



BRILL

# The Book of Ezekiel: A Help or a Hindrance for Environmental Ethics?

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## Abstract

In this essay, I examine how the book of Ezekiel has been employed or criticized as a resource for environmental ethics, and I explore the hermeneutical strategies behind these efforts. To do this, I make use of David Horrell's critique and taxonomy of how the Bible has been used to inform attitudes about the environment. I conclude by arguing that while the book of Ezekiel is not as ecologically dangerous as some readers have claimed, neither can it function on its own as a useful tool for constructing an environmental ethic. However, reading Ezekiel as part of a metanarrative generated by a larger scriptural corpus may render its imagery useful as a resource.

## Keywords

Ezekiel – ecotheology – environmental ethics – earth – land

## 1 Introduction<sup>1</sup>

The current environmental crisis has been well documented.<sup>2</sup> The effects of water and air pollution, land contamination, deforestation, resource extraction,

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1 I wish to thank Amy Smallwood for numerous helpful suggestions. Any infelicities or errors remain my own.

2 See C. Hamilton, C. Bonneuil and François Gemenne, eds., *The Anthropocene and the Global Environmental Crisis: Rethinking Modernity in a New Epoch* (Routledge: London, 2015); see further World Resources Institute, *A Guide to World Resources 2000–2001: People and Ecosystems: The Fraying Web of Life* (Washington, DC: World Resources Institute, 2000); UNEP, *Global*

and biodiversity loss have reached dangerous levels. In light of the magnitude of these problems, it is not surprising that people have turned to the Bible, either to critique it as contributing to the environmental crisis<sup>3</sup> or to use it as a resource for responding to the crisis.<sup>4</sup> The book of Ezekiel in particular serves as an interesting case: on the one hand, it has been vilified as a dangerous book containing imagery hostile to the earth; on the other hand, its imagery has been thought to be useful in motivating hope and care for the earth. Both of these responses are of interest for the study of how the Bible has been interpreted and used, but neither the negative nor the positive claims about the book have been assessed in a hermeneutically explicit manner.

In this essay, I will examine how the book of Ezekiel has been employed or criticized as a resource for environmental ethics, and I explore the hermeneutical strategies behind these efforts. To do this, I will make use of David Horrell's critique and taxonomy of how the Bible has been used to inform attitudes about the environment.<sup>5</sup> I will conclude by arguing that while the book of Ezekiel is not as monstrous as some readers have claimed, neither is it (on its own) as useful as other readers have assumed. However, reading Ezekiel as part of a metanarrative generated by a larger scriptural corpus may render its imagery useful as a resource when constructing an environmental ethic.

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*Environment Outlook: Environment for the Future We Want (GEO-5)* (Valletta: United Nations Environment Programme, 2012); C. D. Rosenzweig et al., eds., *Our Warming Planet: Topics in Climate Dynamics*, Lectures in Climate Change: Volume 1 (Hackensack, NJ: World Scientific, 2018); S. Kaza et al., *What a Waste 2.0: A Global Snapshot of Solid Waste Management to 2050*, Urban Development Series (Washington, DC: The World Bank, 2018).

- 3 E.g., L. White, Jr., "The Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis," *Science* 155 (1967): 1203–1207; A. Toynbee, "The Religious Background of the Present Environmental Crisis," *International Journal of Environmental Studies* 3 (1972): 141–46. White's essay in particular prompted responses faulting him for a lack of precision in his arguments, but largely agreeing that the later reception of Gen 1:26, 28 could be tied to environmental exploitation; see R. Bauckham, "Human Authority in Creation," in *God and the Crisis of Freedom: Biblical and Contemporary Perspectives*, ed. R. Bauckham (Louisville: WJKP, 2002), 128–77; idem, "Dominion Interpreted – A Historical Account," in *Living with Other Creatures*, ed. R. Bauckham. (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2011), 14–62; P. Harrison, "Having Dominion: Genesis and the Mastery of Nature," in *Environmental Stewardship: Critical Perspectives – Past and Present*, ed. R. J. Berry (London: T&T Clark, 2006), 17–30.
- 4 E.g., R. Murray, *The Cosmic Covenant: Biblical Themes of Justice, Peace, and the Integrity of Creation* (London: Sheed & Ward, 1992); R. J. Berry, ed., *The Care of Creation: Focusing Concern and Action* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2000); H. Marlow, *Biblical Prophets and Contemporary Environmental Ethics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009); R. Bauckham, *The Bible and Ecology: Rediscovering the Community of Creation* (Waco: Baylor, 2010). Most of the works cited in this essay are connected with (or responding to) Christian interpretive traditions.
- 5 D. G. Horrell, *The Bible and the Environment: Towards a Critical Ecological Biblical Theology* (London: Equinox, 2010).

## 2 Using the Bible for Ecotheology: Horrell's Taxonomy

In his review of *The Green Bible*, David Horrell argues:

... simply lining up relevant biblical passages cannot generate a clear and consistent message, certainly not on an issue like the environment, where the gap between ancient and modern societies is wide in all sorts of ways and where any meaningful ethics require the input of modern science.<sup>6</sup>

Horrell goes on to note the difficulty in using the Bible to address current environmental problems. First, the biblical statements about “the earth” are so diverse that a facile systematization is impossible. Second, the reader must select which biblical passages they feel are relevant to the topic – a process which raises the question of what principles (if any!) are guiding the reader's selection of data. Third, the individual biblical passages under consideration do not themselves directly instruct the reader how to construct “the teaching” or “the message” of the Bible out of the data. A final concern is that readers inevitably bring their own perspectives to the text in a way that shapes (for better or for worse) their handling of the text.<sup>7</sup>

Horrell's response to the diverse uses of the Bible for environmental ethics is to expose the hermeneutical underpinnings at work. He distinguishes between reading strategies of “recovery” (which seek “the recovery or retrieval of the Bible's ecological wisdom, a wisdom that has been hidden and obscured by interpreters who failed to see or attend to such dimensions of the text”) and reading strategies of “resistance” (which view certain biblical texts as damaging to the earth, requiring them to be “exposed and resisted”).<sup>8</sup> For Horrell, the problem with readings of recovery is that they often naïvely present their

6 D. G. Horrell, “The Green Bible: A Timely Idea Deeply Flawed,” *ExpTim* 121 (2010): 182.

7 See D. G. Horrell, C. Hunt and C. Southgate, “Appeals to the Bible in Ecotheology and Environmental Ethics: A Typology of Hermeneutical Stances,” *SCE* 21.2 (2008): 234: “any attempt to recover a ‘biblical perspective’, to promote a ‘biblical view’, involves not only the prioritising of certain texts over others but also the interpretation of those texts in the light of contemporary issues and concerns, a process which is ever ongoing. Indeed, one problem with readings of recovery of the sort surveyed above is that they tend to imply that one can leap from biblical exegesis to contemporary theology and ethics, reading, say, ecological values direct from Jesus' attitude to birds and flowers, without doing justice either to the gap that separates the biblical texts from our own world and its concerns or to the work that therefore needs to be done in order for the ancient texts to contribute creatively to an adequate contemporary response. The claim to be promoting simply ‘what the Bible says’ is a pernicious one, which masks the agency of the interpreter.”

8 Horrell, *The Bible and the Environment*, 11, 13; see earlier Horrell et al., “Appeals to the Bible,” 221–28.

construal as “*the* meaning of the text.”<sup>9</sup> The problem for readings of resistance is that by using value-based criteria external to the biblical text, they are unlikely to be persuasive to those who use the Bible as a source of authority – which raises questions about the goals and assumed audience of these readings.<sup>10</sup> How then might recent ecologically-minded responses to Ezekiel fit into Horrell’s taxonomy, and what are the hermeneutical strategies behind these treatments?

### 3 Negative Responses to the Book of Ezekiel

Three authors, all of whom have contributed to the Earth Bible Project, have concluded that the book of Ezekiel actually poses a danger to the environment: Keith Carley, Kalinda Rose Stevenson, and Norman Habel. In Horrell’s taxonomy of approaches, their work would be categorized as readings of “resistance.”

First, for these authors, the book of Ezekiel depicts Earth<sup>11</sup> from an anthropocentric perspective, in terms of its value to humans as habitat (Ezek 36:28), as supplier of resources for human use (34:14; 36:34), and as a human political domain (37:22).<sup>12</sup> Ezekiel never speaks of Earth as having intrinsic value,<sup>13</sup> and it is depicted as property belonging either to humans or to YHWH (e.g., 11:15, 17; 36:2, 12, 20).<sup>14</sup> While Carley, Stevenson, and Habel all admit the presence of

9 idem, *The Bible and the Environment*, 118–19.

10 idem, *The Bible and the Environment*, 120–21.

11 The Earth Bible Project uses the capitalized term “Earth” to refer to “planet Earth, that living system within which we humans live in a relationship of interdependence with other members of the Earth community”; see N. Habel, “Introducing the Earth Bible,” in *Readings from the Perspective of Earth*, ed. N. C. Habel (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000), 27.

12 K. Carley, “From Harshness to Hope: The Implications for Earth of Hierarchy in Ezekiel,” in *Ezekiel’s Hierarchical World: Wrestling with a Tiered Reality*, SBLSS 31, ed. S. L. Cook and C. L. Patton (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2004), 122, 124; K. R. Stevenson, “If Earth Could Speak: The Case of the Mountains against YHWH in Ezekiel 6; 35–36,” in *The Earth Story in the Psalms and the Prophets*, ed. N. C. Habel (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001), 160, 166–69; N. Habel, “The Silence of the Lands: The Ecojustice Implications of Ezekiel’s Judgment Oracles,” in *Ezekiel’s Hierarchical World*, 133.

13 Habel, “Silence of the Lands,” 136, 139.

14 Stevenson, “If Earth Could Speak,” 163, 167; Habel, “Silence of the Lands,” 136; see also Julie Galambush, “God’s Land and Mine: Creation as Property in the Book of Ezekiel,” in *Ezekiel’s Hierarchical World*, 91–108. For more nuanced views of Ezekiel’s depiction of land and animals, see W. Pikor, “The Subjecthood of the Land of Israel in the Book of Ezekiel,” *BibAn | Roczniki Biblijne* 3.1 (2013): 29–46; J. W. Olley, “Animals in Heaven and Earth: Attitudes in Ezekiel,” *Colloquium* 33.1 (2001): 47–57. For an interpretation of Ezekiel through the lens of creation, in which God’s ownership of land is taken as evidence of

restoration language in the book (chaps. 34, 36, 47), Carley and Habel evaluate it as purely anthropocentric in character, and Stevenson actually treats it as evidence of YHWH's malevolence.<sup>15</sup> Second, for these authors the book of Ezekiel is marked by silence about – and a lack of concern for – the health of Earth.<sup>16</sup> Indeed, all three speak of Earth as a being whose “voice” is not allowed to be heard or is actively “silenced” by Ezekiel and/or YHWH.<sup>17</sup> Third, all three authors agree that in the book of Ezekiel, YHWH is depicted as personally causing violence to Earth. According to Carley, “Earth is the passive object of horrifying maltreatment. The maltreatment is largely meted out by God in the process of punishing human misdeeds.”<sup>18</sup> Stevenson states, “My purpose here is to make the case that the God of Ezekiel fits the profile of a batterer, and that Earth is one of his battered victims.”<sup>19</sup> Habel agrees: “The land/Earth experiences violence and death at the hands of a jealous God.”<sup>20</sup> Fourth, these authors agree that the violence directed against Earth in the book of Ezekiel is expressed most prominently in two images: Ezekiel's repeated threat that YHWH will make the land and its mountains “waste” and “desolate” (שממה/חרב, e.g., Ezek 6:14; 12:20; 14:15, 16; 15:8; 19:7; 29:9, 10, 12; 30:7, 12; 32:15; 33:28, 29; 35:3; 36:4),<sup>21</sup> and Ezekiel's threat that YHWH will burn down

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positive concern, see W. Briggs, “Creation and Ecotheology in Ezekiel 6; 35:1–36:15,” *HBTh* 40 (2018): 41–64.

- 15 Habel and Carley argue that this restoration is solely for human benefit and that it does not “negate” or “excuse” the pervasive violence against Earth throughout the book; see Habel, “Silence of the Lands,” 139; K. Carley, “Ezekiel's Formula of Desolation: Harsh Justice for the Land/Earth,” in *The Earth Story*, 150. Stevenson likens Ezekiel's restoration language to the (false) promise of a violent husband that he will not batter his wife; see Stevenson, “If Earth Could Speak,” 164.
- 16 Carley, “Ezekiel's Formula of Desolation,” 153–54, 156; Stevenson, “If Earth Could Speak,” 163; Habel, “Silence of the Lands,” 137.
- 17 Carley, “Ezekiel's Formula of Desolation,” 143: “But while Earth is sometimes animated, it never speaks up for itself”; Stevenson, “If Earth Could Speak,” 161, “Despite its central importance in the book, the land has no voice”; Habel, “Silence of the Lands,” 137: “Not only are the lands and all the fullness of life within them forced to suffer, die, and become desolate at the hands of a jealous overlord, but their voice is also silenced. Ezekiel effectively suppresses the possibility that any party will identify with the victims, allowing their blood to cry out for justice” (see further 137–39).
- 18 Carley, “Ezekiel's Formula of Desolation,” 143.
- 19 Stevenson, “If Earth Could Speak,” 153; cf. 164–65.
- 20 Habel, “Silence of the Lands,” 137. Habel asks: do the lands of Earth “suffer injustice at the hands of other characters in the text or at the hands of the writer of Ezekiel? In my opinion, the answer is an unequivocal yes” (Habel, 133).
- 21 Carley, “Ezekiel's Formula of Desolation,” 144–45; Stevenson, “If Earth Could Speak,” 162; Habel, “Silence of the Lands,” 135–35, 138–39.

the forests of the Negev (Ezek 21:1–5).<sup>22</sup> To sum up: for these authors, the book of Ezekiel is marked by pervasive hostility to Earth, a hostility that renders it unsuitable as a resource for “promot[ing] positive environmental values.”<sup>23</sup>

How have these critics arrived at their view of Ezekiel as environmentally dangerous? All three authors wrote essays in connection with the Earth Bible Project, which has been admirably forthright about the hermeneutical strategies informing its approach. The EBP team is clear that they are performing an advocacy reading, and not doing literary- or historical-critical scholarship or even constructing an ecotheology.<sup>24</sup> They are indebted to feminist criticism for a hermeneutic of suspicion and retrieval.<sup>25</sup> They work from a series of six “ecojustice principles,”<sup>26</sup> of which the principle of “voice” is probably the most significant for explaining the conclusions of the three authors considered above.<sup>27</sup> It is by using this principle that Carley, Stevenson, and Habel anthropomorphize Earth and claim that its “voice” has been “silenced.”

To a large extent, I think the negative assessment by these three authors is a response to two features of the book of Ezekiel: the lack of anything that fits

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- 22 Carley, “Ezekiel’s Formula of Desolation,” 148–49; Habel, “Silence of the Lands,” 133–34.
- 23 So Carley, “Earth’s Formula of Desolation,” 156. Carley believes that the book of Ezekiel contains “difficult concepts” and warns about the “danger those concepts represent if they are assumed to convey God’s attitude toward Earth correctly or taken as examples of how Earth should be treated on account of human misdeeds” (Carley, 143).
- 24 See N. Habel, “Introducing the Earth Bible,” 33–34: “Rather than reflecting about the Earth as we analyse a text, we are seeking to reflect with Earth and see things from the perspective of Earth.... [This] involves a move away from searching the text to study the theme or topic of Earth, as part of a creation theology or any other theology”; N. Habel, “The Origins and Challenges of an Ecojustice Hermeneutic,” in *Relating to the Text: Interdisciplinary and Form-Critical Insights on the Bible*, ed. T. J. Sandoval and C. Mandolfo (New York: T&T Clark, 2003), 290: “It needs to be stated, at the outset, that this hermeneutic is a second-level reading of the text”; N. C. Habel, “Introducing Ecological Hermeneutics,” in *Exploring Ecological Hermeneutics*, ed. N. C. Habel and P. Trudinger (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2008), 3: “A revised ecological hermeneutic requires a radical reorientation to the biblical text. The task before us is not an exploration of what a given text may say about creation, about nature, or about earth.... We are not focusing on ecology and creation or ecology and theology.”
- 25 See Habel, “Introducing the Earth Bible,” 33–34; The Earth Bible Team, “Guiding Ecojustice Principles,” in *Readings from the Perspective of Earth*, ed. N. C. Habel (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000), 39–40; the original model is slightly revised in Habel, “Introducing Ecological Hermeneutics,” 3–5.
- 26 These principles include: Intrinsic Worth, Interconnectedness, Voice, Purpose, Mutual Custodianship, and Resistance. These are explained in The Earth Bible Team, “Guiding Ecojustice Principles,” 38–53.
- 27 For their discussion of “voice,” see The Earth Bible Team, “Guiding Ecojustice Principles,” 46–48; idem, “The Voice of Earth: More than Metaphor?” in *The Earth Story*, 23–28.

their notion of “voice,” and the violent imagery in the book. The principle of “voice” constitutes the means by which the Earth Bible Project confers subjectivity and moral standing on Earth, so one would expect a rigorous theoretical grounding for their statement that “Earth is a subject capable of raising its voice in celebration and against injustice.”<sup>28</sup> They later clarify that “We use the term ‘voice’ as shorthand for the diverse ways in which Earth and the Earth community may communicate.... By the voice of Earth we mean the many languages of Earth, be they gesture, sign, image or sound, that send a message – whether to humans, to other members of the Earth community, or to God.”<sup>29</sup> But I wonder if this really provides adequate grounding. First, it is never explained how, e.g., mountains or oceans “communicate” or “send messages,” or how, e.g., bird-song or the movements of fish could be equivalent to “raising [Earth’s] voice in celebration and against injustice.”<sup>30</sup> Nor do they explain how they move from the descriptive fact that some animals communicate with each other to the prescriptive claim that Earth has moral standing. Moreover, their anecdotal appeals to “Indigenous peoples” who feel “kinship” with Earth and “seem to have a capacity to hear the wilderness sing and communicate in a variety of ways” do not constitute definitions, nor do they include explanations of how “less sensitive Westerners” might have the same experience.<sup>31</sup> The biblical authors’ depictions of earth/sea/forests “praising” God (e.g., Ps 65:12–13; 148) might be a starting point if one were constructing an ecotheology, but the EBP team is not; and the fact that they appeal here to the biblical depiction of Earth praising God seems to run afoul of their earlier explicit rationale for omitting any reference to “God” or “creation” from their ecojustice principles.<sup>32</sup>

Second, the EBP does not adequately respond to the charge that in seeking the “voice” of Earth they are actually anthropomorphizing Earth and projecting their own human voice onto it.<sup>33</sup> This anthropomorphizing tendency is perhaps strongest in the essay by Stevenson, where she imagines Earth as a prosecutor and the “mountains of Israel” as a female English-speaking plaintiff in court, bringing charges against YHWH as a husband who batters a spouse.

Finally, the EBP has a tendency to assume that the biblical authors’ silence about Earth (or their depiction of Earth in anthropocentric terms) is

28 The Earth Bible Team, “Guiding Ecojustice Principles,” 46.

29 *idem*, “The Voice of Earth,” 23.

30 *idem*, “The Voice of Earth,” 23. On this point, see the critique of D. G. Horrell, “Ecological Hermeneutics: Reflections on Methods and Prospects for the Future,” *Colloquium* 46.2 (2014): 156–57.

31 *idem*, “The Voice of Earth,” 26.

32 The Earth Bible Team, “Guiding Ecojustice Principles,” 38.

33 Note their awareness of this possibility in “The Voice of Earth,” 23.

tantamount to actively and maliciously “silencing” or “suppressing” the “voice” of Earth.<sup>34</sup> What seems lacking is an exploration of whether the notion of “voice” (which is, to be sure, an essential and powerful tool in feminist and postcolonialist critique) is better-suited than other strategies for recognizing the subjectivity and moral standing of Earth.

With respect to the three authors’ treatment of violent imagery in the book of Ezekiel, I think some of their claims might be contested.<sup>35</sup> First, Ezekiel’s language of “waste” and “desolation” seems not to be violence against the earth as such, but rather violence against *human habitation on the earth*.<sup>36</sup> In other words, it refers to the elimination of humanity from its habitat – not just from “land,” but also from “cities” (a word that appears alongside “land” in Ezekiel’s formulaic language of desolation, e.g., Ezek 12:20; 19:7; 29:12; 30:7; 36:4). That the violence is directed against humans and human habitation is clear in Ezek 14:15, where God causes wild animals to “pass through the land” and they “bereave it, and it becomes desolate so that no one passes through.”<sup>37</sup> Likewise,

34 See note 16 above, and “Guiding Ecojustice Principles,” 38.

35 The treatment of Ezekiel by Carley, Stevenson, and Habel can be usefully contrasted with that by B. E. Kelle, “Dealing with the Trauma of Defeat: The Rhetoric of the Devastation and Rejuvenation of Nature in Ezekiel,” *JBL* 128 (2009): 469–90. Kelle perceives the violent nature of the imagery in Ezekiel and notes its dangerous potential (see esp. 480). Unlike the aforementioned authors, Kelle seeks to *explain* this violent imagery, which he argues “serves as part of Ezekiel’s efforts to reshape the understanding of those who are victims and thus to deal with, or at least give expression to, the trauma of defeat” (472). Yet like these authors, he interprets Ezekielian imagery as “God’s direct, personal, and harsh treatment of the earth and on the land itself as sinful, guilty, and polluted” and speaks of God’s “devastation of nature” (471). It seems to me, however, that Ezekiel’s references to the sinfulness of the “land” (e.g., Ezek 7:1–4; 14:13) refer by metonymy to the people living on it; and the references to devastation are not to “nature” (as something distinct from humans), but to the earth and its plant life as humans’ dwelling places and agricultural products.

36 See HALOT, s.v. שָׂמָה. Stevenson recognizes the issue here, and asks: “Do these words describe ‘scorched Earth’ as well as ‘abandoned Earth’? Do they refer to ‘destruction of the landscape’ or just ‘removal of the inhabitants’? Did the mountains themselves undergo an ecological crisis? What actual damage was done to the mountains?” Her imaginary interlocutor “suspects Ezekiel was thinking only of the people who lived on the mountains, and not about the mountains themselves”; see Stevenson, “If Earth Could Speak,” 167. For another perspective on the connection between the desolation of people and land in different texts, see E. Boase, “Desolate Land / Desolate People in Jeremiah and Lamentations,” in *Ecological Aspects of War: Engagements with Biblical Texts*, ed. A. Elvey and K. Dyer, with D. Guess (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2017), 97–115.

37 D. Rom-Shiloni has argued that Ezekiel’s “desolate land” imagery is part of his rhetoric of communal identity formation and exclusion; see *Exclusive Inclusivity: Identity Conflicts between the Exiles and the People Who Remained (6th–5th Centuries BCE)*, LHBOTS 513 (New York: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2013), 180–81.

in Ezek 6:14, the oracle of judgment states that YHWH will “make the land a desolate waste ... *in all dwelling-places* [בכל מושבותיהם].” Similarly, YHWH’s statement in Ezek 35:14 that he will “make you [*i.e., Mt. Seir, vv. 3, 7*] desolate” must refer to the destruction of humans as inhabitants and not the earth as such, because the verse continues by saying that “the whole earth will rejoice” at the event. Finally, Lev 26:31–33 – which some see as the source of Ezekiel’s “waste and desolate” terminology<sup>38</sup> – is linked in the surrounding verses with the decrease of agricultural products cultivated by humans (Lev 26:20), with wild animals feasting on human children and human livestock (Lev 26:22), and with the land itself enjoying a sabbath rest once it has been made desolate of its human inhabitants (Lev 26:34–35). Again, the imagery here depicts violence against humans on the land, not against the land as such.<sup>39</sup> As many have observed, while we humans cannot survive without the earth, the earth can survive quite well without us.<sup>40</sup> So I am not as convinced as Carley, Stevenson, and Habel that Ezekiel’s language of “waste and desolation” can be taken to depict YHWH’s unjust violence against Earth. And yet, as William Briggs has observed, there *is* a connection between humans and land, between human “pollution” of land and resulting negative consequences for humans.<sup>41</sup>

Second, I am unconvinced that the forest fire imagery in Ezek 21:1–5 – which Carley likens to the modern human destruction of rainforests for agricultural purposes<sup>42</sup> – must be taken as “violence against Earth.”<sup>43</sup> It is certainly true

38 See J. Milgrom, *Leviticus 23–27: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, AB 3B (New York: Doubleday, 2001), 2318–19.

39 See A. B. Erlich, *Randglossen zur Hebräischen Bibel: Textkritisches, Sprachliches und Sachliches, Band 2: Leviticus, Numeri, Deuteronomium* (Leipzig: J. C. Hinrichs, 1909), 101.

40 Bauckham, *Bible and Ecology*, 9; R. R. Ruether, “Ecofeminism: The Challenge to Theology,” *Deportate, Esuli e Profughe* 20 (2012): 28; see further A. Weisman, *The World Without Us* (New York: St. Martin’s, 2007).

41 Briggs’ hermeneutical strategy relies on an analogy between cultic and environmental notions of “pollution”; see “Creation and Ecotheology in Ezekiel,” 52: “Thus, ‘pollution’ properly encompasses the notions of violation and subsequent unusability of land that arise as a result of human actions, whether cultic/moral or environmental in nature. Indeed ... certain objects, whether idols or a factory and its accompanying waste, brought about contagious damage to nature, which in turn brought about damage to humans.... Rather than offering a ‘strange’ ecological message, Ezekiel testifies to the reality that, in a created, relational world, human crimes of polluting the land result in the land polluting humanity, requiring that both be cleansed in the end.”

42 Carley, “Ezekiel’s Formula of Desolation,” 148–49.

43 Forest fires can be a natural phenomenon, and even if they pose an immediate threat to some forms of life, they contribute in numerous ways to the health of ecosystems; see L. F. DeBano, D. G. Neary, P. F. Ffolliott, eds., *Fire Effects on Ecosystems* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1998), esp. 304–308; G. H. Donovan and T. C. Brown, “Be Careful What You Wish For: The Legacy of Smokey Bear,” *Front Ecol Environ* 5.2 (2007): 73–79.

that Ezekiel's imagery is violent, and that this passage constitutes an oracle of judgment. But despite Habel's claim that he cannot understand how this can be a metaphor for *human* judgment, other commentators have no difficulty in understanding it as such – and neither did Ezekiel's audience, who identified it as a *משל* (v. 5).<sup>44</sup> The Judahite humans are the “trees,” and the region in which they live is the “forest of the land of the South.” The metaphorical likening of humans to trees or forests in oracles of judgment is amply attested (Isa 1:30–31; 6:13; 10:18–19, 33–34; Jer 11:16; 21:13–14; 46:22–23; Ezek 31; Dan 4), as is the identification of Judahite territory as the “Southland” (נגב; Josh 15:19, 21; Judg 1:16; 2 Sam 24:7; Jer 13:19). Moreover, the oracle in Ezek 21:1–5 is linked to the following oracle against Jerusalem in 21:6–10 by genre, juxtaposition, and parallel merisms (21:3 “green tree and dry tree” // 21:8 “righteous and wicked”). Ezekiel 21:1–5, then, depicts violence against human habitation on the earth, not against the earth as such.

On the one hand, then, I would disagree with Carley that Ezekiel's “accounts of God's wrath ... convey implicit approval of environmentally destructive behavior.”<sup>45</sup> But on the other hand, I would agree that the book of Ezekiel is not really concerned with exploring the intrinsic value of the earth, and that on its own it cannot serve as the basis for the construction of an environmental ethic that meets the challenge of the current crisis. When Carley says: “If we are to speak up for Earth ... we need to look beyond the book of Ezekiel,” I am in full agreement.<sup>46</sup>

#### 4 Positive Responses to the Book of Ezekiel

Yet while it would seem that the book of Ezekiel has little to offer those who wish to use the Bible as a resource for environmental ethics, there are at least three scholars who *have* used it for this purpose: Katheryn Darr, Carol Dempsey,

44 Habel, “Silence of the Lands,” 134: “But why the forest should be a metaphor for Jerusalem remains unclear, and no such connection is made in the text.... what has the forest done to deserve this disaster? ... The trees have not sinned and yet they have experienced the wrath of God.” See however the treatment of Ezek 21:1–5 in W. Zimmerli, *Ezekiel 1, Hermeneia*, trans. R. E. Clements (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979), 423–24: “Thus the reference to ‘the forest in the south’ may quite simply have in mind Judah, lying in the south of Syria”; M. Greenberg, *Ezekiel 21–37, AB 22A* (New York: Doubleday, 1997), 419: “The three southern locations [v. 2, יער השדה נגב ... דרום ... דרך תימנה] are interpreted as allusions to Israel's soil, its sanctuary, and the city Jerusalem”; cf. K. P. Darr, “The Book of Ezekiel,” in *The New Interpreter's Bible, Volume VI*, ed. L. E. Keck (Nashville: Abingdon, 2001), 1294–96.

45 Carley, “Earth's Formula of Desolation,” 151.

46 Carley, “Earth's Formula of Desolation,” 157.

and Richard Bauckham. In the taxonomy of approaches described by David Horrell, their readings would be categorized as readings of “recovery” – though this category does not fully account for their diversity and complexity.<sup>47</sup>

In her commentary on the book of Ezekiel, Kathryn Darr remarks that “Ezekiel 34 speaks to the issue of what we would call responsible ecological stewardship. God’s creation is not ours to exploit, as Judah’s former kings exploited the flock entrusted to their care. Neither are we, like the strong, selfish members of the flock addressed in vv. 17–22, free to take more than our share of the resources, consuming at will and polluting what remains.”<sup>48</sup> The first strategy Darr employs involves recognizing the power of prophetic imagery and rhetoric in Ezek 34:18 and taking advantage of the fact that this critique can be used to confront greed and destructive exploitation in *any* context, not just that of ancient Israel. However, Darr is quite aware that there are limitations to this; as she notes, “Ezekiel’s world did not know the devastation of nuclear waste and chemical landfills, of cracked-open oil tankers and mountains of non-biodegradable trash.”<sup>49</sup>

The second strategy Darr employs involves a retrieval of the mythic imagery used by Ezekiel – namely, the vision of the life-giving waters in Ezek 47.<sup>50</sup> She uses this imagery as a resource for reflecting on human damage to the planet and the possibility of reversing this damage.<sup>51</sup> But while she is aware of the power of this mythic imagery, she is equally aware of the limitations of the book of Ezekiel, arguing that the prophet’s vision of restoration is not universal, but is located within Israel and is for Israel alone.<sup>52</sup> This dual awareness points to a methodological distinction between Darr’s use of the *book* of Ezekiel and her use of the mythic imagery that originates from *behind* the book.

The third strategy Darr employs is to read the book of Ezekiel alongside other texts. In her comments on Ezekiel 34, Darr notes that the healing and fruitfulness of the land is the result of YHWH’s sole action, then employs Gen 1:26 to argue that this fact cannot be used to justify human inaction in

47 To their credit, Horrell et al. are aware that their binary taxonomy of “recovery” vs. “resistance” is “an oversimplification,” and that individual authors typically use multiple reading strategies; see “Appeals to the Bible,” 220.

48 Darr, “The Book of Ezekiel,” 1469.

49 Darr, “The Book of Ezekiel,” 1469.

50 On this mythic imagery, see M. A. Lyons, “Envisioning Restoration: Innovations in Ezekiel 40–48,” in *I Lifted My Eyes and Saw’: Reading Dream and Vision Reports in the Hebrew Bible*, LHBOTS 584, ed. E. R. Hayes and L. Tiemeyer (New York: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2014), 77–79.

51 Darr, “The Book of Ezekiel,” 1607.

52 Darr, “The Wall around Paradise: Ezekielian Ideas about the Future,” *VT* 37 (1987): 271–79.

the face of environmental crisis.<sup>53</sup> Here Darr reads Ezekiel 34 in context of Genesis 1 in order to construct a stewardship ethic.<sup>54</sup> While I would agree with Darr that Genesis' depiction of human dominion and the divine image (1:26–28) is incompatible with inactivity on the one hand and exploitation on the other,<sup>55</sup> what is lacking in the discussion is a recognition of the problematic nature of the term “stewardship”<sup>56</sup> and the difficulty in interpreting the imagery of dominion.<sup>57</sup>

Another scholar who uses the book of Ezekiel in a positive way is Carol Dempsey, who explores “prophetic texts that link creation and redemption with divine promise and speak of an eschatological vision of a new creation and harmonious relationships.” Her intention in doing this is to “suggest [] how we can hasten the prophets' eschatological vision as we struggle to choose life and not death, hope and not despair.”<sup>58</sup> In her essay, Dempsey cites Ezekiel 34 and 36 as evidence that “humankind's redemption and the restoration of the natural world are interwoven.”<sup>59</sup> Her use of the terms “eschatological” and “humankind's redemption” are telling: she is reading Ezekiel 34 and 36 as if they have an eschatological and universal scope.<sup>60</sup> Dempsey's reading strategy stands in contrast to that of Darr, who emphasizes the *non-universal* scope of

53 Darr, “The Book of Ezekiel,” 1473.

54 For Darr's stewardship ethic, see “The Book of Ezekiel,” 1469, 1473.

55 For interpretations of the divine image and the word “rule” [רָדָה] in Gen 1:26, 28 as benevolent, see J. Barr, “Man and Nature – The Ecological Controversy and the Old Testament,” *BJRL* 55 (1972): 9–32; Bauckham, *The Bible and Ecology*, 16–21 (note that Bauckham insists the depiction of human dominion over other creatures must be balanced by the depiction of humans as connected to and in solidarity with other creatures).

56 The notion of “stewardship” has received considerable criticism because of its ambiguity, implications, and limitations; see Bauckham, *The Bible and Ecology*, 1–12; J. B. Callicott, “Genesis and John Muir,” in *Beyond the Land Ethic: More Essays in Environmental Philosophy*, ed. idem (Albany: SUNY Press, 1999), 187–219; Horrell, *The Bible and the Environment*, 29–30.

57 The difficulty here is that what it means to “rule” animals is not explicitly defined in the local context, and scholars are divided on even the most basic issues (e.g., does it refer to something humans *do*, or does it refer to a status or position describing something about what humans *are*?). And what are we to make of the lack of any reference to “ruling” in Gen 9:1–2?

58 C. J. Dempsey, “Hope Amidst Crisis: A Prophetic Vision of Cosmic Redemption,” in *All Creation is Groaning: An Interdisciplinary Vision for Life in a Sacred Universe*, ed. C. J. Dempsey and R. A. Butkus (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 2000), 271.

59 C. J. Dempsey, “Hope Amidst Crisis,” 274.

60 The power of Revelation's recontextualization and universalization of Ezekiel (see esp. Rev 21–22) is so profound that some readers simply assume the eschatological outlook and cosmic scope of Revelation is present in Ezekiel; e.g., the comments of W. Eichrodt, *Ezekiel*, OTL, trans. C. Quin (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1970), 584–86.

Ezekiel's vision of restoration. It appears that Dempsey has arrived at her position by reading Ezekiel in the context of the larger prophetic corpus and in light of other prophetic statements concerning cosmic restoration, though she does not explain how the compositional and redactional formation of the prophetic corpus might make this possible.<sup>61</sup> Additionally, while Dempsey does not mention them, there may be features in the editorial history of Ezekiel 34 itself that might encourage such a reading.<sup>62</sup>

The third author I wish to consider is Richard Bauckham, who – under a heading titled “The New Creation as Ecotopia” – reflects on the use of Genesis 1–3 and Ezekiel 47 in Revelation 21–22.<sup>63</sup> He notes that

Ezekiel's vision is of ecological renewal that recaptures the vision of the original creation, in which the living creatures of the waters were to multiply and fill them (Gen 1:21–22), as well as surpassing the original in its depiction of the marvellous fruitfulness of the trees that are nourished by the river. The key to all this life-giving vitality is, of course, the fact that the river flows from the Temple, that is, from the presence of God. Life is renewed from its source in God. So it is too in Revelation (22:1–2), but it is worth recalling the ecological detail of Ezekiel's version when reading the more allusive summary in Revelation, because Ezekiel's detail facilitates our recognition of the ecological character of the water of life and the trees of life in Revelation. They are not just symbols of eternal life for humans, though they are that. They conjure a vision of the natural world renewed with new life from the divine source of all life.<sup>64</sup>

Here Bauckham examines how Revelation draws on Ezekiel, both alluding to and modifying its images of temple, city, tree of life, and water of life in order to depict “the final reconciliation of culture and nature, of the human world and the other creatures of Earth.”<sup>65</sup> He concludes that “reconciliation with God and

61 E.g., how the imagery of Ezek 47:1–12 is taken up and extended in Zech 14:8: the mythic “double-stream” of Ezek 47:9 is envisioned in Zechariah as flowing out of the temple *in different directions*, fructifying not only the Dead Sea but also the Mediterranean.

62 Note the references in Ezek 34:11–12 to the restoration of the global diaspora and the “Day of Cloud and Thick Darkness.” The latter reference seems to be borrowed from Zeph 1:15, and situates the deliverance of Ezek 34:11–16 after a judgment that is global in scope (cf. Zeph 1:18; note also how this locution is used in Joel 2:2). See M. A. Lyons, “Extension and Allusion: The Composition of Ezekiel 34,” in *Ezekiel: Current Debates and Future Directions*, FAT 112, ed. W. A. Tooman and P. Barter (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2017), 142.

63 Bauckham, *The Bible and Ecology*, 175–78.

64 Bauckham, *The Bible and Ecology*, 177.

65 Bauckham, *The Bible and Ecology*, 178.

reconciliation with the rest of God's creation are not alternatives but natural partners. In the end they are inseparable, as John's vision shows, and in the crises of our contemporary world both are urgent needs."<sup>66</sup>

Bauckham (who – like Darr – is aware that Ezek 47:1–12 is limited in scope)<sup>67</sup> examines Ezekielian imagery within the contours of a metanarrative generated by the Christian biblical canon, a schema of “ecotopia – loss of ecotopia – renewal of ecotopia.”<sup>68</sup> This is facilitated by the way in which the author of Revelation 21–22 situates the imagery of Ezekiel 47:1–12 (and Genesis 1–3) in a new context and universalizes the limited scope of Ezekiel in light of Isaian passages with a global or even cosmic scope (e.g. Isa 25:6–8 in Rev 21:4 and Isa 65:17 in Rev 21:1).<sup>69</sup>

Yet Bauckham's reading strategy here is not an exclusively Christian one. It can be found in the Second Temple-period Jewish composition of 1 Enoch, which attributes the loss of the primal ecotopia to human and angelic violence (1 Enoch 7:5–6; 9:1–2, 6–9; cf. 10:7), but then envisions a renewal of that ecotopia (1 Enoch 10:16–22; 24–26). In 1 Enoch 24–26 we find imagery from Gen 2 and Ezek 40–48 conflated together: the very high mountain (Ezek 40:2), the tree(s) of life (Gen 2:9, 22; Ezek 47:12), and the water of life (Gen 2:10; Ezek 47:1–12). But if the author of Revelation is not the innovator, neither is the author of 1 Enoch. Such a strategy of recontextualization and extension can already be seen in the prophets: Isa 65:17–25 (which envisions a “new heaven and new earth”) conflates language from the earlier vision of restoration in Isa 11:6–9 with imagery from Gen 3:14 in order to argue that the problematic situation depicted in Gen 3 will never again be a threat.

## 5 Conclusion

It would seem that the responses of all six authors I have considered above demonstrate that *in and of itself*, the book of Ezekiel has little to offer for constructing a comprehensive environmental ethic. To be sure, it does contain a critique of self-centered consumption in Ezek 34:18. I do not wish to minimize the importance of the perspective in this passage, but I doubt that this by itself is a sufficient basis for defining human relationships with other creatures. If

66 Bauckham, *The Bible and Ecology*, 178.

67 R. Bauckham, *The Climax of Prophecy: Studies on the Book of Revelation* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1993), 316.

68 Bauckham, *The Bible and Ecology*, 175–78.

69 For the universalization of Ezekiel's imagery in Revelation, compare the statement about the tree(s) of life in Ezek 47:12 with Rev 22:2.

Ezek 34:18 is taken to mean “humans may use resources, but not destroy them *in order that other humans may use them too*,” this must be adapted on the basis of other passages to think about how humans should relate to non-human life and its needs. This requires a movement from a purely conservationist approach to something more. But if Carley is correct that “we need to look beyond the book of Ezekiel,”<sup>70</sup> how is this best accomplished? Can the book still be profitably used in some way when constructing an environmental ethic?

David Horrell (whose taxonomy of hermeneutical stances I have used in examining these authors) suggests a different approach to using the Bible for ecotheology than any surveyed so far, namely, to “operate[] instead with the notion of doctrinal lenses, which arise from a reading of the text shaped by the context and concerns of the reader and then shape and inform further reading and theological reflection.”<sup>71</sup> These “doctrinal lenses” include “the goodness of all creation”; “humanity as part of the community of creation”; “interconnectedness in failure and flourishing”; “the covenant with all creation”; “creation’s calling to praise God”; “liberation and reconciliation for all things.”<sup>72</sup>

One possible objection to this strategy is that at first glance, the relationship of these apparently diverse “doctrinal lenses” to the Bible is somewhat unclear: to what extent are they “shaped by the context and concerns of the reader”? And why should *these* lenses (as opposed to others) be given prominence, and what (if anything) holds them together? But it seems to me that with little effort, Horrell’s “doctrinal lenses” could actually be related to each other in a “plot line” that resembles Bauckham’s reading schema of “ecotopia – loss of ecotopia – renewal of ecotopia.” Such a narrative approach might offer a way to contextualize individual passages (such as Ezek 34 or Ezek 47) in a larger storyline in a way that accounts for both their limitations and their potential benefits. In this way, a reader could combine Horrell’s hermeneutical sensitivity with the contextualized reading strategy of Darr, Dempsey, and Bauckham, in which Ezekiel was read within a larger narrative context. Specifically, this would involve a reading of Ezek 34 that notes how Ezekiel’s argument about restoration has been redactionally incorporated into the larger prophetic corpus, and a reading of the Ezekielian images of restoration that notes how they have been intertextually incorporated into the “ecotopia – loss of ecotopia – renewal of ecotopia” scheme of the biblical metanarrative.

The rationale for a narrative approach to using the Bible for environmental ethics is twofold: first, such an approach takes advantage of the rhetorical

70 Carley, “Earth’s Formula of Desolation,” 157.

71 Horrell, *The Bible and The Environment*, 128; see further 117–27.

72 Horrell, *The Bible and The Environment*, 129–37.

power of narrative.<sup>73</sup> Second, such an approach is a response to the fact that optimal readings of texts are those that take into account literary shape and formal features. One of the most obvious features of Jewish and Christian scripture is that not only does it begin with narrative (the book of Genesis)<sup>74</sup> and contain large amounts of narrative, it also projects a story that goes beyond its own generically diverse contents.<sup>75</sup> It is thus possible to view the Bible as generating a *metanarrative* that constitutes the reader as a character in its story.<sup>76</sup> This biblical story about creation moves from a beginning in Gen 1–2 to a problematic state of affairs in Gen 3, where the earth is “cursed” because of human actions. This problematic state of affairs continues and is developed in a variety of ways throughout the storyline. At numerous points, however, we hear voices suggesting that a solution for creation is forthcoming, a solution that will be realized at the end of the story. A key feature of this story’s movement

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- 73 For the role and necessity of story in creating and transmitting values, see T. Berry, “The New Story,” in *Teilhard in the 21st Century: The Emerging Spirit of Earth*, ed. A. Fabel and D. St. John (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2003), 77–88; J. Cappel, “Environmental Advocacy and the Absence of the Church,” in *Ecotheology and Non-Human Ethics in Society: A Community of Compassion*, ed. M. J. Brotton (Lanham: Lexington, 2017), 145–58 (esp. 153). On the significance of narrative for theology and for human cognition and experience, see C. G. Bartholomew and M. W. Goheen, “Story and Biblical Theology,” in *Out of Egypt: Biblical Theology and Biblical Interpretation*, ed. C. G. Bartholomew et al. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004), 144–71; W. A. Kort, *Story, Text, and Scripture: Literary Interests in Biblical Narrative* (University Park: Penn State University Press, 1988); G. Currie, *Narratives and Narrators: A Philosophy of Stories* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010). See further H. W. Frei, *The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative: A Study in Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century Hermeneutics* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1974).
- 74 The book of Genesis is forward-looking, and it has rightly been recognized as having an eschatological outlook; see J. Huddleston, *Eschatology in Genesis*, FAT 2/57 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2012).
- 75 As Richard Bauckham notes, while the contents of the Bible are composite and display great diversity of genre, authorship, and socio-historical setting, they nevertheless constitute a coherent storyline: unity is created through the plot, characters, intertextual quotations and allusions, and numerous instances of embedded text segments (often poetic) that summarize the storyline itself (e.g., Deut 32; Josh 24; Neh 9; Pss 78; 105–107, 135–136). See R. Bauckham, “Reading Scripture as a Coherent Story,” in *The Art of Reading Scripture*, ed. E. F. Davis and R. B. Hays (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 38–53.
- 76 The concept of a “metanarrative” is typically attributed to J. Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, trans. G. Bennington and B. Massumi (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984), xxiii–xxiv, 34. Whether the Bible generates a metanarrative in the sense in which Lyotard used the term is open to debate; Bauckham (“Reading Scripture as a Coherent Story,” 46–48) argues that the Bible is not the kind of metanarrative that Lyotard opposes, but claims that the Bible is a “nonmodern metanarrative,” a “story about the meaning of the whole of reality” that “makes a thoroughly universal claim.”

from beginning to end, and from problem to solution, is the highly intertextual nature of the biblical storyline: the descriptions of the solution that will be realized at end of the story are crafted in such a way as to resemble details at the beginning of the story (*Endzeit gleicht Urzeit*).

The kind of approach that I am envisioning here would be able to engage with Horrell's hermeneutical concerns – namely, his critiques of readings that are not self-reflective and do not take into account the fact that they are construals of the text by readers.<sup>77</sup> It would admit upfront that a narrative reading of the Bible is the result of an *interpretive choice* (though not an entirely *arbitrary* choice, since it responds to and is constrained by formal features of the text).

Moreover, a rigorous narrative reading of the Bible would accommodate diversity of portrayal as well as unity. For example, it would admit that the question of how “new” the “new heavens and new earth” will be (Isa 65:17; 2 Pet 3:13; Rev 21:1) is not explained in detail, and is depicted in different ways. The story depicts *both* continuity *and* discontinuity, features that are also reflected in the Bible's image of human bodily resurrection. And because narratives are depictions of reality, we should expect diversity<sup>78</sup> – and resist the tendency to flatten the diverse imagery of the Bible to suit our own comfort.<sup>79</sup>

Finally, the kind of narrative reading I envision would take into account Horrell's concerns about the gap between the Bible's ancient context and our modern context. It is important to note here that a narrative reading of the Bible does not lay out specific policies and practices for responding

77 On Horrell's critique of Bauckham (Horrell, “Ecological Hermeneutics,” 146–49), see however Steven Bouma-Prediger, “Response to David Horrell's ‘Ecological Hermeneutics: Reflections on Methods and Prospects for the Future,’” *Colloquium* 46.2 (2014): 170–74. Horrell's point that all reading is culturally situated and interpretive is well-taken, as is his suspicion of claims to be simply “recovering” the meaning of the Bible. However, if this suspicion is pushed too far, one lapses into claiming that the biblical authors had no thoughts of their own whatsoever about the relationship of humans to the earth, or hope for the earth's future – a stance that is likewise hermeneutically problematic.

78 Biblical authors depicted hope for the future using images of interspecies peace (Isa 11:6–9) *and* images of humans eating animals (Isa 25:6) in the same book. In some passages of John's Apocalypse, God's judgment on humanity negatively impacts the earth (Rev 8:7–12; 16:3–4; note that the plagues of Rev 16:1–11 are transformations of earlier imagery from the Exodus story); in other passages, the earth is specifically spared from harm when human evil is punished (Rev 9:4), and we hear voices stating that God will “destroy those who destroy the earth” (Rev 11:18).

79 In some cases, the trajectory of the Christian biblical metanarrative does seem to prioritize some images over others: e.g., the question of whether death will be done away with (Isa 25:7–8) or whether life will be miraculously prolonged, though still finite (Isa 65:20) seems to be resolved at the end of the story in favour of the former image (Rev 21:4).

to the current environmental crisis. And this is all for the better: ancient Israelites and early Christians had no idea of the extent and nature of our modern environmental problems, and any specific practical directives from ancient socio-historical contexts would be useless for our time. The narrative approach I am describing here is modest in its claims; its strengths lie in its ability to offer a hopeful vision of the future characterized by “liberation and reconciliation for all things” (Horrell’s last “doctrinal lens”) as the conclusion to a cohesive plot line.<sup>80</sup> Such a narrative approach has the potential to motive readers into positive responses that are critically informed by current scientific research.

In this essay I have filled a lacuna in the field of ecotheology by using David Horrell’s hermeneutical taxonomy and critique to provide an evaluation, heretofore lacking, of six responses to the book of Ezekiel. Three of these responses approached the book with an ecojustice hermeneutic, while the other three used Ezekiel as a resource for environmental ethics either by reflecting on the mythic imagery used by the book or by reading Ezekiel within a larger literary context. After analyzing the hermeneutical strategies behind these responses, I concluded that while the book of Ezekiel is not as ecologically dangerous as some readers have claimed, neither can it (on its own) function as a useful tool for constructing an environmental ethic. However, reading Ezekiel as part of a metanarrative generated by a larger scriptural corpus may render its imagery useful as a resource. The suggestions of David Horrell and Richard Bauckham in particular might creatively be combined into a narrative approach to the Bible that offers an alternative to naïve readings.

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80 See on this subject Horrell, *The Bible and The Environment*, 137–40; idem, “A New Perspective on Paul? Rereading Paul in a Time of Ecological Crisis,” and “Ecojustice in the Bible? Pauline Contributions to an Ecological Theology,” chapters 9 and 10 in *The Making of Christian Morality: Reading Paul in Ancient and Modern Contexts* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2019).

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