9; Ro 9:29)”; Poole, *Annotations*, on Ezek 5:3: “as men tie up in a Handkerchief, or in the Skirt of their Garment, what they would not lose: So some few shall be kept, God will not cut off the whole House of Israel, but reserves a Remnant”; Kraetzschmar, *Ezechiel*, 56: “bis nur noch ein winziger Rest vom alten Israel als heiliger Same eines neuen Volkes übrig geblieben ist. Vgl. 20,34ff. 33,1ff. Jes 6,13”; Clements, *Ezekiel*, 24: “the sign of the few hairs preserved in the skirts of his robe (5:3) indicate that God’s plan for Israel’s future is to take effect through a penitent remnant”; Block, *Ezekiel 1–24*, 195: “By tucking the remnants of hair away in his garment, Ezekiel had indeed announced that the future of God’s people lay with the exiles.”

⁸ In 1 Sam 25:29, Abigail says to David, “If a person rises to pursue you and to seek your life, may the life of my lord be bound up in the bundle of the living (*צרורה בצרור החיים*) with Yhwh your God; but the life of your enemies—may he sling it out in the midst of the hollow of a

assumptions are warranted. The verbs צור I (“tie up, bind [in one’s hand], besiege”) and the related צרר I (“tie up, shut up, be restricted”) need not refer to protection, but can be neutral expressions for transport or storage (Exod 12:34; Hos 13:12) or even negative expressions for restriction (e.g. 2 Sam 20:3; Ezek 4:3; Isa 49:20; Ps 139:5).⁹ Moreover, references in Biblical Hebrew to carrying or wrapping things in one’s garment (e.g., meat in one’s hem, Hag 2:12; the waters in one’s mantle, Prov 30:4) refer to transport or storage, not to protection.¹⁰ Finally, the expression צרר בכנפיו is attested in later Hebrew (Midrash Rabbah on Song of Songs 1:8) with an explicitly negative sense, of God “holding [Moses’ actions] against” him.¹¹

Second, those who take Ezek 5:3 to refer to the preservation of a remnant from which Israel will be restored seem to be reading the Isaian “remnant” motif into the book of Ezekiel¹² and/or confusing Ezekiel’s stance toward the exiles of 597 (the prophet’s own community) with his stance toward the exiles of 587.¹³ Yet as Cooke notes, “Ez. holds no doctrine of a remnant sling!” Note that textual allusion (e.g. 1QH^a 10.22) should be distinguished from idiom.

⁹ See HALOT, s.v. צור and צרר.

¹⁰ The expression צרר רוח אותה בכנפיה in Hos 4:19 is unfortunately completely opaque.

¹¹ For the text, see Tamar Kadari, *Midrash Shir HaShirim Rabbah: A Synoptic Edition* (Jerusalem: Schechter Institute of Jewish Studies), 81–82 (in preparation; online at <http://www.schechter.ac.il/mifalhamidrash>); for a translation, see Henry Freedman and Maurice Simon, eds., *Midrash Rabbah, Vol. 9: Esther, Song of Songs*, trans. Maurice Simon (London: Soncino, 1983), 65.

¹² In their arguments, both Calvin (*Ezekiel*, 193) and Kraetzschmar (*Ezechiel*, 56) cite Isa 1:9 and 6:13, respectively.

¹³ See in particular Block (*Ezekiel 1–24*, 195) and Clements (*Ezekiel*, 22, 24).

among the people of Jerusalem who will survive the coming disaster; on the contrary, they will be scattered and destroyed.”¹⁴ And it seems clear that the book does not locate hope for Israel in the survivors of Jerusalem’s destruction, but in the prophet’s own community (the exiles of 597).¹⁵

Third, those who take the reference to binding hairs in one’s hem as a positive image fail to account for its contextual function as one step in a sequence of punishments. For example, Greenberg’s claim that the binding of hairs in the prophet’s hem is “here a friendly act”¹⁶ is difficult to maintain given the fate described in v. 4.¹⁷ Similarly, when Block claims that the binding in the hem “represents the few residents of Jerusalem who will escape the fire, the

¹⁴ Cooke, *Ezekiel*, 60; so also Thomas Renz, *The Rhetorical Function of the Book of Ezekiel*, VTSupp 76 (Leiden: Brill, 1999; repr., 2002), 182.

¹⁵ See the discussion below; also Cooke, *Ezekiel*, 60; Dalit Rom-Shiloni, *Exclusive Inclusivity: Identity Conflicts Between the Exiles and the People Who Remained (6th–5th Centuries BCE)*, LHBOTS 543 (New York: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2013), 2, 139–97.

¹⁶ Moshe Greenberg, *Ezekiel 1–20*, AB (Garden City: Doubleday, 1983), 110. In order to arrive at this interpretation, Greenberg is forced to take the wordplay between 4:3 (וצרת “and you shall besiege”) and 5:3 (וצרת “and you shall bind”) as “strikingly antonymous” rather than strikingly similar.

¹⁷ As Greenberg himself notes (*ibid.*, 110), “Vs. 3 is not a self-contained symbol, but merely a background for vs. 4: there will be survivors of the dispersion (vs. 3), but they will survive only that some might fall victim to a punishment whose long arm will reach out to them from the doomed city. This spells out the meaning of “I will unsheathe a sword after them” (vs. 3 end [*sic*; v. 2]).”

sword, and the scattering,”¹⁸ this disregards the fact that the hairs that are bound are not those that have “escaped” the scattering; rather, these *are* the scattered hairs.

All these commentators are somewhat at a loss when explaining how it is that some hairs are burned in v. 4a if the binding in v. 3 is a sign of protection. Furthermore, if the hairs that are bound and then burned are taken to refer to those who were deported to Babylon in 587,¹⁹ how are we to explain why only *some* of the hairs are burned? What factor explains the difference between those who are burned and those who are not? According to Herrmann, we simply do not know.²⁰ Carley and Fuhs, who are unable to reconcile their positive interpretation of “binding” in

¹⁸ So Block, *Ezekiel 1–24*, 195.

¹⁹ A few have argued that the burned hairs of v. 4a refer to some of the exiles of 597—namely, the prophets Ahab and Zedekiah, who were “roasted in the fire” (Jer 29:15, 21–23). This is the position of Rashi and Radak, and among modern commentators, of Blenkinsopp; see the commentaries of Rashi and Radak in Menahem Cohen, ed., *Miqra’ot Gedolot ‘HaKeter’: Ezekiel* (Ramat Gan: Bar-Ilan University, 2013), 26, 27; Joseph Blenkinsopp, *Ezekiel*, IBC (Louisville: John Knox, 1990), 39. This is consistent with Radak’s and Blenkinsopp’s interpretation of the bound hairs in v. 3 as the exiles of 597 (Radak links the “few” in v. 3 to the deportees mentioned in 2 Kgs 24:14), but seems to create a lack of coherence after v. 2 (which depicts the destruction of Jerusalem in 587). Others saw in the burned hairs a reference to Jerusalemites who survived the destruction of the city in 587, but died soon afterward in the conflict between Gedaliah and Ishmael (cf. Jer 40–41); so Poole, *Annotations*, on Ezek 5:4; Frederic Gardiner, *Ezekiel*, in *An Old Testament Commentary for English Readers. Volume 5*, ed. Charles John Ellicott (London: Cassell, 1884), 216. It is difficult, however, to understand these survivors as “scattered” (v. 2).

²⁰ Herrmann, *Ezechiel*, 39: “Ob 3. 4 auf ein bestimmtes Ereignis blickt oder nur ein

v. 3 with the negative imagery of judgment in v. 2, respond by taking vv. 3–4a as a later interpolation.²¹ Block is forced to read v. 4a as a “warning to complacent exiles” because he has taken the reference to binding as “gracious protective care,”²² but v. 4 does not actually caution against any negative behavior, let alone complacency. Friebel reads v. 3 and v. 4 as commanding two *separate* selections from the scattered hairs that lie on the ground, one to be bound and the other to be burned,²³ then attempts to account for the difference in treatment by attributing it to a difference in moral character.²⁴ But the prophet does not attribute righteousness to any of his contemporaries, let alone the exiles of 587. Finally, several commentators understand the burning in terms of a future refining, a purging of the wicked from the exilic community.²⁵ Yet there are

allgemein noch bestehendes Läuterungsgericht über eine Exulantenkolonie in Aussicht stellt, wissen wir nicht. Übrigens können sich dem Wortlaut nach die Verse nur auf einen Teil der Exulanten von 586 beziehen.”

²¹ Carley, *Ezekiel*, 36; Fuhs, *Ezekiel 1–24*, 36.

²² Block, *Ezekiel 1–24*, 195.

²³ Friebel, *Sign Acts*, 241.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 241: “The action [*in v. 3*] created a distinction between survivors of the destruction (the dispersed hairs still remaining on the ground) and a preserved remnant (the ones bound in the garment). The latter, it is presumed were under divine favor, possibly because of their moral righteousness (cf. Ezek. 14.12–20). Undoubtedly it was among the unbound survivors that Ezekiel would have grouped the wicked who, in other places, he acknowledged would also survive the city’s destruction (cf. 12.16; 14.21–23).”

²⁵ Smend, *Ezekiel*, 33; Bertholet, *Hesekiel*, 30; Kraetzschmar, *Ezekiel*, 56; Gustav Hölscher, *Hesekiel, Der Dichter und Das Buch: Eine Literarkritische Untersuchung*, BZAW 39

no contextual grounds for linking the fire imagery of v. 4a to the purging of Ezek 20:34–38 (situated in the wilderness, on the way out of Babylon!), to Isa 6:13, to Trito-Isaiah, or to Malachi—all suggested as parallels by these commentators. All of these explanations proceed from the assumption that the “binding” in v. 3 is a positive image.

The focus in vv. 3–4 is not on who survives as opposed to who does not, as if there were some factor that explained the difference. Rather, vv. 1–4 depict a sequence of punishments moving from the destruction of Jerusalem to the scattering of survivors to the deportation of some survivors to the death of some of the deportees. The command to “take a few in number and bind them in your hem” (v. 3) in this context signifies collection and transport from one disaster to another. The burning (v. 4a) is simply the final event in the sequence of judgment. Other commentators agree: the “binding in the hem” is not protective, but refers to the punishment of deportation to Babylon.²⁶ Those who think of the symbolic action in terms of its

(Giessen: Töpelman, 1924), 7; Zimmerli, *Ezekiel 1*, 73; Fuhs, *Ezechiel 1–24*, 36.

²⁶ So Hans Bardtke, *Hesekiel. In Auswahl übersetzt und ausgelegt*, Bibelhilfe für die Gemeinde (Leipzig and Hamburg: Schloebmann, 1941), 43–44; Peter C. Craigie, *Ezekiel* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1983), 38 (“unmitigated doom”); Renz, *Rhetorical Function*, 186–87 (“there is no hint at a positive future for those preserved”); Paul M. Joyce, *Ezekiel: A Commentary*, LHBOTS 482 (New York: T&T Clark, 2009), 88 (“survival only for eventual judgment”); Nancy R. Bowen, *Ezekiel*, AOTC (Nashville: Abingdon, 2010), 25–26: “The point of this entire sign-act is to represent to the people that God’s judgment encompasses everyone, including the exiles. Scattering is only one form that punishment takes. The scattered people will also be burnt, perhaps a metaphor for dangers, even death, in exile (compare Dan 3). The twin devastation for the people is their forced deportation from Jerusalem and their forced, precarious

rhetorical function suggest that the binding of hair was employed because it was not a positive image, but a neutral one: while it initially left room for onlookers to consider the possibility of removal for a positive purpose, that possibility would immediately be dashed by the actions of v. 4a.²⁷

2.0 Ezek 5:1–4a, 12 and Earlier Legal Traditions

existence in a foreign land.”

²⁷ So Walther Eichrodt, *Ezekiel*, OTL, trans. Cosslett Quin (London: SCM, 1970), 87: “The remarkable epilogue . . . is more probably aimed at the destruction of all hope of surviving the judgment with a whole skin. Even those who feel assured of being preserved by a higher hand (cf. 1 Sam 25.29) are not thereby guarded against destruction”; Allen, *Ezekiel 1–19*, 72: “But how safe are these individual hairs? Not very, for some of them are to be taken out and consigned to the fire of judgment that still burned on the brick. There is an ironic toying with the notion of hope of survival for a remnant”; Rom-Shiloni, *Exclusive Inclusivity*, 176: “Ezek 5:3–4 is said to project a hope in the few who will survive the exile. Yet, this interpretation cannot be accepted. The sign-act in 5:3–4 involves the preservation of a small amount of hair to be treasured in the prophet’s skirt, and thus raises the expectation of salvation. But although hope was given to that remnant at first, v. 4 excludes every optimistic possibility. . . . Hence, 5:3–4 do not suggest an optimistic prospect for a Jerusalemite remnant in exile. On the contrary, these verses close the sign-acts with an additional intensification of the forecast of Jerusalem’s total annihilation.”

If it is the case that Ezek 5:1–4a depicts a sequence of punishments on Jerusalem and its survivors, what is the conceptual background for this idea? Ezekiel’s depiction of absolute judgment—and the language used to describe it—is best explained as a creative literary reworking of earlier legal traditions: the sequence of punishments for covenant violation described in Lev 26:25–39.²⁸ Ironically, while Greenberg, Block, and Friebel claim that Ezekiel has used this material,²⁹ all three depart from its consistently negative descriptions when they

²⁸ For recent and varied descriptions of the relationship between Ezekiel and the Holiness material (Lev 17–26), see Christophe L. Nihan, “Ezekiel and the Holiness Legislation – A Plea for Nonlinear Models,” in *The Formation of the Pentateuch: Bridging the Academic Cultures of Europe, Israel, and North America*, ed. Jan C. Gertz et al., FAT 111 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2016), 1015–40; Ariel Kopilovitz, “What Kind of Priestly Writings Did Ezekiel Know?,” in idem, 1041–54; Michael A. Lyons, “How Have We Changed? Older and Newer Arguments about the Relationship between Ezekiel and the Holiness Code,” in idem, 1055–74; Tova Ganzel and Risa Levitt Kohn, “Ezekiel’s Prophetic Message in Light of Leviticus 26,” in idem, 1075–86. For examples of how Ezekiel creatively reworks material from the Holiness traditions, see Michael A. Lyons, *From Law to Prophecy: Ezekiel’s Use of the Holiness Code*, LHBOTS 507 (New York: T & T Clark, 2009); Risa Levitt Kohn, *A New Heart and a New Soul: Ezekiel, the Exile, and the Torah*, LHBOTS 358 (London: Sheffield Academic, 2002). For a different perspective, see Klaus Grünwaldt, *Das Heiligkeitgesetz Leviticus 17–26: Ursprüngliche Gestalt, Tradition und Theologie*, BZAW 271 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1999).

²⁹ Greenberg, *Ezekiel 1–20*, 109, 124; Block, *Ezekiel 1–24*, 194–95; Friebel, *Sign Acts*, 238.

claim that the “binding in the hem” (Ezek 5:3) is a symbol of protection.³⁰ I would argue instead that because Ezek 5:1–4a, 12 utilize these earlier traditions containing punishments for covenant violation, the outlook in v. 3 is thoroughly negative. Its goal is not to make an argument about a “remnant” in which hope can be located, but to describe one event in a sequence of punishments.

In Ezek 5:1–2, 12, we find a sequence of punishments selected from material in Leviticus 26 depicting the effects of a siege on a city: pestilence, famine, and sword.³¹ Ezekiel transforms these conditional covenant punishments into threats of actual imminent punishment, first in the report of a command to symbolically act out the threat (5:1–2),³² then in the interpretation of the

³⁰ Greenberg, *Ezekiel 1–20*, 110; Block, *Ezekiel 1–24*, 195; Friebe, *Sign Acts*, 240.

Greenberg (idem, 109) argues that Leviticus 26 speaks of two groups, one that will perish (vv. 36–38) and another that will survive (vv. 39ff), and that Ezek 5:4 is modelled on the former and 5:3 on the latter. But Lev 26:39 should be read as part of the preceding punishments, not with the program for restoration in vv. 40ff (which are likely a later addition). Moreover, the distinctive locutions of Lev 26:40ff have no parallels in Ezekiel (in contrast with the material in Lev 26:3–39), and the prophet Ezekiel certainly does not espouse the outlook in these verses: Lev 26:40–42 makes restoration contingent on Israel’s initiative in confession, humility, and repentance, whereas Ezekiel argues that his contemporaries are incorrigible and that Yhwh must take the initiative to bring about restoration.

³¹ Lev 26:25 (חרב) > Ezek 5:2, 12; Lev 26:25 (דבר) > Ezek 5:12; Lev 26:26 > Ezek 5:12 (רעב; note that here the author has shortened the metaphorical descriptions of famine in the source text into a single word in order to integrate the material more easily into his presentation); Lev 26:33 (זרה) > Ezek 5:2, 12.

³² Note the coordination of 5:2 (“ . . . in the midst of the city, when the days of the siege

symbolic action (v. 12). This act of shaving hair, dividing it into three piles, and manipulating the hair in three ways depicts the effects on the inhabitants of the city: death by pestilence and famine is modelled as the burning of hair,³³ the death of the citizens by attackers is modelled by striking hairs with a sword, and the dispersion of any survivors is modelled by scattering hairs to the wind. Ezekiel has fashioned material from the Holiness traditions into a three-part merism in order to depict the total destruction of the city of Jerusalem: its inhabitants will either be dead or scattered.

In the last clause of v. 2, there is a shift to a first-person statement that mirrors what we see in the last clause of v. 12: “I will unsheathe a sword after them.” This first-person statement fits the context of v. 12 as the interpretation of the symbolic act (= divine punishment), and is taken (with only a change in verb tense) from the first-person statement in Lev 26:33. So far, Ezekiel has simply followed the sequence of punishments depicted in Leviticus 26: after the destruction of the city, the scattered survivors will continue to be threatened. However, the appearance of this statement in v. 2 makes best sense when seen as a *literary* strategy (coordinating the sign act in vv. 1–2 with the interpretation in v. 12) rather than as a *spoken* rhetorical strategy.

Verse 3 picks up the argument of Lev 26:36a that some of the scattered survivors will wind up “in the land of their enemies.” The “taking” and “binding in the hem” of Ezek 5:3 is a visual way to depict how some of the scattered survivors (represented by some of the scattered hairs of v. 2) will be deported.

are completed”) to the sign act in 4:1–3.

³³ For the association of pestilence (דבר, רשף) and famine (רעב) with burning, see Deut 32:24; Hab 3:4–5; Lam 5:10.

Verse 4a continues the flow of argument by describing the death of deportees even in exile (“from them³⁴ again you shall take, and you shall throw them into the midst of the fire and burn them in the fire”). This is a visual depiction of Lev 26:36b, 38, which state that the deportees will fall, perish, and be devoured.³⁵ These stereotypical terms for death are represented in Ezekiel with the image of fire, which is often used to depict death as divine judgment (Ezek 10:2, 6; 15:7; 21:37; 28:18; 30:8, 14, 16).

The sequence of events in Ezek 5:1–4a, then, is modelled after the sequence of punishments found in Lev 26:25–38. This means that Ezek 5:3–4a do not represent a “correction” or “modification” of vv. 1–2; there is no difference in outlook between these verses, because the “binding in the hem” is not protective in nature. Neither does the movement from v. 3 to v. 4 set up a dichotomy of “unburned” vs. “burned.” What we see in vv. 1–4 is simply a movement from the destruction of the city to the deportation of a few survivors to the death of some of the survivors in exile. As Greenberg concludes, “there will be survivors of the dispersion (vs. 3), but they will survive only that some might fall victim to a punishment whose long arm will reach out to them from the doomed city.”³⁶

³⁴ *Contra* Friebel (*Sign Acts*, 241), I take the antecedent of “from them” (מֵהֶם) in v. 4 to refer to the bound hairs in v. 3 (אֹתָם). Note that the word “hair” is never actually used (cf. the use of עֲמָהֶם in Jonah 1:3 before the sailors are mentioned).

³⁵ For the use of Lev 26:39 in Ezekiel, see Ezek 4:17; 24:23; 33:10.

³⁶ Greenberg, *Ezekiel 1–20*, 110 (though this clashes with his earlier interpretation of v. 3 as protective); so also Kasher, *Ezekiel*, 205. See also Ezek 15:7.

3.0 The Fall of Jerusalem and the Meaning of Survivors in Ezekiel

The topic of survivors from the destruction of Jerusalem in 587 receives considerable attention in the book of Ezekiel. First, the prophet must deal with the reality of survivors because of tensions between his community and the Jerusalemites. As Rom-Shiloni has shown, the partial deportation in 597 resulted in the unanticipated creation of *two* Israelite communities, one in Jerusalem and the other in Babylon. Both appealed to earlier traditions in order to validate their own existence as the people of Yhwh and to exclude the other community (e.g., Ezek 11:14–21; 33:23–29).³⁷ Ezekiel’s use of material from these earlier legal traditions to depict the survivors of 587 as those who were “scattered” by Yhwh is in keeping with his rhetoric of community identity-shaping. Second, Ezekiel must provide for his community an explanation of the trauma of exile, one that interprets both their own deportation as well as the fall of Jerusalem. This explains his strategy of interpreting destruction and exile as divine punishment that was fully deserved. Third, Ezekiel must offer for his community an alternative to assimilation and despair. This explains on the one hand why he asserts that Yhwh will repatriate his fellow-exiles (Ezek 11:17; 20:34, 41) and on the other hand why he challenges the Jerusalemites’ assertion that they alone are the people of Yhwh (Ezek 11:15; 33:23–29). For the prophet, this strategy can be consistently employed only by taking a negative stance toward the survivors of Jerusalem’s fall.³⁸

³⁷ Rom-Shiloni, *Exclusive Inclusivity*, 2, 139–97.

³⁸ See Cooke, *Ezekiel*, 60: “Ez. fixes his hopes for the future, not on any survivors from the overthrow of Jerusalem, but on the faithful among the exiles in Babylon: out of them the new Israel will be created.” See also Renz’s comments about “Old Israel” and “New Israel”

As I will demonstrate below, Ezekiel 5 is not the only place in the book where we see a comment on survivors juxtaposed with a merism (composed of locutions from earlier legal traditions) depicting the complete destruction of Jerusalem. The following five passages reveal a repeated pattern and a consistent strategy of “managing” the significance of survivors.³⁹

3.1 Ezek 5:1–2, 12 + 3–4a

As I noted above, these verses contain a report of a command to the prophet to perform a three-part sign act with his shaved hairs followed by an interpretation of the sign act (5:2, 12). The interpretation consists of a three-part merism depicting the complete destruction of Jerusalem by pestilence and famine, sword, and scattering. This is juxtaposed with a comment about survivors, arguing that punishment will pursue them even in exile (metaphorically described in vv. 3–4a as being “thrown into the fire and burned”). This passage represents one of the least conceptually-developed responses to the issue of survivors: it simply draws on earlier legal traditions in Leviticus 26 to argue that Yhwh will collect some survivors and bring them into exile where some will undergo further punishment. The rest of the passages show an

(*Rhetorical Function*, 92–93, 176), and Rom-Shiloni’s discussion of community identity formation (*Exclusive Inclusivity*, 176, 179–80, 185).

³⁹ The similarities between these passages were noted by Greenberg, *Ezekiel 1–20*, 140–41, and Henry Van Dyke Parunak, “Structural Studies in Ezekiel” (PhD diss., Harvard University, 1978), 191–92, 203, 218, 241–42, 246. Pohlmann notes similarities in some of these passages and links them with community conflict, though I would date the conflict earlier than he does; see K.-F. Pohlmann, *Das Buch Hesekiel (Ezechiel). Kapitel 1–19*, ATD 22/1 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1996), 96–97.

increasing creativity in attributing other functions to the survivors.⁴⁰

3.2 *Ezek 6:11–12 + 8–10*

These verses also contain a three-part merism using the punishments of Lev 26:25–26 to depict the destruction of the “House of Israel”: “The one who is far off will die by pestilence, the one who is nearby will fall by the sword, and the one who remains and is spared will die by famine” (Ezek 6:12).⁴¹ This is preceded by a comment stating that Yhwh will leave survivors (פליטים) from those who were scattered (זרה/√). These survivors will “remember [Yhwh] among the nations where they were taken captive”—specifically, with respect to how their unfaithful actions affected Yhwh, and “they will be loathsome to themselves because of the evils which they did, with respect to all their abominations” (Ezek 6:8–9). This will demonstrate that Yhwh “did not speak in vain to do this disaster to them” (6:10). Here, then, the deportees of 587 have a purely negative function: they will serve as witnesses to their own wickedness and to the fact that their exilic condition constitutes deserved punishment efficaciously decreed and administered by Yhwh.

⁴⁰ Greenberg (*Ezekiel 1–20*, 140–41) remarks on the conceptual development of the survivors motif (although I would disagree with him that the survivors are ever described as “undergo[ing] a conversion” or “turn[ing] back in contrition”).

⁴¹ According to Zimmerli (*Ezekiel 1*, 191), “the combination of two things to express a totality, with a threefold form of judgement, is not particularly skillful.” But the heightening of the merism “far and near” with a third element (resulting in a narrowing focus) in order to match the three judgments is a classic example of Ezekiel’s artistic style: repetition with variation.

3.3 Ezek 7:15 + 16

These verses contain a three-part merism (again using the punishments of Lev 26:25–26) depicting the downfall of Jerusalem and its environs: “The sword is outside, and the pestilence and famine are inside! Whoever is in the field will die by the sword, and whoever is in the city—famine and pestilence will devour him!” (Ezek 7:15).⁴² This is immediately followed by a comment about survivors (פליטים). In LXX Ezek 7:16, as in 5:4a, they are simply put to death.⁴³ In MT Ezek 7:16, they have a negative function similar to what we saw in 6:8–10: they are left over to bear witness to their own iniquity (described here as the moaning of doves).

3.4 Ezek 12:14–15 + 16

These verses comment on Jerusalem’s military forces: Yhwh will “scatter [them] to every wind . . . and unsheathe the sword after them . . . and scatter them among the lands” (Ezek 5:14–15). Here Ezekiel employs previously-used locutions (“scatter . . . unsheathe the sword after”; cf. Ezek 5:2, 12 // Lev 26:33) to describe the complete destruction of Judahite forces. This is followed by a comment about survivors that again uses a three-part merism depicting the complete destruction of Jerusalem: “I will leave over from them a few men⁴⁴—from sword, from famine, and from pestilence—in order that they may recount all their abominations in the lands where they are” (Ezek 5:16). As in the previous examples, here too the sole function of survivors

⁴² Zimmerli offers the same assessment of 7:15 (“rather unskilful[]”; *Ezekiel 1*, 211) as he did of 6:12. See however my comment in the footnote above.

⁴³ On the text, see Zimmerli, *Ezekiel 1*, 198–99.

⁴⁴ Compare v. 16 (ולקחת משם מעט במספר) with Ezek 5:3 (והותרתי מהם אנשי־מספר).

is to serve as witnesses to their own iniquity.⁴⁵ This time, however, it is in an even more explicit manner—“recounting,” as opposed to “remembering” (6:9) or “moaning over” (MT 7:16).

3.5 Ezek 14:21 (cf. vv. 12–20) + 22–23

Here Ezekiel creates four hypothetical scenarios: if a “land” (the name of which is initially withheld) sins against Yhwh by acting faithlessly, and he punishes it, even if three virtuous men of antiquity were in it, they could not save anyone but themselves alone. The punishments sent upon the land are described as famine, wild animals, sword, and pestilence (Ezek 14:13, 15, 17, 19)—again, all punishments that are listed in Leviticus 26.⁴⁶ The four hypothetical scenarios are turned into an *a fortiori* argument constructed around a four-part merism in v. 21: how much more will Jerusalem not be saved when Yhwh sends his “four deadly judgments: sword, famine, wild animals, and pestilence”! This is followed by a statement that there will be survivors (פְּלִטָה) left over from the fall of Jerusalem to come to Ezekiel’s community (the exiles of 597). Ezekiel’s community will be “comforted” (נָחָם) when they see

⁴⁵ Zimmerli (*Ezekiel 1*, 274) argues that this verse “raises the question what the divine purpose could be in a small remnant . . . just as in 14:21–23 the existence of these survivors, who could not be designated as a “pious remnant” and who therefore appeared to contradict the firm order of divine retribution, is interpreted as a means of demonstrating the righteousness of Yahweh before all the world.”

⁴⁶ See v. 13 וְשִׁבְרֵי לֵה מִטֵּה-לַחֶם (// Lev 26:26); v. 13 וְהִשְׁלַחְתִּי-בָהּ רֶעֶב (// Lev 26:26); v. 13 וְהִכְרַתִּי מִמֶּנָּה אָדָם וּבְהֵמָה (// Lev 26:22); v. 15 חִיָּה רְעָה אַעֲבִיר בָּאָרֶץ וְשִׁכַלְתָּהּ (// Lev 26:22); v. 15 דְּבַר אֲשֶׁלַח (// Lev 26:22 + 32); v. 17 חָרַב אָבִיא עֲלֵיהָ אֶרֶץ הַחַיָּה (// Lev 26:25); v. 19 דְּבַר אֲשֶׁלַח (// Lev 26:25).

the exiles of 587, because they will know that it was not “without cause” (חנם) that Yhwh destroyed Jerusalem (Ezek 14:22–23). Again, the survivors’ only function is to serve as witnesses that the fall of Jerusalem was indeed warranted.⁴⁷ Here, however, the perspective shifts to the exiles of 597 and the cognitive resolution they experience when they see the survivors.

3.6 The Dating and Function of the References to Survivors

As I have demonstrated above, Ezek 5:1–4a, 12 are part of a larger pattern (a merism describing the fall of Jerusalem, juxtaposed with a comment about survivors) that is employed five times in the book of Ezekiel. But to what end? I would argue that not only is Ezekiel arguing for the necessity of Jerusalem’s fall, he is attempting to control the meaning of the survivors. This forces us to consider issues of literary stratification and dating.⁴⁸ While it is true that the book of Ezekiel (including the pattern I have described above) is a post-587 composition in the form we have it, do Ezek 5:3–4a reflect earlier statements that were orally proclaimed?

Some commentators have argued that the reference to survivors in Ezek 5:3–4a

⁴⁷ See Zimmerli, *Ezekiel I*, 316: “This remnant will become, through its ways and deeds which will make clear the wickedness of Jerusalem to those far away in exile, a sign in a new way of the inexorable justice of Yahweh spoken of in vv 13–20. . . . The appearance of the remnant of the wicked citizens of Jerusalem among the exiles becomes a clearer proof of the righteousness of Yahweh than would the straight forward fulfillment of the destruction of Jerusalem, which would not have the same relevance and evidence for the exiles.”

⁴⁸ See the comments of Friebel (*Sign Acts*, 196, 239–40) regarding assumptions about the dating of the survivor-passages.

contradicts (and therefore must be a later addition to) the picture of total destruction in 5:1–2.⁴⁹ But this is a misinterpretation of the punishment imagery: Ezek 5:1–2 refer to the destruction of a *city*, and vv. 3–4a to the deportation and subsequent death of *individual survivors*.⁵⁰ As I have argued above, v. 3 is not an image of preservation or safety. There is no contradiction or difference in outlook here.

For Ewald, the commands in Ezek 5:3–4a did not represent performable actions, and were thus a later interpolation.⁵¹ But this confuses the issue of performability with the issue of literary shape and genre. It is not the case that making a model city, lying on one's side, eating multigrain bread, cooking food over excrement, and shaving one's hair are *per se* unperformable actions. Rather, Ezekiel 4–5 cannot be taken as a script for performing these actions: these chapters leave out essential details (regarding e.g. timing and duration), they juxtapose and editorially connect disparate sign acts, and displace (or even omit) their interpretations. On the one hand, the composite nature of the material suggests that actual sign acts were summarized and shaped into the text we now have. If the descriptions of these sign acts were purely fictitious, *de novo* literary creations, we would expect more coherence. On the other hand, the text as we now have it has been composed and edited in such a way that it is almost impossible to reconstruct how some of these actions might have been performed.

⁴⁹ So e.g. Herrmann, *Ezechiel*, 39; Cooke, *Ezekiel*, 58; Georg Fohrer, *Ezechiel*, HAT (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr: 1955), 33; Zimmerli, *Ezekiel 1*, 173; Carley, *Ezekiel*, 36; Fuhs, *Ezechiel 1–24*, 36; Pohlmann, *Hesekiel*, 96.

⁵⁰ So also Friebe, *Sign Acts*, 240 (n. 365 cont'd).

⁵¹ Heinrich Ewald, *Die Propheten des Alten Bundes*, vol. 2 (Stuttgart: Adolph Krabbe, 1841), 211.

Still, if the “fire” of v. 4a cannot be simply equated with the “flame” of v. 2,⁵² we should at least consider the possibility that vv. 3–4a are a literary expansion of the sign act. If vv. 3–4a are an instance of *Fortschreibung*, they would have been added to coordinate vv. 1–2 with the other passages in the pattern described above. The fact that the interpretation of the sign act in v. 12 includes details present only in vv. 1–2 might also support this possibility.⁵³ We should, however, note the fact that not all the sign acts in Ezekiel 4–5 (see e.g. 4:4–5) are provided with a separate interpretation. Also, given the more reflective nature of the other passages in the pattern described above, we might expect a later interpolation to assign a more complex function to the survivors than what we find in vv. 3–4a.

With respect to dating, it is not uncommon for commentators to claim that Ezekiel’s references to survivors must postdate the fall of the city, as if the prophet could not have anticipated this event.⁵⁴ Even Joyce, who argues that Ezek 5:3 is not necessarily a later addition

⁵² The burning in v. 4a (שרפת . . . באש) is distinguished from the burning of v. 2 (באור). *Contra* Friebel (*Sign Acts*, 241–42), these are not the same fire: the act of returning some of the scattered hairs to the model city would result in confusion. See further Kraetzschmar (*Ezekiel*, 56); Cooke (*Ezekiel*, 58).

⁵³ So Herrmann, *Ezekiel*, 39.

⁵⁴ The references to survivors in Ezek 5:3–4; 6:8–10; 7:15–16; 12:16; 14:21 are dated after 587 by Zimmerli, who attributes them to Ezekiel or his school (*Ezekiel 1*, 173–74, 185, 190, 208, 211, 269, 274, 313); see also Wevers, *Ezekiel*, 56, 114. The separation of symbolic acts depicting exile from acts depicting siege goes back to Carl Heinrich Cornill, *Das Buch des Propheten Ezechiel* (Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1886), 198–201.

to the context, refers to the mention of survivors as “unexpected.”⁵⁵ But is this really the case? On the contrary, it seems highly likely that Ezekiel could have anticipated the destruction of Jerusalem and the possibility of deportees in the six years between his opening vision (593) and the fall of the city (587). As onomastic research has shown, Babylon was teeming with deported peoples from various areas.⁵⁶ The anticipation of a forthcoming deportation would therefore not be unusual, given Ezekiel’s own experience and the presence of other foreigners living in Babylon due to Babylonian foreign policy and labor practices.⁵⁷ After all, Zedekiah’s anti-

⁵⁵ Joyce, *Ezekiel*, 88.

⁵⁶ See Johannes Hackl and Michael Jursa, “Egyptians in Babylonia in the Neo-Babylonian and Achaemenid Periods,” in *Exile and Return: The Babylonian Context*, ed. Jonathan Stökl and Caroline Waerzeggers, BZAW 478 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2015), 157–80; Ran Zadok, “The Representation of Foreigners in Neo- and Late-Babylonian Legal Documents (Eighth through Second Centuries B.C.E.),” in *Judah and the Judeans in the Neo-Babylonian Period*, ed. Oded Lipschitz and Joseph Blenkinsopp (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2003), 471–589; note Zadok’s comment (555) that “Altogether there are no less than 2,500 N/LB [*neo/late-Babylonian*] individuals with foreign names if one takes into account the Murasû archive.”

⁵⁷ On the forced resettlement of Judeans in light of Babylonian deportation practices, see Rainer Albertz, *Israel in Exile: The History and Literature of the Sixth Century B.C.E.*, trans. David Green (Atlanta: SBL, 2003), 53–56, 82–90; Israel Eph‘al, “The Western Minorities in Babylonia in the 6th–5th Centuries B.C.: Maintenance and Cohesion,” *Orientalia* 47 (1978): 74–90; David Vanderhooft, *The Neo-Babylonian Empire and Babylon in the Latter Prophets*, HSM 59 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1999), 110–112. For references to deportation in Babylonian

Babylonian and pro-Egyptian sympathies were hardly a secret, even in Babylon (Ezek 17:1–21, esp. v. 15).⁵⁸ Moreover, Zimmerli himself concedes that the rhetoric of Ezekiel’s community “seeing and knowing” (Ezek 14:22b, 23b) only makes sense if proclaimed *before* the survivors from Jerusalem arrive.⁵⁹ But if this is the case, all the passages that I have discussed above—which, along with 14:21–23, make up the same pattern—can also on the same grounds be dated before the arrival of the survivors in Babylon.

To sum up: Ezekiel’s references to survivors are not about the *possibility* of survivors, as if his proclamations of Jerusalem’s total destruction required editorial reworking after survivors suddenly showed up in Babylon. Rather, they are concerned with interpreting (and thereby controlling) the *status* and *function* of survivors. For Ezekiel, future hope for Israel does not lie in the survivors of 587; their sole function for him is to bear witness to their own iniquity and to the fact that the downfall of Jerusalem was justified divine punishment. This harsh stance reflects the tensions between the deportees of 597 and the Jerusalemites / deportees of 587. These

documents, see Albert Kirk Grayson, *Assyrian and Babylonian Chronicles*, TCS 5 (Locust Valley, NY: Augustin, 1975), 3.8–9, 47–49; 6.8–23. See also Franz Heinrich Weissbach, *Das Hauptheiligtum des Marduk in Babylon, Esagila und Etemenanki* (Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1938), 46–47, and the assessment of Weissbach’s material in Daniel L. Smith-Christopher, “Reassessing the Historical and Sociological Impact of the Babylonian Empire (597/587–539 BCE,” in *Exile: Old Testament, Jewish, and Christian Conceptions*, ed. James M. Scott (Leiden: Brill, 1997), 7–36 (here 24).

⁵⁸ Note that Zimmerli (*Ezekiel 1*, 361) dates the parable in 17:1–10 before the fall of the city.

⁵⁹ Zimmerli, *Ezekiel 1*, 313.

considerations suggest that we cannot restrict all the comments about survivors to a post-587 date, after which time it would have been too late for the prophet to shape public opinion among his contemporaries.⁶⁰

4.0 Ezek 5:4b as a Critique of King Zedekiah

We now arrive at Ezek 5:4b, “from it will go forth a fire to the whole house of Israel.”⁶¹

⁶⁰ A recent argument for assigning Ezek 5:1–4a to the Ezekielian *Grundschrift* can be found in Yoo Hong Min, *Die Grundschrift des Ezechielbuches und ihre Botschaft*, FAT 2/81 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2015), 238–43.

⁶¹ In MT v. 4b a single clause ends the verse (מִמֶּנּוּ תִצְאֵ אֵשׁ אֶל־כָּל־בֵּית יִשְׂרָאֵל), while in LXX v. 4b there are two clauses, the second of which introduces v. 5 (ἐξ αὐτῆς ἐξελεύσεται πῦρ. Καὶ ἐρεῖς παντὶ οἴκῳ Ἰσραηλ). Many commentators take LXX to preserve the original reading; so e.g. Cornill, *Ezekiel*, 202–3; Bertholet, *Hesekiel*, 30; Crawford H. Toy, *The Book of the Prophet Ezekiel* (Leipzig: Hinrichs; Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 1899), 49; Herrmann, *Ezekiel*, 39; Cooke, *Ezekiel*, 58; Fohrer, *Ezekiel*, 33. Both Wevers (*Ezekiel*, 57) and Zimmerli (*Ezekiel 1*, 151) favor the LXX, and state that MT does not “fit” the context; Zimmerli incorrectly claims that LXX lacks v. 4b in entirety. However, LXX seems to be following its usual practice of inserting a verb of speech before the Messenger Formula where MT lacks it (Ezek 4:13; 5:4; 7:2; 13:8; 15:6; 17:19; 22:19; 39:17). This represents an assimilation to the frequent locution וְאָמַר כֹּה אָמַר אֲדֹנָי יְהוִה (Ezek 13:18; 16:3; 17:3; 21:33; 22:3; 28:22; 29:3; 30:2; 36:3; 38:3; 39:1). Here in 5:4, LXX has inserted a verb of speech before the prepositional phrase in v. 4b (assuming that

What does this signify, and what is its function in context? For some, the statement is original to its context; these commentators explain it as a reference to the destruction of all Israel (including the exilic community),⁶² a metaphor for the loss of hope among the exiles,⁶³ or a metaphor for the danger posed by the exiles of 587 to Ezekiel's community (the exiles of 597).⁶⁴ Related to these interpretations is the question of how the antecedent of the 3ms pronoun on "from it" (ממנו, MT v. 4b) should be explained.⁶⁵ Proposals include: a reference to the "midst [of the city]" (v. 2),⁶⁶ a reference to the "flame" (אור, masc.) in v. 2,⁶⁷ a scribal error for "from me" (ממני),⁶⁸ a

it designated the addressee) rather than at the beginning of v. 5. For a different explanation of LXX's harmonization, see Allen, *Ezekiel 1–19*, 52.

⁶² Radak, in Cohen, *Ezekiel*, 27; Allen, *Ezekiel 1–19*, 72; Darr, "Ezekiel," 1151; Block, *Ezekiel 1–24*, 195.

⁶³ Calvin, *Ezekiel*, 193–94.

⁶⁴ Rom-Shiloni, *Exclusive Inclusivity*, 176. Given Ezekiel's consistently negative stance toward the Jerusalemites, this idea is plausible. Some link this passage with the image of purging in Ezek 20:38, suggesting that the ones who are purged are the survivors of 587; see A. B. Davidson, *Ezekiel*, CBC (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1892), 37. But the purging of Ezekiel 20 is envisioned as taking place in the wilderness, as Yhwh brings the people out of exile.

⁶⁵ LXX's ἐξ αὐτῆς probably has the city (v. 2) in mind.

⁶⁶ Wevers, *Ezekiel*, 57.

⁶⁷ Radak, in Cohen, *Ezekiel*, 27; Kasher, *Ezekiel*, 205.

⁶⁸ Kraetzschmar, *Ezechiel*, 56.

general reference to the last act of judgment,⁶⁹ a general reference to the people's sinful behavior,⁷⁰ or a reference to the "fire" (שא, fem.!) in v. 4a.⁷¹

While some of these proposals yield coherent interpretations, it is worth considering another option: that Ezek 5:4b should be understood as a later redactional addition, a sentiment coordinated with other passages that critique Israelite kings. The likelihood of this is supported by two literary-syntactic features. First, v. 4b is not tightly anchored to the context because the masculine singular pronoun on ממנו lacks an unambiguous antecedent. This feature has been widely regarded as evidence of its secondary nature.⁷² Second, the locution "a fire will go forth from X" is attested in a network of strikingly similar passages—the conclusion of Ezekiel's parable of the vine (Ezek 19:10–14), the conclusion of Jotham's fable (Judg 9:7–15; cf. vv. 16–20), and the passage under consideration:

ותצא אש ממטה בדיה פריה אכלה ולא־היה בה מטה־עז שבט למשול (Ezek 19:14)

ואס־אין תצא אש מן־האטד ותאכל את־ארזי הלבנון (Judg 9:15)

ממנו תצא־אש אל־כל־בית ישראל (Ezek 5:4b)

⁶⁹ Cooke, *Ezekiel*, 58 (one of two interpretive options he offers); Greenberg, *Ezekiel 1–20*, 110: "the expression is vague The meaning is, then: the symbolic act you perform presages a general destruction. The masculine suffix of MT is most likely to be taken as a neuter, a reference to the whole symbolism that preceded (on masculine for neuter, see Joüon §152)."

⁷⁰ Poole, *Annotations*, on Ezek 5:4.

⁷¹ Allen, *Ezekiel 1–19*, 52; Block, *Ezekiel 1–24*, 190; Friebel, *Sign Acts*, 242.

⁷² So e.g. Cornill, *Ezechiel*, 202–3; Toy, *Ezekiel*, 48; Jahn, *Ezechiel*, 32; Hölscher, *Hesekiel*, 63; Cooke, *Ezekiel*, 58; Zimmerli, *Ezekiel 1*, 151.

Ezekiel's parable of the vine is a lament for the fall of the monarchy and a critique of Zedekiah: it is said that "fire has gone forth from its [*the vine's, i.e., the monarchy's*] branch [= *Zedekiah*] and consumed its shoots and its fruit, and there is not in it a strong branch, a scepter to rule" (Ezek 19:14). This verse characterizes the disastrous results of Zedekiah's actions as a devouring fire. The same language and imagery appears in Jotham's fable, where the bramble responds to the trees' request that it be king by warning against insincerity: "let fire come forth from the bramble and devour the cedars of Lebanon." According to Schöpflin, this verse draws on prophetic doom oracles expressed in metaphorical language.⁷³ Her comments on Judg 9:15 are suggestive:⁷⁴

V 15b β is a redactional verse. It was inserted in order to supply an element matching v 20b. At the same time, the cedars, rather coming in as a surprise, probably are an allusion to Jerusalem, whose representative buildings were made of cedar wood. These were consumed by literal flames when the city was seized. But fire also occurs as a metaphor of divine judgement within prophecies of doom. Both is to say that the king(s) caused the fire, they are responsible for the judgement of Jerusalem, the climax of divine retribution. So this verse is trying to make the foreshadowing of Israelite history complete. It is in line with the ingredients of the chapter that take Abimelech as a prefiguration of Northern Israelite Kings.

Ezekiel 5:4b can be explained as an editorial link to these contexts, triggered by the fire imagery of v. 4a and the contextual topic of exile: it argues that due to Zedekiah and his foolish rebellion against Babylon, a fire has gone forth that will destroy all Israel. The connection

⁷³ Karin Schöpflin, "Jotham's Speech and Fable as Prophetic Comment on Abimelech's Story," *SJOT* 18.1 (2004): 3–22 (here 19).

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 13.

between Ezek 5:4b and Ezek 19:14 was noted by Cornill and Cooke,⁷⁵ and the connection between Ezek 5:4b and Judg 9:15 was noted by Jahn.⁷⁶ The connection between Ezek 19:14 and Judg 9:15 (// v. 20) was noted by Hitzig and Cooke.⁷⁷ But granting that the same locution is found in all three contexts, why should we attribute this to deliberate editorial activity?

First, it is clear that Ezekiel is highly critical of Zedekiah and his policies, linking them with the downfall of Judah (see e.g. Ezek 12:10–14; 17:1–21; 19:11–14; 21:30–32).⁷⁸ The earliest form of the book, then, already contains polemical statements about the monarchy.

⁷⁵ See Cornill, *Ezechiel*, 203; Cooke, *Ezekiel*, 58. This is accepted as a possibility by Bertholet (*Hesekiel*, 30) and Zimmerli (*Ezekiel 1*, 151). Davidson (*Ezekiel*, 37) also sees the similarity but thinks 19:14 refers to a purging fire rather than a destructive fire.

⁷⁶ Jahn, *Ezechiel*, 32: “וּשְׂרַפְתָּ אוֹתָם בְּאֵשׁ” ist Glosse, ebenso ganz 4b, was aus der Parabel Jotams Jud. 9, 15 eingesetzt ist. Das Suffix in מִמֶּנּוּ ist, wenn מֵשֶׁם stehen bleibt, ohne correcte Beziehung.”

⁷⁷ Ferdinand Hitzig, *Der Prophet Ezechiel*, KeH (Leipzig: Weidmann, 1847), 132: “V. 14. Nachdem der aus dem Unglücke V. 12. erwachsene Bestand V. 13. angegeben worden, sieht Ez. schliesslich auf den Ursprung des Unheiles zurück. Zum 1. Versgl. vgl. Richt. 9, 20. Das Land wurde durch das “Haus Davids”, den Hof, welcher den Krieg entzündete ins Verderben gestürzt”; Cooke, *Ezekiel*, 210: “So the fire which destroyed the vine came from a rod of her own; the royal house itself brought both nation and dynasty to ruin. . . . *fire has come forth from ‘her’ rod*] Cp. the image in Jud. 9¹⁵.”

⁷⁸ See Iain M. Duguid, *Ezekiel and the Leaders of Israel*, VTSupp 56 (Leiden: Brill, 1994), 33–43. LXX Ezek 19:1 τὸν ἄρχοντα (sg.; cf. MT’s plural נוֹשֵׂי־אֵי) may also have Zedekiah in mind; so Hölscher, *Hesekiel*, 108.

Second, it is widely recognized that the laments over and critiques of the monarchy in Ezekiel 19 and 21 have been coordinated with *another* text: Gen 49:8–12.⁷⁹ Ezekiel has borrowed the distinctive locutions of Judah’s blessing and transformed them into metaphorical statements of doom. So it is not at all unreasonable that we would find other texts being creatively used for similarly polemical purposes. Finally, it is not only plausible that Jotham’s fable has been edited in light of prophetic texts (so Schöpflin); a number of studies have pointed out that Jotham’s fable and the Gideon-Abimelech narratives as a whole have in turn had a profound impact on the editorial history of other texts dealing with the monarchy.⁸⁰ These passages, then, form an

⁷⁹ See William L. Moran, “Genesis 49,10 and its use in Ezekiel 21,32,” *Biblica* 39 (1958): 405–25; Zimmerli, *Ezekiel 1*, 447–48; Block, *Ezekiel 1–24*, 692–93; Richard C. Steiner, “Four Inner-Biblical Interpretations of Genesis 49:10: On the Lexical and Syntactic Ambiguities of טַר as Reflected in the Prophecies of Nathan, Ahijah, Ezekiel, and Zechariah,” *JBL* 132.1 (2013): 33–60.

⁸⁰ On the use of the Abimelech material (including Jotham’s fable) for crafting narrative analogies in 1 Samuel, see Moshe Garsiel, *The First Book of Samuel: A Literary Study of Comparative Structures, Analogies and Parallels* (Jerusalem: Rubin Mass, 1990), 97–99; Robert H. O’Connell, *The Rhetoric of the Book of Judges*, VTSupp 63 (Leiden: Brill, 1996), 291–93. For examples of the coordination of the book of Isaiah with the Gideon-Abimelech material in Judges, I am indebted to xxxx xxxx and xxxx xxxx (personal communication); see also Jacob Stromberg, “Figural History in the Book of Isaiah: The Prospective Significance of Hezekiah’s Deliverance from Assyria and Death,” in *Imperial Visions: The Prophet and the Book of Isaiah in an Age of Empires*, ed. Reinhard Kratz and Joachim Schaper, FRLANT (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, forthcoming).

intertextual network reflecting on the relationship between the monarchy and the downfall of Judah.

5.0 Conclusion

In this essay I have argued that the image of “taking and binding” (Ezek 5:3) does not signify protection or the preservation of a “remnant” in which hope can be located. Rather, it is one step in a sequence of punishments in vv. 1–4a, 12 that have been constructed by a creative reworking of earlier legal traditions in Lev 26:25–38. Moreover, Ezek 5:1–4a, 12 should be read in light of a larger group of passages in Ezekiel that share the same argument structure: a merism depicting the destruction of Jerusalem juxtaposed with a comment about survivors (6:8–10, 11–12; 7:15–16; 12:14–16; 14:21–23). The argument is not about the possibility of survivors, but is concerned with interpreting (and thereby controlling) the status and meaning of survivors. For Ezekiel, future hope for Israel does not lie in the survivors of 587; their sole function for him is to bear witness to their own iniquity and to the fact that the downfall of Jerusalem constitutes justified divine punishment. Finally, it seems possible that Ezek 5:4b can be understood as a later addition, a sentiment coordinated with other passages that constitute a critique of Israel’s monarchy (and in Ezekiel, of King Zedekiah in particular). Ezekiel 5:1–4, 12 on the one hand represent the prophet’s attempt to interpret the disaster for his community, and on the other form an essential part of his strategy of community identity formation over and against the exiles of 587.