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Ezekiel's Contribution to a Biblical Theology of Mission

Elmer Martens

Ezekiel is hardly the first biblical book to spring to mind on the topic of a biblical theology of mission. Yet this book contains one of the strongest reiterations of God's missionary intent. If a definitive theology of mission from within the Old Testament needs yet to be written, then Ezekiel's contribution to that theology must certainly be factored in, since a check of current monographs on the subject shows that little, if any, attention is given to Ezekiel.¹

The prophet Ezekiel understands that God has an overriding intention: that both Israel and (yes, especially!) the nations might "know that I am Yahweh."

The objective of this essay is to call attention to two main features of the book which especially bear on the subject of the cross-cultural communication of the divine message of salvation. The book of Ezekiel is distinctive among the prophetic books in at least two ways. First, the book is characterized by the repetition of the expression, "And you/they shall know that I am Yahweh." Secondly, more is related in this book than in any other about the glory of the Lord, largely through vision reports. The comments that follow trace some of the missiological ramifications of these two features.

THE MISSION OBJECTIVE: UNIVERSAL ACKNOWLEDGMENT OF GOD

The expression, "And you/they shall know that I am Yahweh" has been described as a "recognition-formula" by Walther Zimmerli whose research is presented in a classic essay first published in 1954.² The

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recognition formula occurs with slight variations at least seventy-eight times. Zimmerli's essay serves well to launch our analysis.

On examining the textual context of this formula, Zimmerli comes to several conclusions: (1) in more than half of the passages this statement of recognition occurs as the final goal of what has preceded (cf. 7:2-4; 25:3-5; 37:5-6); (2) it is by an act of Yahweh whereby the recognition of Yahweh is to occur, rather than by any sort of human effort or intellectual exercise; and (3) in the larger context of the Old Testament the formula is found in the earlier traditions, as in the stories of Pharaoh and Elijah, and so is not of Ezekiel's invention (e.g., Exod. 6:6-9; 7:5, 14:4, 18; 29:43-46; 1 Kings 20:28).

Zimmerli examines the nature of the events that trigger the acknowledgment of Yahweh. These events are God's acts on the historic plain, or even the recounting of his acts (as with Jethro in Exod. 18:8-11, and Rahab in Josh 2:9-11), as well as "signs" (cf. Exod. 31:13; Ezek. 20:20). Zimmerli concludes: (1) given the great frequency of the statement, Ezekiel's highest concern was not primarily the restoration of a people but an adoration by Israel, and by all peoples, of one who announces, "I am Yahweh"; (2) historical events have a definitive and purposeful character which call forth recognition and obedience; and (3) Yahweh's actions in both judgment and salvation betray something of the mystery associated with his person. The statement is not "that they may know Yahweh," for such familiarity would be presumptuous; but at the threshold, so to speak, a voice from far within can be heard to say, "I am Yahweh."

Zimmerli does not draw out missiological implications except to say, "This same recognition is expected from the rest of the world's nations. In this Ezekiel is similar to Deutero-Isaiah."³ The emphasis on the world's peoples is hardly minor. In the seven chapters known as "Oracles against the Nations" (chaps. 25-32), the recognition formula occurs more than fifteen times. The following remarks seek to make explicit some of the ramifications of Zimmerli's research for mission theology.⁴

The World's People are Unquestionably in God's Purview

Ezekiel's contribution to mission theology is to insist, almost ad nauseam, that God's work in the world aims at something larger than one nation. Israel, even Jerusalem, may be at the center (Ezek. 5:5), but all nations are within the circumference of God's concern. Prophetic books such as Isaiah and Jeremiah also contain oracles about (or more often, against) nations.⁵ But in Ezekiel one cannot lose sight of the intended

end result: "they [the nations] shall know that I am the Lord" (e.g., 25:5, 7, 11, 14, 17; 26:6; 28:22-23; 29:6, 9, 16, 21; 30:8, 19, 25-26; 32:15).

A reason for this emphasis on nations might be found in Ezekiel's social location. Situated in Babylon, a foreign land, Ezekiel, so one could argue from a sociological perspective, had a need to come to terms with the intersection of two realities: God, in whom Israel believed, and the nations, among whom Israel now lived.

But beyond a sociological explanation for this theme about God's purpose with nations, one might see a vocational consideration. Ezekiel belonged to the priestly class (Ezek. 1:3). One of the functions of priests was to transmit knowledge about Yahweh (Mal. 2:7). Long ago Israel itself had been designated a priest (Exod. 19:6), presumably with that same function. That priestly nation was now in exile residing among a foreign people. Was it not her vocation to transmit the knowledge of Yahweh to the world? A thoughtful person like Ezekiel might well wrestle with issues of vocation, both personal and national.

The heavy accent on the world's people can perhaps best be accounted for, however, in the context of salvation history. By the end of the exile, God's progressive (or better cumulative) revelation had reached a strategic stage, something of an apex. Viewed historically as well as canonically, by the end of the exile the substance of God's revelation about judgment, salvation, and righteousness had been largely disclosed both to Israel and via Israel to the world. After the exile Israel geared for a new chapter.

Ezekiel firmly nailed down a major agenda item: Israel must operate with the awareness that God's purview is decidedly on all the world's nations.⁶ At the time of the Exodus God's intention with Pharaoh was made clear: Pharaoh, and also "all peoples of the earth" were to acknowledge Yahweh (Exod. 14:18; Josh. 4:24). It is as though at the exile, the second large juncture in Israel's history, the global perspective of God's intent is once more stated but with greater insistence. Hedlund has it right: "What God does is connected with the nations God's action has in view the nations."⁷

Ezekiel's emphasis is appropriate preparation for a subsequent stage of salvation history, the climactic Christ event at which point the concern for the nations is again articulated (Matt. 28:18-20; Acts 1:8). In short, the goal for nations is specified at three major nodal points in salvation history: exodus, exile, and the Christ-event.

God's Intention: That the World's Peoples "Know" Him

In what sense are nations to "know" Yahweh? One answer from lin-

guistic analysis is that "to know" entails having information about God as one would know, for example, about the denuding of forests in Brazil. Or, "to know" might mean, more characteristically according to Hebrew usage, an intimate familiarity with someone (1 Sam. 3:7; Gen. 4:1). Such a knowledge or intimacy with God is described as being the highest of priorities (Jer. 9:23-24).

At a minimum, for nations to know "that I am Yahweh" means that nations will have an exposure to, and hence an awareness of, this deity called Yahweh. By his description of this formula as "*Erkenntnis-aussage*" or "*Erkenntnisformel*," Zimmerli points to the recognition dimension of "know." Zimmerli's exposition, however, soon carries him to a further conclusion. Leaning on the outcome of the contest between Elijah and the Baal prophets, Zimmerli notes that the concern is "above all else the adoration that kneels because of divinely inspired recognition, an orientation toward the one who himself says "I am Yahweh."⁸ A victorious deity as described, for example, in Psalm 46, is deserving of such adoration. Hence the exhortation: "Be still and know that I am Yahweh" (Ps. 46:10). An informed adoration, fitting for Israel, is also fitting for nations everywhere.

A more maximal interpretation of "know" is to see it as entailing obedience. Zimmerli's essay concludes with the comment, "A recognition of God . . . will always simultaneously include acknowledgment and response in the form of confession, worship, and obedience."⁹ One may wonder about the final word "obedience." Earlier Zimmerli has appealed to the expression "lay it to your heart" (Deut. 4:39) with its sense of keeping Yahweh's statutes and commandments. Recalling Solomon's prayer in which knowing Yahweh is linked with fearing Yahweh, Zimmerli affirms, "It is put very clearly here that recognition of Yahweh means obedience to Yahweh."¹⁰ For nations "to know" Yahweh, according to this exposition, is for them to be set on a continuum from a point of becoming aware of Yahweh, to giving him his due as cosmic Lord. And at the far end of the continuum is rendering full obedience to Yahweh.¹¹

The objective of mission, as informed by Ezekiel's emphasis, might be phrased as follows: Christian mission aspires to participate in God's project of bringing people to a recognition of Yahweh, and beyond that to an acknowledgment of his authoritative supremacy, and ideally to the goal of rendering him worship and obeying him. Such a statement is theocratic in focus. It is not the same as an anthropological orientation in which the all-consuming concern is the human condition and personal conversion, legitimate though these may be. Nor is this theocentric focus

the same as an ecclesiological focus, that of building a Christian community. The latter is also an important goal but nevertheless a subgoal contributing to the larger goal. Might Ezekiel, with his insistence that the driving force in missional undertakings be “for the sake of Yahweh,” not offer a corrective to less adequate ways of defining the goal of mission?

Our phrasing of the mission objective takes into account the possibility of stages of response, of intermediate goals. Granted, listeners to the good news will find themselves at various points on this continuum, viz., from information about Yahweh, to conversion (described by one Asian as “coming under the God”), to a conscious and passionate commitment to him. As for the cross-cultural messenger, however, fixed attention on the divine objective as stated by Ezekiel could serve most wholesomely for both motivation and strategy.¹²

Reaching the Divine Objective

By what means does such an acknowledgment of Yahweh, as envisioned by Ezekiel, come about? Zimmerli finds that in all cases, that which triggers the recognition of Yahweh is something which God has done or will do. God’s actions may be salvific (Ezek. 37:11-12), or they may be retributive (Ezek. 35:15), or they may entail God’s work with his people. An example of the last point: Israel’s going into exile had been interpreted by the nations so as to damage Yahweh’s reputation (Ezek. 36:20). But Yahweh will vindicate his name by gathering his people from all lands and returning them to their own land (36:22-24). By this divine action with Israel, the nations are to “know that I am Yahweh.” It is therefore by this altogether-public event of Israel’s return to the homeland—an event played out on the stage of world history—that nations will come to acknowledge Yahweh.¹³

From this and other passages where God’s actions are prelude to the people’s recognition, Zimmerli helpfully points to a negative conclusion: recognition of Yahweh is not attained along the path of conceptual reflection or analysis of any sort. “Ezekiel makes it clear that for him none of the preconditions for recognition of Yahweh reside in human beings or in any preliminary human understanding; they lie totally within the divine initiative.”¹⁴ It is God’s initiative by which the sanctuary in Jerusalem is to be built; so even a cultic structure, though not an international “event,” is God’s act by which he gains recognition (Ezek. 37:26-28).

Divine action, therefore, is the decisive trigger for the recognition of Yahweh. Human involvement is not thereby eliminated, but is minimal. In Ezekiel’s vision of the dry bones coming to life, the prophet is told to

preach (37:4, 9). God's power is released. The remarkable transformation in which dry bones become a living army is unquestionably the work of God. Unlike Isaiah who pictures more of a lead role for the servant, Israel, Ezekiel has little to say about the human role, as though Ezekiel in this way protests the overrated importance of human agency. In Ezekiel, knowledge of God, whether by Israel or nations, emerges as a consequence of God's actions. Given Ezekiel's deference to the role of God in these matters, Ezekiel could be a patron saint of Calvinism!

On the stage of world history the most extraordinary act of God is the incarnation of Jesus, his death by crucifixion, and his grand resurrection. To that divine act the missionary bears witness. For a mission theology, and as a form of apologetic, this Ezekielian emphasis on the divinely appointed means of God's work in the world calls for a greater awareness of God's ongoing work on the plane of history even into the present. Unlike the biblical revelation where interpretation accompanies event, we today witness the event but cannot with the same certitude offer the interpretation.

Still, must one not wonder to what extent, for example, the remarkable "resurrection" of the state of Israel in 1948 is a singular event in which the hand of God is present? From the standpoint of a Christian philosophy of history how is one to interpret the fall of the Bastille (1789), or the fall of the Berlin wall (1989), or even the shift away from logical positivism to postmodernism? From Ezekiel it would follow that attention to divinely appointed means, whatever the shape of those divine acts, is an important plank in the platform for a mission theology.

A corollary follows, one aimed at the missionary as entrepreneur. Given the frequency of missionary burnout and the pervasive discussions of mission strategy and technique, those involved in mission endeavors would do well to recover a sense of the transcendent, a return to the basics. The mission enterprise is *missio Dei* in conceptualization, objective, and means. Practically speaking, a grip on Ezekiel's theology could be highly liberating for the stressed missionary for it would sharply relativize his or her efforts.

To summarize, the recognition formula bears on mission theology in three ways. First, nations stand well within the circumference of God's concern, and so to be aligned with God's purposes is to operate with a global perspective. Second, a distant marker toward which God's work is directed is that nations recognize him, and ultimately worship and obey him. Finally, Ezekiel's emphasis on God's recognition-producing action warrants the claim that the ultimate realization of the goal will result from what *God* will do.

ADDRESSING THE CLAIMS OF NONBIBLICAL RELIGIONS: THE INCOMPARABLE GLORY OF GOD

“Blessed is the glory of the Lord from his place” (Ezek. 3:12). The theme of Yahweh’s glory is the second defining characteristic of the book of Ezekiel. The opening vision of the book (chaps. 1-3), as also its concluding vision (chaps. 40-48), depicts God’s glory. Between these two is another vision which is especially germane to mission theology, that of Ezekiel in the Jerusalem temple (chaps. 8-11). The occasion for the vision is the visit to Ezekiel by the elders, whose inquiry is thought to turn on a proposal for a structure of worship in Babylon to replace the Jerusalem temple, and possibly to accommodate the Babylonian religion (cf. Ezek. 14).

Whatever the details of the elders’ inquiry, in the trance-like journey by Ezekiel to the Jerusalem temple, two realities are at once juxtaposed. At the north gate Ezekiel sees an image of jealousy. There inside the temple court he also sees the glory of the Lord as he saw it in his inaugural vision on the plains of Kebar. In this juxtaposition there is posed for modern discussion the issue of multiple religions and competing truth claims.

Challenging the Allegiances to Nonbiblical Religions

The “outrageous statue of jealousy,” the first of several reported perversions of worship, is described as one of the “great abominations” (Ezek. 8:1-6).¹⁵ The image which provokes to jealousy, likely the representation of some deity, is an affront to Yahweh to whom alone worship belongs (Exod. 20:3-6). The best conjecture is that the image was a statue depicting the goddess Asherah, likely placed in the temple by King Manasseh.¹⁶ Asherah is described in ancient Near Eastern texts as the consort of El and the “mother of gods” including Baal. Although recognized more especially as the patron goddess of Tyre and Sidon, she was worshiped from Asia Minor to Mesopotamia.¹⁷ She may have been thought of as a “guest goddess.” But Yahweh has low tolerance for such guests.

In his vision Ezekiel finds a second worship perversion within the temple when he digs through a wall and enters a room sufficiently spacious to accommodate seventy leading elders offering incense. The number of elders may signal that this is an “official religion.” The assortment of creeping things, abominable beasts, and the miscellany of idols “carved in the wall or created with inlaid tiles”¹⁸ portrayed on the wall are best identified with Egyptian deities (8:10). Such worship might well be linked to the political party which was lobbying King Zedekiah to

cooperate with Egypt against Babylon.¹⁹ To Yahweh, the worship of such creatures is grotesque and disgusting.

At the north gate (still in his vision) female worshipers are engaged in a ritual of weeping over Tammuz, an ancient Babylonian deity. He was the god, according to mythology, who died at the end of spring and went to the underworld, but was rescued at the end of summer by his female consort. The women may not have intended their worship of Tammuz to replace Yahweh, but in syncretistic fashion to supplement the worship of Yahweh. This ritual is totally unacceptable to Yahweh.

Sun worship, virtually a universal practice then, is the greatest abomination. In an area between the temple porch and the courtyard altar, twenty-five men are facing eastward into the sun. Temples were constructed facing east; worshipers would face west. But these men, facing and bowing east, had their buttocks toward the temple and its holiest of holies where, as Ezekiel saw, the glory of the Lord resided. More than disregard, this posture signals rebellion. Yahweh is nauseated.

Thus Ezekiel has no use for any of the four worship options he sees in the vision. Set alongside the magnificent glory of God, these statues, images of creatures—and might we say by extension all nonbiblical idolatrous religions—totally fall short.

The Unfettered Sovereignty Expressed in the “Glory of God”

The interpretive key to much of the book, but especially to these chapters (8-11), is the depiction of the grandeur of that inaugural vision of God's glory (chaps. 1-3). The governing perspective is the majesty of Yahweh as glimpsed by Ezekiel on the Babylonian plain. There the severe weather disturbance of a storm cloud becomes before Ezekiel's gaze a representation of heavenly things. The chassis of wheels within wheels, so that travel could be multidirectional without pivoting, supports a platform on which was placed a throne. “Living creatures” with faces of an ox, a lion, an eagle, and a human face are discernible among the wheels. The platform, more or less identical with the firmament, supports a throne on which sits a figure in the likeness of a human, only the lower parts being visible. The upper parts reach into the heavenlies. All, especially the throne, is glitter and brightness. Ezekiel's label for what he sees is “the Glory of the Lord.”

God's unfettered sovereignty over the cosmos is the implicit message of Ezekiel's vision. The cosmic glory is uniquely focused in the temple (chaps. 8-11). The second vision of glory within the temple shows the incongruity of any other worship alongside Yahweh and the reasons for the departure of God's glory (8:6). But the message has a

decided bearing on any missiological discussion: Yahweh will not brook rivals.

That conviction about Yahweh's supremacy is expressed in Israel's creed (Deut. 6:4), and his incomparability is emphasized throughout Scripture.²⁰ Ezekiel's contributions to the subject of Yahweh's supremacy over the deities are several. First, he is especially broad-ranging in identifying competing beliefs since the deities of his vision are not one or two, but a representative of the religions of the then-known world. The idols are not only Canaanite (the Phoenician Asherah), but also Assyrian (the image of jealousy). Ezekiel's depiction ranges from Egypt with its animism, to Babylon with its myth of Tammuz, and beyond regions either west, east, or north to the ubiquitous astral worship. With these multiple divinities the issue of the exclusive claims by Yahweh is decidedly joined.

The resolution is implicit: to make a comparative evaluation of these zoomorphic deities or various worship systems in order to determine which might be "better" or which might be "true" is a misplaced exercise. How can a wooden pole, or pictures and graffiti on the wall, or a dying mythical deity become in any sense a competitor of Yahweh? Is the sun, placed in the firmament, to be compared with one whose throne rests on that firmament?

While others also make the case for the unquestioned supremacy of Yahweh, Ezekiel is distinctive. He does not proceed via rational apologetics as does Isaiah, or with sarcasm as does Jeremiah (Jer. 10:1-5), or via spectacular deliverances as in Daniel (Dan. 3:19-30). Ezekiel relies for an answer to the question of multiple religious options upon a mystical vision. For him the conclusion about the incomparability of Yahweh comes through an overpowering personal experience, but one which has not only individualistic but cosmic overtones.

Ezekiel presses the issue of pluralism in an unusual way. Other prophets excoriate their listeners on the subject of idolatry, but mostly in theory (Isa. 44:6-28; 46:5-7; Jer. 10:1-16). The striking feature of Ezekiel's vision is that his message is so situational. The locations in the temple are specified, and some of the participants are named (Ezek. 8:11). Within a space of several hundred square meters inside the temple court, as though in a microcosm, the issue is joined. Is Yahweh one of the several deities or is he alone God? Especially telling in this prophetic depiction of idolatrous practices is that these occur, not in some distant country, but in Yahweh's temple courts ("the palace of Yahweh," Ezek. 8:16a,b) and in sight of his visible glory cloud. Given the large grandeur of that inaugural vision of glory, the allegiance to any other form of reli-

gion is incongruous, ugly, even bizarre.

On the question of religious pluralism and worship options, Ezekiel not only draws the line as have others, but he draws it with a particular sharpness. Given God's absolute greatness, his transcendence and his glory, any thought that he is only one of several legitimate deities is utterly preposterous. Other Scriptures show that there is value in some non-Judaic religious cultures (e.g., borrowings from Egypt in Proverbs 22:17-24:22), but as to a rightful claim to a person's ultimate allegiance, Ezekiel's answer is decisive. Yahweh alone is God and so the only proper deity to worship.

All believers, but cross-cultural Christian witness in particular, would do well to reflect often on this categorical answer that Ezekiel gives through his visions of God's glory. Given the plurality of religions—animism, Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam—of which Christians in the west are more conscious than heretofore, since devotees of these faiths often live among them, the issue of the biblical claim that Yahweh is exclusively God and other allegiances are not acceptable rises quickly to the fore.²¹ Ezekiel's message can help. Christians whose belief is rooted in the Hebrew Scriptures have no choice but to affirm, against any competing claims, that Yahweh and he alone is God.

SUMMARY

Ezekiel is not so obvious a book as Isaiah in which to locate a theology of mission. But it is perhaps overstated to hold that, in contrast to Isaiah, Ezekiel is parochial.²² That his chief concern has to do with the institution of temple is hardly disputable. And it may seem somewhat odd that Ezekiel, living among a non-Yahwist culture, should not present more of an immediate hands-on manual for "missionary" activity. Might it be that by his emphasis on God's global intention Ezekiel means to combat what might have been a parochial mentality generated by ghetto existence? While this prophet is called to direct and sustain the spiritual life of the people of God, he is nevertheless a prophet who understands that for his people as well as for the world God has an overriding intention. Ezekiel insists that God's work is directed toward the end that Israel, but also (yes, especially!) the nations, might "know that I am Yahweh."

Moreover, Ezekiel's social location, Babylon, gives his emphasis on the glory of Yahweh a particular poignancy. By the end of the book, Ezekiel pictures graphically how Yahweh's glory fills the temple of his people. That glory cloud, with its unmistakable message of grandeur surpassing that of any existing religious object of veneration, appears to

him first on “foreign” Babylonian soil. Consumed by the vision of such an eminent Yahweh, Ezekiel concludes—as must anyone embracing his message—that the gods of other nations surrounding Israel, then and now, are inadequate and their worship unacceptable.²³ ✨

It is a particular joy to salute Professor Hans Kasdorf, a much-valued friend and highly esteemed teaching colleague of twenty years. Throughout his career, his passion to articulate a biblical theology of mission has been particularly keen.

NOTES

1. A sampling of monographs would include H. H. Rowley, *The Missionary Message of the Old Testament* (London: Carey Kingsgate, 1945); G. W. Peters, *A Biblical Theology of Missions* (Chicago: Moody, 1972); R. R. DeRidder, *Discipling the Nations* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1975); D. Senior and C. Stuhlmüller, *The Biblical Foundations for Mission* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1983); and R. E. Hedlund, *The Mission of the Church to the World: A Biblical Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1991). For a bibliography which lists older as well as recent monographs see Richard Schultz, “‘Und sie verkünden meine Herrlichkeit unter den Nationen’: Mission im Alten Testament unter besonderer Berücksichtigung von Jesaja,” in *Werdet meine Zeugen: Weltmission im Horizont von Theologie und Geschichte*, ed. Hans Kasdorf and Friedemann Walldorf (Neuhausen-Stuttgart: Hänssler, 1996), 33-35.
2. W. Zimmerli, “Knowledge of God According to the Book of Ezekiel,” in *I Am Yahweh*, trans. D. W. Stott, ed. W. Brueggemann (Atlanta, GA: John Knox, 1982), 29-98.
3. *Ibid.*, 88.
4. For quite different implications see Millard Lind, “A Political Alternative: An Examination of Ezekiel’s Recognition Statements,” in *Monotheism, Power, Justice: Collected Old Testament Essays*, Text-Reader Series no. 3 (Elkhart, IN: Institute of Mennonite Studies, 1990), 260-71.
5. For pertinent data from the prophets see John N. Oswalt, “The Mission of Israel to the Nations,” in *Through No Fault of Their Own*, ed. W. V. Crockett and J. G. Sigountos (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1991), 85-95.
6. Other generally-recognized post-exilic books also incorporate the same agenda but not as insistently, e.g., Hag. 2:7; Zech. 14:16; and

- Mal. 1:5.
7. Hedlund, 107.
 8. Zimmerli, 88.
 9. *Ibid.*, 98.
 10. *Ibid.*, 53.
 11. Contrast Lucien Legrand, "He [Ezekiel] does not suggest that, before acknowledging the Lord, the nations will be converted. His viewpoint remains that of the holiness of God, rather than of any faith on the part of pagans" (*Unity and Plurality: Mission in the Bible*, trans. R. R. Barr [Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1990], 18-19).
 12. Cf. the Methodist and Presbyterian beginnings of Christian mission in Korea where initial contacts were with political rulers. The "work" had at once a scope that was national.
 13. Cf. Elmer A. Martens, "Motivations for the Promise of Israel's Restoration to the Land in Jeremiah and Ezekiel" (Ph.D. diss., Claremont Graduate School, Claremont, California, 1972), 329ff.
 14. Zimmerli, 88.
 15. Daniel I. Block, *The Book of Ezekiel: Chapters 1-24* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1997), 282.
 16. M. Greenberg (*Ezekiel 1-20* [Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1983], 168) translates "the statue of outrage that outrages." He draws on 2 Kings 21:7 and 2 Chron. 33:7, 15, as well as on some linguistic interchanges, to give plausible support to the Asherah identity of the idol.
 17. Judith M. Hadley, "Baal," in *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis*, vol. 4, ed. W. VanGemeren (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1997), 422.
 18. Block, *Ezekiel*, 291.
 19. Millard Lind, *Ezekiel* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald, 1996), 79.
 20. For example, Isa. 46:5-13; cf. Exod. 15:11; Ps. 113:5. See C. B. Labuschagne, *The Incomparability of Yahweh in the Old Testament* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1966).
 21. The current mission debate about inclusivism/exclusivism is affected by what Ezekiel maintains, but in precisely what way is beyond our subject since it reaches into biblical and systematic theology more broadly.
 22. A brief comparison between Isaiah and Ezekiel emphasizing Isaiah's more universal perspective is found in Senior and Stuhlmüller, 27. Daniel Block, in a lucid and compelling article on the theology of Ezekiel, makes the debatable assertion, given the exposition above, "The parochialism of Ezekiel stands in sharp contrast to the univer-

salism and cosmic intent of Isaiah” (Daniel I. Block, “Ezekiel: Theology of,” in *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis*, ed. W. VanGemeren [Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1997], 4:618). True, Ezekiel is considerably occupied with temple matters, but even the sanctuary is to be a witness whereby nations know the Lord (Ezek. 37:26-28).

23. I thank Prof. Raymond C. Van Leeuwen of Eastern Baptist Seminary for helpful feedback.