

THE PRESECNE OF YHWH IN EXILE ACCORDING TO THE BOOK OF EZEKIEL

THE MEANING OF THE EXPRESSION *מִקְדָּשׁ מְעֻט* IN EZEK. 11:16

Abstract

Ezekiel was the only Hebrew prophet mentioned in the Hebrew Bible who is called in the Exile. The kernel of his message was that hope for Israel would exclusively be realized through the exilic community. The readers of his book are urged to distance themselves from the past and orientate themselves on the future. In his second vision wherein the prophet sees the glory of YHWH departs the Temple he receives a promise for the exilic community that YHWH will be for them a *מִקְדָּשׁ מְעֻט*. This expression can be understood both as a little and a temporal sanctuary.

In the Exile the prophet himself and the oracles of hope he receives mediate the presence of YHWH for the exilic community. Especially with the final vision of the return of the glory of YHWH to a completely new and purified Temple Ezekiel the prophet Ezekiel functions as a priest. This vision gives hope to the exiles in their present condition. It also makes clear that when it will be fulfilled, a *מִקְדָּשׁ מְעֻט* will be finally belong to the past. Its temporal character is than proved and the presence of YHWH will no longer be a reduced presence.

Introduction

No event before the Common Era had such a disrupting effect on the people of Israel as the destruction of Jerusalem with Temple of YHWH. A great part of the people that survived the destruction was deported to Babel.¹ Already before the destruction of Jerusalem a substantial part of the upper class of the people had gone in exile.

What was the cause of the Exile? Why did YHWH not prevent the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple? Was there any future for the people of Israel? And when the answer was affirmative, could there anything concretely said about this future? With these questions the people of Israel wrestled in exile.

In a great part of the Hebrew Bible or the Old Testament we feel the impact of the exile: either as a foreseen, present or past reality. As a foreseen and present reality this is especially true of the Major Prophets Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel. The prophetic texts interpret the Babylonian exile as the fulfillment of prior promises of judgment and blessing. We can mention especially the curses and blessings in the Holiness Code in Leviticus and in Deuteronomy.² Instead in

¹ I do not enter the discussion what was the percentage of the people that remained in the land. Certainly, a substantial part remained as archeology data indicate. Close reading shows us that this is not in contradiction with the Hebrew Bible. Cf. K.A. Kitchen (*On the Reliability of the Old Testament* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003], 67): ‘The idea that the Babylonians carried *everybody* from both Jerusalem and Judah off to Babylon is true neither archaeologically nor to the biblical text itself. However, the Old Testament represents with regard to the exile almost exclusively the viewpoint of the exiles and not of the people that remained in the land. From the perspective of the exiles a theological explanation is given of the destruction of Jerusalem and the First Temple. The book of Lamentations is a notable exception but the explanation given there is the same as in other texts of the Hebrew Bible. Lamentations most likely reflects the feelings of people who survived the Babylonian siege and remained in the land.

² Especially in the book of Ezekiel we see a close relationship between the prophecies of Ezekiel and the Holiness Code. M.A. Lyons, *From Law to Prophecy: Ezekiel’s Use of the Holiness Code*, LHBOTS 507 (New York: T &

ending with judgment, however, all the prophets end in hope and joyful expectation. That hope is expressed in language which makes increasingly that the future reality will far surpass whatever was seen until now.³ This is especially true for Ezekiel.

More than Isaiah and his near contemporary Jeremiah Ezekiel must be characterized as a prophet of the exile. He is the only of the Scripture prophets who was called to his office in the Babylonian exile; an exile that according to the view represented in the book of Ezekiel started already with the deportation of king Jojachin and a part of the elite of Jerusalem in 598/597 BCE.

What is true for the person of Ezekiel is also true for the book connected with his name. The whole book is structured from the viewpoint of the reality and cause of the Exile and its reversal. YHWH is portrayed as the sole subject both of the Exile and its reversal. The cause of the Exile is not that Babel and its gods are mightier than YHWH but the sin of the people of Israel.⁴

T Clark, 2009); P. de Vries, *The Kābôd of Yhwh in the Old Testament. With Particular Reference to the Book of Ezekiel*, SSN 65 (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 262 f.

³ Ronald E. Clements, 'Law and Promise', in Ben C. Ollenburger (ed.), *Old Testament Theology: Flowering and Future* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2004), 167.

⁴ Ezekiel shows a marked preference for the expression *בֵּית יִשְׂרָאֵל* (house of Israel) for the exilic community. This last house of Israel usually signifies Judah and Jerusalem and its inhabitants but also the exilic community. This is indicated 83 times (of a total 'Israel' is used 186 times, 'house of Israel' use is an indication for a hopeful future for Israel. '15 times and 'house of Judah' 5 times. The terms 'house of Judah' and Judah are used 147 times in the Hebrew Bible), '12, 17. The terms 'elders of Israel' are used side by side for the citizens of Jerusalem in Ezek. 8:6, 10 'house of Israel' and 'elders of Judah' are used without distinction in Ezek. 8:1; 20:1, 3 for the leaders of the exilic community; 27:17 Israel and Judah are mentioned side by side, there is no indication that they point to two different entities. Although in Ezek. 9:9; 25:3 part which is described there, -6. In the two-they point to two different entities. The only exception is Ezek. 4:4 southern kingdom. In Ezek. 37:17 'Judah' is used for the 'Israel' refers to the northern kingdom and 'Judah' to the

Especially idolatry, social and sexual sins and Sabbath violation are mentioned. As a priest who was called by YHWH to be his prophet. Ezekiel prefers cultic terms for describing sin also when its character is not cultic.⁵

Also for the reversal of the Exile not in the least place cultic terms are used (see Ezek. 36). Climax not only structurally but also with regard of its content is Ezekiel's final vision of the return of the glory of YHWH to a new Temple and completed renewed land which is habituated by a completely renewed people. The reversal of the Exile is solely ascribed to YHWH. His only reason is his own name. The repentance of the people does not precede but follows the gift of the renewing spirit of YHWH to his people.

Even more radically than his near contemporary Jeremiah Ezekiel proclaimed in the name of YHWH that the glorious future (a future with the glory of YHWH in their midst) is not for the inhabitants of Jerusalem and Judah, neither before nor after the destruction of Jerusalem, but for the exiles in Babel and their offspring.⁶

Noteworthy is that for Ezekiel the actual Exile started not with the destruction of Jerusalem and its Temple, but with the deportation of king Jojachin.⁷ Ezekiel wrote his book to interpret for

southern kingdom and 'Joseph' and 'Ephraim' for the northern kingdom. The real important distinction in the book .ytinummoc tsal eht ot sgnoleb erutuf ehT .lebaB ni dna dnalemoh eht ni ytinummoc eht neewteb taht si leikezE fo

⁵ When in Ezek. 1:1 it is stated that the prophet was called in thirtieth year. I think this is a reference to the prophet's age. Ezekiel was called to be a prophet at the age at which if he had been in Jerusalem, he would have been anointed a priest. (Num. 4:23). De Vries, *Kābôd*, 237-238.

⁶ Also in the book of Jeremiah we see that YHWH brings the future of salvation through the way of deportation to Babel. This is stated explicitly in Jer. 24, 27 and 29. The narrative of the assassination of Gedaliah (Jer. 41-44) shows that all other ways have a dead end. H.G.L. Peels, 'The Assassination of Gedaliah (Jer. 40:7-41:18)', in: B.E.J.H. Becking & D. Human (eds.) *Exile and Suffering*, OTS 50 (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 99-101.

⁷ The dates in the book of Ezekiel are given with this deportation as starting point.

the exiles in Babel the disaster of the Exile and offer them a hope for their future there far surpassed their imagination.⁸ The book itself has its origins completely in the Exile.⁹ Also in this way it distinguishes itself from the book of Jeremiah.

Thomas Renz rightly called attention to the strong rhetorical character the book of Ezekiel has in the form we have it. Readers have to distance themselves from Israel's past. They are invited to identify themselves with the exilic community at the river Chebar in Babel and to orientate themselves just as this exilic community was expected to do radically on a total new and brilliant future.¹⁰

The hope of the future is exclusively described to YHWH and not to possibilities or capacities of the exiles or their offspring. It is significant to note that the Jerusalem is mentioned for the last time in the book of Ezekiel when a messenger announcing its destruction arrives among the

⁸ The book of Ezekiel is actually about what YHWH told the prophet to say and not what Ezekiel said to the people. More than any of the other prophetic books the book of Ezekiel was directly committed to writing. We must assume that the prophet's written compositions were read aloud after delivery. Lyons Ezekiel must be seen not only as prophet and priest but also as a writer. He first delivered much of his message directly in writing, i.e. there was never a time when his message was free of the written form. It is telling in this connection that he had to eat a scroll when he was first called. (Ezek. 2:1-3; cf. 24:1-2 and 37:16). Ellen F. Davis, *Swallowing the Scroll: Textuality and the Dynamics of Discourse in Ezekiel's Prophecy*, JSOTSup 78 (Sheffield: Sheffield University Press, 1989), 45. That does not mean that we have to deny that the written book derives from an oral debate. Thomas Renz, *The Rhetorical Function of the Book of Ezekiel*, VTSup 76 (Leiden: Brill, 1999), 16.

⁹ I think this is true for the whole book; the chapter on Gog and the final vision included. I do not deny that we see signs of editing in the book of Ezekiel, but also this editing can be dated in the Exile and was perhaps already partly done by the prophet himself.

¹⁰ Renz, *Rhetorical Function*, 70, 165, 178.

exiles in Babel. The name of the future new city is not Jerusalem but יהוה שמה (YHWH is there).

What about the presence of YHWH in Babel?

The exilic community and everyone who reads the book of Ezekiel is warned to distance itself from Israel's past and to orientate his life radically on the future promised by YHWH. But can we say anything about the condition of the exiles in Babel with regard to the relationship of YHWH with them? In Ezek. 8-11 we read that the prophet is transported in the spirit from the community of Tel Aviv at the river Chebar in Babel to the Temple in Jerusalem. In his second vision he sees with his own eyes that the glory of YHWH leaves in the Temple.¹¹ The description of the departure is described in four phases or scenes in all.¹²

¹¹ De Vries, *Kābôd*, 273. William Tooman ('Ezekiel's Radical Challenge to Inviolability', *ZAW* 121/4 (2009), 498-514) has argued that the vision of Ezek. 8-11 does not depict the abandonment of the Temple by the glory of YHWH, but rather a visitation by the glory of YHWH to destruct it. His main point is that the glory of YHWH has already been depicted outside the Temple when Ezekiel was called. (Ezek. 1-3). The glory of YHWH transports the prophet for his second vision from Babel to Jerusalem. (Ezek. 8:2). I do not think the arguments of Tooman are conclusive. The fact that the glory of YHWH could manifest itself outside the Temple does not mean that it did reside in it. Especially the final vision makes clear that the Temple is the place where the glory of YHWH resides on earth. The abandonment described in Ezek. 8-11 is reversed. The difference with the old situation is that the glory of YHWH will not leave the Temple anymore. (Ezek. 44:1-2).

¹² First the glory of YHWH moves from the cherub(s) above the mercy-seat to the Temple threshold. (Ezek. 9:3). This description is repeated with the remark that the Temple was filled with the cloud and its court with the brightness of the glory of YHWH. (Ezek. 10:4). In the third scene we read that the glory of YHWH goes up from the threshold of the Temple to the vehicle (throne with cherubs as throne bearers) ready waiting, and stands upon

YHWH departs from Jerusalem and its inhabitants, but what about the exiles in Babel? According to Ezek. 9:2, while the prophet is in spirit in the court of the Temple the six men (angelic beings) appear out of the north with a slaughter weapon in their hands.¹³ The prophet sees also a seventh heavenly figure which is clothed in linen.¹⁴ The task of this heavenly scribe is tasked with placing a mark upon those inhabitants of Jerusalem who sigh under the religious, cultic and social injustice of their day. Before the judgment is executed the first phase of the departure of the glory of YHWH is mentioned. (Ezek. 9:3). When the judgment is executed by the six heavenly figures the prophet asks in Ezek. 9:8b despair whether even the remnant (שְׁאֲרִית) of Israel will be given over to destruction; a question he repeats in Ezek. 11:13b. If even the remnant is completely destroyed, the judgment will be completely irreversible.¹⁵

it. (Ezek. 10:18-19). Finally it is stated that the glory of YHWH went up from the midst of the city and stood on the mountain that is on the east side of the city. (Ezek. 11:22-23).

¹³ The north is the side from which the Assyrian and Babylonian enemies came to the land of Israel from Mesopotamia. So the north is connected with destruction.

¹⁴ Linen was characteristic clothing both for priests (Ex. 28:29–42) and for heavenly beings (Dan. 10:5; 12:6–7). Here, we must think of the figure that does service in the heavenly Temple.

¹⁵ In the Hebrew Bible the concept of the remnant (mostly: שְׁאֲרִית/sometimes: שְׂאָר) is developed in connection with the falling away of the people of Israel from YHWH and his service. The first usage of the term in the Hebrew Bible in its canonical form is found in the narrative of the Flood. According to Gen. 7:32b: ‘Only Noah was left (וַיִּשְׁאָר), and those with him in the ark.’ In the history of Israel as a people in the land of Canaan we find its earliest expression in the narratives of Elijah. YHWH promises Elijah. YHWH assures Elijah: ‘Yet I will leave seven thousand in Israel, all the knees that have not bowed to Baal, and every mouth that has not kissed him.’ (וְהַשְׂאֲרִיתִי)

(. בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל שְׁבַעַת אֲלָפִים כָּל־הַבָּרִכִּים אֲשֶׁר לֹא־כָרְעוּ לַבַּעַל וְכָל־הַנֶּפֶשׁ אֲשֶׁר לֹא־נִשְׁקָה לוֹ:). The remnant idea most articulated among the prophets of the eighth century BC beginning with Amos. The remnant motive plays a significant role in the book of Isaiah. Jeremiah, who lived during the end of the pre-exilic period and the beginning of the exilic period, makes the most extensive use of the root שאר. In the book of Jeremiah the noun שְׁאֲרִית usually designates

The answer of YHWH in Ezek. 9:9-10 seems to imply that the fear of the prophet is real. YHWH says that he will not spare, nor have pity, because guilt of the house of Israel and Judah is exceedingly great. Between the third (Ezek. 10:18-19) and the fourth phase (Ezek. 11:22-23) of the departure of the glory of YHWH the prophet in Ezek. 11:13b for the second time cries in despair: 'Ah, Lord YHWH, will you make a full end of the remnant of Israel?' Actually the second cry is more urgent than the first one.¹⁶

Only after this second cry of despair YHWH assures the prophet that this fear is unfounded. YHWH promises not only that he will restore Israel and gather the exiles out of the countries where they have been scattered, but also that he will be **מְקֹדֶשׁ מְעַט** (temporary or little sanctuary for the exiles in Babel. (Ezek. 11:14f.). Perhaps it not without significance that the glory of YHWH when departing is seen for the last time by the prophet standing on the mountain that is on the east side of Jerusalem (Mount of Olives). (Ezek. 11:23). The glory of YHWH departs in the direction of the east. That is in the direction of Babel where the exiles live. So the fourth stage contains a veiled hint of a presence of YHWH among the exiles in Babel. In this way an indication is given about the meaning of the **מְקֹדֶשׁ מְעַט**.¹⁷

the survivors left behind Jerusalem by their conquerors. This remnant is insignificant or will be totally destroyed. Hope for the future is connected with the exiles in Babel. Also for them the word **שְׁאֲרִית** can be used. (Jer. 23:3; 31:7; 50:20). However, Jeremiah seems to prefer the word **גְּלוּת** (exiles) when speaking about the positive future of the exiles. (Jer. 24:5; 28:4, 6; 29:4, 16, 20).

¹⁶ In the first cry the prophet used the hifil of the verb **שָׁחַת** (destroy) and in the second the qal of the verb **קָלָה** (completely destroy/make a full end).

¹⁷ In the book of Ezekiel the **כְּבוֹד** of YHWH is never directly related to **מְקֹדֶשׁ**. When directly related to the **כְּבוֹד** of YHWH the sanctuary is always called **בַּיִת** (house). (Ezek. 9:3; 10:4, 18, 19; 43:4, 5; 44:4). I do not suggest that the word **מְקֹדֶשׁ** as such suggests a reduced presence, for it is also used when in Ezek. 37:26, 28 a new sanctuary is

Ezek. 11:16. Two possibilities of understanding the expression מְקַדֵּשׁ מַעַט

In Ezek. 11:26 YHWH promises explicitly to the prophet that he will be a מְקַדֵּשׁ מַעַט for the exiles. In first place I notice that the book of Ezekiel makes a great use of older traditional material. In several occasions this must have been material that was also available in written form.¹⁸ It seems therefore quite likely that we can hear in Ezek. 11:26 an allusion to Isa. 8:14 when can trust the MT here.¹⁹ In the context of the threats of Syria and Northern Israel for Judah

promised. Nevertheless it remains noteworthy that the word בֵּית for the new Temple is reserved for the final vision in connection with the return of the כְּבוֹד of YHWH.

¹⁸ I give two examples in which it is very likely that the prophet had access to written material. The description of the situation on the Day of YHWH in Ezek. 7:19 is almost completely comparable to that given in Zeph. 1:18. In the portrayal of the spiritual condition of the people of Israel, Ezek. is congruent with the priestly code of the Pentateuch and particularly with the Holiness Code (Lev. 17–26). Especially there is a close connection between Ezek. 4–6 and the curses of the covenant in Lev. 26. Both Avi Hurvitz (*A Linguistic Study of the Relationship between the Priestly Source and the Book of Ezekiel: A New Approach to an Old Problem*, CahRB 20 [Paris: Gabalda, 1982]) and Mark F. Rooker, (*Biblical Hebrew in Transition: The Language of the Book of Ezekiel*, JSOTSup 90 [Sheffield: Sheffield University Press, 1990]) have shown that the language of the Holiness Code predates the language of the book of Ezekiel.

¹⁹ The conjectures מִקֶּשׁ (snare) or מְקַשֵּׁר (cause of difficulty) are suggested. Targum Jonathan has but פּוֹרֵעַן (vengeance/avenger). The MT is clearly the harder reading and makes excellent sense. The LXX agrees with the MT and translates ἄγασμα but puts a negative before the following parallels. The MT presupposes here that the attitude the inhabitants of Jerusalem take towards YHWH will determine how they experience him.

in the last half of the eight century BCE the prophet assures the inhabitants of Jerusalem that he himself will for them a sanctuary, a place of refuge.²⁰

We can interpret the expression *מִקְדָּשׁ מְעַט* in Ezek. 11:26 in two ways. We can understand it either temporally (a little while, temporary) or quantitatively (not large).²¹ Perhaps both elements are intended. It is the latter that will have to bear the emphasis: the presence of YHWH and his *כְּבוֹד* with the exiles is but small in comparison with His presence in the Temple prior to his departure from it. We have to do with a reduced presence of YHWH. Nevertheless, he

²⁰ Garry V. Smith (*Isaiah 1-39*, NAC 15a [(Nashville: Broadman & Holman Academic, 2007), 227] points to the parallel with Ezek. 11:16.

²¹ *מְעַט* can be a substantive but also use appositional adjectively or adverbially. In Ezek. 11:16 it is either used an adjectively or an adverbially. When we understand *מְעַט* as an adjective in Ezek. 11:16, we must translate *מִקְדָּשׁ מְעַט* as ‘a little/small sanctuary’. Compare *מְעַט מְעֹזֶר* (a little help) in Dan. 11:24. However *מִקְדָּשׁ מְעַט* may also be understood adverbially, either temporally ‘for a little while’ hinting to the limited duration of the Exile, or quantitatively ‘to a limited extent’. The adverbial understandings suits better with the context. When we compare the translations we can see that several translators made different choices here.

Compare the following translations:

LXX: καὶ ἔσομαι αὐτοῖς εἰς ἁγίασμα μικρὸν.

Vulgate: ero eis in sanctificationem modicum.

KJV: yet will I be to them as a little sanctuary.

NIV: yet for a little while I have been a sanctuary for them.

ESV: yet I have been a sanctuary to them for a while.

JPS: and I have become to them a diminished sanctity.

will be present and that is a message of hope. That is also true because we may also see in מַעַט a hint that the Exile will not last interminably.

In Ezek. 11:16 the place of worship is personalized. When we do not accept the MT of Isa. 8:14 this is the only place in the Hebrew Bible where this is stated. YHWH promises to be for the exiles what the Temple had been for them until now in Jerusalem.²² So long the כְּבוֹד of YHWH resided in the Temple, this oracle could not have real significance. When the prophet has seen in his second vision that the כְּבוֹד of YHWH leaves the Temple, this oracle is highly significant and a source of hope for the exiles. The kernel of the promise of which a מִקְדָּשׁ מַעַט is the harbinger, is the covenant formula, which is cited in its full form in Ezek. 11:20b: ‘And they shall be my people, and I will be their God’ (וְהָיִיתִי לָעָם וְאֲנִי אֱהִיָּה לָהֶם לְאֱלֹהִים). YHWH stays faithful to his covenant with Israel. The exiles can be sure that in accordance with his covenant loyalty YHWH will reverse the Exile (Compare Ezek. 16:62). He is loyal to his covenant despite Israel’s unfaithfulness. This assurance is already a form of מִקְדָּשׁ מַעַט.

How YHWH will be sanctuary for the exilic community

How must we understand the kind of presence of YHWH in the exile? The מִקְדָּשׁ מַעַט should in the first place be understood in terms of the כְּבוֹד of YHWH which according to the prophet’s

²² We can furthermore understand the מִקְדָּשׁ מַעַט in light of Jer. 29:12–14 as being the closeness of YHWH experienced by the exiles in prayer.

calling-vision is well able to appear in Babylon. The call of Ezekiel is an indication that in some sense the prophet mediates the presence of YHWH in exile. (Ezek. 1-3).²³ It is a sign of the After the six executioners has done their work In Ezek. 9:8a the prophet starts with the acknowledgement וְנִשְׁאַרְתִּי אֲנִי.²⁴ This expression can be understood as ‘I was left by myself’ or ‘I alone was left.’ I suggest the second interpretation and see here an indication that the prophet mediates the presence of YHWH in Exile. That impression is reinforced by how the prophet here unusually uses the personal pronoun אֲנִי of himself.

In the book of Ezekiel that little word is reserved almost exclusively for YHWH. Of the 169 times that אֲנִי occurs in Ezekiel, all but nine of the mentions refer to YHH. Apart from Ezek. 9:8 in Ezek. 1:1; 8:1; and 12:11 אֲנִי refers to the prophet. The profundity of the expression וְנִשְׁאַרְתִּי is partly indicated by the fact that this is the only time in the book of Ezekiel that אֲנִי is used of the prophet in a verb sentence. The three other sentences where אֲנִי is used for the prophet are nominal sentences. Noting the correspondence between Ezek. 9:8a and Ezek. 11:13f. we can think of the little sanctuary in terms of the prophet himself, who has been given to see the כְּבוֹד of YHWH in exile and through whose prophecies of salvation YHWH is close to the exiles.

²³ In the traditional Jewish exegesis מִקְדָּשׁ מְעֻט is taken to mean the synagogue. We find this interpretation as early as Targum Jonathan. However, there is no proof for that notion: the first indications of the presence of synagogues are several centuries after the Exile.

²⁴ The nifal of the verb שָׁאַר in the first part of Ezek. 9:8 has a relationship with the noun שְׁאֵרִית in the second part. The clause וְנִשְׁאַרְתִּי אֲנִי is not translated in the LXX. We must assume that the words did not feature in the Hebrew manuscript used by the translator of the LXX.

Later, we read expressly that the prophet is a sign (מוֹפֵת) for the exiles. (Ezek. 12:6, 11; 24:24, 27). He is not only a sign of judgment but also of hope. This hope is related to the fact that after the fall of Jerusalem the silence of the prophet is ended. (Ezek. 24:24, 27; 33:22). From now on his message is exclusively a message of hope.

The silence of the prophet and its ending

When we relate the promise of the מְקַדֵּשׁ מִטֶּט to Ezekiel and his message of hope, it is clear that we must pay attention in this context to his silence beginning seven days after his was called.²⁵ (Ezek. 3:24-27). It finally ended when he heard the news of the fall of Jerusalem. (Ezek. 33:22). The passages about the silence of the prophet confront us with some difficulties. Gerhard Fohrer and Walther Zimmerli are of the opinion that the words in 3:24b–27 about the prophet's muteness are secondary and ought to be moved to a place after 24:26b.²⁶ These Old Testament scholars believe that these words obtained their placement in 3:24b–27 in order to accentuate the muteness.

²⁵ The period of seven days between the calling of the prophet and his initiation corresponds to the time of separation for those who were being consecrated priests (Lev. 8:33ff.). This is an indication that the calling of Ezekiel to prophethood has the traits of a priestly dedication. H.L. Ellison, *Ezekiel: The Man and His Message* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1956), 29; T.J. Betts, *Ezekiel the Priest: A Custodian of Tôrâ*, SBL 74 (New York: Peter Lang, 2005), 47f. Ezekiel's silence, too, is priestly in character: the priests were expected to be silent as they carried out the sacrificial service. Israel Knohl, *The Sanctuary of Silence: The Priestly Torah and the Holiness School* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995).

²⁶ Georg Fohrer, *Ezechiel*, HAT 13 (Tübingen: Mohr, 1955), 26; Walther Zimmerli, *Ezechiel 1–24*, BKAT XIII/1 (Neukirchen – Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1996), 106f.

Berend Maarsingh believes that there were two distinct periods of muteness: the first when his prophetic work commenced and the second, which lasted 175 days, around the fall of Jerusalem.²⁷ According to Ellen F. Davis the muteness of Ezekiel is metaphoric for the trend towards immediately writing down prophetic messages. The prophetic message comes to Ezekiel in the form of a text; the digested scroll (Ezek. 2:9f.) must speak through him.²⁸ But with this view still the actual silence of the prophet remains unexplained.

I suggest that the Ezekiel's silence means that he remained at home and spoke only to the elders who came to him. We must translate 3:27a iteratively: 'every time I address you, I loose your tongue.'²⁹ Seven days after his calling the prophet hears that he will not be able to speak but will be dumb. The muteness of the prophet is one of the a trio of restrictions relating to his forthcoming actions³⁰

When the prophet opens his mouth before the fall of Jerusalem, it is usually for prophecies of judgments to be declared in each case. Ezekiel was merely the mouthpiece of YHWH. When Ezekiel spoke, YHWH was speaking, and when Ezekiel was silent, YHWH was keeping silent. While the prophet is mute, he cannot act as an *אִישׁ מוֹכִיחַ*.³¹ The prophet is not given powers to play a mediator's role.³² One can only either resist the message of God's judgments or accept

²⁷ Berend Maarsingh, *Ezechiël*, volume 1, POT (Nijkerk: Callenbach, 1985), 50.

Davis, *Swallowing the Scroll*, 50f.

²⁹ De Vries, *Kābôd*, 258.

³⁰ The other two restrictions are that he must remain at home from now on and he must be bound.

³¹ The word combination *אִישׁ מוֹכִיחַ* is specific to Ezek. It can be compared with *אִישׁ נָבִיא* in Judg. 6:8.

³² In the wisdom literature we encounter the *מוֹכִיחַ* as the one who punishes and warns in an attempt to improve the behavior of another. (Prov. 9:7; 24:15; 25:12; 28:23). In legal trials, the *מוֹכִיחַ* had a role in the conduct of procedure

them.³³ The judgments as such are irreversible. Repentance is no longer a possibility, so that YHWH will not carry them out. For Ezekiel muteness we see a parallel in Jeremiah, Ezekiel's older contemporary. Jeremiah was not permitted to intercede for the people (Jer. 7:16; 11:14; 14:11).

Only once the veracity of his prophecies of doom has been borne out does Ezekiel speak openly and in public (Ezek. 24:25-27; 33:21-22). The prophet's muteness constitutes a prelude to the departure of the *כְּבוֹד* of YHWH. When his tongue is loosed again, this is a harbinger of the return of the *כְּבוֹד* of YHWH. After Ezek. 33 we find no longer a message judgment for Israel, but only a message of hope.

The מְקַדֵּשׁ מַעַט and the oracles of hope in Ezek. 34-48

In what way functioned the prophet Ezekiel and functioned the oracles YHWH gave him as a מְקַדֵּשׁ מַעַט in Exile? I start with the fact that is highly significant here that the call of Ezekiel to prophethood has priestly features.³⁴ As a prophet Ezekiel diagnoses Israel's problem in priestly terms.³⁵ He offers a solution using priestly traditions. The promises made in Ezek. 3:18f., 18:4f. and 33:1f. that the just and the repentant will live, have as background the casuistically, priestly

(Is. 29:1; Amos 5:10). Whether he acted as prosecutor or defendant depended on the context. In Job 9:33, the מוֹכִיחַ is a man who lays his hands on the shoulders of both parties to attain a right relationship between them.

³³ Renz, *Rhetorical Function*, 159–160; Robert R. Wilson, 'An Interpretation of Ezekiel's Dumbness', *VT* 22/1 (1972), 91–104.

³⁴ Cf. page 8 and especially note 23.

³⁵ Ezekiel uses the words טָמֵא (unclean/defile) and חָלָל (pollute, defile, profane) to characterize the sins of the people of Israel and that not only for a cultic but also for sexual and social sins.

laws. Another background that can be understood for the use of language in those passages is the Temple liturgy (Ps. 15; 118:19–20) sung when the gates of the Temple were entered. Ezekiel is promising life to those in Exile just as once the priests did when they sang such promises as they passed inside the gates of the sanctuary.³⁶

Already in the first part of Ezekiel we find here and there a message of hope.³⁷ Ezek. 6 is the hinge: it contains a message of total perdition yet concludes with the cleansing of the prophet himself and with a veiled message of hope and expectation. It is no coincidence that we find the first explicit message of hope in Ezek. 11:14-21; that is within the passage of the מִקְדָּשׁ טַעַם.³⁸

The real transition to only a message of hope we find after Ezek. 33. This chapter belongs formally and structurally to the third part of the book of Ezekiel, but is also reverts to Ezek. 24 and it is the conclusion of the message of judgment. Before the prophet actually makes the transition to announcing a message of hope, he first declares on the authority of YHWH that there is no hope for the remaining inhabitants of the land of Israel after the fall of Jerusalem.

³⁶ Walther Zimmerli, *The Fiery Throne: The Prophets and Old Testament Theology*, eds. K.C. Hanson (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003), 94; Zimmerli, *Ezekiel 1–24*, 398.

³⁷ We can divide the book of Ezekiel in three or two parts, namely Ezek. 1-24; 25-32; 33 -48. In Ezek. 25-32 we find the prophecies against the nations. When we divide the book of Ezekiel in two parts we must reckon them to the second part. The judgment of the nations is an introduction to the message of hope for the nations. In Ezek. 28:24-26 we find explicitly a message of hope for Israel. Within Ezek. 25–32 there are 97 verses, preceding 28:24–26 and 97 verses after that section. Daniel I. Block, *The Book of Ezekiel. Chapters 25-48* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 4-5.

³⁸ There are also glimpses of hope in Ezek. 16:60–63; 17:22–24 and, when we divide the book of Ezekiel in three parts, in the second part in Ezek. 28:24-26.

(Ezek. 33:23–33). Ezek. 34–48 announces the restoration and glorious future of the people and land of Israel.

The promise of a *מִקְדָּשׁ מְעֻט* is the harbinger of a new Exodus and of an inward transformation (Ezek. 11:17f.); the promise of an inward transformation receives its outworking in the second half of the book of Ezekiel, especially in Ezek. 36–37. This transformation opens the way for the return of the *כְּבוֹד* of YHWH to a complete new Temple that surpasses the old Temple in holiness.³⁹ Especially the final vision of Ezekiel shows that the mediating function of the prophet has a priestly aspect.

³⁹ The Tabernacle had only three zones with increasing degrees of holiness, If we assume that the walls around the forecourt of the Temple of Solomon and the gates that give access to the innermost court of the Temple of Ezekiel demarcate a separate sphere, then the zone count is five and seven respectively. Given the meaning of the number seven, that is the preferable interpretation of the number of the spheres of holiness of the Temple of Ezekiel. Much more emphatically than in the Tabernacle and the Temple of Solomon, the focus is upon gradation and the concomitant separation. De Vries, *Kābôd*, 307–308. In the final vision when the new Temple and its service are described, no high priest is mentioned. The explanation is not that the legislation of the final vision of Ezekiel predates the priestly legislation of the Pentateuch. The presupposition of this view is that the priestly legislation of the Pentateuch is a further development of an earlier stage of priestly service in which there was no place for a high priest. In fact the final vision of Ezekiel presupposes the priestly legislation of the Pentateuch. In the final vision that the Holy of Holies is so exclusively the property of the *כְּבוֹד* of YHWH that it may never be entered by man. Because his services are no longer required, no high priest has been spoken of in the book of Ezekiel. In the Temple of Ezekiel the Holy Place has only a wooden altar which is also called a table. (Ezek. 41:22). It is likely that is wooden altar or table has which appear to have the function that the table of shewbread had in the Tabernacle and the Temple of Solomon. It is not impossible that the intention of this inclusion is that the Holy Place of the new Temple will have only a table of shewbread and no incense offering. The fact that the altar is wooden also decreases the likelihood that it is there for incense offerings. This therefore means that the Holy Place will only be entered on Sabbaths for the priests to change the shewbread (cf. Lev. 24:8). De Vries, *Kābôd*, 305–306, 315–316.

When the final vision will be fulfilled, the Exile is definitely a past reality, but in the Exile this vision is an essential part of the promise of the **מִקְדָּשׁ מְעֻט** for the exiles. In Ezek. 11:15 the prophet repeats the words of the inhabitants of Jerusalem who are left in the land after the destruction of the city and the Temple: ‘Go far from YHWH (**רָחֲקוּ מֵיְהוָה**); to us this land is given for a possession.’ In Ezek. 11:16 YHWH admits that he has distanced the exiles among the nations (**בְּגוֹלִים הִרְחַקְתִּים**). Then immediately the promise of a **מִקְדָּשׁ מְעֻט** follows. Although distanced from the land YHWH is present among the exiles and not among them who are left in the land. So the **מִקְדָּשׁ מְעֻט** mitigates the fact that the exiles are distanced from

The verb **רחק** is used for the first time in the book of Ezekiel in Ezek. 8:6. By their sins the people of Israel drive away or distance YHWH from his sanctuary (**עָשִׂים כֵּן לְרָחֲקָה מֵעַל מִקְדָּשִׁי**).

After the return of the **כְּבוֹד** of YHWH to a complete new Temple, the prophet hears YHWH saying to the people of Israel that they will or must put their whoring and the dead bodies of their kings far from him. Then He will dwell in their midst forever (**עָתָה יִרְחָקוּ אֶת־זִנוּתָם וּפְגָרֵי** (Ezek. 43:9).
(מִלְכֵיהֶם מִמֶּנִּי וְשִׁכְנָתִי בְתוֹכְכֶם לְעוֹלָם:

Must we understand **יִרְחָקוּ** in Ezek. 43:9 as a command or an announcement? Almost all translations choose for the first option.⁴⁰ Almost in every case a qatal- or jiqtolform in third person after **עָתָה** can be understood as an imperative mood. Clear exceptions are 1 Kgs. 12:26b

⁴⁰ An exception is the Dutch States Translation (SV) (1637). This is one of the instances where the SV does not follow the KJV (1611). The medieval Jewish exegetes Rasji and David Kimchi support the view that we must understand **יִרְחָקוּ** as a future and not as a jussive.

and Job 16:7.⁴¹ Following the Vulgata (nunc ergo repellat) I would slightly prefer an indicative mood here.⁴² My argument is that in the third part of the book Ezekiel we read almost exclusively about what YHWH does and not about what Israel is commanded.⁴³ YHWH himself realizes in the members of the people of Israel what he expects from them.⁴⁴

By reading or hearing the description the new Temple and its service given by the prophet the readers and listeners of the book of Ezekiel can imagine what it will be to participate in its service. They can be sure that the future that is described, one day will be a reality. So the description of the new Temple and its service especially has in the Exile the function of a **מְקֹדֵשׁ מַעֲטָט**.

The residing of the **כְּבוֹד** of YHWH in a new and completely pure Temple is the final hope of the book of Ezekiel. In the final vision of Ezekiel the new Temple is outside the new city. Nevertheless the name of the new city, which forms the expression that concludes the final vision and the entire book of Ezekiel, is a suitable summary of the final hope YHWH gives the exile through the oracles of Ezekiel: **יְהוָה שָׁמָּה** (YHWH is there). This is a mighty assurance

⁴¹ In 1 Kgs. 12:26b we read: **עַתָּה תָּשׁוּב הַמְּמִלְכָּה לְבֵית דָּוִד**. The ESV translates: ‘Now the kingdom will turn back to the house of David.’ In Job 16:7 we read: **אִדְּעָתָה הִלְאֵנִי**. The ESV translates: ‘Surely now God has worn me out.’

⁴² The Septuagint has an imperative of the aorist here: **ἀπώσασθωσαν**. However, in Ezek. 26:18 the Septuagint translates **עַתָּה יִחַרְדּוּ הָאִלִּים** as **καὶ φοβηθήσονται αἱ νῆσοι** (and the islands shall be frightened).

⁴³ Now it is true that in Ezek. 43:11 we find a condition, namely ‘if they are ashamed of all that they have done’ (**מִכָּל אֲשֶׁר-עָשׂוּ**). However it is remarkable that the Septuagint has not a condition here. It has the following translation: **καὶ αὐτοὶ λήμψονται τὴν κόλασιν αὐτῶν περὶ πάντων** (‘and they shall receive their punishment for all they have done’).

⁴⁴ I can point here to the words of St. Augustine: ‘give what you command and command what you will.’ *De dono perseverantiae* 20, 53

that the **מִקְדָּשׁ מְעֻט** although a consoling reality is not, as indicated by the word, **מְעֻט** the final reality.

Summarizing, I restate that there are several indications that the prophetic ministry of Ezekiel in its consoling aspects is the **מִקְדָּשׁ מְעֻט** mentioned in Ezek. 11:16. First we can point to his message of life for them who adheres to their righteousness and for the wicked who repent. He functions for them as a kind of priest who assures them of the spiritual presence of YHWH; a reality to be compared with the entrance into the sanctuary. Above all the message of Ezekiel functions as the **מִקְדָּשׁ מְעֻט** where the glorious future of Israel is foretold and especially the new Temple that will surpass in holiness the old Temple.

The glorious presence of YHWH among the exiles is a reduced presence compared with the past, but even more compared with the future. Already the expression **מִקְדָּשׁ מְעֻט** itself makes clear that the reduced presence will not be a permanent reality. What follows is the new Temple filled by the **כְּבוֹד** of YHWH who will never leave it again. This last aspect is symbolized by the fact the east gate of the outer court is closed for ever after the entry of the **כְּבוֹד** of YHWH in the new Temple. (Ezek. 44:1-2).

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