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EXPLAINING EZEKIEL'S ENIGMATIC MUTENESS

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For my beloved Christiana, אשת חיל, who daily helps me on to the Celestial City,
and for the glory of יהוה, the maker of heaven and earth.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CSB	Christian Standard Bible
DSS	Dead Sea Scrolls
esp	especially
ESV	English Standard Version
HB	Hebrew Bible
HCSB	Holman Christian Standard Bible
KJV	King James Version
MT	Masoretic Text
N	No
NASB	New American Standard Bible
NIV	New International Version
NKJV	New King James Version
NLT	New Living Translation
NRSV	New Revised Standard Version
Y	Yes

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PREFACE

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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION, THESIS, METHODOLOGY, AND
NOMENCLATURE

Introduction

Throughout Israel’s history, YHWH raised up various individuals to serve as his prophet, and he chiefly meant for them to proclaim his word to his people (Deut 18:15–18). Interestingly, several whom YHWH selected for this vocation struggled with speech. For example, YHWH commissioned Moses and Jeremiah as his prophets, but both men objected to their call on grounds that they could not speak (Exod 4:10; Jer 1:6). YHWH also commissioned Ezekiel as a prophet and watchman in Babylon charged to speak his word and accountable for warning rebellious Israel to repent (Ezek 2–3:21). Yet, unlike Moses and Jeremiah, Ezekiel never claimed a speech problem. Instead, YHWH announced that he would bind Ezekiel’s tongue to the roof of his mouth so that Ezekiel would be mute and not some sort of “reprover” (אִישׁ מוֹכִיחַ) to his people (Ezek 3:26). YHWH added that he would open Ezekiel’s mouth to communicate in some way (Ezek 3:27), and he later revealed that he would remove Ezekiel’s muteness when a siege survivor told of Jerusalem’s demise (Ezek 24:25–27). Then, when that survivor arrived, YHWH freed Ezekiel’s tongue (Ezek 33:21–22). Thus, Ezekiel too dealt with hampered speech.

Surprisingly, however, between the announcement of Ezekiel’s tongue binding and its eventual liberation (Ezek 4–33), Ezekiel delivered many prophecies to others, including verbal addresses and apparent reproofs (see for example Ezek 11:13, 25; 13–14; 20; 24:18, 20). As a result, the book of Ezekiel sets up Ezekiel’s muteness as something of an enigma—how could a mute prophet still speak to and reprove others?

To be sure, Ezekiel's experience of muteness has mystified many. Some have called it complex or complicated.¹ Others have deemed it obscure, perplexing, paradoxical, or the like.² Many have said that Ezekiel's muteness entails a particularly difficult interpretive problem or that it is part of one of the most difficult passages in the book of Ezekiel.³

This dissertation acknowledges that Ezekiel's muteness poses a complicated, challenging, and at times paradoxical problem. As I will show, the book of Ezekiel presents prophetic muteness as a complex of features, with each aspect contributing to Ezekiel's composite muted experience. Moreover, reconciling all aspects of his muteness

¹ Leslie C. Allen, *Ezekiel 20–48*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 29 (Dallas: Word Books, 1990), 61–62; Keith W. Carley, *Ezekiel among the Prophets: A Study of Ezekiel's Place in Prophetic Tradition*, Studies in Biblical Theology, Second Series 31 (Naperville, IL: Alec R. Allenson, 1975), 75n34; cf. part of “the most complex call narrative in all of Scripture.” Daniel I. Block, *The Book of Ezekiel, Chapters 1–24*, New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1997), 151.

² Peter C. Craigie, *Ezekiel*, The Daily Study Bible (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1983), 24; Ellen F. Davis, “Swallowing Hard: Reflections on Ezekiel's Dumbness,” in *Signs and Wonders: Biblical Texts in Literary Focus*, ed. J. Cheryl Exum, Semeia Studies (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 1989), 218; Ellen F. Davis, *Swallowing the Scroll: Textuality and the Dynamics of Discourse in Ezekiel's Prophecy*, Journal for the Study of the Old Testament, Supplement Series 78, Bible and Literature Series 21 (Sheffield, England: Almond Press, 1989), 47; Paul M. Joyce, *Ezekiel: A Commentary*, T & T Clark Library of Biblical Studies (New York: T & T Clark, 2007), 82; Michael A. Lyons, *An Introduction to the Study of Ezekiel*, T & T Clark Approaches to Biblical Studies (London: Bloomsbury T & T Clark, 2015), 88; Christopher J. H. Wright, *The Message of Ezekiel: A New Heart and a New Spirit*, Bible Speaks Today (Leicester, England: InterVarsity Press, 2001), 69.

³ Joseph Blenkinsopp, *Ezekiel*, Interpretation (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1990), 150; Block, *Ezekiel 1–24*, 152; Kathryn Pfisterer Darr, “Write or True? A Response to Ellen Frances Davis,” in Exum, *Signs and Wonders*, 239; Davis, “Swallowing Hard,” 218; Davis, *Swallowing the Scroll*, 47; Walther Eichrodt, *Ezekiel: A Commentary*, trans. Cosslett Quin, Old Testament Library (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1970), 75; Moshe Greenberg, “On Ezekiel's Dumbness,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 77, no. 2 (1958): 102; Ronald M. Hals, *Ezekiel*, Forms of the Old Testament Literature, vol. 19 (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1989), 26; Rimon Kasher, “Ezekiel's Dumbness: (Ez. 3:22–27): A New Approach / (27–22 ג' יח) פרשת האלם בספר יחזקאל,” *Beit Mikra: Journal for the Study of the Bible and Its World / כתב-עת לחקר המקרא ועולמו מג' ד (1998)*: 235; Lyons, *Ezekiel*, 87; Nicholas J. Tromp, “The Paradox of Ezekiel's Prophetic Mission: Towards a Semiotic Approach of Ezekiel 3,22–27,” in *Ezekiel and His Book: Textual and Literary Criticism and Their Interrelation*, ed. J. Lust, Bibliotheca Ephemeridum Theologicarum Lovaniensium 74 (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1986), 201; Robert R. Wilson, “An Interpretation of Ezekiel's Dumbness,” *Vetus Testamentum* 22, no. 1 (1972): 91; Walther Zimmerli, *Ezekiel 1: A Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Ezekiel, Chapters 1–24*, ed. Frank Moore Cross, Klaus Baltzer, and Leonard Jay Greenspoon, trans. Ronald E. Clements, Hermeneia, vol. 1 (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1979), 71, 158; cf. “It is not easy to form any clear conception of the prophet's ministry during the years preceding the fall of the state.” A. B. Davidson, *The Book of the Prophet Ezekiel: With Notes and Introduction*, ed. A. W. Streaue, rev. ed., Cambridge Bible for Schools and Colleges (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1916), 30; John W. Olley who cites Zimmerli's comments. John W. Olley, *Ezekiel: A Commentary Based on Iezekiël in Codex Vaticanus*, Septuagint Commentary Series (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 257.

into a coherent, non-contradictory explanation entails unique difficulty and paradox. Nevertheless, this work aims to challenge the notions that the text involving Ezekiel's muteness "as it stands raises insuperable difficulties"⁴ and that the problem of Ezekiel's muteness "has no incontrovertible solution."⁵ While noting these claims and the ongoing debate over this topic, this dissertation will endeavor to resolve all the evidence for Ezekiel's muteness and so supply a convincing solution that explains its true nature.

More specifically, this dissertation will address the following question: if Ezekiel experienced a muting of his speech with a stated purpose that he not be a kind of reprover of his people, but he still went on to speak with and rebuke others, then what conception of Ezekiel's muteness best explains these facts and all other textual and contextual evidence of his muted prophetic ministry?

Thesis

Ezekiel's muteness was a divinely imposed, literal silencing that precluded informal speech and a reproving lifestyle toward exilic Israel despite their rebelliousness. Yet, because of the exiles' recalcitrance, his muteness also enabled prophetic speech at YHWH's decree. Moreover, Ezekiel's muteness and return to ordinary talking signified the exiles' proper speech conduct of silence toward YHWH while under judgment and a renewed freedom to speak with YHWH once judgment had passed over.

Methodology

I will argue the above thesis in five chapters. This first chapter introduces the dissertation. It cites the primary biblical texts, notes a fundamental problem these texts set up in relation to the book of Ezekiel, specifies the research question addressing this

⁴ G. A. Cooke, *Ezekiel*, *Biblical Studies: The Hebrew Bible* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2015), 46.

⁵ Allen, *Ezekiel 20–48*, 62.

problem, declares the central thesis that answers the research question, introduces the methodology used to argue this thesis, and clarifies nomenclature employed throughout the work. Chapter 2 then moves to overview approaches from the history of interpretation given to explain Ezekiel's muteness. It covers how these approaches impact the interpretation of the book of Ezekiel and the lacuna that they leave, which provides warrant for this dissertation. Next, chapter 3 supplies the literary-theological context for interpreting the prophet Ezekiel's muteness. It discusses the prophetic experiences of Moses, Nathan, and Jeremiah—all of whom in one way or another struggled with speech. Such context will supply a backdrop from which to draw out both the nature and significance of Ezekiel's muteness. After that, chapter 4 presents a thorough examination of Ezekiel's muteness. This investigation includes first a broad look at his mute prophetic experience and then a passage-by-passage exegesis of the texts citing Ezekiel's muteness in order of their occurrence (Ezek 3:22–27; 24:25–27; 33:21–22). Finally, chapter 5 outlines several significant implications for how one reads and interprets the book of Ezekiel resulting from this explanation of Ezekiel's muteness.

Throughout, I will argue using a straightforward exegesis of pertinent texts. I will interpret passages using a historical-grammatical hermeneutic, giving primacy of place to the plain meaning of each text as dictated by its use of language, grammar, structure, and context. Relevant contexts include adjacent passages, the chapter and book in which texts reside, biblical events leading up to and occurring at the time of a passage, and a given prophet's place amidst a succession of prophets.

Nomenclature

For clarity, I here introduce both general items used throughout the dissertation along with a more specific introduction to the concept of informal and formal speech.

General Items

Usually, I will cite Scripture references according to the Hebrew versification with any English references that deviate in square brackets. When citing references from other versions, such as the Greek, Latin, Syriac, and Aramaic, I will use the ancient version versification with any English references that deviate in square brackets. Unless otherwise noted, all biblical translations are my own.

I will use the following words interchangeably to indicate their respective subjects. “Muteness,” “dumbness,” “silence,” or “speechlessness” will indicate Ezekiel’s state resulting from his constrained mouth. “Willful” or “voluntary” will indicate Ezekiel’s muteness as a self-regulated silence. “Imposed” or “involuntary” will indicate Ezekiel’s muteness as an enforced silence foisted upon him. “Literal,” “real,” or “physical” will indicate Ezekiel’s muteness as a tangible restriction on his speech observable in space and time. “Symbolic” or “metaphorical” will indicate Ezekiel’s muteness as a representational act. “Durative,” “total,” “perpetual,” “unmitigated,” or “absolute” will indicate Ezekiel’s muteness as an uninterrupted halt on his speech. And “intermittent,” “recurring,” “recurrent,” or “periodic” will indicate Ezekiel’s muteness as entailing an occasional release and restoration of the hold on his speech.

Specific Items: Informal, Formal Speech

Additionally, I will use “informal speech” and “formal speech” according to the following definitions and recognize their occurrence using the subsequent criteria.

Definitions. By “informal speech” I mean conversation amidst one’s community and outside any professional prophetic capacity. This is not to say that such interactions necessarily lack authority. Instead, they do not come from YHWH, and so they do not carry his authority. In addition to “informal,” the words “normal,” “routine,” “casual,” “ordinary,” “unremarkable,” “everyday,” “common,” “spontaneous,” “impromptu,” “incidental,” “free,” “private,” “personal,” “self-motivated,” “self-

initiated,” “of one’s own,” “not divinely prompted,” “unofficial,” “unsanctioned,” and “non-prophetic” will interchangeably serve as descriptors that indicate informal speech.

Conversely, by “formal speech” I mean utterances sourced from YHWH and expressed in conjunction with fulfilling one’s call as YHWH’s prophet. In addition to “formal,” the words “prophesying,” “prophetic,” “official,” “from / in accordance with one’s professional prophetic office / capacity,” “divine,” “divinely sanctioned / authorized / prompted,” “on YHWH’s behalf,” “for YHWH,” or “as YHWH’s prophet” will interchangeably serve as descriptors that indicate formal speech.

Speech recognition criteria. Introducing this formal-informal speech dichotomy implies an ability to discern whether a prophet speaks in either capacity. The Bible neither mentions these discrete categories nor offers complete definitions as described above. However, it does suggest their existence by presenting speeches from prophets with markers (or a lack thereof) that color the speeches in accordance with the above formal and informal speech definitions. The following are examples of such markers.

First, a divine consultation leading to a prophet speaking marks the prophet’s ensuing speech as formal. For a prophet to speak after conferring with YHWH implies that YHWH told him to convey his message. Then since formal speech entails “divinely prompted speech,” “speech on YHWH’s behalf,” and “speech for YHWH,” a prophet’s utterance following a divine consultation suggests formal speech.

Second, certain basic forms of prophetic speech mark a prophet’s speech as formal. For instance, a prophet tagging his proclamation with the *word event formula*—“the word of YHWH came to me”—directly links his words to YHWH’s. Also, when YHWH addresses a prophet with the *commissioning formula*—“Go and say to . . .”—the associated speech that the prophet then utters clearly stems from YHWH’s command to speak. Additionally, a prophet prefacing his declared word with the *messenger formula*—

“Thus says the Lord YHWH”—overtly speaks for YHWH. All these characteristics self-evidently comport with the notion of formal speech and thus identify a given speech as such.

Third, a prophet speaking for YHWH in the first person marks the prophet’s speech as formal. For a prophet to say, “I YHWH,” is to speak “on YHWH’s behalf” or “for YHWH,” descriptors that both exist as part of the definition of formal speech.

Fourth, a prophet speaking while plainly acting in YHWH’s place marks the prophet’s speech as formal. Such would be the case when YHWH would send a prophet to do a specific task, and the prophet then spoke commensurate with fulfilling that task. A prophet speaking to satisfy his commission coheres with speaking “in accordance with one’s professional prophetic office / capacity” and so signifies formal speech.

Fifth, a prophet foretelling future events marks the prophet’s speech as formal. Since receiving and disclosing YHWH’s word of the future properly belonged to the role of a prophet (Deut 18:15–22), such speech occurs “in accordance with one’s professional prophetic office / capacity” and qualifies as formal.

Sixth, YHWH’s presiding presence or supernatural signs accompanying a prophet’s communication mark the prophet’s words as formal speech. YHWH’s presiding over or performing a supernatural sign in conjunction with a prophet’s message implies he means to confirm and has thus “divinely sanctioned / authorized” the spoken word. Therefore, the prophet’s word in that case meets the criteria of formal speech.

Seventh, the linking of a prophet’s speech to specific Hebrew terms marks the speech as formal. Namely, a prophet’s speaking a “prophecy” (נְבוּאָה) is to “prophesy” (נָבֵא). A prophet’s disclosing a “vision” (חֲזוֹן; חֲזוֹן; חֲזוֹן; חֲזוֹן) discloses what YHWH has made known and spoken to his prophet (Num 12:6). A prophet’s relaying YHWH’s issued “revelation”—or more woodenly his “uncovering of the ear”—(גִּלְיָה אֶת־אָזְנוֹ) is to proclaim what YHWH has revealed or uncovered. And a prophet pronouncing a “declaration of YHWH” (נִאֲמַר יְהוָה) or a “word of YHWH” (דְּבַר־יְהוָה) is to speak

YHWH's word. In all such cases, the prophet is prophesying or speaking "on YHWH's behalf" or "for YHWH," each of which reflects the meaning of formal speech.

Eighth, a prophet interceding with YHWH marks formal speech. Not all agree that interceding properly belongs to the prophetic office.⁶ However, evidence implies that intercession was expected of Israel's prophet. For instance, YHWH invited Abraham—the first person called a prophet—and Moses—the archetype prophet—to intercede (Gen 18–20; Exod 32:7–14; 33:12–17). Additionally, the prophet Samuel deemed it sin to abandon intercession (1 Sam 12:23). Furthermore, prophets after Samuel, such as Amos and Jeremiah, took up this task (Amos 7:1–6; Jer 21:1–10; 37:3–10; 42:1–22; cf. 7:16; 11:14; 14:11; 15:1). Moreover, YHWH's critique at the time of Ezekiel that no prophet stood to intercede against his judgment suggests he expected prophets to intercede (Ezek 13:4–5; 22:30).⁷ Reasonably then, a prophet interceding speaks "from / in accordance with one's professional prophetic office / capacity," and so indicates formal speech.

Ninth, a later passage that applies any of the above markers to a prophet's speaking reveals that prophet's specific message as formal as well.

Though not a comprehensive list, noting the presence or lack of these markers in conjunction with a prophet's particular speech provides more objective criteria for recognizing and thus delineating between formal prophetic speech and ordinary speaking. Specifically, a speech marked by one or more of the above features conveys a prophetic sense, making it distinct from more ordinary speech and identifying it as formal. Alternatively, speech that lacks these markers carries a non-prophetic sense and may be recognized as informal speech. These formal-informal speech definitions and recognition criteria will be used in chapters 3 and 4.

⁶ See for example Samuel E. Balentine, "The Prophet as Intercessor: A Reassessment," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 103, no. 2 (1984): 161–73.

⁷ See Aaron Chalmers, *Interpreting the Prophets: Reading, Understanding and Preaching from the Worlds of the Prophets* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2015), 18–19.

CHAPTER 2

EVALUATING THE HISTORY OF INTERPRETATION

In this chapter, I will present six approaches or methods from the history of interpretation that scholars have used to explain Ezekiel's muteness, and I will describe how they impact the interpretation of the book of Ezekiel as a whole. Evaluating each approach will reveal weaknesses and implications that provide warrant for advancing my position.

Since Ezekiel's muteness entails multiple aspects, and scholars dispute the meaning of individual aspects, two scholars rarely share a complete set of matching conclusions.¹ This makes creating a typology of Ezekiel's muteness complex. As a result, I have elected to organize scholarship by common methods or approaches used to explain one or more aspects of Ezekiel's muteness.

Of note, different approaches tend to emphasize different features of Ezekiel's muteness. Some are more holistic than others, meaning that not every approach aims to address every aspect of Ezekiel's muteness. For example, one approach may focus on dealing with an apparent symbolic aspect of Ezekiel's muteness and not seek to tackle its other features. Consequently, a single approach may not fully explain all aspects of Ezekiel's muteness. With that said, scholars often integrate several approaches in an effort to offer a complete explanation. Below, I first present these typical approaches and then move to evaluate the merits of each one.

¹ See table A1 in appendix 1 for a summary of approaches scholars have used to explain Ezekiel's muteness along with their associated views on its various aspects as considered in this dissertation.

Summary of the Research

Historically, scholars have explained Ezekiel's muteness in diverse ways and as noted, they often invoke multiple approaches in their explanations. I have categorized the varied approaches under the following six headings: (1) "Later Redactional Editing," (2) "Vindicate YHWH's Prophet," (3) "Prophecy YHWH's Written Tradition," (4) "Prophecy Only Doom," (5) "Do Not Intercede," and (6) "Speak Only as YHWH's Messenger." The summaries below offer brief synopses of these commonly employed methods.

Later Redactional Editing

First, some explain Ezekiel's muteness as a speech ban that truly contradicts his speaking in subsequent chapters. These scholars thus assert that later scribes must have located the apparent onset of Ezekiel's muteness in chapter 3 despite the fact that its placement there introduces a contradiction. For example, Georg Fohrer argues that Ezekiel cannot have been silent for years after his call, and therefore verses citing his muteness "belong rather at the end of the first period of Ezekiel's preaching."²

Such scholars often posit that this redaction occurred for literary, theological, or other editorial purposes. For instance, Walther Zimmerli asserts that since Ezekiel speaks in Ezekiel 4–24, his muteness must have begun near the time of Jerusalem's fall. Ezekiel's followers, then, added his muteness to chapter 3 "in view of the prophet's whole life."³ Similarly, Walther Eichrodt claims that Ezekiel's disciples thought his muteness reflected the book's character and viewed it as a repeated sign to faithless

² Georg Fohrer, *Die Hauptprobleme des Buches Ezechiel*, Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft 72 (Berlin: Alfred Töpelmann, 1952), 30–31, cf. 47, 101, 242, 254. My translation.

³ Walther Zimmerli, *Ezekiel 1: A Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Ezekiel, Chapters 1–24*, ed. Frank Moore Cross, Klaus Baltzer, and Leonard Jay Greenspoon, trans. Ronald E. Clements, Hermeneia, vol. 1 (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1979), 160–61; see also Walther Zimmerli, *Ezekiel 2: A Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Ezekiel, Chapters 25–48*, ed. Paul D. Hanson and Leonard Jay Greenspoon, trans. James D. Martin, Hermeneia, vol. 2 (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983), 193.

Israel. As a result, they moved it to the front of the book to make their teacher's work "intelligible as a whole."⁴ These scholars believe that Ezekiel's muteness in fact began closer to the time of Jerusalem's siege and before its fall, but redactors positioned it at the front of the book for various purposes. For those who take this approach, later textual editing would permit interpreting Ezekiel's muteness as unmitigated silence while also obviating any contradiction with his subsequent speech and rebuke—he was actually muted after delivering his prophetic reproofs.⁵

Vindicate YHWH's Prophet

As a second approach, some scholars hold that Ezekiel's muteness serves in part to signify his vindication as YHWH's true prophet. For instance, Daniel I. Block claims that YHWH intends Ezekiel to function as his "living idol" such that when Ezekiel's muteness ends, people will see that YHWH speaks not through wood and stone but his human.⁶ At that time, YHWH will free Ezekiel's tongue, and "both Ezekiel and Yahweh are vindicated. The liberated prophet stands before his people as a *môpēt*, a 'sign,' living proof of the veracity of the divine word."⁷ Likewise, Katheryn Pfisterer

⁴ Walther Eichrodt, *Ezekiel: A Commentary*, trans. Cosslett Quin, Old Testament Library (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1970), 75–76, cf. 72–73, 348–49, 457.

⁵ See also Joseph Blenkinsopp, *Ezekiel*, Interpretation (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1990), 31–32, 105, 150; William H. Brownlee, *Ezekiel 1–19*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 28 (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1986), 52–58, 93; William H. Brownlee, "Ezekiel's Parable of the Watchman and the Editing of Ezekiel," *Vetus Testamentum* 28, no. 4 (1978): 395–97; Keith W. Carley, *The Book of the Prophet Ezekiel*, Cambridge Bible Commentary: On the New English Bible (London: Cambridge University Press, 1974), 28, 168, 223; G. A. Cooke, *Ezekiel*, Biblical Studies: The Hebrew Bible (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2015), 46–48, 264–65, 367; Ronald M. Hals, *Ezekiel*, Forms of the Old Testament Literature, vol. 19 (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1989), 24–26, 174–75, 240; Bruce Vawter and Leslie J. Hoppe, *A New Heart: A Commentary on the Book of Ezekiel*, International Theological Commentary (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1991), 37–39, 115, 150; John W. Wevers, *Ezekiel*, Century Bible (London: Nelson, 1969), 56–59, 194, 253; cf. Thomas Renz's and Robert R. Wilson's unique Later Redactional Editing approaches to Ezekiel's muteness: Thomas Renz, *The Rhetorical Function of the Book of Ezekiel*, Supplements to Vetus Testamentum, vol. 76 (Leiden: Brill, 1999), 158–59; Robert R. Wilson, "An Interpretation of Ezekiel's Dumbness," *Vetus Testamentum* 22, no. 1 (1972): 93–94, 104; Robert R. Wilson, *Prophecy and Society in Ancient Israel* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1980), 283.

⁶ Daniel I. Block, *The Book of Ezekiel, Chapters 1–24*, New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1997), 158–59.

⁷ Daniel I. Block, *The Book of Ezekiel, Chapters 25–48*, New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1998), 256; Block elsewhere speaks of Ezekiel's sign

Darr sees Ezekiel's muteness and release functioning as part of an "agenda" to defend him from "charges of false, indeed, seditious prophecy."⁸ When Jerusalem falls, "the prophet's mouth will be opened, i.e., the fulfillment of his prophecies of judgment will demonstrate Ezekiel's authenticity."⁹

In a variation of this method, Thomas Renz finds that Ezekiel's mouth opening from muteness indicates, "He will engage more freely in conversation and he will have a greater confidence in speech News about the fall of Jerusalem will give the prophet a credibility Seen in this light, Ezekiel's dumbness is fundamentally connected with issues of credibility."¹⁰ Whether for his people, for himself, or for both, this approach stresses that Ezekiel's initial silence and later freedom convey his credibility and a confidence in his speech, and thus Ezekiel's muteness corresponds to his vindication as YHWH's true prophet.¹¹

when his muteness ends (Ezek 24:27) saying, YHWH "will vindicate his prophet by confirming his sign value for the nation." Block, *Ezekiel 1–24*, 795; cf. Block relating YHWH's giving Ezekiel an "openness of mouth" (פִּתְחוּן־פִּיָּה; Ezek 29:21) with Ezekiel's "prophetic status" being "unequivocally reaffirmed by Yahweh." Block, *Ezekiel 25–48*, 152–53.

⁸ Katheryn Pfisterer Darr, "Write or True? A Response to Ellen Frances Davis," in *Signs and Wonders: Biblical Texts in Literary Focus*, ed. J. Cheryl Exum, Semeia Studies (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 1989), 245. For Darr, Ezekiel's muteness serves to "address . . . the need to distinguish between true and false prophecy." Darr, "Write or True?," 241.

⁹ Darr, "Write or True?," 246. Here, she further characterizes this event as Ezekiel's "authenticity confirmed." Elsewhere, Darr associates Ezekiel's sign when his muteness ends (Ezek 24:27) with the fact that "Ezekiel's authenticity would be vindicated." Katheryn Pfisterer Darr, *The Book of Ezekiel*, in *The New Interpreter's Bible: General Articles & Introduction, Commentary, & Reflections for Each Book of the Bible, Including the Apocryphal/Deuterocanonical Books in Twelve Volumes*, vol. 6 (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2001), 1453; cf. Darr relating YHWH's giving Ezekiel "an opening of the mouth" (פִּתְחוּן־פִּיָּה; Ezek 29:21) with Ezekiel's gaining "a claim to be heard." Darr, *Ezekiel*, 1411.

¹⁰ Renz, *Rhetorical Function*, 159–60.

¹¹ See also Ralph H. Alexander, *Ezekiel*, Everyman's Bible Commentary (Chicago: Moody, 1976), 79, cf. 96; Ralph H. Alexander, *Ezekiel*, in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, vol. 7, *Jeremiah-Ezekiel*, ed. Tremper Longman III and David E. Garland, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 779, cf. 812–13; Lamar Eugene Cooper Sr., *Ezekiel*, New American Commentary, vol. 17 (Nashville: B&H, 1994), 240, 240n109, cf. 276; A. B. Davidson, *The Book of the Prophet Ezekiel: With Notes and Introduction*, ed. A. W. Streaton, rev. ed., Cambridge Bible for Schools and Colleges (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1916), 28–30, 194, 266, cf. 236; Gregory Yuri Glazov, *The Bridling of the Tongue and the Opening of the Mouth in Biblical Prophecy*, Journal for the Study of the Old Testament, Supplement Series 311 (Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001), 262, 267, 274, cf. 244; Moshe Greenberg, *Ezekiel 1–20: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, Anchor Bible, vol. 22 (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1983), 121; Moshe Greenberg, *Ezekiel 21–37: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, Anchor Bible, vol. 22A (New York: Doubleday, 1997), 512–13, cf.

Prophecy YHWH's Written Tradition

In a third method, Ellen F. Davis explains Ezekiel's muteness as a limitation signifying the shift to prophetic writing. For her, "Ezekiel's dumbness is a metaphor for the move toward textualization of Israel's sacred traditions; the figure stands over all that follows to designate this prophet's career as a critical juncture in the history of revelation."¹² Davis affirms that Ezekiel "talked with the people (24.18)" and showed "considerable verbal activity during the period of restriction," but "the representation of Ezekiel's call to prophecy suggests that he never functioned in a purely or even primarily oral mode."¹³ To rephrase, Ezekiel's call indicates that speech was not a dominant part of his prophetic ministry. Rather, his muteness symbolized that he wrote his prophecy.

In support of her claims, Davis supplies the following line of reasoning: (1) she highlights written prophecy's advance by the eighth century, (2) she touts Ezekiel's literate mind and education, his literate setting and addressees, and his advantage in using written address, (3) she observes that Ezekiel swallows YHWH's revelation "already *as a text* [emphasis original]" (Ezek 2:8–3:3), (4) she notes that Ezekiel is confined and goes on to employ developed literary techniques in his written prophecy, and (5) she thus explains that in being mute, "Ezekiel must fall 'silent' and let the scroll which he has swallowed speak through him. . . . Ezekiel is merely the vehicle of the divinely authored

616; Margaret S. Odell, *Ezekiel*, Smyth & Helwys Bible Commentary (Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys, 2005), 416–17; John W. Olley, *Ezekiel: A Commentary Based on Iezekiël in Codex Vaticanus*, Septuagint Commentary Series (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 247, 408, 466, cf. 445; Mark F. Rooker, *Ezekiel*, Holman Old Testament Commentary, vol. 17 (Nashville: Holman Reference, 2005), 173–74; Zimmerli, *Ezekiel 25–48*, 193–94, cf. 120–21; see also Rimon Kasher who implies that Ezekiel's muteness aids his vindication by drawing a crowd to hear his prophecies. Later, his silence will end since the crowd sees Ezekiel is God's prophet. Rimon Kasher, "Ezekiel's Dumbness: (Ez. 3:22–27): A New Approach / פרשת האלם בספר יחזקאל (27–22 ג, יח' ג)," *Beit Mikra: Journal for the Study of the Bible and Its World* / כתב-עת לחקר בית מקרא: כתב-עת לחקר (1998): 240–42; Walter R. Roehrs who cites and seems to sympathize with this approach. Walter R. Roehrs, "The Dumb Prophet," *Concordia Theological Monthly* 29, no. 1 (1958): 179–80; Paul M. Joyce who seems to generically link Ezekiel's functioning as a sign to his vindication. Paul M. Joyce, *Ezekiel: A Commentary*, T & T Clark Library of Biblical Studies (New York: T & T Clark, 2007), 168.

¹² Ellen F. Davis, *Swallowing the Scroll: Textuality and the Dynamics of Discourse in Ezekiel's Prophecy*, Journal for the Study of the Old Testament, Supplement Series 78, Bible and Literature Series 21 (Sheffield, England: Almond Press, 1989), 50.

¹³ Davis, *Swallowing the Scroll*, 37–38, 48.

text.”¹⁴ That is, Ezekiel’s muteness does not bar prophecy or reproof. It uniquely primes him to write, and in so doing, it inaugurates the era of YHWH’s written prophecy.¹⁵

Prophecy Only Doom

A fourth approach explains Ezekiel’s muteness as YHWH restricting Ezekiel to prophecies of doom. For instance, Ralph H. Alexander declares that Ezekiel was “muted by God except to announce the warnings of God’s judgments.”¹⁶ Once his speech is restored, Alexander asserts that Ezekiel is freed to proclaim messages emphasizing hope.¹⁷ Similarly, Moshe Greenberg states that Ezekiel’s muteness means he “could speak of nothing except this impending doom He felt struck dumb by God for any purpose but to recite the laments and moaning and woe that he was charged to announce. . . . [H]e could break his silence only to speak oracles of Judah’s doom.”¹⁸ And Greenberg notes that upon regaining his speech, Ezekiel then announced restoration.¹⁹

Those adopting this method also often contend that Ezekiel’s muteness serves to express doom-laden metaphorical meaning. For example, Alexander claims, “God’s alienation from Israel is reflected in these symbolic acts.”²⁰ Along these lines, Greenberg avers that Ezekiel’s silence and later restored speech convey God’s estrangement from Israel, followed by his turn back to his people.²¹ Whether a restraint on his message, a

¹⁴ Davis, *Swallowing the Scroll*, 30–45, 50–64, 70–71, 77ff; see also Ellen F. Davis, “Swallowing Hard: Reflections on Ezekiel’s Dumbness,” in Exum, *Signs and Wonders*, 220–30.

¹⁵ See also Henry McKeating who sympathizes with Davis’s approach. Henry McKeating, *Ezekiel*, Old Testament Guides (Sheffield, England: JSOT Press, 1993), 24.

¹⁶ Alexander, *Ezekiel*, 1976, 18, cf. 11; see also Alexander, *Ezekiel*, 2010, 674.

¹⁷ Alexander, *Ezekiel*, 1976, 79, 105–6; Alexander, *Ezekiel*, 2010, 779.

¹⁸ Moshe Greenberg, “On Ezekiel’s Dumbness,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 77, no. 2 (1958): 103–4, cf. 105; see also Greenberg, *Ezekiel 1–20*, 103; Greenberg, *Ezekiel 21–37*, 512, 514, 516.

¹⁹ Greenberg, *Ezekiel 1–20*, 121; Greenberg, *Ezekiel 21–37*, 513.

²⁰ Alexander, *Ezekiel*, 2010, 673.

²¹ Greenberg, *Ezekiel 1–20*, 120–21; Greenberg, *Ezekiel 21–37*, 513–14, cf. 516.

symbolic act, or both, those espousing this approach explain Ezekiel's muteness as a silence that limits him to communicating judgment.²²

Do Not Intercede

Another method entails explaining Ezekiel's muteness as a literal restriction on one of his prophetic functions—he may not intercede with YHWH on Israel's behalf.

This approach hinges on the following two claims. First, Israelite prophets typically interceded for Israel, as evidenced by Ezekiel's predecessors.²³ Second, the Hiphil of יכח verb form entails the lexical meaning “intercede” or “mediate,” and in context, YHWH's

²² See also Leslie C. Allen, *Ezekiel 1–19*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 28 (Dallas: Word Books, 1994), xxix, 58, 61–64; Leslie C. Allen, *Ezekiel 20–48*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 29 (Dallas: Word Books, 1990), 61, 63, 152; Block, *Ezekiel 1–24*, 796–97; Block, *Ezekiel 25–48*, 255; Carley, *The Book of the Prophet Ezekiel*, 223; Peter C. Craigie, *Ezekiel*, The Daily Study Bible (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1983), 25; Iain M. Duguid, *Ezekiel*, NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1999), 80–81, 316; Eichrodt, *Ezekiel*, 76, 348–50, 459–60; Patrick Fairbairn, *Ezekiel and the Book of His Prophecy: An Exposition*, 4th ed. (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1876), 269, 356–58; Fohrer, *Ezekiel*, 30, 241–42; Glazov, *Bridling of the Tongue*, 223–24, 236, 260, 263, 267–68, 274, 348, cf. 244, 252; Ralph W. Klein, *Ezekiel: The Prophet and His Message*, Studies on Personalities of the Old Testament (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1988), 9, 37–40; Millard C. Lind, *Ezekiel*, Believers Church Bible Commentary (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1996), 208–10; Renz, *Rhetorical Function*, 158; Rooker, *Ezekiel*, 53, 55, 166, 173–74, 211; Charles Sherlock, “Ezekiel's Dumbness,” *The Expository Times* 94, no. 10 (1983): 296, 296n11; Douglas K. Stuart, *Ezekiel*, Communicator's Commentary, Old Testament, vol. 18 (Dallas: Word Books, 1989), 244, 317; Nicholas J. Tromp, “The Paradox of Ezekiel's Prophetic Mission: Towards a Semiotic Approach of Ezekiel 3,22–27,” in *Ezekiel and His Book: Textual and Literary Criticism and Their Interrelation*, ed. J. Lust, Bibliotheca Ephemeridum Theologicarum Lovaniensium 74 (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1986), 209–11, cf. 203; Steven Tuell, *Ezekiel*, Understanding the Bible Commentary (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2012), 17–18, 160, 164–65, 228, 230; Wilson, “An Interpretation of Ezekiel's Dumbness,” 102, 104; Christopher J. H. Wright, *The Message of Ezekiel: A New Heart and a New Spirit*, Bible Speaks Today (Leicester, England: InterVarsity Press, 2001), 73, 212, 223–24; Hals who says Ezekiel's muteness ending helps create a “redactional device . . . functioning as the end of the collection of judgment material.” Hals, *Ezekiel*, 175; Vawter and Hoppe who link Ezekiel's muteness to having “no ‘gospel’ to proclaim” and his resumed speech to having new words of hope. Vawter and Hoppe, *Ezekiel*, 150–51, cf. 38, 115.

²³ Block, *Ezekiel 1–24*, 157n45, 797; Darr, *Ezekiel*, 1140, 1179–80; Duguid, *Ezekiel*, 81; Glazov, *Bridling of the Tongue*, 109, 120, 152, 159–60, 164–66, 170–75, 182, 184, 189–90, 201, 205–10, 214–18, 232–33, 246, 248, 269, 273, 318–21, 337, 340–47, 356; Joyce, *Ezekiel*, 82; Michael A. Lyons, *An Introduction to the Study of Ezekiel*, T & T Clark Approaches to Biblical Studies (London: Bloomsbury T & T Clark, 2015), 143–44; Odell, *Ezekiel*, 152; Lena-Sofia Tiemeyer, “Ezekiel: A Compromised Prophet in Reduced Circumstances,” in *Constructs of Prophecy in the Former and Latter Prophets and Other Texts*, ed. Lester L. Grabbe and Martti Nissinen, Ancient Near East Monographs 4 (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2011), 180–87, 194n72; Lena-Sofia Tiemeyer, “God's Hidden Compassion,” *Tyndale Bulletin* 57, no. 2 (2006): 191–206; Tuell, *Ezekiel*, 18, 165; Wilson, “An Interpretation of Ezekiel's Dumbness,” 101n1, 104; Wilson, *Prophecy and Society*, 150–51, 155–56, 165–66, 178–82, 201, 203–4, 206, 209, 215–16, 228, 238–41, 251, 267, 283–84, 301; Wright, *Ezekiel*, 73, 116–17; see also Marvin A. Sweeney who includes this aspect in Ezekiel's muteness but says Ezekiel's intercession aligns with Moses and Aaron for their common priestly role. Marvin A. Sweeney, *Reading Ezekiel: A Literary and Theological Commentary*, Reading the Old Testament (Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys, 2013), 37.

muting Ezekiel from being *אִישׁ מוֹכִיחַ* to Israel precluded him from acting as Israel's intercessor (Ezek 3:26).²⁴ Therefore, silencing Ezekiel prevented not reproof but prophetic appeal. This perspective appears to have influenced translators of the modern English version, the Christian Standard Bible, for they render YHWH's injunction as "you will be mute and unable to be a mediator for them" (Ezek 3:26 CSB).

Proponents will often support taking this approach with one or more of the following arguments: (1) Ezekiel's apparent intercession on Israel's behalf either fails or does not qualify as such (Ezek 9:8–10; 11:13–23), (2) YHWH refuses those pursuing prophetic inquiry (Ezek 14:1–11; 20:1–3, 31; cf. 8:1ff), (3) YHWH finds no intercessor despite Ezekiel's presence (Ezek 13:5; 22:30), and (4) YHWH again permits intercession after Ezekiel's muteness ends (Ezek 36:37–38).²⁵ To sum up then, Ezekiel was able to speak with and reprove Israel during his period of speechlessness, but YHWH silenced his capacity to intercede on their behalf.

²⁴ Alexander, *Ezekiel*, 2010, 673–74, 779; Block, *Ezekiel 1–24*, 151, 157–58, 797; Block, *Ezekiel 25–48*, 255; Corrine L. Carvalho, *The Book of Ezekiel*, in *New Collegeville Bible Commentary, Old Testament*, vol. 16, *Ezekiel, Daniel*, ed. Daniel Durken (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2012), 17; Darr, *Ezekiel*, 1137–40, 1453–54; Darr, "Write or True?," 245; Davis, "Swallowing Hard," 229; Davis, *Swallowing the Scroll*, 54–55, 136; Duguid, *Ezekiel*, 37, 80–81, 316; Glazov, *Bridling of the Tongue*, 224, 232–33, 259–60, 263, 272–73; Joyce, *Ezekiel*, 82, 84; Lyons, *Ezekiel*, 143–44; Odell, *Ezekiel*, 58, 58n7; Sherlock, "Ezekiel's Dumbness," 297n15; Lena-Sofia Tiemeyer, "Ezekiel: Book of," in *Dictionary of the Old Testament: Prophets*, ed. Mark J. Boda and J. Gordon McConville, IVP Bible Dictionary Series (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2012), 221; Tiemeyer, "Ezekiel: A Compromised Prophet in Reduced Circumstances," 188–90, 194; Tiemeyer, "God's Hidden Compassion," 191, 207–11; Tuell, *Ezekiel*, 18, 22, 164–65, 228, 230; Wilson, "An Interpretation of Ezekiel's Dumbness," 98–102, 104; Wright, *Ezekiel*, 73, 224; see also Cooper who sympathizes with this approach but prefers "advocate," "mediator," and "legal arbiter," over "intercessor." Cooper, *Ezekiel*, 88, 88n122; Sweeney who holds that Ezekiel's muteness bars intercession but without explicitly sourcing it to YHWH's prohibition on Ezekiel being an *אִישׁ מוֹכִיחַ*. Sweeney, *Ezekiel*, 37; Kelvin G. Friebel who agrees that YHWH's ban on being *אִישׁ מוֹכִיחַ* bars Ezekiel from intercession but sees this as "a distinct statement about the execution of the prophetic office" and not "an inclusive and metaphorical definition of the speechlessness . . . the two can be understood in a coordinated manner." Kelvin G. Friebel, *Jeremiah's and Ezekiel's Sign-Acts: Rhetorical Nonverbal Communication*, Journal for the Study of the Old Testament, Supplement Series 283 (Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999), 172–76, 186.

²⁵ Alexander, *Ezekiel*, 2010, 674; Davis, *Swallowing the Scroll*, 54, 58, 58n24; Duguid, *Ezekiel*, 416; Glazov, *Bridling of the Tongue*, 247, 259–60, 272; Joyce, *Ezekiel*, 83, 103, 123, 152, 206–7; Lyons, *Ezekiel*, 144; Odell, *Ezekiel*, 122, 157–58, 246–48; Tiemeyer, "Ezekiel: A Compromised Prophet in Reduced Circumstances," 190–93; Wilson, "An Interpretation of Ezekiel's Dumbness," 103–4; Wilson, *Prophecy and Society*, 283–84; Wright, *Ezekiel*, 73, 117; cf. Block, *Ezekiel 25–48*, 364.

Speak Only as YHWH's Messenger

Yet still others approach Ezekiel's muteness as a literal constraint on speech except when speaking as YHWH's messenger (Ezek 3:27). For example, John B. Taylor notes Ezekiel's "silence was not intended to be absolute: from time to time God would speak with the prophet and permit him to pass on a message to his people. . . . Ezekiel was to be known as nothing but the mouthpiece of Yahweh. When he spoke, it was because God had something to say; when he was silent, it was because God was silent."²⁶ Likewise, Charles Sherlock regards "Ezekiel's dumbness as quite real, qualified only by the permission of Yahweh to speak."²⁷ For these scholars, Ezekiel's muteness limits him from speech apart from delivering YHWH's message.²⁸

Significance

A brief evaluation of these approaches, however, reveals that each one contains substantive deficiencies. Using the same sequence, the following discussion evaluates each method's propositions and considers their associated implications.

²⁶ John B. Taylor, *Ezekiel: An Introduction and Commentary*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries, vol. 22 (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2009), 75–76, cf. 211.

²⁷ Sherlock, "Ezekiel's Dumbness," 298, cf. 297.

²⁸ See also Alexander, *Ezekiel*, 1976, 11, 18; Alexander, *Ezekiel*, 2010, 673–74; Block, *Ezekiel 1–24*, 156, 159–60, 796; Block, *Ezekiel 25–48*, 255; Carley, *The Book of the Prophet Ezekiel*, 29; Carvalho, *Ezekiel*, 17, 88; Cooper, *Ezekiel*, 87–89; Craigie, *Ezekiel*, 25–26; Darr, *Ezekiel*, 1139, 1454; Darr, "Write or True?," 245; Duguid, *Ezekiel*, 37, 80; H. L. Ellison, *Ezekiel: The Man and His Message* (London: Paternoster Press, 1956), 31–32, 98, 118; Fairbairn, *Ezekiel*, 44–45; Charles Lee Feinberg, *The Prophecy of Ezekiel: The Glory of the Lord*, 4th printing (Chicago: Moody Press, 1974), 30–31; Glazov, *Bridling of the Tongue*, 222; Greenberg, *Ezekiel 1–20*, 102–3, 121; Greenberg, "On Ezekiel's Dumbness," 103; Robert W. Jensen, *Ezekiel*, Brazos Theological Commentary on the Bible (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2009), 55, 205; Joyce, *Ezekiel*, 82; Kashner, "Ezekiel's Dumbness / פרשת האלם בספר יחזקאל," 240; C. F. Keil, *Ezekiel*, in *Commentary on the Old Testament*, vol. 9, *Ezekiel Daniel*, ed. C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, trans. James Martin (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2006), 10, 39, 200; Klein, *Ezekiel*, 38–39, cf. 9; Lind, *Ezekiel*, 44–46, cf. 247; Lyons, *Ezekiel*, 16, 88, 143–44, cf. 26; McKeating, *Ezekiel*, 24; Odell, *Ezekiel*, 416; Olley, *Ezekiel*, 256–58; Renz, *Rhetorical Function*, 65, 157–59; Roehrs, "The Dumb Prophet," 178, 184, cf. 179; Rooker, *Ezekiel*, 55; Stuart, *Ezekiel*, 50–51, 243–44, cf. 316; Sweeney, *Ezekiel*, 37; Tiemeyer, "Ezekiel: Book of," 218, 221; Tiemeyer, "Ezekiel: A Compromised Prophet in Reduced Circumstances," 188–89; Tiemeyer, "God's Hidden Compassion," 209–11; Tromp, "Paradox of Ezekiel's Prophetic Mission," 209–10, 212–13; Tuell, *Ezekiel*, 8, 17–18; Wilson, "An Interpretation of Ezekiel's Dumbness," 101, cf. 104; Wright, *Ezekiel*, 70, 72–73, 223; see also Friebe who agrees Ezekiel's muteness is suspended to prophesy, but it is not a "metaphor for speaking when God wanted him to." Friebe, *Jeremiah's and Ezekiel's Sign-Acts*, 174–75, cf. 183–85, 194; Davis who avers Ezekiel's dumbness means he must let YHWH's scroll speak through him. Davis, "Swallowing Hard," 229–30, 233; Davis, *Swallowing the Scroll*, 52, 56.

Later Redactional Editing

The approach claiming that redactors placed the onset of Ezekiel's muteness in chapter 3—detached from its presumed beginning near Jerusalem's fall—is unfounded. The first mention of muteness is YHWH's chapter 3 announcement that he would silence Ezekiel (Ezek 3:22–27), and this passage gives indications that it belongs with the earlier call material. For example, Block points out that “the adverb ‘there’ (*šām*, v. 22) ties the paragraph to the foregoing, and several motifs in the text echo what has been described in 1:4–3:15.”²⁹ Therefore, a natural reading of this passage recognizes that YHWH enacted Ezekiel's muteness at the time of chapter 3 and commensurate with his prophetic call.

Additionally, the book of Ezekiel mentions muteness only two other times outside of chapter 3 (Ezek 24:25–27; 33:21–22), and neither such passage indicates that YHWH muted Ezekiel at, in between, or near the time of these texts. The text preceding Ezekiel 24:25–27 does forbid expressions of bereavement (Ezek 24:16–17, 22–23), including by means of a kind of silence (דָּם; v. 17). Yet, this proscription does not initiate Ezekiel's muteness for multiple reasons. Namely, this silence occurred in context with Ezekiel's bereavement sign-act (Ezek 24:15–18), and it qualified not his speaking but his groaning or sighing (אָנָה; v. 17). Also, since YHWH ordered Ezekiel to explain his bereavement behavior shortly after he performed it (Ezek 24:20–24), this silence was short-lived and did not reflect an unbroken muteness continuing until its announced end at the fall of Jerusalem (Ezek 33:21–22). Furthermore, this silence employs a word stemming from a different verbal root than that which otherwise describes Ezekiel's muteness (דָּמָם; Ezek 24:17; cf. אָלַם; Ezek 3:26; 24:27; 33:22). Moreover, YHWH here commanded this silence of Ezekiel rather than imposed it upon him, as I will argue for the case of his muteness.

²⁹ Block, *Ezekiel 1–24*, 77, cf. 152; see also others who see commissioning themes and references in Ezekiel 3:22–27 and so tie it to Ezekiel's call: Allen, *Ezekiel 1–19*, 64; Craigie, *Ezekiel*, 25.

Regarding the only other reference to muteness in Ezekiel 33:21–22, YHWH here led up to its mention by repeating the watchman call and addressing Israel’s misconceptions, but again, he cited no onset of muteness (Ezek 33:1–20).³⁰ Ezekiel 24:25–27 and 33:21–22 do speak of Ezekiel being mute “not . . . again” (רִיב . . . אֵל; Ezek 24:27; 33:22). However, such language suggests not that Ezekiel’s muteness began here but that it was already in effect at the time of these texts.

To summarize these points, Ezekiel 24:25–27 and 33:21–22 and their contexts do not cite the onset of Ezekiel’s muteness, Ezekiel 24:27 and 33:22 imply his muteness was already in place, Ezekiel 3:26 contains the only other reference to muteness, Ezekiel 3:22–27 has links to the call narrative, and Ezekiel 3:26 announces the coming muteness. On such grounds, therefore, one may deduce that Ezekiel’s muteness began at the time of chapter 3 and continued until its declared end in chapter 33.³¹ Such a conclusion significantly undermines the Later Redactional Editing approach to explaining Ezekiel’s muteness.

Implications. For those embracing this method, several important implications result as well. First, it involves, as one scholar put it, “a desperate assumption that an originally continuous and eminently sensible arrangement . . . was thus violently destroyed by the work of later redactors.”³² In other words, if Ezekiel were truly muted sometime during the events of chapters 24–33, but later scribes located the onset of his muteness to chapter 3, then these redactors would have had to purposefully disassociate

³⁰ I take YHWH’s words here (Ezek 33:1–20) to immediately precede the siege survivor’s arrival and notice of Jerusalem’s fall (Ezek 33:21–22). See also Block, *Ezekiel 25–48*, 252; Keil, *Ezekiel*, 278–79.

³¹ See others who offer similar arguments: Friebel, *Jeremiah’s and Ezekiel’s Sign-Acts*, 181–83; Greenberg, *Ezekiel 1–20*, 102–3; Keil, *Ezekiel*, 39–40, 201.

³² Greenberg, “On Ezekiel’s Dumbness,” 102.

content from its natural point of origin with the result of introducing apparent textual discontinuity. Such an act appears highly unlikely.³³

Second, this approach undercuts the legitimacy of chronology in a prophetic book particularly marked by a date-based structuring. A recurring date formula serves to frame much of the material in the book of Ezekiel (Ezek 1:1–3; 8:1; 20:1; 24:1; 26:1; 29:1, 17; 30:20; 31:1; 32:1; 32:17; 33:21; 40:1). Granted, not all its passages proceed in sequential time order. For instance, an oracle dated to the eleventh year of King Jehoiachin’s exile (Ezek 26:1; cf. 1:1–2) precedes one dated to the tenth year (Ezek 29:1). Similarly, an oracle dated to the twenty-seventh year of Jehoiachin’s captivity (Ezek 29:17) precedes one dated to the eleventh year (Ezek 30:20). In these cases, the oracles against Tyre and Sidon along with those against Egypt stand together, suggesting that a thematic collection took priority over a chronological arrangement. Still, these collections do not suggest a broad disregard for the historical order of events in favor of thematic arrangements. Instead, the date formulae predominantly increment chronologically throughout the book of Ezekiel, and their frequent presence indicates when a text deviates from this order. Thus, for redactors to implement an unidentified break in a largely consistent chronology by placing Ezekiel’s muteness in chapter 3 would undermine what appears to be an intentional sequencing of events.³⁴

Finally, by asserting that Ezekiel 3:26 truly contradicts subsequent chapters of Ezekiel’s prophecy, this method associates an inconsistency of message with the very prophet who decried false prophets (Ezek 13; 14:9–10; 22:25, 28) and whom YHWH said

³³ See also comparable conclusions: “the removal of vv. 22–24a and 26d–27 from the call narrative as inauthentic is unwise.” Block, *Ezekiel 1–24*, 152; “it is not logical for a coherent original account to have been fragmented to the degree in which it is presently found in the texts.” Friebel, *Jeremiah’s and Ezekiel’s Sign-Acts*, 182; “This [approach] is quite arbitrary.” Keil, *Ezekiel*, 40; see also Davis who points out that despite Ezekiel’s charge to speak, muteness, and subsequent oracles, “the text itself acknowledges no contradiction.” Davis, “Swallowing Hard,” 218; Davis, *Swallowing the Scroll*, 48.

³⁴ See also Davis who observes that taking such an approach may come “at the expense of the text’s synchronic intelligibility.” Davis, “Swallowing Hard,” 219; Davis, *Swallowing the Scroll*, 50.

others would recognize as a credible prophet speaking his word (Ezek 2:5; 33:33). In that regard, Sherlock rightly observes that “if the idea of his dumbness was due to his followers, no amount of juggling will make it testify to the message being from God.”³⁵ That is, such disjointed ingenuity by redactors would sever Ezekiel from his identity as YHWH’s prophet, delivering YHWH’s true word. These implications cast further doubt on the Later Redactional Editing approach. Tellingly, even some who advocate for this method will describe it as speculative.³⁶ As a result, the Later Redactional Editing approach offers an unconvincing explanation for Ezekiel’s muteness.

Vindicate YHWH’s Prophet

The approach asserting that Ezekiel’s muteness and eventual liberation serve to authenticate him as YHWH’s true prophet also founders. First, if the end of Ezekiel’s muteness were meant to signal his true-prophet status, then why is its mention associated with the *divine recognition formula* (Ezek 24:27) instead of some sort of *prophet vindication formula*? The formula, “then they will know that a prophet was in their midst,” appears twice elsewhere in the book of Ezekiel and clearly connects Ezekiel’s prophetic action to affecting his vindication (Ezek 2:4–5; 33:30–33). Tagging the declared end of muteness and its sign in Ezekiel 24:27 with this formula would have made plain YHWH’s intent for Ezekiel’s release from silence to signify his prophetic vindication. However, tagging the announced end of muteness and its sign with the *divine recognition formula*—“then they will know that I am YHWH”—indicates the event sought to stimulate awareness of something specific to YHWH. Since a *prophet vindication formula* recurs in the book of Ezekiel but not with the stated end of Ezekiel’s muteness, and instead the *divine recognition formula* appears with it, the end of Ezekiel’s

³⁵ Sherlock, “Ezekiel’s Dumbness,” 296.

³⁶ Hals, *Ezekiel*, 26; Vawter and Hoppe, *Ezekiel*, 39.

muteness must convey knowledge about YHWH and thus not Ezekiel and his vindicated status.

Second, YHWH specified that Ezekiel's recognized authenticity would come not from his silence and later release but from his prophecies and their later fulfillment (Ezek 2:4–5; 33:30–33). Along these lines, when Israel expressed doubt about Ezekiel's credibility (Ezek 12:22, 27), YHWH said that he would address these doubts with fulfilled prophecy (Ezek 12:23–25, 28).³⁷ Furthermore, Ezekiel's meticulous prophecy dating demonstrates that his predictions predate their fulfillment and therefore invite an assessment of his legitimacy based on fulfilled prophecy.³⁸ Moreover, passages outside of the book of Ezekiel consistently describe fulfilled prophecy as that which authenticates YHWH's true prophet (Deut 18:20–22; Jer 28:9; cf. Num 16:28–30; 1 Sam 3:19–20; 9:6; 1 Kgs 22:28; 2 Kgs 1:10, 12; Zech 2:13 [9], 15 [11]; 4:9; 6:15; 2 Chr 18:27).

Third, if the end of Ezekiel's muteness were meant to signify his vindication for Israel or also for himself, one cannot be sure it had any effect. While Ezekiel drew Israel's interest after his muteness ceased (Ezek 33:30–32), this may have equally or even more likely resulted from his fulfilled prophecy concurrent with his newfound speech (Ezek 33:21–22). Additionally, Israel still approached Ezekiel as obliviously and cavalierly as they did during his speechlessness. One need only compare Israel's posture in Ezekiel 33:30–32 with their ignorance (Ezek 12:9; 21:12 [7]; 24:19), flippancy (Ezek 21:5 [20:49]), and presumptuousness (Ezek 14:1–3; 20:1–3, 30–31) while Ezekiel remained muted. Although scholars embracing this explanation will often grant this

³⁷ See also Carvalho, *Ezekiel*, 33; Hals, *Ezekiel*, 240.

³⁸ See others who offer this perspective: "The purpose of the precise dating . . . seems to have been to provide careful documentation as to the genuineness of the prophetic experience and so to eventually vindicate Ezekiel when his forecast came true." Allen, *Ezekiel 1–19*, 137; "Having the dates recorded meant that it could not be disputed that he had genuinely predicted these events in advance." Wright, *Ezekiel*, 97.

fact,³⁹ none go on to suggest that YHWH should again mute and free Ezekiel’s mouth to spur a greater recognition of his status. Instead, many also affirm the authenticating power of fulfilled prophecy,⁴⁰ and thus some even suggest that Ezekiel here awaits his vindication from further fulfilled prophecy.⁴¹ In so doing, they seem to tacitly concede that Ezekiel’s release from muteness does not represent his confirmed prophetic status. Furthermore, no evidence suggests that Ezekiel himself had more boldness or confidence in his speaking with his mouth opened from muteness than with his mouth muted. Block is correct that the passage describing the end of Ezekiel’s muteness and its sign function “leave[s] open in what respect Ezekiel would become a sign for the people” (Ezek 24:25–27),⁴² but Ezekiel’s freedom from speechlessness does not appear to confirm his prophetic status in any meaningful way. One could argue that if fulfilled prophecy were the sole means of prophetic vindication, then here too it seems to have had doubtful effect on Ezekiel’s audience. Yet, even in the face of Israel’s disappointing response, YHWH reassured Ezekiel that his vindication would come not with muteness and release but by further fulfilled prophecy (Ezek 33:33).⁴³

³⁹ See for instance Alexander, *Ezekiel*, 1976, 106; Alexander, *Ezekiel*, 2010, 832; Block, *Ezekiel 1–24*, 161; Block, *Ezekiel 25–48*, 266–68; Cooper, *Ezekiel*, 297–98; Darr, *Ezekiel*, 1459–60; Davidson, *Ezekiel*, 268; Greenberg, *Ezekiel 21–37*, 690–91; Kasher, “Ezekiel’s Dumbness / פרשת האלם / בספר יחזקאל,” 241–42; Odell, *Ezekiel*, 413, 418; Olley, *Ezekiel*, 466–68; Rooker, *Ezekiel*, 212–13; Zimmerli, *Ezekiel 25–48*, 201.

⁴⁰ See for instance Alexander, *Ezekiel*, 1976, 106–7, 137; Alexander, *Ezekiel*, 2010, 674, 700; Block, *Ezekiel 1–24*, 796; Block, *Ezekiel 25–48*, 254, 256, 265; Cooper, *Ezekiel*, 297; Darr, *Ezekiel*, 1123, 1344, 1455; Darr, “Write or True?,” 244–46; Davidson, *Ezekiel*, 17, 28–30, 194, 266, 268–69; Greenberg, *Ezekiel 21–37*, 514, 516, 681, 687; Joyce, *Ezekiel*, 196; Kasher, “Ezekiel’s Dumbness / פרשת האלם / בספר יחזקאל,” 241; Odell, *Ezekiel*, 40; Olley, *Ezekiel*, 466–68; Renz, *Rhetorical Function*, 102, 159–60; Rooker, *Ezekiel*, 39, 210–11; Zimmerli, *Ezekiel 25–48*, 194, 201–2.

⁴¹ See for instance Alexander, *Ezekiel*, 1976, 106–7; Block, *Ezekiel 25–48*, 267; Cooper, *Ezekiel*, 298; Darr, *Ezekiel*, 1455, 1459–60; Darr, “Write or True?,” 245; Greenberg, *Ezekiel 21–37*, 690; Olley, *Ezekiel*, 466–68; Rooker, *Ezekiel*, 213; Zimmerli, *Ezekiel 25–48*, 201–2.

⁴² Block, *Ezekiel 1–24*, 786; see also others who affirm the ambiguity in Ezekiel’s muteness: Cooper observes of Ezekiel 3:24–27, “Neither the purpose, the duration, nor the extent of these restrictions is here made clear.” Cooper, *Ezekiel*, 87; Friebel says, “the precise meaning of the behavior is not interpreted.” Friebel, *Jeremiah’s and Ezekiel’s Sign-Acts*, 186, cf. 193, 383–84, 416–17.

⁴³ Against claims that Ezekiel’s mouth opening in Ezekiel 29:21 (פתחון־פה) relates to his prophetic vindication and so suggests his mouth opening from muteness (פתח + פה; Ezek 33:22) signals his vindication, interpretations of פתחון־פה vary considerably, which implies such claims are not strong. Given

Fourth, while Ezekiel's release from muteness and his improving prophetic reputation do begin at the same time, this does not necessarily signify a tight, logical relationship in which one event is meant to evoke the other. The two events may have simply coincided.⁴⁴ Considering the several arguments outlined above, this alternative appears more plausible. On these grounds, Ezekiel's improved prophetic status neither results from the end of his muteness nor explains its meaning.

Implications. Several consequences become apparent for those who would invoke this method. First, this approach indicates that YHWH rather ambiguously instituted an additional means of confirming his prophet. Not only that, but in choosing this additional means, he would appear to have opted for one with dubious effect.

Second, this method implies that YHWH gave this means of prophetic authentication peculiarly to Ezekiel. While Ezekiel confronted a rebellious people and, at least in the eyes of his hearers, functioned as a prophet of uncertain authenticity, so also did his predecessors. For example, Jeremiah's audience was repeatedly described as rebellious (Jer 3:13; 4:17; 5:21–23; 6:28–30; 28:16; 29:32; 33:8), and they often disregarded his prophetic status and word (Jer 11:21; 18:18; 20:1–2; 26:7–11; 29:26; 36:5, 26; 37:13–15; 38:4–6). Nevertheless, Jeremiah maintained that fulfilled prophecy confirmed YHWH's true prophet (Jer 28:9). Moreover, none of Ezekiel's successors experienced this supposed means of prophetic authentication.

the commonalities between פתח־הוֹן־פֶּה and פֶּה + פתח along with the fact that פֶּה + פתח specifies a starting to talk (see chapter 4 discussion), it seems reasonable to view פתח־הוֹן־פֶּה as related to a starting to speak and not necessarily to prophetic vindication or a confidence in speech. Ludwig Koehler and Walter Baumgartner note that the הוֹ- ending "corresponds to Akk. -ānu indicating the enduring nature of the situation." Ludwig Koehler and Walter Baumgartner, *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*, ed. Johann Jakob Stamm, trans. M. E. J. Richardson (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1994), 3:989. This understanding suggests פתח־הוֹן־פֶּה may mean a continued state of speaking or initiating speech. Thus, פתח־הוֹן־פֶּה in Ezekiel 29:21 may simply specify Ezekiel's continued state of speaking or initiating speech and so not imply that his mouth opening from muteness signals his prophetic vindication or a confidence in speech.

⁴⁴ See Friebel, *Jeremiah's and Ezekiel's Sign-Acts*, 191.

Third, it unduly conflates two concurrent events—Ezekiel’s enhanced status and his release from muteness. In so doing, it incorrectly attributes prophetic vindication to Ezekiel’s muteness sign function, thus occluding the sign’s true meaning. All such repercussions further weaken this approach to explaining Ezekiel’s muteness and give sufficient cause to reject it.

Prophecy YHWH’s Written Tradition

The method claiming that Ezekiel’s muteness inaugurates YHWH’s written tradition is unpersuasive as well. First, despite Davis’s claims of a limited oral ministry, the book of Ezekiel chiefly characterizes Ezekiel’s prophecy as verbal and not written. For instance, YHWH described Ezekiel’s overall prophetic ministry as related to the mouth, ears, and words (לשון, שפה, שמע, דבר; Ezek 3:4–7; 33:30–32). Also, during the period of his muteness, the people’s actions toward Ezekiel suggest that they expected he could speak, for they both sat before him and questioned him (Ezek 8:1; 12:9; 14:1–4; 20:1–4; 21:12 [7]; 24:19).⁴⁵ Furthermore, the book of Ezekiel characterizes Ezekiel’s communication during his time of speechlessness as at least oral if not spoken. Specifically, YHWH commanded Ezekiel to “say,” “speak,” “cry out,” “make known,” “declare,” “preach,” “propound a riddle,” “utter a parable,” “groan,” “wail,” “raise a lamentation,” call others to “hear,” and “prophecy.”⁴⁶ Additionally, YHWH identified Ezekiel’s “prophesying” with his “saying,” “speaking,” “crying out,” “preaching,” and

⁴⁵ See Block, *Ezekiel 1–24*, 156; Friebe, *Jeremiah’s and Ezekiel’s Sign-Acts*, 180.

⁴⁶ YHWH told Ezekiel to “say” (אמר; Ezek 6:3, 11; 11:5, 16, 17; 12:10, 11, 19, 23, 28; 13:2, 11, 18; 14:4, 6; 16:3; 17:3, 9, 12 (2x); 19:2; 20:3, 5, 27, 30; 21:3 [20:47], 8 [3], 12 [7], 14 [9] (2x), 33 [28] (2x); 22:3, 24; 24:3, 21; 25:3; 27:3; 28:2, 12, 22; 29:3; 31:2; 33:2, 10, 11, 12), “speak” (דבר; Ezek 12:23; 14:4; 20:3, 27; 29:3; 33:2), “cry out” (זעק; Ezek 21:17 [12]), “make known” (ידע; Ezek 16:2; 20:4; 22:2), “declare” (נגד; Ezek 23:36), “preach” (נטף; Ezek 21:2 [20:46], 7 [2]), “propound a riddle” (חוד חידה; Ezek 17:2), “utter a parable” (משל משל; Ezek 17:2; 24:3), “groan” (אנח; Ezek 21:11 [6] (2x)), “wail” (ילל; Ezek 21:17 [12]; depending on the month of Ezek 32:17, perhaps נהה; Ezek 32:18), “raise a lamentation” (נשא קינה; Ezek 19:1; 27:2; 28:12), call others to “hear” (שמע; Ezek 6:3; 13:2; 16:35; 18:25; 21:3 [20:47]; 25:3), and “prophecy” (נבא; Ezek 4:7; 6:2; 11:4 (2x); 13:2, 17; 21:2 [20:46], 7 [2], 14 [9], 19 [14], 33 [28]; 25:2; 28:21; 29:2).

calling others to “hear.”⁴⁷ Moreover, Ezekiel “said,” “spoke,” “cried out,” “groaned,” became known as “a maker of parables,” and “prophesied” to others.⁴⁸ Albeit not without qualification, even Davis grants that Ezekiel’s prophesying meant “he speaks.”⁴⁹ Thus, the book of Ezekiel largely presents Ezekiel’s prophetic ministry—including during his muteness—as one of speaking.⁵⁰

Second, while YHWH did command Ezekiel to write (Ezek 24:2; 37:16, 20; 43:11), these instances are rare, and most of them occurred after Ezekiel’s muteness had passed. Consequently, they hardly qualify as initiating a text-based prophecy movement.

Third, Davis makes some valid points regarding writing and literary progress by Ezekiel’s day, but she exaggerates these as relevant to the meaning of Ezekiel’s muteness. Specifically, she is likely correct that Ezekiel’s circumstances were conducive for writing,⁵¹ she rightly observes that Ezekiel ate YHWH’s scroll as a text and was later muted (Ezek 2:8–3:3; 3:26), and she proves that Ezekiel’s prophecy exhibits remarkable

⁴⁷ YHWH identified Ezekiel’s “prophesying” (נבא) with “saying” (אמר; Ezek 6:2–3; 11:4–5; 13:2, 17–18; 21:2–3 [20:46–47], 7–8 [2–3], 14 [9] (2x), 33 [28] (2x); 25:2–3; 28:21–22; 29:2–3), “speaking” (דבר; Ezek 29:2–3), “crying out” (זעק; Ezek 21:14–17 [9–12]), “preaching” (נטף; Ezek 21:2 [20:46], 7 [2]), and calling others to “hear” (שמע; Ezek 6:2–3; 13:2; 21:2–3 [20:46–47]; 25:2–3).

⁴⁸ Ezekiel “said” (אמר; Ezek 4:14; 9:8; 11:13; 21:5 [20:49]; 24:20), “spoke” (דבר; Ezek 11:25; 24:18), “cried out” (זעק; Ezek 9:8; 11:13), “groaned” (אנח; Ezek 21:12 [7]), became known as “a maker of parables” (משל משלים; Ezek 21:5 [20:49]), and “prophesied” (נבא; Ezek 11:13; 12:27) to others. For the translation “a maker of parables” (משל משלים; Ezek 21:5 [20:49]), see Francis Brown et al., *The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon: With an Appendix Containing the Biblical Aramaic: Coded with the Numbering System from Strong’s Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2018), 605.

⁴⁹ Davis, *Swallowing the Scroll*, 82. She also says that Ezekiel’s prophecies are “uttered,” include “diatribe,” and entail a “way of speaking” and, more ambiguously, that they are a “performance” and letting “the scroll that he swallowed speak through him.” Davis, *Swallowing the Scroll*, 56–58.

⁵⁰ See similar perspectives: Daniel I. Block, review of *Swallowing the Scroll: Textuality and the Dynamics of Discourse in Ezekiel’s Prophecy*, by Ellen F. Davis, *Journal of Biblical Literature* 110, no. 1 (1991): 146; Friebel, *Jeremiah’s and Ezekiel’s Sign-Acts*, 17n13, 33, 184, 226, 226n343; Paul M. Joyce, review of *Swallowing the Scroll: Textuality and the Dynamics of Discourse in Ezekiel’s Prophecy*, by Ellen F. Davis, *Journal of Theological Studies* 42, no. 1 (1991): 171; Lyons, *Ezekiel*, 54–56.

⁵¹ Paul L. Redditt and William M. Schniedewind agree that writing burgeoned in the eighth century: Paul L. Redditt, “Editorial/Redaction Criticism,” in Boda and McConville, *Dictionary of the Old Testament: Prophets*, 171–72; William M. Schniedewind, *How the Bible Became a Book: The Textualization of Ancient Israel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 64, 67; see also Daniel 1:4, which supports the idea of a developed literary culture in Mesopotamia; Zimmerli finds that Ezekiel “undertook the secondary work of learned commentary upon and further elaboration of his prophecies, i.e., with a kind of ‘school activity.’” Zimmerli, *Ezekiel 1–24*, 71.

literary prowess and rhetorical technique. Nevertheless, none of these conditions require that Ezekiel's muteness signaled the move to prophetic writing. Other explanations remain equally possible, if not more plausible.

Implications. The effects of embracing Davis's approach are at least twofold. First, her approach underemphasizes Ezekiel's verbal prophecies despite their prominent presence throughout his period of speechlessness. Since YHWH stated that speaking of some sort would occur in conjunction with Ezekiel's muteness (Ezek 3:27), one should expect to find verbal communication as a conspicuous component of his muted ministry.

Second, her method undervalues the written workings of prophets preceding Ezekiel, such as Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Habakkuk (Isa 8:1, 16; 30:8; Jer 17:1; 29; 30:2; 36; 51:60–64; Hab 2:2). While Davis recognizes such activity, she maintains her position on the basis that "Ezekiel greatly exceeded his predecessors [I]t was through him that Israelite prophecy for the first time received its *primary* impress from the new conditions and opportunities for communication created by writing [emphasis original]."⁵² However, as others have mentioned, Ezekiel likely continued the tradition of producing both verbal and written prophecy, and Davis's claims like this one and others seem overstated and vague.⁵³ Such implications further diminish her method, and thus, Davis does not convince her audience that Ezekiel's muteness indicates the shift to prophetic writing.

Prophecy Only Doom

The approach stating that Ezekiel's muteness constrained him to prophesying doom has problems as well. First, while Ezekiel was silenced, he also preached varying

⁵² Davis, *Swallowing the Scroll*, 39.

⁵³ See similar such perspectives: Allen, *Ezekiel 1–19*, 40; Block, review of *Swallowing the Scroll*, 146; Darr, "Write or True?," 241–43; Feinberg, *Ezekiel*, 30; Michael H. Floyd, "Introduction," in *Prophets, Prophecy, and Prophetic Texts in Second Temple Judaism*, ed. Michael H. Floyd and Robert D. Haak, Library of Hebrew Bible/Old Testament Studies 427 (New York: T & T Clark, 2006), 13–15; Friebel, *Jeremiah's and Ezekiel's Sign-Acts*, 176; Joyce, *Ezekiel*, 79; Joyce, review of *Swallowing the Scroll*, 171; Zimmerli, *Ezekiel 1–24*, 137.

degrees of hope and salvation amidst his judgment oracles (Ezek 6:8–10; 11:14–21; 12:16; 13:21–23; 14:10–11; 16:53–63; 17:22–24; 20:33–44; 28:24–26; 33:10–20). Conversely, after Ezekiel’s muteness ended, he yet pronounced judgment messages against Israel and the nations (Ezek 33:23–29; 34:1–10; 35; 36:7; 38–39). Therefore, Ezekiel’s message content does not appear constrained to first doom followed by hope.

Second, since Ezekiel proclaimed ruin and salvation both in and after his muteness, Ezekiel’s silence and release would also not seem to symbolize a shift from a state of judgment to hope. Along these lines, though YHWH did hide his face from Israel in exiling and destroying some of them (Ezek 39:23–24, 29), he hardly appears withdrawn from the exiles during Ezekiel’s silent period and then present again after it ended. For example, YHWH manifested his presence in Babylon (Ezek 8:1–3; cf. 1:26–28), he dwelt with the exiles in a special way (Ezek 11:16), and he gave them numerous prophecies (Ezek 4–33) all during the period of Ezekiel’s muteness. Then, after unmuting his prophet, YHWH continued issuing prophecies to exilic Israel as before (Ezek 34–48). Accordingly, Ezekiel’s silence and later resumed speech would also not seem to symbolize a kind of divine estrangement followed by YHWH’s return.⁵⁴

Third, YHWH commanding Ezekiel to eat and speak his woe scroll (Ezek 2:8–3:4) or YHWH’s prerogative to ordain his prophet’s words (Ezek 2:4, 7; 3:10–11, 27) would more reasonably explain any constraint on Ezekiel’s message content than would his speechlessness. Said differently, better explanations exist for the limited subject matter that Ezekiel prophesied as a mute. Some who employ this method to explain Ezekiel’s muteness will also note one or more of these mentioned points.⁵⁵ As they do so, they seem to implicitly concede the weaknesses of this approach.

⁵⁴ See also Friebel, *Jeremiah’s and Ezekiel’s Sign-Acts*, 186, 190.

⁵⁵ See for instance Block, *Ezekiel 1–24*, 796–97; Block, *Ezekiel 25–48*, 255; Duguid, *Ezekiel*, 80–81, 383; Renz, *Rhetorical Function*, 156, cf. 65; Sherlock, “Ezekiel’s Dumbness,” 296–97; Wilson, “An Interpretation of Ezekiel’s Dumbness,” 94n1; Wright, *Ezekiel*, 73, 224.

Fourth, though Ezekiel predominantly delivered prophecies of judgment while silenced and then preached largely positive prophecies after his muteness ceased, this need not indicate a tight, causal linkage wherein the end of muteness is meant to signal his shift in prophetic messaging. Instead, the two events may have simply correlated.⁵⁶ Given the vulnerabilities of this method already outlined, this alternative appears more likely. As I will argue in chapter 4, Ezekiel's messages mainly of wrath while silenced and hope afterward do relate to his muteness sign. However, evidence from the book of Ezekiel suggests they do not supply the sign's representative meaning itself. Instead, they provide the general context in which the sign's meaning is situated. Thus, the explanation that Ezekiel's speechlessness limits his prophecy to doom remains unpersuasive.

Implications. The repercussions resulting from this approach include the following. First, this method overlooks prophetic messages that do not fit its schema and in so doing, it oversimplifies the nature of Ezekiel's prophecy. A nuanced representation of Ezekiel's prophetic content recognizes the full variety of his messages.

Second, this approach overly conflates two concurrent events—Ezekiel's release from muteness and his broad shift in message content. In so doing, it mistakenly views Ezekiel's messaging as the representative meaning of his muteness sign function and therefore misleads as to the sign's true significance. As with the prior explanations for Ezekiel's muteness, such implications further hinder one from invoking this approach.

Do Not Intercede

The method that claims Ezekiel's muteness restricted his prophetic intercession falters not in its first premise but in its second. Its first premise correctly affirms that Israelite prophets typically interceded on Israel's behalf. Its second premise incorrectly asserts that the Hiphil of יִכַּח verbal form—and thus מוֹכִיחַ in Ezekiel 3:26—entails the

⁵⁶ See Friebel, *Jeremiah's and Ezekiel's Sign-Acts*, 172, 191.

sense of to “intercede” or “mediate.” This approach offers a thoughtful but unconvincing attempt at resolving the apparent contradiction resulting from Ezekiel issuing many reproofs during the period in which YHWH had banned him from being *אִישׁ מוֹכִיחַ*.

Notably, Greenberg says that *מוֹכִיחַ* never carries the meaning of “‘intercessor’ . . . but only reprover, arbitrator, or judge.”⁵⁷ Likewise, Renz finds that “while it might be appropriate to think of an intercessor as an ‘arbiter,’ the root *יכח* seems to refer more specifically to arbitration by means of criticising, warning, or calling to account. *אִישׁ מוֹכִיחַ* nowhere carries the sense of ‘intercessor.’”⁵⁸ In chapter 4, I will conclude along lines similar to Greenberg and Renz.

Specifically, I will present a detailed word study showing that the lexical meanings “reprove” or “rebuke,” “judge” or “decide,” and “argue” sufficiently capture the semantic range of the Hiphil of *יכח* as used in the MT. In certain contexts, the Hiphil of *יכח* may acquire a secondary sense of “arbitration” as when a third party objectively rebukes, judges, or decides amidst others. However, it never connotes entreaty or supplication, it does not act with respect to personal interests or by taking one’s side, and it does not express the subjective sense of conciliating, reconciling estranged parties, or restoring friendly relations. As a result, construing *מוֹכִיחַ* in Ezekiel 3:26 to mean intercession or mediation like Israel’s prophets who petitioned YHWH on Israel’s behalf or worked to restore relations between Israel and YHWH exceeds semantic limitations.

I will also demonstrate in chapter 4 that *מוֹכִיחַ* in Ezekiel’s context does not carry the sense of third-party arbitration of judgment or decision but that of reproof. Thus, interpreting *מוֹכִיחַ* in Ezekiel 3:26 to mean arbitrate, as in adjudicating justice between Israel and YHWH, exceeds contextual warrant.

⁵⁷ Greenberg, *Ezekiel 1–20*, 102; see also Klein who affirms Greenberg making this point. Klein, *Ezekiel*, 38.

⁵⁸ Renz, *Rhetorical Function*, 158.

Moreover, other Hebrew roots that mean to “intercede” or “mediate” on another’s behalf occur throughout the HB. For example, HB writers will use פגע, עתר, and פלל to convey the sense of to “intercede.”⁵⁹ In his study of prophetic intercession, Samuel E. Balentine found that these roots, along with קרא, בקש, דרש, שאל, נשא תפלה, and עמד לפני יהוה all qualify as either “technical language of intercession” or “prayer language.”⁶⁰ Not once, however, did Balentine identify the Hiphil of יכח as belonging to either such category. Significantly, when banning Jeremiah from interceding, YHWH used this typical language of “pray” (פלל), “lift up a prayer” (נשא תפלה), “intercede” (פגע), and “stand before YHWH” (עמד לפני יהוה) multiple times (Jer 7:16; 11:14; 14:11; 15:1), and he did so not long before banning Ezekiel from being מוֹכִיחַ (Ezek 3:26). If YHWH meant to bar both Jeremiah and Ezekiel from intercession, his switch from typical to uncharacteristic language in a relatively short time span would be surprising. More likely, YHWH meant to prohibit something other than intercession by banning Ezekiel from being מוֹכִיחַ. Therefore, translating מוֹכִיחַ in Ezekiel 3:26 as a kind of “intercessor” or “mediator” remains unjustified and appears to be special pleading.

Further still, the supporting arguments given for this approach also do not persuade. First, Ezekiel does speak out on Israel’s behalf without any apparent constraint on his speech (Ezek 9:8; 11:13). Also, Ezekiel’s speech in such cases resembles that of prior prophetic intercession. For example, Abraham, Moses, Amos, and Jeremiah used questions to urge YHWH against his impending wrath (Gen 18:23–25, 28–32; Exod 32:11–13; Amos 7:1–2, 4–5; Jer 14:19–22; cf. Ezek 9:8; 11:13), and YHWH in turn both limited his wrath (Gen 19:15–23, 29; Exod 32:14; Amos 7:3, 6; cf. Ezek 9:11; 11:14–20)

⁵⁹ See the following intercession examples for these three roots: פגע (Gen 23:8; Isa 53:12; 59:16; Jer 7:16; 15:11; 27:18; 36:25); עתר (Gen 25:21; Exod 8:4 [8], 5 [9], 24 [28], 25 [29], 26 [30]; 9:28; 10:17, 18; 2 Sam 21:14; 24:25; Isa 19:22); פלל (Gen 20:7; Num 21:7; Deut 9:20; 1 Sam 2:25; 7:5; 12:19, 23; 1 Kgs 13:6; Jer 7:16; 11:14; 14:11; 29:7; 37:3; 42:2, 20; Ps 72:15; Job 42:10).

⁶⁰ Samuel E. Balentine, “The Prophet as Intercessor: A Reassessment,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 103, no. 2 (1984): 162–68.

while yet carrying out some measure of it (Gen 19:24–29; Jer 15:1; cf. Ezek 9:9–10; 11:21). Furthermore, numerous scholars describe Ezekiel’s speech here as intercession, intervention, or crying out on Israel’s behalf.⁶¹ Incidentally, Ezekiel elsewhere even appears to successfully intercede for himself and so persuade YHWH to take a different course (Ezek 4:14–15). Ezekiel does not seem at all limited in his ability to intercede.

Second, the elders did come to Ezekiel seeking YHWH, but they may have come for purposes other than prophetic intercession. For instance, they may have come to receive a vision, ask a question, or get an explanation (cf. Ezek 7:26; 12:9; 18:19; 21:12 [7]; 24:19; 33:10). Additionally, the text indicates that the elders unsuccessfully sought YHWH not because of Ezekiel’s speechlessness but because their idolatry provoked YHWH to reject them (Ezek 14:3; 20:3–4, 31). And had the elders come for intercession, but Ezekiel’s muteness prevented it, YHWH’s rebuttal would have been unnecessary (14:4ff; 20:4ff; cf. Ezek 8:1ff)—Ezekiel’s muteness would have sufficed to thwart them.

Third, YHWH did decry Israel’s lack of intercession (Ezek 13:5; 22:30), but he did not attribute the problem to Ezekiel’s muteness. Instead, YHWH assigned the blame to Israel’s false prophets (Ezek 13:2–4, 6–7) and the wicked yet remaining in Israel’s land (Ezek 22:23–29, 31).

Fourth, though YHWH expressed a willingness to hear Israel’s requests after Jerusalem fell (Ezek 36:37–38), it remains unclear whether this new enthusiasm resulted particularly from the end of Ezekiel’s muteness.

⁶¹ See for instance Allen, *Ezekiel 1–19*, 149, 163, 201; Blenkinsopp, *Ezekiel*, 58–59; Carley, *The Book of the Prophet Ezekiel*, 59–60, 68; Cooke, *Ezekiel*, 107–8, 123–24; Craigie, *Ezekiel*, 67–68; Davidson, *Ezekiel*, 68, 75, 78; Ellison, *Ezekiel*, 44, 47; Fairbairn, *Ezekiel*, 99, 111; Feinberg, *Ezekiel*, 57, 65; Greenberg, *Ezekiel 1–20*, 178, 188–89; Hals, *Ezekiel*, 56, 66; Jenson, *Ezekiel*, 84–85, 96; Keil, *Ezekiel*, 77, 86; Klein, *Ezekiel*, 59; Lind, *Ezekiel*, 82–83, 86, 210; Rooker, *Ezekiel*, 87, cf. 90; Stuart, *Ezekiel*, 94, 102; Taylor, *Ezekiel*, 104–5, 111; Vawter and Hoppe, *Ezekiel*, 71, 75; Wevers, *Ezekiel*, 86, 95; Zimmerli, *Ezekiel 1–24*, 249.

Finally, some who claim that Ezekiel's muteness precluded his ability to intercede will also acknowledge one or more of these points noted above.⁶² In so doing, they weaken support for this approach to explaining Ezekiel's muteness. Therefore, the explanation that Ezekiel's muteness bans prophetic intercession remains unconvincing.

Implications. Adhering to this method results in the following implications. First, to make its points, this method requires meaning foreign to both the Hebrew words used and the book of Ezekiel. Namely, it asserts a sense for the Hiphil of יכה that exceeds semantic range limitations. It also posits reasons for the elders' approach, for YHWH's rejecting the elders, for YHWH's not finding an interceding prophet, and for YHWH's again hearing Israel's request that remain unspecified by or in conflict with the text.

Second, it implies a contradiction exists in the book of Ezekiel by claiming that Ezekiel cannot intercede for Israel while he is mute even though he plainly petitions on their behalf (Ezek 9:8; 11:13). These implications also detract from accepting this approach. Consequently, one may conclude that a ban on prophetic intercession does not suitably explain Ezekiel's muteness.

Speak Only as YHWH's Messenger

The method arguing that Ezekiel's muteness limits him to speaking only as YHWH's messenger has the most merit of all the approaches. It offers plain readings of Ezekiel's tongue binding and the apparent periodic stay on his speechlessness for oracle delivery (Ezek 3:26–27). As I will argue, YHWH does qualify Ezekiel's muteness using language that may mean intermittent prophesying.

⁶² See for instance Alexander, *Ezekiel*, 1976, 18–19, 29, 32–33, 37, 49, 64–65, 67–68, 72–73; Alexander, *Ezekiel*, 2010, 674, 695, 714, 745, 752; Block, *Ezekiel 1–24*, 385, 424–26, 618–20; Block, *Ezekiel 25–48*, 265, 364; Cooper, *Ezekiel*, 119, 128, 141, 159, 200, 206, 224; Darr, *Ezekiel*, 1174, 1179–80, 1205, 1276, 1286; Davis, "Swallowing Hard," 229; Davis, *Swallowing the Scroll*, 37–38, 58n24, 60; Duguid, *Ezekiel*, 130–31, 135, 150, 183, 259–60, 263; Joyce, *Ezekiel*, 123; Lyons, *Ezekiel*, 26, 122, 149, 169, 171; Odell, *Ezekiel*, 101, 125, 173, 244, 247–48, 256; Sweeney, *Ezekiel*, 54, 62, 68, 78, 103, 106; Tiemeyer, "Ezekiel: A Compromised Prophet in Reduced Circumstances," 190–92; Tuell, *Ezekiel*, 45, 50, 58, 76–77, 127, 132; Wright, *Ezekiel*, 116–18, 123, 161–62.

Still, this approach has several deficiencies. First, it does not seem that Ezekiel may speak only YHWH's word or only at YHWH's command. Ezekiel also occasionally speaks his own thoughts unprompted by YHWH (Ezek 4:14; 9:8; 11:13; 21:5 [20:49]). As a result, his muteness does not limit him to uttering simply YHWH's message.

Second, this method inadequately explains the accompanying language serving to qualify Ezekiel's muteness. Namely, as part of his speechlessness, YHWH prohibited Ezekiel from being *אִישׁ מוֹכִיחַ* (Ezek 3:26). Yet, if *אִישׁ מוֹכִיחַ* does not mean "intercessor" or "mediator," what then does it mean? Many who explain Ezekiel's muteness as limiting him to speak only for YHWH will render it as a "reprover" of sorts; however, these scholars will then only vaguely clarify its meaning with consideration for both YHWH's ban on Ezekiel being *אִישׁ מוֹכִיחַ* and Ezekiel's subsequent reproof.⁶³

In one of the more detailed treatments, Nicholas J. Tromp asserts that Ezekiel is not to be "a reproving man No prophet any more which might talk them out of their disastrous ways somebody who reproves and in that way attempts to bring about the conversion of his audience. . . . influencing the others in view of a reform of life. . . . There is no summons to conversion any more."⁶⁴ Tromp offers an intriguing

⁶³ Descriptions regarding the meaning of not being *אִישׁ מוֹכִיחַ* include the following: not being "a direct reprover to the whole nation" (Alexander, *Ezekiel*, 1976, 19); not "speaking to the nation in reproof or even to God as their advocate. . . . speaking on Israel's behalf or reproving Israel with the view of restoring covenant promises" (Cooper, *Ezekiel*, 88, 88n122); implied as not to "denounce Israel's sin in order to bring them to the place of blessing under God's prospering hand" (Feinberg, *Ezekiel*, 192); not to "fill the role of a reprover—one who reproaches wrongdoers with their wickedness and calls on them to mend their ways. A public censor—the reprover in the gate' He evidently fulfilled, on a communal scale, the religious injunction of Lev 19:17 Prudence admonishes the zeal of the reprover in Prov 9:7f" (Greenberg, *Ezekiel 1–20*, 102); not speaking "as a public censor, admonishing them on his own" (Greenberg, *Ezekiel 21–37*, 682); not being "a reprover in the gate" (Kasher, "Ezekiel's Dumbness / פֶּרֶשֶׁת הָאֵלֶּם בְּסִפּוֹר יְחֻקָּאֵל," 239). My translation; to "not even correct them with words 'no reprover' . . . place their sins before them to no greater extent, and in no other way, than God expressly directs him" (Keil, *Ezekiel*, 39–40); "preventing him from offering reproof to the rebellious house" (Klein, *Ezekiel*, 38); not speaking as "a participant in a legal process . . . on his own initiative," including as an "arbiter" or "accuser" (Olley, *Ezekiel*, 258); being unable "to act as a reprover" (Renz, *Rhetorical Function*, 159); being unable to "*on his own* criticize [emphasis original]" (Stuart, *Ezekiel*, 51); see also Fairbairn who does not overtly tie it to the ban on being an *אִישׁ מוֹכִיחַ* but says Ezekiel must forgo "all remonstrance . . . warnings . . . counsels . . . disclosure of the people's sins, and the revelation of the Lord's judgments. . . . to impress on men's minds the necessity and the nearness of the Divine retribution" (Fairbairn, *Ezekiel*, 269).

⁶⁴ Tromp, "Paradox of Ezekiel's Prophetic Mission," 201, 210–12.

interpretation, and he is correct in that compared with Israel's other prophets, Ezekiel appears to deliver fewer sermons overtly meant to elicit repentance. Yet, even in his muteness, Ezekiel rebuked with an eye toward motivating repentance.

For example, Ezekiel presaged Jerusalem's expulsion, declared her exile, and called her out as a people of "abominations" in the sight of the exiles because YHWH said, "Perhaps they will understand" (Ezek 12:1–16, esp v. 3). Such language resembles Jeremiah's similar approach to prompting repentance (Jer 26:3; 36:3, 6–7). Later, Ezekiel decried idolatry and unjust ways as well as made blatant calls for repentance to the exiles (Ezek 14:1–6, esp v. 6; 18:1–32, esp vv. 30–32; 33:10–20, esp v. 11). Ezekiel also confronted sin that led his hearers away from listening and turning from their evil ways (Ezek 13, esp v. 22; 20:33–44, esp v. 39). And throughout Ezekiel's muted ministry, he pronounced judgment and salvation aimed at prompting heart change (Ezek 6:8–10; 11:16–21; 12:16; 14:4–5, 7–11, 21–23; 16:53–63; 21:11–12 [6–7], 19–20 [14–15]; 22:14–16; 23:27, 48). Since YHWH ordered his mute prophet to speak this way, YHWH implied he meant for Ezekiel's muted messages to evoke heart change in the exiles. In other words, YHWH intended his speechless prophet to reprove the exiles or at least reprove others in their presence so that the exiles might then recognize their own situation and live out of changed hearts and minds. Notably, all such prophesying aligns with Ezekiel's watchman call to warn apostates that they might take heed and live, for warning a sinner inherently involves reproof and calls for repentance (Ezek 3:16–21, esp v. 18, 21; cf. 33:1–9, esp v. 5). Thus, *אִישׁ מוֹכִיחַ* would not seem to mean "a reproofing man" as Tromp conceives of it, since even when silenced, Ezekiel rebuked and sought to prompt repentance.

Additionally, if Ezekiel were permitted to reprove while muted just because YHWH would open his mouth on occasion (Ezek 3:27), then why even qualify Ezekiel's muteness with the prohibition on being *אִישׁ מוֹכִיחַ*? The question remains: what is the nature and significance of YHWH muting Ezekiel from being *אִישׁ מוֹכִיחַ* (Ezek 3:26)?

Other inadequately addressed language includes כִּי in Ezekiel 3:26 and מוֹפֵת in Ezek 24:27. כִּי in Ezekiel 3:26 marks the relationship between Israel’s rebelliousness (בֵּית מְרֵי הַמָּה) and Ezekiel’s muteness. However, what relationship does כִּי indicate in this verse, how ought one then translate כִּי here, and what does this relationship reveal about Ezekiel’s muteness? Often without much justification, many espousing this approach will acknowledge the translation “for,” “because,” “since,” or “due to” and so recognize a causal relationship.⁶⁵ However, כִּי is a polysemous word with a diverse semantic range, and a non-causal use may yield a different interpretation of the connection between Israel’s rebelliousness and Ezekiel’s muteness. To clarify in what way the two relate requires investigating the precise meaning of כִּי in Ezekiel 3:26.

Lastly, YHWH stated that at Ezekiel’s release from muteness, he would become a sign of sorts (מוֹפֵת; Ezek 24:27). Such language reveals that his speechlessness must entail a symbolic aspect as well. Yet, if it does not signify prophetic vindication, a turn to prophecy writing, or YHWH’s judgment and withdrawal followed by his later hope and return, what does it mean? Others who invoke this approach to Ezekiel’s muteness suggest the sign indicates something about YHWH or a kind of model for Ezekiel’s hearers,⁶⁶ but few offer much explanation. Thus, this aspect of Ezekiel’s muteness also requires careful consideration.

⁶⁵ Block, *Ezekiel 1–24*, 151, 156; Craigie, *Ezekiel*, 24; Darr, *Ezekiel*, 1137, 1139, 1454; Fairbairn, *Ezekiel*, 40, 44, 269; Glazov, *Bridling of the Tongue*, 238, 259, 273; Greenberg, *Ezekiel 1–20*, 98, 102; Keil, *Ezekiel*, 38–39; Olley, *Ezekiel*, 73, 257; Renz, *Rhetorical Function*, 135, cf. 121; Roehrs, “The Dumb Prophet,” 176; Tromp, “Paradox of Ezekiel’s Prophetic Mission,” 201, 210–11; Wilson, “An Interpretation of Ezekiel’s Dumbness,” 98; Jenson implies causal כִּי. Jenson, *Ezekiel*, 55; see also Stuart who presents the translation “for” while saying that Ezekiel cannot be a reprover “even though” they are rebellious. Stuart, *Ezekiel*, 49, 51; Tuell who presents the translation “though” while arguing “not *despite* the fact that they are a rebellious house, but *because* they are a rebellious house [emphasis original].” Tuell, *Ezekiel*, 17; see also others who accept “though”: Alexander, *Ezekiel*, 2010, 673; Carley, *The Book of the Prophet Ezekiel*, 28; Cooper, *Ezekiel*, 86; Duguid, *Ezekiel*, 77.

⁶⁶ Carley, *The Book of the Prophet Ezekiel*, 28; Carvalho, *Ezekiel*, 65–66; Cooper, *Ezekiel*, 240; Craigie, *Ezekiel*, 185; Darr, *Ezekiel*, 1453; Davis, *Swallowing the Scroll*, 83–84; Friebel, *Jeremiah’s and Ezekiel’s Sign-Acts*, 185–95; Joyce, *Ezekiel*, 85; Keil, *Ezekiel*, 201; Lyons, *Ezekiel*, 79, 92–93; Renz, *Rhetorical Function*, 91–92, 150–60, cf. 65; Sweeney, *Ezekiel*, 125; Taylor, *Ezekiel*, 180; Tiemeyer, “Ezekiel: A Compromised Prophet in Reduced Circumstances,” 190.

Implications. Invoking this method results in the following repercussions.

First, the approach commends great interest for its plain readings and interpretations of the text. However, its overly broad, underdefined, and incomplete explanations suggest that clarity and reconciliation of the evidence for certain aspects of Ezekiel's muteness remain evasive.

Second, depending on how one interprets *אִישׁ מוֹכִיחַ*, this method may imply a contradiction in the book of Ezekiel, for it may claim that Ezekiel cannot act as a reprover of sorts while muted even though he clearly reproved his people during that time.

Without a satisfactory approach to explaining Ezekiel's muteness, a fresh consideration of the evidence is in order. I do not aim to propose a brand-new solution. Instead, I intend to follow and advance this last position by answering its open questions. In so doing, I mean to offer a consistent, comprehensive, and thus compelling explanation of Ezekiel's muteness. In the subsequent chapter, I begin this process by looking at Ezekiel's prophetic predecessors and so lay the contextual foundation for arguing my explanation of Ezekiel's speechlessness.

CHAPTER 3

EZEKIEL'S LITERARY-THEOLOGICAL ANTECEDENTS

Israel's prophets exhibited deep social entanglement. They interacted with society leaders, personal associates, and the broader public. They also spoke out against unchecked rebellion plaguing these spheres. Whether simply stating their divine rebukes or making a lifestyle out of reproving, Israel's prophets confronted their hearers. As I will contend, Ezekiel's muteness radically curtailed his social expression from that of Israel's typical prophet. What background information provides context for arguing such a perspective?

Moses, Nathan, and Jeremiah preceded Ezekiel and held his same prophetic office. They did not, however, experience his muteness. As Ezekiel's literary-theological antecedents without his speech limitation, these prophets and their ministries supply relevant context with which to compare Ezekiel and his tongue-tied ministry.

Specifically, an examination of these three prophets reveals that each communicated through formal prophesying in conjunction with informal, non-prophetic dialogue. It also illustrates that as a part of their prophecy, all three rebuked others, with Jeremiah's whole life centering on reproof. And viewed together, their formal speech and reproof alongside ordinary speaking throughout their ministries show that Israel's prophets normally engaged in all such forms of speech. Comparing Ezekiel's speech with that of these forerunners will bring into relief the nature of his muteness. As I will maintain, Ezekiel's muteness permitted formal speech and reproof but barred him from all informal dialogue and a reproving lifestyle, or manner of life, toward his hearers.

Furthermore, a look at these three prophets shows that their ministries have

special significance regarding prophetic speech. Moses and Jeremiah feared their vocation and claimed a speech problem to avoid it. YHWH's reply to each reveals that he assists weak prophets in their call, even if by divinely supplying his words. Additionally, Moses and Nathan each misspoke and faced correction for their wrong speech. Moreover, although Jeremiah spoke faithfully, his hearers refused his rigorous prophetic reproof. Comparing Ezekiel's speech experience to that of these predecessors will clarify the significance of Ezekiel's silence. As I will argue, Ezekiel's muteness ensured that he spoke YHWH's word alone, when required, and with a measured message, manner, and behavioral model. Muteness thus equipped Ezekiel for pure prophesying, mercifully aimed at receptivity. It also staged him in unique theological succession to prior prophets.

To support these claims, I will first in this chapter present snapshots of Moses, Nathan, and Jeremiah's communications and so provide the seedbed from which to draw out the nature of Ezekiel's muteness. I will spotlight select speech events from the prophets' ministries and identify each event as involving either formal or informal speech. I will not consider every instance of a prophet's communication but will offer a broad sampling as representative of their ministry landscape. I will locate each speech event alongside simple headings that describe the prophet's basic purpose in communicating. Under these headings, I will briefly summarize each event and support its classification as formal or informal speech using evidence from the event itself.

Here, I will employ the characteristic markers of formal prophecy as outlined in chapter 1. In particular, the presence of such formal speech markers amidst a prophet's messaging without contravening evidence suggests that he communicates in his official capacity. Conversely, the lack of these formal speech markers in a prophet's messaging with evidence of casual correspondence implies that he communicates in an informal, non-prophetic fashion. Observing non-prophetic, everyday speech will sometimes entail highlighting incidental textual details and so seem to focus on the mundane. Still, recognizing the presence of ordinary dialogue satisfies the purpose of showing that non-

muted prophets had freedom to converse with their community.

Therefore, in first examining Moses, Nathan, and Jeremiah's communications, I have a modest goal. I do not mean to precisely characterize the varied roles of each prophet and so contribute to the discussion on Israel's prophets' societal roles and functions.¹ Neither do I aim at strictly compartmentalizing ordinary speech into specific non-prophetic roles that a prophet may otherwise fulfill. Instead, I merely seek to recognize that Israel's prophets typically engaged in degrees of formal speech and reproof along with informal dialogue in their community.

Lastly in this chapter, I will highlight experiences from Moses, Nathan, and Jeremiah's prophetic ministries that provide the backdrop from which to draw out the implications of Ezekiel's muteness. I will note instances wherein prophets expressed fear in response to their prophetic duty—particularly on account of claimed speech hindrances—along with YHWH's reply to these prophets. I will also cite cases in which a prophet spoke in error. After that, I will observe the reaction of rebellious hearers to fervent prophetic rebuke. Finally, I will summarize and offer conclusions.

Moses's Communications

First, Moses conveyed a variety of communications during his ministry. As leader and prophet to the new nation of Israel, he lived a life deeply intertwined with his

¹ See the following for some examples of this: Joseph Blenkinsopp, *A History of Prophecy in Israel*, rev. and enl. ed. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1996); R. P. Carroll, "Prophecy and Society," in *The World of Ancient Israel: Sociological, Anthropological, and Political Perspectives: Essays by Members of the Society for Old Testament Study*, ed. Ronald E. Clements (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 203–25; Lester L. Grabbe, "Prophets, Priests, Diviners and Sages in Ancient Israel," in *Of Prophets' Visions and the Wisdom of Sages: Essays in Honour of R. Norman Whybray on His Seventieth Birthday*, ed. Heather A. McKay and David J. A. Clines, *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament*, Supplement Series 162 (Sheffield, England: JSOT Press, 1993), 43–62; Victor H. Matthews, *The Hebrew Prophets and Their Social World: An Introduction*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2012); Victor H. Matthews, "Prophecy and Society," in *Dictionary of the Old Testament: Prophets*, ed. Mark J. Boda and J. Gordon McConville, IVP Bible Dictionary Series (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2012), 623–34; Andrew D. H. Mayes, "Prophecy and Society in Israel," in McKay and Clines, *Of Prophets' Visions and the Wisdom of Sages*, 25–42; David L. Petersen, *The Roles of Israel's Prophets*, *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament*, Supplement Series 17 (Sheffield, England: JSOT Press, 1981); Robert R. Wilson, *Prophecy and Society in Ancient Israel* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1980).

community. Moses's ministry shows that he interacted with diverse members of his society, including leadership, lay people, national neighbors, and personal associates, and his exchanges consisted of official and everyday speech.

Formal Speech

Shortly after his commissioning, Moses uttered divine messages to foreign powers, the people of Israel, and Israel's leaders.

Deliver Israel. For instance, Moses began speaking as YHWH's prophet to deliver Israel from Egypt's bondage (Exod 4–12), and many features of his speeches mark them as formal. First, Moses consulted with YHWH, and YHWH in turn prompted him to confront Egypt's Pharaoh (Exod 5:22–6:13; 6:29–7:2). Second, Moses's call to speak and his actual words to Pharaoh entailed basic prophetic speech forms or similar language, including the *commissioning formula* (Exod 4:19–22; 6:11; 7:15–16, 26 [8:1]; 8:16 [20]; 9:1, 13; 10:1) and *messenger formula* (Exod 4:22; 5:1; 7:17, 26 [8:1]; 8:16 [20]; 9:1, 13; 10:3; 11:4). Third, YHWH commanded Moses to speak for him, and Moses regularly did so in the first person (Exod 4:22–23; 5:1, 23; 6:29; 7:2, 16–17; 7:26–27 [8:1–2]; 8:16–19 [20–23]; 9:1, 13–18, 35; 10:3–4; 11:4). Fourth, Moses foretold future events accompanied by supernatural signs (Exod 4:23; 7:17–21; 7:27–8:2 [8:2–6]; 8:17–20 [21–24]; 9:2–6, 14, 18–26; 10:4–6, 12–15; 11:4–10; 12:29–30). Fifth, Moses's speech was associated with YHWH's word (Exod 9:20–21). Sixth, Moses discussed intercession with Pharaoh and pleaded with YHWH for Pharaoh and Egypt (Exod 8:4–9 [8–13], 24–27 [28–31]; 9:28–33; 10:17–19). While delivering Israel from bondage, therefore, Moses spoke as YHWH's prophet.

Instruct Israel. Following liberation from Egypt, Moses would also formally instruct Israel. For example, he declared YHWH's teaching on consecrating Aaron and his sons, the Sabbath and jubilee years, treating property and the poor, various vows, and

Levite duties (Lev 8; 25–27; Num 4). These speech events specify that YHWH voiced his word to Moses (Lev 8:1; 25:1; 27:1; Num 4:1) and that the teaching then came to Israel “by the hand of Moses” (Lev 8:36; 26:46; Num 4:37, 45, 49)² or to “Moses for the sons of Israel” (Lev 27:34). As YHWH gave instruction, then, Moses officially taught Israel.

Adjudicate Israel’s conflicts. Moses would deliver divine words when handling disputes too. For instance, when a boy blasphemed YHWH, when unclean men longed to keep the Passover, when a man broke the Sabbath, and when Zelophehad’s daughters doubted their welfare, Moses addressed the issues with YHWH’s word (Lev 24:10–23; Num 9:6–14; 15:32–36; 27:1–11; 36:1–12). These cases specify or imply that Moses consulted YHWH (Lev 24:12; Num 9:8; 15:33–34; 27:5), that YHWH told Moses his word on the matter (Lev 24:13–22; Num 9:9–14; 15:35; 27:6–11; 36:2, 10), and that Moses relayed it to Israel (Lev 24:23; Num 15:36; Num 36:2, 5–9). Elsewhere, Moses himself said that it was his practice to resolve Israel’s disputes by seeking YHWH and making known his will (Exod 18:13–16).³ Thus, Moses’s conflict consultations came by way of his prophetic office.

Rebuke Israel. Moses would reprove Israel and its leadership by YHWH’s word as well. In one case, some had disregarded YHWH’s decree to rest on the Sabbath, and so Moses heard word from YHWH and issued a formal reprimand (Exod 16:4–5, 22–30). YHWH’s denouncing Israel to Moses for their failure to rest coupled with the people’s subsequent resting on the Sabbath indicates that Moses passed along YHWH’s

² See other instances of the phrase “by the hand of Moses” used to signify Moses’s speaking as YHWH’s prophet (Exod 9:35; 35:29; Lev 10:11; Num 9:23; 10:13; 15:23; 17:5 [16:40]; 27:23; 33:1; 36:13).

³ Moses also consulted and returned on word from YHWH about Israel’s quarreling at Massah and Meribah (Exod 17:1–7; Num 20:1–11) and perhaps the Transjordan settlement (Num 32, esp vv. 28–31).

rebuke (Exod 16:30).⁴ In other words, Moses levied YHWH's sanctioned reproof.

In another case, after war with Midian, Moses scolded Israel's army officers for letting Midian's women live, and he commanded them to kill all boys and non-virgin women but let the virgin women live (Num 31:1–18). Since YHWH had ordered Israel to avenge Midian because its women seduced Israel (Num 31:1–4; cf. Num 25), and letting Midian's women and boys live failed to redress that offense, Moses's order rectified the botched fulfillment of YHWH's order. In that regard, he spoke with divine authority.

Intercede for Israel. Lastly, Moses would speak formally among Israel to intercede for them. For example, in the matter of the golden calf, Moses announced his intent to seek atonement, and he pleaded with YHWH for Israel's interests (Exod 32:25–32). Another time, when YHWH had punished Miriam for opposing Moses, Moses cried out for her sake (Num 12:1–13). And in a third case, as YHWH's anger fell on Israel's spies for their evil report, Moses spoke with YHWH on Israel's behalf (Num 13–14).⁵ Whether telling Israel his plan to intercede and privately doing so (Exod 32:30–32) or pleading in Israel's presence (Num 12:11–13; 14:5, 13–19), Moses took up the prophetic call to intercede and spoke formally with Israel.⁶ In his professional prophetic capacity, Moses had broad influence and officially addressed his community for various purposes.

Informal Speech

Though a national leader and prophet, Moses had a family and other ordinary relationships as well. Thus, he would also speak casually with members of his society.

⁴ See also Douglas K. Stuart, *Exodus*, New American Commentary, vol. 2 (Nashville: B&H, 2006), 382–83.

⁵ See also R. Dennis Cole who says Moses here “is challenged to exercise his role as revelatory intercessor.” R. Dennis Cole, *Numbers*, New American Commentary, vol. 3B (Nashville: B&H, 2000), 212.

⁶ Several other instances suggest Moses fulfilled this prophetic function both publicly and privately (Exod 32:7–14; 33:12–17; 34:6–9; Num 11:1–3; 16:1–40, 41–50; 21:4–9; Deut 9:20–29).

Lead his assistant. One exchange between Moses and his assistant Joshua (Exod 24:13; 33:11; Num 11:28; Josh 1:1) suggests that they engaged in normal conversation. Specifically, while descending Mount Sinai, Joshua told Moses that he heard “a sound of war in the camp,” yet Moses replied that it was not war “but the sound of singing that I hear” (Exod 32:17–18). Moses and Joshua expressed what each had individually heard, and so Moses’s reaction implies that he spoke at least partly from his limited human faculties.⁷ Their conversation also appears prompted by circumstances and not a divine command. At this moment then, Moses arguably relayed his private perceptions to Joshua.

Relate with family. Moses would speak in this way with his family members too. For example, at one time he sent his wife and kids to stay with his father-in-law Jethro (Exod 18:2–4), which would have required routine dialogue. Some have proposed that Moses here arranged with his family for their care during his hazardous mission in Egypt and until his later return.⁸ This sort of familial interchange qualifies as non-prophetic, ordinary speech.

Another time, Moses and Jethro met at Sinai, asked each other about their welfare, shared updates, worshipped, and ate together (Exod 18:7–12). Douglas K. Stuart points out that Moses’s greeting “showed proper, normal hospitality, deference, and family affection,” and his consequent interaction entailed treating Jethro “as his guest.”⁹

⁷ See also other characterizations of Moses’s reaction in terms that support this stance: “Moses immediately rules out” what he did not hear. Victor P. Hamilton, *Exodus: An Exegetical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011), 543; Moses “did not discern the noise of war.” Stuart, *Exodus*, 676.

⁸ Hamilton, *Exodus*, 277; J. Alec Motyer, *The Message of Exodus: The Days of Our Pilgrimage*, Bible Speaks Today (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2005), 189; Stuart, *Exodus*, 402–4; see also C. F. Keil who suggests Moses was “induced” by the circumcision event (Exod 4:24–26) “to decide not to take his wife and children with him to Egypt, but to send them back to his father-in-law.” C. F. Keil, *The Second Book of Moses (Exodus)*, in *Commentary on the Old Testament*, vol. 1, *The Pentateuch*, ed. C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, trans. James Martin (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2006), 299.

⁹ Stuart, *Exodus*, 410; see also similar characterizations: Hamilton, *Exodus*, 279; Keil, *Exodus*, 376.

As such, Moses's speaking appears non-prophetic. Later, the two discussed Moses's hectic routine, Jethro bid Moses to heed his counsel, and Moses did so (Exod 18:13–27). This conversation looks to be an exchange of suggested advice and principled wisdom.¹⁰ Therefore, on these occasions, Moses dialogued casually with Jethro as a son would with his father-in-law.

Then, about a year later, Moses invited his brother-in-law Hobab to join Israel in trekking from Sinai to the promise land (Num 10:29–32). Here, Moses's speech rings of a personal plea from a man to his relative: "Come with us, and we will do good to you Please do not leave us And if you will go with us, that good which YHWH will do to us, the same we will do to you" (Num 10:29, 31–32). As a result, Moses addressed Hobab not with formal prophecy but with informal, personal entreaty.¹¹

Update his leaders. Moses would likewise talk with Israel's leaders. For instance, after his descent from Sinai, Moses called Israel over, "Aaron and all the leaders of the congregation returned to him, and Moses spoke with them" (Exod 34:29–31). In this case, Moses's chat with Israelite leadership appears to be non-prophetic, for the next verse states that "afterward all the sons of Israel approached, and he commanded them all that YHWH had spoken with him in Mount Sinai" (Exod 34:32). Stuart posits that before declaring YHWH's words, Moses shared "reassurance that he was not coming to them in judgment and that his face would not kill them or harm them in any way" along with "where he had been, what God had said about being willing to be close to them once

¹⁰ See also Hamilton, *Exodus*, 286–88; Paul E. Hughes, "Jethro," in *Dictionary of the Old Testament: Pentateuch*, ed. T. Desmond Alexander and David W. Baker, IVP Bible Dictionary Series (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2003), 468–69; Keil, *Exodus*, 377; Stuart, *Exodus*, 419.

¹¹ See also others who have termed Moses's speech as a request, appeal, entreaty, or expression of desire: Timothy R. Ashley, *The Book of Numbers*, New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1993), 194–97; Cole, *Numbers*, 176–77; C. F. Keil, *The Fourth Book of Moses (Numbers)*, in *Commentary on the Old Testament*, vol. 1, *The Pentateuch*, ed. C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, trans. James Martin (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2006), 690–91; Gordon J. Wenham, *Numbers: An Introduction and Commentary*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries, vol. 4 (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2008), 105.

again, and other reassurances of the good results of his encounter with Yahweh.”¹² Stuart suggests that Moses, at least in part, spoke ordinarily. Since the text places his talking with Israel’s leaders separate from and prior to his disclosure of YHWH’s word, it allows and even implies that Moses first communicated ordinarily with the leadership.

At a different time, when tabernacle craftsmen received an over-abundance of building materials, Moses declared, “Let no man or woman do any more work for the contribution of the sanctuary” (Exod 36:3–7). Scholars offer little to no comment on Moses’s words here, which implies they view his speech as unremarkable and incidental.¹³ Truly so, for though prophetic declaration had otherwise regulated the tabernacle’s construction (Exod 35:4–36:2), Moses’s response to the craftsmen here appears unprompted by YHWH, attendant to the pressing circumstances, and therefore not to stem from his prophetic office.

Wrongly address rebellious Israel. Moses would also speak of his own accord when he lost his temper. After Israel quarreled with him at Meribah, Moses received counsel from YHWH, and then he spoke to Israel (Num 20:1–12). Despite consulting with YHWH and returning with his word, several indications show that Moses did not speak for YHWH. First, YHWH had commanded him to tell the rock to give its waters in Israel’s sight (Num 20:8), but Moses said to Israel, “Hear now, you rebels. Shall we bring water for you out of this rock?” (Num 20:10). Thus, his speech did not match YHWH’s order. Second, YHWH expressed disapproval of Moses’s behavior through censure and imposed consequences (Num 20:12; cf. 27:13–14; Deut 1:37; 3:23–

¹² Stuart, *Exodus*, 739.

¹³ Hamilton, *Exodus*, 602–3; Motyer, *Exodus*, 320–21; T. Desmond Alexander, “Exodus,” in *New Bible Commentary: 21st Century Edition*, ed. D. A. Carson et al., 4th ed. (Leicester, England: InterVarsity Press, 1994), 118–19; see also Keil who offers a description ascribing volition to Moses: “Moses let the cry go through the camp . . . he put a stop to any further offerings.” Keil, *Exodus*, 483; more passively, Stuart says, “Moses was eventually required to insist rather forcefully to all the people (‘throughout the camp’) that no more material could be donated.” Stuart, *Exodus*, 761.

26; 4:21–22; 31:2; 32:51–52; 34:4). Third, the Psalmist reveals that Moses “spoke rashly with his lips,” and “it went ill with Moses because of them” (Ps 106:32–33).

Consequently, Moses in this case deviated from YHWH’s order to prophesy and addressed Israel of his own volition.

Deal with Israel’s neighbors. Lastly, Moses would speak informally to deal with neighboring nations. When Israel sought to enter Canaan, Moses sent messengers to Edom’s king requesting passage, but Edom refused (Num 20:14–21). Several have identified Moses’s communication as a diplomatic correspondence,¹⁴ which implies a non-prophetic message. Granted, Moses sent word by messenger and so did not speak with Edom’s king. Nevertheless, he likely verbalized to his messengers either the message itself or at least delivery instructions for his written memo. Additionally, his message petitioned Edom’s king in an ordinary way, similar to his appeal to Hobab—he invoked familial ties, sympathies, and entreaty (Num 20:14–17). Furthermore, Moses used an address like the *messenger formula*, but he did not indicate he spoke for YHWH. Instead, he said, “Thus says your brother Israel” (Num 20:14). Moreover, Edom denied passage, but YHWH did not challenge Edom’s refusal. Accordingly, Moses directed his messengers to speak with Edom’s king of his own mind and apart from YHWH’s word.

In summary, Moses interacted as YHWH’s prophet with Egypt, Pharaoh, Israel, and Israel’s leaders, and in so doing, he would speak to deliver, instruct, adjudicate, reprove, and intercede. Moses also dialogued ordinarily across all levels of his society. He conversed with his assistant, his relatives, his people, and Edom’s king. In that way, he would communicate to lead, relate to, provide updates for, and deal with others. Throughout his ministry, Moses spoke extensively with his community.

¹⁴ Ashley, *Numbers*, 389; Cole, *Numbers*, 332–37; Wenham, *Numbers*, 152; see also Keil who describes Moses as seeking “to solicit from the kindred nation a friendly and unimpeded passage.” Keil, *Numbers*, 741.

Nathan's Communications

Second, Nathan too had a significant societal presence. Scholars often identify him as active in Israel's royal court.¹⁵ Nathan interacted with Israel's king, those around the throne, and Israel more broadly, and he communicated through both formal prophecies along with informal, casual correspondence.

Formal Speech

Unlike Moses, no biblical record of Nathan's prophetic call exists. Still, his ministry shows him fulfilling the charge to speak as YHWH's prophet.

Pronounce David's dynasty. For example, Nathan received YHWH's word and announced that YHWH would build David a house (2 Sam 7:4–17; 1 Chr 17:3–15). His speech to David entailed multiple signs of formal prophecy. First, the *word event* and *commissioning formulae* mark its introduction (2 Sam 7:4–5; 1 Chr 17:3–4), a divine charge to speak and the *messenger formula* mark the speech (2 Sam 7:5, 8; 1 Chr 17:4, 7), and a summary statement marks its conclusion (2 Sam 7:17; 1 Chr 17:15). Second, the speech calls for Nathan to speak for YHWH in the first person (2 Sam 7:5–15; 1 Chr 17:5–14). Third, it foretells the future of Israel and David's dynasty (2 Sam 7:9–16; 1 Chr 17:4, 8–14). Fourth, the passage labels Nathan's message as a "vision" (וַיִּזְוֶן; 2 Sam 7:17; וַיִּזְוֶן; 1 Chr 17:15), and David later called it a "revelation" (וַיִּתְּחַלֵּם; 2 Sam 7:27; 1 Chr 17:25). As YHWH's prophet, Nathan received and told David the divine oracle.¹⁶

¹⁵ Leslie C. Allen, *1, 2 Chronicles*, Mastering the Old Testament, vol. 10 (Dallas: Word, 1987), 122; Robert D. Bergen, *1, 2 Samuel*, New American Commentary, vol. 7 (Nashville: B&H, 1996), 374; Matthews, *Hebrew Prophets and Their Social World*, 31, 48; Paul R. House, *1, 2 Kings*, New American Commentary, vol. 8 (Nashville: B&H, 1995), 89; Andrew E. Hill, *1 & 2 Chronicles*, NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003), 242; David Toshio Tsumura, *The First Book of Samuel*, New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2007), 540; David Toshio Tsumura, *The Second Book of Samuel*, New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2019), 127, 322; Wilson, *Prophecy and Society*, 264; Donald J. Wiseman, *1 and 2 Kings: An Introduction and Commentary*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries, vol. 9 (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2008), 47.

¹⁶ See also Bill T. Arnold, *1 & 2 Samuel*, NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003), 471–72; Joyce G. Baldwin, *1 and 2 Samuel: An Introduction and Commentary*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries, vol. 8 (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2008), 229, 232; Bergen, *1, 2*

Rebuke Israel's king. Nathan would also speak formally to reprimand Israel's king. For instance, Nathan rebuked David in the Bathsheba affair (2 Sam 12:1–15), and his speech included the *messenger formula* (2 Sam 12:7, 11), speech for YHWH in the first person (2 Sam 12:7–8, 10–12), and a future prediction (2 Sam 12:10–14). In his professional capacity, then, Nathan admonished David.¹⁷

Confirm Solomon. Next, Nathan would go on to pronounce YHWH's word of favor from his prophetic office as well. After Bathsheba had borne Solomon to David, YHWH is said to have loved Solomon, and so YHWH “sent by the hand of Nathan the prophet, and he called his name Jedidiah, because of YHWH” (2 Sam 12:24–25). In a clear-cut case, Nathan relayed YHWH's word as one dispatched with divine authority.

Record Israel's history. Then, Nathan would formally convey history. The Chronicler reveals that Nathan helped document “the matters of David the King, the first to the last” and “the rest of the matters of Solomon, the first to the last” (1 Chr 29:29; 2 Chr 9:29). While his history writing does not indicate verbal speech, it yet shows Nathan's divine messaging intended for his people. Significantly, the Chronicler groups Nathan's historical records with those of the prophets—Samuel and Gad—and he identifies these other prophets' records as “prophecy” (נְבוּאָה) and “visions” (חִזּוֹת). Therefore, Nathan's historical records were likely of this same prophetic sort.¹⁸

Samuel, 338, 344–45; Hill, *1 & 2 Chronicles*, 242; Matthews, *Hebrew Prophets and Their Social World*, 49; J. A. Thompson, *1, 2 Chronicles*, New American Commentary, vol. 9 (Nashville: B&H, 1994), 36, 145; Tsumura, *2 Samuel*, 128–29, 136; Ronald F. Youngblood, *1, 2 Samuel*, in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, vol. 3, *1 Samuel–2 Kings*, ed. Tremper Longman III and David E. Garland, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009), 382–83, 385, 391.

¹⁷ See also Arnold, *1 & 2 Samuel*, 532; Baldwin, *1 and 2 Samuel*, 251–55, 258; Bergen, *1, 2 Samuel*, 369; Matthews, *Hebrew Prophets and Their Social World*, 50–51; Tsumura, *2 Samuel*, 186, 189; Youngblood, *1, 2 Samuel*, 442–43.

¹⁸ See also others who regard such records as “given in prophetic terms” (Allen, *1, 2 Chronicles*, 183); “the authoritative word of God's prophets” and “prophetic records . . . ‘prophetic sources’” (Hill, *1 & 2 Chronicles*, 353, 411); “prophetic writings” (Martin J. Selman, *1 Chronicles: An Introduction and Commentary*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries, vol. 10 (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2008), 273); “prophetic sources . . . the words of God's spokesmen” (Martin J. Selman, *2*

Designate musicians in YHWH's house. Finally, Nathan would influence as YHWH's messenger even after his days. During Hezekiah's reign, Hezekiah is said to have placed Levitical instrumentalists in YHWH's house "with the commandment of David and of Gad, the king's seer, and of Nathan the prophet, for the commandment was by the hand of YHWH, by the hand of his prophets" (2 Chr 29:25). That is, the king's stationing of musicians in YHWH's house came via divine decree.¹⁹ As a prophet then, Nathan influenced Israel's leaders and general populace with various forms of official address.

Informal Speech

Like Moses, however, Nathan would also speak more casually. He interacted in Israel's royal circle, and so he offered his personal counsel in that arena.

Counsel Israel's king. For instance, when David consulted him over building YHWH a temple, Nathan told David, "Go, do all that is in your heart, for YHWH is with you" (2 Sam 7:1–3; cf. 1 Chr 17:1–2). Nathan approved David's temple plans, counseled David to proceed, and grounded his advice in YHWH being with David. In other words, he meant to speak authoritatively. Still, the fact that YHWH later gave word on the matter and negated Nathan's counsel confirms that Nathan did not here speak for YHWH (2 Sam 7:4–17; 1 Chr 17:3–15). He instead gave his personal, unsanctioned advice.²⁰

Chronicles: An Introduction and Commentary, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries, vol. 11 (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2008), 375); "prophetic materials" (Thompson, *1, 2 Chronicles*, 245); "official chronicles" (Wilson, *Prophecy and Society*, 266, 293).

¹⁹ See also others who conclude similarly: "the Levitical music was by prophetic authorization." Allen, *1, 2 Chronicles*, 378; Hezekiah linked his actions to earlier divinely "sanctioned" traditions. Hill, *1 & 2 Chronicles*, 583; "a levitical choir . . . was authorized by a prophetic word." Thompson, *1, 2 Chronicles*, 176, cf. 348.

²⁰ See also others who conclude similarly and so describe Nathan's word as his "blessing" and "natural but wrong conclusion" (Allen, *1, 2 Chronicles*, 122); support, concurrence, and encouragement (Arnold, *1 & 2 Samuel*, 472–73); "immediate reaction" and "personal opinion" (Baldwin, *1 and 2 Samuel*, 228, 232); "encourage[ment] . . . Nathan spoke without first consulting God in this matter" (Bergen, *1, 2 Samuel*, 335); "assent" (A. B. Davidson, *Old Testament Prophecy*, ed. J. A. Paterson, 4th ed. (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1912), 347); "blessing" (Hill, *1 & 2 Chronicles*, 242); "initial response" (Matthews, *Hebrew*

Overall, Nathan prophesied to Israel's king and Israel in general, and in that way, he would convey divine pronouncements, rebukes, confirmations, designations, and chronicles. Less formally, Nathan would also advise in Israel's royal circle, including with Israel's king. Like his predecessors, he too had robust communication with Israel.

Jeremiah's Communications

Third, Jeremiah held a pivotal post in Israelite society as one of Israel's last prophets before the fall of Jerusalem. His ministry reveals that he interacted with national leaders and ordinary people, and his communication consisted of prophetic and informal speech.

Formal Speech

After his commission, Jeremiah spoke as YHWH's prophet to Israel, Israel's leaders, and foreign nations, and he frequently reproved them in the name of YHWH.

Rebuke Israel and its leaders. For instance, Jeremiah stood in YHWH's temple and admonished Israel's priests, prophets, officials, and general populace (Jer 26:1–15; cf. 7). Multiple indications make clear that Jeremiah spoke prophetically. His speech entailed basic prophetic speech forms or similar language, such as the *word event*, *commissioning*, and *messenger formulae* (Jer 26:1–2, 4), he spoke for YHWH in the first person (Jer 26:4–6), he foretold future events (Jer 26:4–6, 13), and his speech was linked to YHWH's words (Jer 26:2, 12–13, 15). Therefore, Jeremiah here censured Israel and its leadership as part of his prophetic commission.²¹ Elsewhere, he likewise rebuked Israel's leaders, including its king and prophets (Jer 19; 21:11–22:30; 28; 29:24–32).

Prophets and Their Social World, 49); “approval Yahweh rejected” (Thompson, *1, 2 Chronicles*, 146); “own opinion” (Tsumura, *2 Samuel*, 127); “word of encouragement . . . Only later does a divine word come to Nathan” (Wilson, *Prophecy and Society*, 264); see also Youngblood who sees Nathan speaking here as “a loyal subject following customary protocol” (Youngblood, *1, 2 Samuel*, 382).

²¹ See also J. A. Thompson, *The Book of Jeremiah*, New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1980), 526.

Another time, Jeremiah warned and rebuked a remnant asking him for divine approval of their flight to Egypt (Jer 42–43:1). In this case, Jeremiah prayed to and heard word from YHWH (Jer 42:4, 7), his speaking involved the *word event* and *messenger formulae* (Jer 42:7, 9, 15, 18), he spoke for YHWH in the first person (Jer 42:10–12, 17–18), he foretold future events (Jer 42:10, 12, 15–18, 22), and his speech was associated with YHWH’s words (Jer 42:13, 15, 19–21; 43:1). Also, YHWH identified this message as his own declaration (נְאֻם יְהוָה; Jer 42:11). Then, even after the people refused his word, Jeremiah further admonished them (Jer 43–44). Thus, he formally chided Israel’s people.

Rebuke foreign nations. Jeremiah would likewise reprove foreign powers. At one point, YHWH charged him to prophesy wrath against the nations, and Jeremiah pronounced judgment upon numerous foreign states (Jer 25:12–38). Notably, YHWH’s command to confront the nations came with the *messenger formula* (Jer 25:27–28, 32), a call for Jeremiah to speak for YHWH in the first person (Jer 25:12–14, 27, 29), and a foretelling of future events (Jer 25:16, 30–38). Additionally, YHWH identified this message as his own declaration (נְאֻם יְהוָה) and word (Jer 25:12–13, 29, 31). As he would in his later oracles against the nations (Jer 46–51), Jeremiah here reproved foreign peoples on YHWH’s behalf and in accordance with his prophetic call (cf. Jer 1:5, 10).²²

Intercede for Israel and its leaders. Jeremiah would also officially speak in pleading for others. He must have typically interceded, for YHWH told Jeremiah multiple times to refrain from doing so (Jer 7:16; 11:14; 14:11; 15:1). Still, Zedekiah twice asked Jeremiah to seek YHWH for him and the nation,²³ and later a militia bid Jeremiah to pray

²² See also Hetty Lalleman, *Jeremiah and Lamentations: An Introduction and Commentary*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries, vol. 21 (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2013), 204–7; Thompson, *Jeremiah*, 515.

²³ See also Lalleman whose comment suggests Jeremiah was known for interceding with YHWH: despite YHWH’s ban, “Zedekiah still expects something positive as a result of the prophet’s intercession (21:1–10).” Lalleman, *Jeremiah and Lamentations*, 257.

on their behalf (Jer 21:1–2; 37:3; 42:1–3). Though only one such case makes plain that he prayed for them (Jer 42:4), Jeremiah returned to his petitioner each time with a divine word (Jer 21:3–10; 37:6–10; 42:7–22). As a prophet, Jeremiah interceded for his people.

Declare YHWH's word in writing. Lastly, Jeremiah would fulfill his office by communicating written prophecy as well. He gave scrolls of prophecy to King Jehoiakim (Jer 36; 45:1; cf. 30:1ff), he issued a book of prophecy against the nations (Jer 25:13; 51:60), and he wrote official address to those in exile (Jer 29; cf. Dan 9:2; 2 Chr 36:21–22; Ezra 1:1). Like Nathan, Jeremiah's written prophecy does not signal verbal utterance, but it does exemplify his prophetic messaging meant for his community. Significantly, Jeremiah's writings to Jehoiakim and the nations are associated with YHWH's word (Jer 36:2, 11, 28; 25:13; 51:60). Also, his letter to the exiles entailed the *word event* and *messenger formulae* (Jer 29:4, 8, 10, 16–17, 21, 25, 30–32), it involved Jeremiah speaking for YHWH in the first person (Jer 29:7, 9–14, 17–21, 23, 31–32), it foretold future events (Jer 29:7, 10, 12–14, 17–18, 21–22, 32), and it was associated with YHWH's declaration (נְאֻם יְהוָה) and word (Jer 29:9, 11, 14, 19–20, 23, 32). As a result, Jeremiah's writing formally conveyed YHWH's divine word.

Informal Speech

Jeremiah's communications provide evidence of informal dialogue with his society as well. Despite the magnitude of his ministry, the book of Jeremiah records only a small number of these casual interactions.

Answer Israel's king and officials. For instance, as a gate official charged Jeremiah with desertion upon his return to the land of Benjamin, Jeremiah spoke to refute the allegation (Jer 37:11–14). Since he meant to go home peaceably and join the people (Jer 37:12), Jeremiah's speech appears entirely prompted by the official and not YHWH. Also, he answered the official without signs of formal speech but with a simple denial

(Jer 37:14).²⁴ Consequently, Jeremiah here spoke of his own volition.

In a second case, King Zedekiah sought YHWH's word from Jeremiah, and Jeremiah in turn delivered it and then petitioned his own welfare (Jer 37:16–20). F. B. Huey Jr. states, "In vv. 18–20 we are reminded of Jeremiah's humanity. [This was] one of his rare displays of self-interest It was unusual for Jeremiah to show concern for himself."²⁵ Indeed, after giving the divine word (Jer 37:17), Jeremiah's words bear marks of mere personal plea, for he appealed to the king by reasoning, sympathies, and entreaty (Jer 37:18–20). Accordingly, Jeremiah expressed first formal and then ordinary speech.

A third example occurred when King Zedekiah again called Jeremiah to inquire of him (Jer 38:14–28). At this time, Jeremiah clearly disclosed "the voice of YHWH" and "the word which YHWH has shown" (Jer 38:20–23). Yet, he first expressed personal doubts (Jer 38:15) and then later received and relayed Zedekiah's word to the king's officials (Jer 38:27–28). Importantly, Jeremiah's misgivings restrained divine speech and eventuated his personal reasoning with the king.²⁶ Furthermore, his later answer to the king's officials came from Zedekiah's command—not YHWH's. Therefore, as before, Jeremiah spoke both prophetically and of his own accord.

²⁴ See also other similar characterizations of Jeremiah's reaction: "his protests" (F. B. Huey Jr., *Jeremiah, Lamentations*, New American Commentary, vol. 16 (Nashville: B&H, 1993), 330); "Jeremiah tries to deny" (Walter C. Kaiser Jr. and Tiberius Rata, *Walking the Ancient Paths: A Commentary on Jeremiah* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2019), 434); "his denial" (Derek Kidner, *The Message of Jeremiah: Against Wind and Tide*, Bible Speaks Today (Leicester, England: InterVarsity Press, 1987), 123).

²⁵ Huey, *Jeremiah, Lamentations*, 331; see also other similar characterizations of Jeremiah's speech: "he takes the opportunity to ask why he is being held Jeremiah makes the plea" (Kaiser and Rata, *Jeremiah*, 435); a "turn to his own case . . . his *humble plea* for better conditions [emphasis original]" (Kidner, *Jeremiah*, 123); "Jeremiah asks . . . a better place for him (v. 20)" (Lalleman, *Jeremiah and Lamentations*, 258); "Jeremiah's counter-request concerned his own welfare. . . . Jeremiah's plea was an earnest one" (Thompson, *Jeremiah*, 634–35).

²⁶ See also others who comment along these lines: "By now Jeremiah was wary of the king with good reason not to trust him." Huey, *Jeremiah, Lamentations*, 337; before sharing YHWH's word, "Jeremiah wants some assurances." Kaiser and Rata, *Jeremiah*, 442; Jeremiah "knows what poor security a solemn oath (16) from this man amounts to." Kidner, *Jeremiah*, 125; "Zedekiah wants to hear God's words again, as in 37:17, but Jeremiah is not convinced." Lalleman, *Jeremiah and Lamentations*, 259; "Jeremiah recognized the futility of passing on to him any word from Yahweh." Thompson, *Jeremiah*, 642.

Live life among his people. Finally, Jeremiah would have normal interactions with his community where he lived. Several times, Jeremiah is cited as being among those in his society. He was “coming and going out among the people” (Jer 37:4), he sought to return “among the people” in Benjamin (Jer 37:12), and he eventually “dwelt among the people” (Jer 39:11–14) and at Mizpah with Gedaliah “among the people who remained in the land” (Jer 40:5–6). Without themselves disclosing specific speech events, these statements allude to Jeremiah’s having everyday exchanges apart from his divine speeches and as part of living ordinary life among his community.

On the whole, Jeremiah interacted in his official capacity with Israel, its leaders, its general population, and foreign nations, and in this way, he would communicate to pronounce, rebuke, and intercede. More routinely, and occasionally out of self-preservation, Jeremiah would interact with Israel’s leadership and populace and so speak informally.

Moses, Nathan, and Jeremiah’s Ministry Experience Implications for a Prophet’s Speech

Next, experiences from these prophets’ ministries have unique implications for prophetic communication. Specifically, Moses and Jeremiah feared their call to speak for YHWH and even sought to shirk it. Moses and Nathan misspoke during their ministries. And Jeremiah’s rebellious hearers refused his ardent reproof. The discussion below considers each of these instances and their significance regarding a prophet’s speech.

Fearing to Speak

First, Moses and Jeremiah feared to fulfill their prophetic commission. YHWH called Moses to proclaim and lead Israel’s freedom from Egypt (Exod 3:10–4:9). Yet, Moses hesitated, worrying that he was not “eloquent” but “slow of speech and of tongue” (Exod 4:10). YHWH replied, “Who has made man’s mouth? Or who makes the mute, or deaf, or seeing, or blind? Is it not I, YHWH? Therefore now go, and I will be with your

mouth and teach you what you will speak” (Exod 4:11–12). YHWH reasoned that since he assigns one’s abilities, should he impose a personal impediment, he may equally attend that restrained individual with the power to act. For Moses, then, YHWH meant that he would “impart to him the necessary qualification both as to matter and mode.”²⁷ That is, YHWH would enable Moses to prophesy through his limited speaking ability and so remove cause for fear and doubt in serving as YHWH’s prophet.

Still, Moses remained unconvinced and balked again, and thus YHWH turned to commission Moses with Aaron to speak for him (Exod 4:13–16; cf. 6:10–13, 6:28–7:2). YHWH now said he would be with Moses and Aaron’s mouth and teach them both what to do (Exod 4:15), and he went on to explain that Aaron would speak to the people as Moses’s mouth and Moses would put his words in Aaron’s mouth as God (Exod 4:16). To rephrase, YHWH would enable Moses to speak the divine word by situating Aaron as his mouthpiece. In the face of Moses’s continued dismay and demurral over an alleged speaking hindrance, YHWH again promised supernatural speech empowerment.

Significantly, YHWH’s pledge to aid the supposedly speech-impaired Moses suggests that a personal speaking deficiency primes a prophet to receive divine assistance for accomplishing his commission. Near the end of Moses’s ministry, Moses shared YHWH’s plan in calling his prophet—he would put his word in the prophet’s mouth, and the prophet would pronounce it to the people (Deut 18:18). Since YHWH gives the speech-restricted prophet his word and enables him to proclaim it, a prophet’s speech problem thus paradoxically helps him fulfill his prophetic call.

Like Moses, Jeremiah also protested his commission. He asserted that he was a youth and did “not know how to speak” (Jer 1:6). And YHWH responded to Jeremiah as he did with Moses. He refused Jeremiah’s excuse, he said Jeremiah would speak all that he commanded, he touched Jeremiah’s mouth, and he told Jeremiah, “Behold, I have put

²⁷ Keil, *Exodus*, 293; see also Stuart, *Exodus*, 135.

my words in your mouth” (Jer 1:7, 9; cf. 1:17). From this exchange, J. A. Thompson concludes, “Human inadequacy and inexperience provide the occasion for divine enablement.”²⁸ Said differently, one’s deficiency creates the opportunity for YHWH to strengthen and supply his own power in the situation at hand. In Jeremiah’s case, his claimed speaking deficiency gave cause for YHWH to assist his mouth. Again, a prophet’s personal speech limitation paradoxically helps him fulfill his duty to proclaim the divine word.

YHWH’s later word to Jeremiah warrants noticing as well. He directed Jeremiah to speak everything that he would command him, and “do not diminish a word” (Jer 26:2). This order implies that though YHWH had previously empowered Jeremiah’s mouth, Jeremiah yet retained some ability to waver in speaking YHWH’s word and may have felt tempted to do so. Such hesitance would not be surprising given the challenging prophetic conditions into which YHWH had sent him.²⁹ While Jeremiah would go on to faithfully disclose the divine word, he at one point expressed qualms about prophesying to King Zedekiah, citing danger to his life (Jer 38:14–15). Moses and Jeremiah’s experiences show that a prophet can be tempted to fear and to hesitate in speaking for YHWH—especially under adverse conditions—and thus to jeopardize the fulfillment of his commission. Yet, any speaking difficulty he may have positions him to receive divine speech empowerment that addresses his reluctance and assists him in satisfying his call.

Flawed Speech

Next, some prophets uttered incorrect speech. As mentioned, Moses wrongly addressed Israel at Meribah (Num 20:1–13). According to the Psalmist, Israel had become “rebels” to Moses, and they had so angered and embittered him that he railed

²⁸ Thompson, *Jeremiah*, 148.

²⁹ See Huey, *Jeremiah, Lamentations*, 235; Thompson, *Jeremiah*, 524.

against them instead of speaking YHWH's prescribed message (Ps 106:32–33). Amidst unfavorable prophetic conditions, prophets can be tempted toward flawed speech and lashing out at their hearers.

Even under less adverse conditions, a prophet can still err in his messaging. As noted, Nathan erroneously approved David's plan to build YHWH's temple and later received a divine corrective (2 Sam 7:1–17; 1 Chr 17:1–15). Moses and Nathan's exchanges reveal that apart from assistance and amidst either hostile or relatively peaceable prophetic conditions, the speech of a true prophet bears the risk of error.

Fervently Reproving the Rebellious

Finally, YHWH sent Jeremiah to zealously rebuke his hearers, Jeremiah did so in the face of a rebellious people, and his hearers in reply fought against him. First, YHWH said that he would put his words in Jeremiah's mouth in part "to pluck up, and to break down, and to destroy, and to throw down" (Jer 1:9–10). And indeed, YHWH made his words "a fire, and this people wood, and it will consume them" (Jer 5:14; cf. 23:29). Jeremiah was to preach judgment directly against his hearers and so severely chide them.

Additionally, Jeremiah dealt with an obstinate, scornful people (Jer 6:10), a condition which inclined him toward fervent, unrelenting chastisement. Jeremiah said their recalcitrance made him "full of the wrath of YHWH" and "weary of holding it in," and YHWH in turn ordered Jeremiah to "pour it out" upon all the people (Jer 6:11). In other words, Jeremiah could not "stop speaking about God's anger at their rebellious behaviour."³⁰ In Jeremiah's view, he had become "a man of strife and a man of contention (אִישׁ רִיב וְאִישׁ מְדוֹן) to the whole land" (Jer 15:10). Walter C. Kaiser Jr. and Tiberius Rata understand Jeremiah to see "himself as a man who stirs up contention and

³⁰ Lalleman, *Jeremiah and Lamentations*, 102.

strife wherever he speaks.”³¹ And this interpretation matches Jeremiah’s subsequent characterization of his ministry.

Jeremiah went on to say that whenever he spoke, he cried out and shouted, “violence and destruction,” and he could not do otherwise (Jer 20:7–9). For Thompson, such descriptors “convey the impression of a loud and aggressive proclamation” and indicate Jeremiah’s “constant reiteration of threats” and “denunciation.”³² Huey claims these were “the only messages he could speak.”³³ Jeremiah said he so frequently exclaimed “Terror is on every side!” that his people had come to turn the phrase back on him and mockingly whisper it at him in his company (Jer 20:10).³⁴ In Jeremiah’s own estimate, he relentlessly criticized and contended with his hearers over their sin—he had become the embodiment of reproof toward his rebellious people.

Then in response, almost everyone in Jeremiah’s life treated him with contempt or hostility. Jeremiah’s community mocked, cursed, plotted against, and persecuted him (Jer 11:18–20; 15:10, 15; 18:18; 20:1–2, 7–8, 10). His friends denounced and schemed against him (Jer 20:10). His hometown threatened him and sought his life (Jer 11:21; cf. 1:1). Even his own family betrayed him (Jer 12:6). While YHWH had distanced Jeremiah from typical family and community relations (Jer 15:17; 16:2), Jeremiah’s defiant hearers themselves opposed him over his repeated reproof.³⁵ This is not to say that their stubborn response was Jeremiah’s fault or intention. He faithfully prophesied as YHWH had ordered, which at times even entailed offering opportunities for repentance and mercy (see for example Jer 3:6–4:4). Still, Jeremiah’s hearers chose to

³¹ Kaiser and Rata, *Jeremiah*, 204.

³² Thompson, *Jeremiah*, 460.

³³ Huey, *Jeremiah, Lamentations*, 192.

³⁴ See Huey, *Jeremiah, Lamentations*, 193; Kaiser and Rata, *Jeremiah*, 252; Lalleman, *Jeremiah and Lamentations*, 177; Thompson, *Jeremiah*, 460.

³⁵ See also others who comment along these lines: Huey, *Jeremiah, Lamentations*, 98; Kaiser and Rata, *Jeremiah*, 204; Lalleman, *Jeremiah and Lamentations*, 154; Thompson, *Jeremiah*, 392, 460.

fight against him, a response that YHWH had foretold from Jeremiah's prophetic call and reiterated amidst his ministry (Jer 1:19; 15:20). Jeremiah's experience demonstrates that a recalcitrant people may opt to refuse rather than receive contentious calls for correction and repentance.

Conclusion

The biblical witness of Moses, Nathan, and Jeremiah's messaging reveals that they engaged in formal speech and reproof with Israel, with its leaders, and, for Moses and Jeremiah, with foreign powers. All three prophets also had normal dialogue amidst their community, such as with members of their household, the public, government officials, and at times foreign peoples. Taken together, all such communication appears typical of Israel's prophet.

Furthermore, Moses, Nathan, and Jeremiah's ministry experiences reveal important implications for prophetic speech. Moses and Jeremiah showed that a prophet can be tempted to fear and avoid his commission, particularly amidst tough prophetic conditions. Nevertheless, YHWH helps his timid, reluctant prophet. YHWH's reply to Moses's and Jeremiah's claimed speech problem demonstrates that a prophet's speech deficiency optimally poises him for his prophetic duty, for YHWH divinely enables that prophet to speak for him. Additionally, difficult conditions can tempt a prophet to go off message and speak in error, as Moses did. Nathan similarly showed that when casual speech is possible, the risk of speaking wrongly always remains present. Finally, Jeremiah's ministry made evident that rebellious individuals may choose to fight against and not listen to a vehemently scolding prophet. Taken together then, these experiences from Moses, Nathan, and Jeremiah's ministries invite bold, pure, and extraordinarily penetrating prophetic speech. Having laid the literary-theological foundation for Ezekiel's muteness, the next chapter now turns to a focused examination of its nature.

CHAPTER 4

EZEKIEL'S PROPHETIC MUTENESS

In this chapter, I consider the evidence for Ezekiel's muteness and the explanation that consistently, comprehensively, and thus compellingly accounts for this evidence. Ezekiel's muteness was a divinely imposed, literal silencing that precluded informal speech and a reproofing lifestyle toward exilic Israel despite their rebelliousness. Yet, because of the exiles' recalcitrance, his muteness also enabled prophetic speech at YHWH's decree. Moreover, Ezekiel's muteness and return to ordinary talking signified the exiles' proper speech conduct of silence toward YHWH while under judgment and a renewed freedom to speak with YHWH once judgment had passed over.

To support these claims, I will begin by examining Ezekiel's prophetic conditions and so establish the immediate context for discerning the nature and significance of his muteness. First, I will discuss Ezekiel's initial commission and note that YHWH called him as a prophet and watchman to Israel's exiles. Second, I will consider the character of Ezekiel's audience during his ministry. I will show that though banished to Babylon, exilic Israel remained deeply rebellious and thus did not recognize that YHWH had judged them and would yet judge Judah. Third, I will observe that Ezekiel prophesied grave and occasionally hopeful messages to these rebellious exiles until judgment fell on Jerusalem.

After establishing this context, I will exegete each text that cites Ezekiel's muteness in order of its occurrence (Ezek 3:22–27; 24:25–27; 33:21–22). In so doing, I will identify the various aspects of Ezekiel's silence that, when considered together, constitute my explanation for his muteness. First, I will argue that Ezekiel experienced a divinely imposed, literal, circumstantial, and provisional silence from speech (Ezek 3:22–

26αβ). Second, I will investigate the word מוֹכִיחַ, the construction אִישׁ מוֹכִיחַ, and the phrase וְלֹא־תִהְיֶה לָהֶם לְאִישׁ מוֹכִיחַ and contend that Ezekiel’s muteness prevented him from being a “man of reproof” to exilic Israel (Ezekiel 3:26αγ). In other words, Ezekiel could not live a life of zealous admonition toward his people as Jeremiah had with his. Third, I will note typical uses of the particle כִּי with examples from the book of Ezekiel, examine כִּי as employed in the phrase common to Ezekiel 3:26–27 (כִּי בַיִת מְרִי הָמָּה; cf. Ezek 2:5, 6, 7; 3:9; 12:2, 3), and then reason that YHWH linked Ezekiel’s muteness to the exiles’ rebelliousness through a concessive use of כִּי (Ezek 3:26b). That is, YHWH silenced Ezekiel and prevented him from fervently reproving his people “though” they remained rebellious. Fourth, I will assert that because exilic Israel remained refractory, YHWH enabled the mute prophet to prophesy to them and so prompt their response whenever he spoke his divine word to Ezekiel (Ezek 3:27). By implication then, Ezekiel’s speechlessness permitted divinely commissioned speech but restrained all non-prophetic speaking with his people. Fifth, I will assess Ezekiel’s muteness as a sign (מוֹפֵת) and contend that it modeled for the exiles both silent listening to YHWH while under his judgment along with renewed dialogue after his judgment had passed (Ezek 24:25–27). Sixth, I will observe that Ezekiel’s silence ended at Jerusalem’s fall (Ezek 33:21–22).

Next, I will maintain that Ezekiel’s communications before, during, and after his speechlessness, as noted in the book of Ezekiel, substantiate my explanation for his muteness. Specifically, evidence suggests that before his silencing, Ezekiel conversed normally with his community, but while muted, Ezekiel addressed his people strictly through formal prophetic pronouncements. Then after YHWH removed his speech restriction, Ezekiel resumed normal dialogue with others.

Finally, I will summarize the nature of Ezekiel’s muteness.

Ezekiel’s Prophetic Conditions

To begin, this section outlines the immediate context pertinent to Ezekiel’s

muteness. Namely, in the prelude to his muteness, YHWH called Ezekiel to fulfill specific duties toward a particular people (Ezek 2–3:21; cf. 33:1–9).

Ezekiel's Initial Call

First, though Ezekiel was trained as a priest (Ezek 1:3), YHWH summoned him, filled him with his Spirit, sent him out, and declared him a prophet (Ezek 2:1–5). Accordingly, YHWH commanded Ezekiel to hear and receive all his words, go to his hearers, and speak to them saying, “Thus says the Lord YHWH” (Ezek 2:4–5, 7–8; 3:1, 4, 10–11). His message would contain “lamentation, and moaning, and woe,” yet Ezekiel was not to fear his hearers nor rebel against his commission, for YHWH had supplied and strengthened him (Ezek 2:6, 8–3:3, 8–9). And Ezekiel was to proclaim YHWH’s word regardless of audience response (Ezek 2:4–5, 7; 3:10–11).

Then, YHWH expanded Ezekiel’s call by making him a watchman. Like the trumpeter who warns a city of impending ruin (cf. Ezek 33:2–6), Ezekiel was to warn his hearers whenever YHWH alerted him of a sin-induced disaster (Ezek 3:17; cf. 33:7). If Ezekiel did not “speak to warn the wicked from his wicked way, in order to save his life,” YHWH would hold him accountable for the perished sinner (Ezek 3:18; cf. 33:8). Yet, if Ezekiel gave a warning that went unheeded, he would not incur guilt (Ezek 3:19; cf. 33:9). Likewise, should Ezekiel not warn the righteous who “turns from his righteousness and commits injustice,” leading to his demise, YHWH would hold him liable for this lost sinner (Ezek 3:20). But if Ezekiel warned him “not to sin” though to no avail, he would bear no responsibility (Ezek 3:21). Thus, YHWH bound Ezekiel to warn the apostate.

YHWH also specified the people whom Ezekiel would address and warn. YHWH sent him not to foreigners (Ezek 3:5–6) but to the “people of Israel,” also called the “house of Israel” (Ezek 2:3; 3:1, 4–5, 7, 17; cf. 33:7). More specifically, YHWH directed Ezekiel “to the exiles, to your people” (Ezek 3:11, cf. 15; 11:24–25; 33:2). As a result, he ministered principally to exilic Israel, and the various references to “them”

(2:4–7; 3:4, 9, 11, 15, 17; cf. 33:2, 7), “their” (2:3, 6; 3:8–9), and “they” (2:3, 5–7; 3:7, 9, 11, cf. 15) in Ezekiel’s initial call refer to Israel’s exiles. They were to hear his prophecies and heed his warnings.

Ezekiel’s initial call at least hypothetically suggests he may encounter some righteous exiles receptive to his word (Ezek 3:21; cf. 13:22; 18:5–9, 19–22, 27–28; 23:45). Conversely, it also implies he may find wicked exiles who reject his word (Ezek 3:19). YHWH’s refrain, “whether they hear or refuse to hear” (Ezek 2:5, 7; 3:11) casts doubt on audience response—and for good reason. As YHWH put it, exilic Israel was a “rebellious house” (Ezek 2:5–8; 3:9; cf. 3:26–27; 12:2–3, 9, 25; 17:12; 24:3; 44:6). Ezekiel’s initial call shows YHWH made him a watchman-prophet to the stubborn exiles.

Ezekiel’s Rebellious Audience

Next, the nature of their stubbornness also offers context relevant to Ezekiel’s speechlessness. From Ezekiel’s call and well into his ministry, YHWH identified exilic Israel as a nation of obstinate, impudent, transgressing rebels (Ezek 2:3–4; 3:7–8; 20:38). They were idolatrous and corrupt (Ezek 3:7; 12:2; 14:3–4, 7; 20:16; 33:31). Therefore, instead of hearing the word of YHWH’s prophet, they might jeer at him (Ezek 2:6; 3:7, 9). They were worse than foreigners who would at least listen (Ezek 3:6). A sampling of their behavior during Ezekiel’s ministry sheds light on this rebellious character.

Neglecting true prophecy. To begin, the exiles neglected true prophecy. For example, when Ezekiel portrayed Israel’s exile for their sin (Ezek 12:1–20), his people only replied, “What are you doing?” (Ezek 12:9). Ezekiel had performed this sign act “in their sight” (7x; Ezek 12:3–7), but as Daniel I. Block points out, “their mental obtuseness and their spiritual recalcitrance prevented them from grasping its meaning.”¹ They did

¹ Daniel I. Block, *The Book of Ezekiel, Chapters 1–24*, New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1997), 372.

not understand nor receive Ezekiel's message. Instead, they circulated a proverb claiming, "The days become long, and every vision fails" (Ezek 12:22).² Exilic Israel cared little for and so ignored grave warnings of judgment like Ezekiel's.³ Other exiles insisted of Ezekiel that "the vision that he sees is for many days from now, and he prophesies of times far off" (Ezek 12:27). From this response, Block reasons that the exiles "were as much a part of this rebellious household of Israel as were their compatriots back home."⁴ He means that just as Ezekiel's countrymen back in the land had rebelled against messages of judgment for sin, his hearers now disregarded these same prophecies.

Elsewhere, exilic Israel asked Ezekiel as he prophesied, "Why do you groan?" and "Will you not tell us what these things that you are doing mean for us?" (Ezek 21:12 [7]; 24:19). At one time, YHWH told Ezekiel to question them in return saying, "Do you not know what these things mean?" (Ezek 17:12). Ezekiel's exchanges with his people show them to be clueless about his prophetic message. Eventually, the exiles called Ezekiel "a maker of parables" (Ezek 21:5 [20:49]). Iain M. Duguid says their response seems to express a "total lack of comprehension."⁵ Again, Ezekiel's people did not grasp his prophecy. Rather, they thought it carried little consequence, they did not receive it, and so they did not understand YHWH's purposes of bringing judgment for iniquity.

Trusting false prophecy. Worse still, exilic Israel accepted false prophecy that claimed judgment had not come to them nor would come to Jerusalem. For instance, Jeremiah's letter to the exiles identified liars among them who asserted that all remained

² See Block who says this proverb need not "be restricted to the land of Israel." Block, *Ezekiel 1-24*, 387.

³ See also Block, *Ezekiel 1-24*, 388-89.

⁴ Block, *Ezekiel 1-24*, 392.

⁵ Iain M. Duguid, *Ezekiel*, NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1999), 274.

well and that their stay in Babylon would soon end (Jer 29). These frauds must have swayed exilic Israel, for YHWH sent word by Jeremiah ordering them not to permit lying prophets and diviners there to deceive them (Jer 29:8–9). John Calvin comments, “Almost everyone’s mind was taken up with the vain and false confidence they had imbibed from false prophecies—namely, that they would return after two years.”⁶ Said differently, the exiles had believed lies that their Babylonian stint would not last long.

Similarly, Ezekiel confronted charlatans in Babylon “prophesying for Jerusalem and seeing for her visions of peace, though there was no peace” (Ezek 13:16, cf. 10). These individuals got the people to listen, misled them, “disheartened the righteous with a lie . . . and strengthened the hands of the wicked, that he should not turn from his evil way to save his life” (Ezek 13:10, 19, 22). Exilic Israel fell prey to delusions of security from sin’s consequences.⁷ Again, the fact that YHWH told Ezekiel both to denounce falsehoods about his true prophet and word and to condemn the frauds shows that false prophets had persuaded the exiles to doubt YHWH’s judgment (Ezek 12:23–25, 28; 13; 14:9–10; cf. 22:25, 28). Even from Babylon then, exilic Israel denied that YHWH had punished them with expulsion and that he would yet punish Jerusalem for their sin.

Living in sin. Furthermore, since the exiles did not attribute YHWH’s bringing divine retribution to the fact that his people were sinning against him, they continued in their iniquity even from Babylon. For instance, as exilic elders approached Ezekiel, presumably for a divine word, YHWH replied with a vision revealing Jerusalem’s evil and consequent demise (Ezek 8–11). By answering with this vision, YHWH implied that the exiles still followed Jerusalem’s wicked practices and required a warning of coming judgment for sin and, by extension, for their own evil deeds.

⁶ John Calvin, *Jeremiah and Lamentations*, Crossway Classic Commentaries (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2000), 168.

⁷ See also Duguid, *Ezekiel*, 175.

Another time when the elders came to Ezekiel, YHWH described them as men who “have taken their idols into their hearts and set the stumbling block of their iniquity before their faces” (Ezek 14:3). Despite removal to Babylon, the exiles brought with them the same sin problem found among those back in the land.⁸ YHWH then went on to set the precedent that if anyone did evil as these elders had done, YHWH would “answer him coming with the multitude of his idols” (Ezek 14:4)—he would make an example out of all who followed such wicked ways. Although YHWH had already judged exilic Israel, Walther Zimmerli rightly points out that the “judgement had not completely broken their old nature, with the old trust in powers other than God.”⁹ That is, the exiles continued in their stupor of idolatry.

Then, during the elders’ last recorded visit to Ezekiel for a divine word, YHWH said to them, “Do you come to inquire of me? As I live, I will not be inquired of by you, declares the Lord YHWH” (Ezek 20:3; cf. 14:3; 20:31). YHWH’s indignance shows that these men had come smugly and without regard for their divine betrayal and YHWH’s resultant wrath upon them. He went on to state that they deserved judgment for their defilement and whoring after abominations like their fathers (Ezek 20:4, 30–32). Even from Babylon, the exiles were senseless to the fact that their infidelity had ruptured the covenant with YHWH and provoked his wrath, and so they yet lived in sin.¹⁰

Insightfully, John N. Day comments, “Although the location of God’s people had been forcibly changed, their disposition had not.”¹¹ In other words, deportation should have prompted recognition of divine discipline for sin and the need to repent, but

⁸ See John N. Day, “Ezekiel and the Heart of Idolatry,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 164, no. 653 (2007): 27.

⁹ Walther Zimmerli, *Ezekiel 1: A Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Ezekiel, Chapters 1–24*, ed. Frank Moore Cross, Klaus Baltzer, and Leonard Jay Greenspoon, trans. Ronald E. Clements, Hermeneia, vol. 1 (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1979), 309.

¹⁰ See also Duguid, *Ezekiel*, 259–60, cf. 183–84.

¹¹ Day, “Ezekiel and the Heart of Idolatry,” 33.

it had not. They remained what YHWH called “a rebellious house,” which Mark F. Rooker interprets to mean that the people’s “rebellion had taken on a dynastic quality.”¹² They were generationally lodged in rebellion. Despite banishment to a foreign land, exilic Israel neglected true prophecy, trusted false prophets, and persisted in infidelity. Such were those to whom Ezekiel would prophesy.

Ezekiel’s Message

Third, the nature of Ezekiel’s message provides further context pertinent to Ezekiel’s muteness. As noted, YHWH ordained for exilic Israel a word containing “lamentation, and moaning, and woe” (Ezek 2:9–10), and so Ezekiel would issue a predominantly severe message to the refractory exiles while divine judgment yet loomed. Indeed, until judgment finally fell on Jerusalem, Ezekiel prophesied mainly YHWH’s wrath against Judah and Jerusalem—hereafter simply called Judah—YHWH’s wrath against the nations, and occasional interlaced messages of hope and calls for repentance.

Against Judah. Specifically, Ezekiel decried Judah’s rebellion against YHWH as worse than nearby nations (Ezek 5:6–9), and he went on to denounce their extensive acts of covenant betrayal.¹³ As an example, Ezekiel witnessed Judah’s evil occurring in YHWH’s very temple (Ezek 8:3, 5–6, 9–12, 14; 11:25). He learned that Judah did “great” and yet “greater abominations” (Ezek 8:6, 13, 15) such that its guilt was “exceedingly

¹² Mark F. Rooker, *Biblical Hebrew in Transition: The Language of the Book of Ezekiel*, Journal for the Study of the Old Testament, Supplement Series 90 (Sheffield, England: JSOT Press, 1990), 63–64n34.

¹³ In a broad sampling, Judah sinned with high places (Ezek 6:3–6, 13), altars (Ezek 6:4–6, 13), idols (Ezek 6:4–6, 9, 13; 8:3, 5, 10–12, 14, 16; 22:4; 23:7, 30, 37, 39, 49), abominations (Ezek 5:9, 11; 6:9, 11; 7:3–4, 8–9, 20; 8:6, 9, 13, 15, 17; 9:4; 11:18; 12:16; 16:2, 22, 25, 43, 47, 51; 22:2, 11; 23:36), violence (Ezek 7:23; 8:17; 9:9; 11:6; 12:19; 22:2–3, 6, 9, 12, 25–27), pride (Ezek 8:12; 9:9), devising evil (Ezek 11:2), rejecting YHWH’s ordinances and statutes (Ezek 11:12), false prophecy (Ezek 13; 22:25, 28), faithlessness (Ezek 15:8), whoredom (Ezek 16; 20:30; 22:10–11; 23), child sacrifice (Ezek 16:20; 23:37–39), desiring to be like the nations (Ezek 23:30), defiled ways and evil deeds (Ezek 23), contempt for discipline (Ezek 21:15–18 [10–13]), parental contempt (Ezek 22:7), extorting sojourners and neighbors (Ezek 22:7, 12, 29), wronging orphans and widows (Ezek 22:7), despising holy things (Ezek 22:8, 26), profaning Sabbaths (Ezek 22:8, 26; 23:38), slander (Ezek 22:9), lewdness (Ezek 22:9; 23), bribery (Ezek 22:12), neglecting YHWH (Ezek 22:12, 26), and dishonest gain (Ezek 22:13, 27).

great,” the land was “full of blood, and the city full of perversity” (Ezek 9:9). And Ezekiel declared this vision to the exiles upon his return to Babylon (Ezek 11:25).¹⁴

In perhaps the harshest expression of Judah’s infidelity to his people, Ezekiel cast Judah as a wanton whore (Ezek 16; 23). Day posits, “Given the abject stubbornness of this ‘rebellious house,’ severe measures were needed to get across the severity of what they were doing and what this meant *to God* [emphasis original].”¹⁵ In other words, since the exiles remained obstinate and denied that YHWH had judged sin and would yet do so, YHWH prescribed a jarring message of Judah’s infidelity, including graphic depictions of Judah as a shameless prostitute. In part, therefore, Ezekiel’s prophecy to exilic Israel exposed and condemned Judah’s unfaithfulness.

Ezekiel’s message also specified the consequences for such infidelity. He told the exiles that YHWH would send against Judah’s land the sword (Ezek 5:12, 17; 6:11; 14:21), famine (Ezek 4:16–17; 5:10, 12–17; 6:11; 7:15, 19; 12:16, 19; 14:21), wild beasts (Ezek 5:17; 14: 21), and pestilence (Ezek 5:12, 17; 6:11; 14:21). Furthermore, Ezekiel prophesied that YHWH would banish Judah by scattering them “to all the winds” (Ezek 5:10), “among the lands . . . among the nations where they are taken captive” (Ezek 6:8–9; cf. 20:34, 41; 22:15), “on the mountains” (Ezek 7:16), “out of the midst of” Jerusalem (Ezek 11:7, 9), and “into the hand of strangers” (Ezek 11:9). He also portrayed this coming captivity in a dramatic sign act (Ezek 12:3–7). As such, Ezekiel signified that Judah’s prince, his helpers, and his troops would “go into exile, into captivity” (Ezek 12:6, 10–14). And on account of YHWH’s judgments, Ezekiel said that the land would

¹⁴ See also Christopher J. H. Wright who says, “Ezekiel sees and condemns the whole range of social and economic evils that Israel wallowed in once they neglected the way of life and community that should have been theirs under the covenant regime of Yahweh.” Christopher J. H. Wright, *The Message of Ezekiel: A New Heart and a New Spirit*, Bible Speaks Today (Leicester, England: InterVarsity Press, 2001), 108–9.

¹⁵ Day, “Ezekiel and the Heart of Idolatry,” 30.

lie desolate (Ezek 6:6, 14; 7:1–4; 12:17–20; 15:1–8; 21:1–5 [20:45–49]). Ezekiel declared desolation for the land of Judah to his fellow exiles.

Additionally, Ezekiel told the exiles that YHWH would remove Judah's king. In a parable, he depicted the king as one who should have humbled himself but instead dealt treacherously with YHWH's instrument Babylon and thus with YHWH himself (Ezek 17:3–15, 18–20). Consequently, Ezekiel reported that YHWH would send Judah's king to Babylon, where he would perish (Ezek 17:16–18, 20–21). Since Judah failed to accept with humility YHWH's judgment through Babylon, Ezekiel prophesied to exilic Israel that YHWH would further judge Judah in taking its royal leader from the throne.¹⁶

Furthermore, Ezekiel proclaimed that YHWH would destroy Judah's temple. He announced that YHWH would first withdraw his presence and then permit foreigners to ravage it (Ezek 5:11; 7:20–22; 10). Ezekiel also saw and testified to YHWH's presence leaving the temple (Ezek 9:3; 10:4, 18–19; 11:22–23, 25). Then at the death of his wife, Ezekiel again conveyed the coming destruction of the temple through a graphic sign act (Ezek 24:15–24). Ezekiel prophesied ruin for Judah's land, king, and temple to the exiles.

Against the nations. Moreover, Ezekiel declared that YHWH would bring judgment against many foreign powers. He uttered prophecies and laments concerning the nations of Ammon, Moab, Edom, Philistia, Tyre, Sidon, and Egypt (Ezek 21:33–37 [28–32]; 25–32). As a result, his hearers received word that YHWH would bring judgment upon other foreign states too.

Significantly, Ezekiel on occasion uttered wrath against Jerusalem from Jerusalem (Ezek 11:4–13) and against the exiles from exile (Ezek 13; 14:1–11; 20:1–44). Yet, he largely spoke judgment against Judah and the nations to the exiles from Babylon.

¹⁶ See also Patrick Fairbairn, *Ezekiel and the Book of His Prophecy: An Exposition*, 4th ed. (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1876), 183.

Hope and repentance. Still, Ezekiel prophesied salvation and repentance as well. He foretold that YHWH would spare some from among those who received wrath (Ezek 6:8–10; 12:16). Additionally, Ezekiel revealed that YHWH had been a sanctuary to those judged with banishment (Ezek 11:16). Also, he prophesied that YHWH would deliver his people from false prophets and threatening nations, and he gave warning about that way of deliverance (Ezek 13:21–23; 28:24; 33:10–20). Furthermore, Ezekiel preached multiple messages disclosing YHWH’s intent to restore his people (Ezek 11:17–20; 14:10–11; 16:53–63; 17:22–24; 20:33–44; 28:25–26). Moreover, as outlined already, Ezekiel prophesied to the exiles with the aim of inspiring their repentance—he sought to stir understanding, he denounced idolatry and injustice while calling for repentance, he addressed sin that led people astray, and he declared judgment and salvation to prompt heart change.

In summary, YHWH called Ezekiel as a watchman-prophet to address his deeply rebellious people in exile. Exilic Israel did not accept true prophecy, and they believed in false prophets. As a result, they denied YHWH had judged them, they denied YHWH would yet bring judgment upon Judah, and they continued living out their sinful ways. Ezekiel, in turn, proclaimed a message largely comprised of judgment upon Judah and the nations interspersed with words of salvation and calls for repentance. Having established Ezekiel’s prophetic conditions and thus the context of Ezekiel’s muteness, the examination below begins the exegesis and evaluation of each text relevant to his muteness, starting with those of Ezekiel 3—the completion of Ezekiel’s commission.

Ezekiel 3:22–26aαβ: Muteness from Speaking

In the lead-up to Ezekiel’s silencing, YHWH directed him to a valley, showed him his glory, imbued him with his Spirit, ordered him to shut himself up at home, and said he would be bound with cords (Ezek 3:22–25). Then, YHWH announced Ezekiel’s muteness saying, “And I will cause your tongue to cling to the roof of your mouth so that

you will be mute” (וְלִשׁוֹןְךָ אֶדְבִיק אֶל־חִכְךָ וְנִאֲלַמְתָּ; Ezek 3:26aαβ). As noted in chapter 2, Ezekiel’s speechlessness began here at his call and continued until Jerusalem’s fall. This pronouncement of his muteness also supplies important evidence about its nature.

Namely, Ezekiel’s muteness was neither a voluntary abstention from speech nor a mere affliction of sorts. Instead, it was a divinely imposed inability to speak. This conclusion becomes evident first from examining the language of Ezekiel 3:26aαβ as it occurs elsewhere in the HB and then from evaluating this language as it appears in Ezekiel 3:26aαβ. To begin, Ezekiel 3:26aα utilizes the phrase, “the tongue clings to the roof of the mouth” (לְשׁוֹן + דָּבַק + חֵךְ). Douglas K. Stuart describes this construction as “an idiomatic way of saying that one cannot talk.”¹⁷ Indeed, this language in other instances means either a voluntary or involuntary ceasing from speech with usage determining whether oneself or an external entity affects the tongue binding. For example, in two cases, tongue clinging occurs amidst men preventing their own speech (Job 29:9–10) and one bidding his own self to cease from activity (Ps 137:5–6). These instances imply voluntary speechlessness. Conversely, tongue binding in two additional cases occurs in context with thirst (בְּצָמָה; Lam 4:4) and depleting maltreatment (Ps 22:15–16 [14–15]). Psalm 22:16 [15] also employs the passive causative (Hophal) use of “cling” (מִדְבָּק), which indicates that the condition is imposed on the subject. Such cases specify an involuntary clinging of the tongue.

Next, Ezekiel 3:26aβ employs the verb “mute” (אָלַם). Elsewhere, this verb and its adjectival form (אָלֵם) likewise denote silence of either a willful or involuntary kind. Usage determines whether one’s own self or an external agent affects the muteness. For example, a sheep’s muteness on the way to the slaughter and during its sheering implies

¹⁷ Douglas K. Stuart, *Ezekiel*, Communicator’s Commentary, Old Testament, vol. 18 (Dallas: Word Books, 1989), 51; see also G. A. Cooke, *Ezekiel*, Biblical Studies: The Hebrew Bible (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2015), 47; Mark F. Rooker, *Ezekiel*, Holman Old Testament Commentary, vol. 17 (Nashville: Holman Reference, 2005), 55.

the animal's simple, voluntary silence (Isa 53:7). By the same token, muteness in context with the poor and destitute who need someone to protect their rights suggests voluntary muteness (Prov 31:8–9). Such people can speak but choose not to because they themselves cannot protect their rights.¹⁸ Other cases of willful muteness exist as well (Ps 39:3 [2], 10 [9]). Alternatively, calling YHWH to mute insolent, lying lips speaks of an involuntary act of silence, for one with such lips would never volunteer for muteness (Ps 31:18–19 [17–18]). Similarly, muted lips that speak again after an external agent touched them implies enablement over an involuntary muteness (Dan 10:15–16). Also, this formerly muted man attributed his loss of faculties to a great vision, which further suggests he experienced an involuntary silence (Dan 10:16–17, cf. 8). Additional cases of imposed muteness occur elsewhere as well (Exod 4:11; Ps 38:14 [13]; Isa 35:6; 56:10; Hab 2:18). Thus, depending on their usage, the construction לִשְׁוֹן + דַּבַּק + הָהָךְ and the word אִלֵּם may indicate either a willful or involuntary muteness.

That said, the use of such language in Ezekiel 3:26 $\alpha\alpha\beta$ does not signify a voluntary act of muteness.¹⁹ As indicated by the first-person Hiphil of דַּבַּק (אִדְבִּיק), YHWH said he himself would cause Ezekiel's tongue to cling to the palate of his mouth so that Ezekiel would be mute. Leslie C. Allen recognizes YHWH's word here as the “determinative statement,” saying it specifies “a physical constraint, rather than merely an enabling of Ezekiel's voluntary abstinence from speech. This judgment is reinforced by the reference in 33:22 $\alpha\gamma$ to Yahweh's opening the prophet's mouth, in the light of

¹⁸ See Block, *Ezekiel 1–24*, 155–56; Kelvin G. Friebel, *Jeremiah's and Ezekiel's Sign-Acts: Rhetorical Nonverbal Communication*, Journal for the Study of the Old Testament, Supplement Series 283 (Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999), 178.

¹⁹ Contra those suggesting Ezekiel's muteness may in some way be voluntary: Block, *Ezekiel 1–24*, 155; H. L. Ellison, *Ezekiel: The Man and His Message* (London: Paternoster Press, 1956), 32, 98; Georg Fohrer, *Die Hauptprobleme des Buches Ezechiel*, Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft 72 (Berlin: Alfred Töpelmann, 1952), 30, 86, 242; Friebel, *Jeremiah's and Ezekiel's Sign-Acts*, 169, 169n205, 173n215, 179–81, 184–85, 188, 374; Gregory Yuri Glazov, *The Bridling of the Tongue and the Opening of the Mouth in Biblical Prophecy*, Journal for the Study of the Old Testament, Supplement Series 311 (Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001), 359.

which the passive variants of the phrase in 24:27aα; 33:22ba imply divine agency.”²⁰

That is, the language for muteness used throughout the book of Ezekiel consistently identifies YHWH as acting on Ezekiel’s mouth and physically restraining or freeing his speaking ability. Ezekiel’s will and agency were not involved. Incidentally, all other instances of the first-person Hiphil of דבק entail YHWH’s agency to enforce clinging (Jer 13:11; Ezek 29:4). Therefore, Ezekiel experienced an involuntary silencing from speech resulting from YHWH’s divinely imposed tongue binding.

Significantly, this recognition excludes seeing Ezekiel’s muteness as stemming from any clinical or psychological affliction.²¹ YHWH alone enacted speechlessness upon Ezekiel’s mouth—not mere circumstances.

Another aspect of Ezekiel’s muteness stems from this Hebrew language used to describe muteness. Specifically, all the above-noted uses of דבק + לשון and אדם entail a literal silence based in physical reality rather than mere symbolism.²² Also, since

²⁰ Leslie C. Allen, *Ezekiel 1–19*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 28 (Dallas: Word Books, 1994), 64.

²¹ Contra those suggesting Ezekiel’s muteness may in some way be a clinical or psychological affliction: Joseph Blenkinsopp, *Ezekiel*, Interpretation (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1990), 31–32; William H. Brownlee, *Ezekiel 1–19*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 28 (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1986), xxxiv, 54–58, 93; William H. Brownlee, “Ezekiel’s Parable of the Watchman and the Editing of Ezekiel,” *Vetus Testamentum* 28, no. 4 (1978): 395–97; Keith W. Carley, *The Book of the Prophet Ezekiel*, Cambridge Bible Commentary: On the New English Bible (London: Cambridge University Press, 1974), 5, cf. 28; Keith W. Carley, *Ezekiel among the Prophets: A Study of Ezekiel’s Place in Prophetic Tradition*, Studies in Biblical Theology, Second Series 31 (Naperville, IL: Alec R. Allenson, 1975), 35n117; A. B. Davidson, *The Book of the Prophet Ezekiel: With Notes and Introduction*, ed. A. W. Streane, rev. ed., Cambridge Bible for Schools and Colleges (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1916), xi, 28–29, 236; Walther Eichrodt, *Ezekiel: A Commentary*, trans. Cosslett Quin, Old Testament Library (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1970), 347–48, 459; Fairbairn, *Ezekiel*, 44, 357, cf. 269; Marvin A. Sweeney, *Reading Ezekiel: A Literary and Theological Commentary*, Reading the Old Testament (Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys, 2013), 125, 168; Bruce Vawter and Leslie J. Hoppe, *A New Heart: A Commentary on the Book of Ezekiel*, International Theological Commentary (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1991), 38–39; Glazov who blends the willful and afflicted views. Glazov, *Bridling of the Tongue*, 223, 273–74, 359; Moshe Greenberg who blends the imposed and afflicted views. Moshe Greenberg, *Ezekiel 1–20: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, Anchor Bible, vol. 22 (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1983), 102, 120–21; Moshe Greenberg, *Ezekiel 21–37: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, Anchor Bible, vol. 22A (New York: Doubleday, 1997), 516, cf. 681–82; Moshe Greenberg, “On Ezekiel’s Dumbness,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 77, no. 2 (1958): 103; Robert W. Jenson who blends the imposed and afflicted views. Robert W. Jenson, *Ezekiel*, Brazos Theological Commentary on the Bible (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2009), 55, 256–57; Millard C. Lind who blends the imposed and afflicted views. Millard C. Lind, *Ezekiel*, Believers Church Bible Commentary (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1996), 44–45, 205.

²² See also Friebel, *Jeremiah’s and Ezekiel’s Sign-Acts*, 177, 180.

YHWH later designated Ezekiel's muteness as a sign (Ezek 24:27), and signs convey meaning to others through objective, tangible phenomena, Ezekiel's silence must be observable and thus physical.²³ Accordingly, Ezekiel's muteness manifested itself in a physical or literal inability to speak.

Furthermore, Ezekiel experienced a circumstantial and provisional muteness. The circumstances of his silence in part include those outlined above. YHWH deployed his muted watchman-prophet into exile, with a prophecy of judgment and glimmers of salvation, to a deeply rebellious people who did not believe in YHWH's present and forthcoming judgment. In chapter 5, I will consider why such circumstances prompted YHWH to impose this literal muteness on his prophet.

As to its provisional nature, Ezekiel's silence was certainly non-permanent, for it finally ended at Jerusalem's fall. However, it remains to be clarified whether Ezekiel's muteness was durative and existed perpetually from his call until Jerusalem's fall or intermittent such that other circumstances occasioned its recurrent suspension during his period of speechlessness. Since YHWH imposed the muteness, it would seem to subsist entirely at his discretion. This reality becomes more apparent from YHWH's later qualification placed on the muteness (Ezek 3:27). Additionally, because Ezekiel's silence began at his call and continued until Jerusalem's fall, and Ezekiel clearly spoke during this time, the evidence heavily favors an intermittent understanding. When examining Ezekiel 3:27, I will consider these factors and argue that his muteness entails an intermittent aspect. However, to sum up Ezekiel 3:26aαβ, Ezekiel's muteness was an imposed, literal, circumstantial, and provisional silence from speech.

²³ See Allen, *Ezekiel 1–19*, 63; Block, *Ezekiel 1–24*, 155; Friebe, *Jeremiah's and Ezekiel's Sign-Acts*, 175n220, 177, 185–86; Robert R. Wilson, "An Interpretation of Ezekiel's Dumbness," *Vetus Testamentum* 22, no. 1 (1972): 92–93.

Ezekiel 3:26a_γ: Muteness from a Lifestyle of Reproof toward His Hearers

Next, YHWH further qualified Ezekiel's speechlessness by stipulating an additional aspect of its nature. He continued stating, וְלֹא־תִהְיֶה לָהֶם לְאִישׁ מוֹכִיחַ, which one may in part translate to mean, “and you will not be to them for אִישׁ מוֹכִיחַ” (Ezek 3:26a_γ). To translate the whole phrase and so elucidate this aspect of muteness requires rightly rendering the word מוֹכִיחַ, the construction אִישׁ מוֹכִיחַ, and then the whole of Ezekiel 3:26a_γ. The discussion below assesses each of these items in sequence.

מוֹכִיחַ: A Word Study

Since מוֹכִיחַ is a participle in the Hiphil stem from the root יכח, the following study determines the meaning of מוֹכִיחַ as used in Ezekiel 3:26a_γ first by resolving the range of meaning for the verbal root יכח in the Hiphil stem. The study considers its usage in the MT, its translation into ancient versions, its Hebrew synonyms, and the translation of cognates of יכח from related languages. Then given this established range of meaning, the study examines and interprets the Hiphil of יכח in its participle form (מוֹכִיחַ) as employed in Ezekiel 3:26a_γ.

MT usage. The Hiphil of יכח occurs fifty-four times (54x) in fifty verses, including Ezekiel 3:26. Its use extends from the Pentateuch (7x) through the Prophets (13x) and into the Writings (34x). An analysis of all such occurrences reveals that three distinct lexical meanings sufficiently encapsulate and satisfy the span of its semantic range.

Reprove or rebuke (a person or figure for a person). First, the Hiphil of יכח can convey to “reprove” or “rebuke,” as in to admonish, censure, critique, disapprove, reprimand, or reproach. It signifies this action forty-two times in the MT (42x; 78%; Gen 21:25; 31:42; Lev 19:17 (2x); 2 Sam 7:14; 2 Kgs 19:4; 1 Chr 12:18 [17]; 16:21; Job 5:17; 6:25 (2x), 26; 13:10 (2x); 16:21; 22:4; 32:12; 40:2; Ps 6:2 [1]; 38:2 [1]; 50:8, 21; 94:10;

105:14; 141:5; Prov 3:12; 9:7, 8 (2x); 15:12; 19:25; 24:25; 25:12; 28:23; 30:6; Isa 29:21; 37:4; Jer 2:19; Hos 4:4; Amos 5:10; Hab 1:12; and I maintain Ezek 3:26).

Of these occurrences, the action's recipient may be marked using the direct object marker **תא** (4x; Gen 21:25; Lev 19:17; Job 13:10; Prov 3:12), it may appear as a pronominal suffix (9x; 2 Sam 7:14; Job 5:17; 22:4; Ps 6:2 [1]; 38:2 [1]; 50:8, 21; 141:5; Jer 2:19), it may be unmarked (6x; Job 6:26; 40:2; Ps 105:14; Prov 9:8; 28:23; 1 Chr 16:21), and it may remain less explicit (9x; Gen 31:42; 1 Chr 12:18 [17]; Job 6:25; Ps 94:10; Prov 24:25; Isa 29:21; Hos 4:4; Amos 5:10; Hab 1:12; and I maintain Ezek 3:26).

Common prepositions also mark the action's recipient, including **ל** (7x; Job 16:21 (2x); 32:12; Prov 9:7, 8; 15:12; 19:25), **ב** (3x; 2 Kgs 19:4; Prov 30:6; Isa 37:4), and **על** (1x; Prov 25:12). **על** marks the ground for the action as well (4x; Gen 21:25; Ps 50:8; 105:14; 1 Chr 16:21). Additionally, **מן** marks the action's ground (1x; Job 22:4) or source (1x; Job 6:25). Furthermore, **ב** marks the manner of action (4x; 2 Sam 7:14 (2x); Ps 6:2 [1]; 38:2 [1]) or the sphere of action (2x; Isa 29:21; Amos 5:10). And **עם** likewise marks the sphere of action (1x; Job 16:21).

The context for the Hiphil of **יכח**, when used in this sense, involves a fault that prompts address and redress between parties. Situations include unfair or partial treatment, blameworthy words, theft, mocking, apostasy, harm, and other sin. Personal agents perform or withhold the action, including Abraham, YHWH God, Israel, Job, Job's friends, Job's witness, a wise or righteous person, one in the gate, Ezekiel, and generic or unspecified persons. Personal agents also receive the action, such as Abimelech, Laban, neighbors, David's offspring, Israel, kings, Job, Job's friends, YHWH God, the psalmist, generic or unspecified persons, and more. In one instance, the apostasy of YHWH's people performs the action (Jer 2:19), and elsewhere, the Rabshakeh's words (2 Kgs 19:4; Isa 37:4), Job's words (Job 6:26), and a listening ear (Prov 25:12) receive the action. Even in these latter cases, however, the impersonal referents serve as figures for individuals who spoke words, have ears, and committed apostasy.

Notably, the recipient welcoming the Hiphil of יָכַח enjoys blessing, love, delight, grace, knowledge, anointing, and adorning (Job 5:17; Ps 141:5; Prov 3:12; 9:8; 19:25; 25:12; 28:23), and he thus shows himself correctible. Günter Mayer views such individuals as having “a receptive ear” and, therefore, enjoying “the ideal relationship between student and teacher.”²⁴ On the other hand, the unwelcoming recipient responds with disdain, hatred, and abuse (Prov 9:7, 8; 15:12), revealing himself to be incorrigible or uncorrectable. A sampling of these forty-two instances examined in context reveals that “reprove” or “rebuke” sufficiently reflects the intended meaning here for the Hiphil of יָכַח.

For instance, after Abimelech’s servants stole Abraham’s well, “Abraham הוֹכַח Abimelech because of a well of water” (Gen 21:25). Abimelech’s ensuing defensiveness after Abraham spoke to him (Gen 21:26) shows that הוֹכַח here means Abraham voiced disapproval to Abimelech so that he would right the experienced wrong. Said another way, Abraham rebuked Abimelech. Similarly, whenever David’s son would commit iniquity as king of the Davidic dynasty, YHWH said, “וְהִכַּחְתִּי him with the rod of men and with the blows of the sons of man” (2 Sam 7:14). Since the rod and blows serve as instruments of scolding—for iniquity in this case—YHWH meant by וְהִכַּחְתִּי that he would reprimand or reprove David’s son for sin. Also, when the psalmist felt burdened, in part by his own sin (Ps 38:3–4 [2–3]; cf. 6:3–4 [2–3]), he pleaded with YHWH saying, “תּוֹכִיחַ me not in your anger” (Ps 38:2 [1]; cf. 6:2 [1]). The presence of sin and apparent risk of YHWH’s angry reply show that in using תּוֹכִיחַ, the psalmist meant that he wanted to avoid YHWH’s wrathful admonishment or rebuke for his faults.

The participial form of the Hiphil of יָכַח (מוֹכִיחַ) may also convey this same sense (9x; 17%; Job 32:12; 40:2; Prov 9:7; 24:25; 25:12; 28:23; Isa 29:21; Amos 5:10;

²⁴ Günter Mayer, “יָכַח *ykh*; תּוֹכַחַת *tōkahat*; תּוֹכַחָה *tōkēhā*,” in *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, ed. G. Johannes Botterweck and Helmer Ringgren, trans. David E. Green (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1990), 6:70.

and I argue Ezek 3:26 as well). For instance, in Job 40:2, God replied to Job’s charges against him by demanding from him, “Is a faultfinder (יִסּוֹר) contending with the Almighty? Let מוֹכִיחַ with God answer it.” YHWH’s labeling Job both יִסּוֹר and מוֹכִיחַ in such tight proximity reveals that these terms share a similar meaning. Then, since יִסּוֹר indicates a “reprover” or “faultfinder,”²⁵ the participle form for the Hiphil of יָכַח (מוֹכִיחַ) likewise here conveys this sense.

The use of מוֹכִיחַ elsewhere confirms this meaning as well. For example, some texts compare מוֹכִיחַ to one who disciplines others (Prov 9:7), speaks truth (Amos 5:10), and answers someone’s words (Job 32:12). Other passages contrast מוֹכִיחַ with one who calls wicked people righteous (Prov 24:24–25) and flatters with the tongue (Prov 28:23). In other words, the context and use of מוֹכִיחַ show that it may mean one who speaks rightly to both instruct someone and discipline a wicked person or purveyor of wrong speech—מוֹכִיחַ may indicate one who reproves.

At times, a third party performed the Hiphil of יָכַח and so reproved amidst other people. For example, when Laban pursued Jacob and meant him harm, YHWH warned him against his plans and ultimately corrected his course (Gen 31:29). After discovering YHWH’s action, Jacob concluded that YHWH “saw my affliction and the labor of my hands and יָכַח last night” (Gen 31:42). That is, Jacob understood YHWH to have considered Laban’s history of mistreating Jacob and his current malicious intent and rebuked Laban.

Job 16:21 offers a comparable case. Job 16:19–21 contains textual variants, but on the basis that four early witnesses all uphold the MT—the Septuagint, Latin Vulgate, Syriac Peshitta, and Aramaic Targums—one may reasonably accept the MT here. In

²⁵ Francis Brown et al., *The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon: With an Appendix Containing the Biblical Aramaic: Coded with the Numbering System from Strong’s Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2018), 416; Ludwig Koehler and Walter Baumgartner, *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*, ed. Johann Jakob Stamm, trans. M. E. J. Richardson (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1994), 2:417–18.

Of these occurrences, the action's recipient may be marked using the direct object marker אֶת (1x; Gen 24:14), it may appear as a relative pronoun אֲשֶׁר with its head noun (1x; Gen 24:44), and it may remain less explicit (6x; Gen 31:37; Job 9:33; Isa 2:4; 11:3, 4; Mic 4:3). Common prepositions mark the action's pertinent parties or faculties, including לְ (7x; Gen 24:14 (2x), 44; Isa 2:4; 11:3, 4; Mic 4:3) and בֵּין (2x; Gen 31:37; Job 9:33). Once, בְּ marks the manner of action (1x; Isa 11:4).

The context for the Hiphil of יָכַח, when used in this sense, involves an unsettled matter that calls for resolution through a right finding. Situations include whom one should marry (Gen 24:14, 44), who stands culpable for an apparent wrong (Gen 31:37; Job 9:33), and general human affairs (Isa 2:4; 11:3, 4; Mic 4:3). Personal agents perform or withhold the action, including YHWH God, Jacob and Laban's brethren, an offspring of Jesse, or an unspecified individual. Personal agents also receive the action, such as Isaac's future wife. A sampling of these eight occurrences examined in context reveals that "judge" or "decide" sufficiently reflects the intended meaning here for the Hiphil of יָכַח. Notably, in all eight cases, a third party performed the Hiphil of יָכַח and so judged or decided among others.

For instance, when charged to find Isaac's wife (Gen 24), Abraham's servant asked that YHWH provide a woman who would water his camels. He said, "הֲבִיחֵךְ her for your servant Isaac, and in this I will know that you have worked steadfast love with my master" (Gen 24:14; cf. v. 44). In other words, the servant said that he would view the coming of a camel-watering-woman as YHWH's choice for Isaac's wife. Significantly, once the servant recognized YHWH's decision regarding Isaac's wife, he declared that YHWH had led him on the "right way" (Gen 24:48).

A second example occurred after Laban accused Jacob of theft, rifled through all his belongings, but discovered no evidence of guilt (Gen 31:25–35). Jacob responded, "[W]hat have you found from all the vessels of your house? Set it thus in front of my brothers and your brothers so that יִכָּיָח between the two of us" (Gen 31:37). Jacob bid

his and Laban's brothers to consider the evidence from Laban's search and find whether in the matter of the missing stuff, Jacob—or perhaps now Laban—had committed a “transgression” or “sin” (Gen 31:36). Said another way, Jacob invited others to judge who stood culpable in this situation.

In a third case that twice uses the Hiphil of יָכַח, Isaiah 11:3 describes an offspring of Jesse as one who “will judge (יִשְׁפֹּט) not by the appearance of his eyes” and “יִזְכֶּיחַ not by the hearing of his ears.” Then, Isaiah 11:4 describes this offspring as one who “will judge (יִשְׁפֹּט) the poor with righteousness, יְהוֹכִיחַ for the meek of the earth with uprightness.” These parallel constructions tightly juxtapose the Hiphil of יָכַח with שָׁפַט, which has the basic meaning of to “judge” or “decide.”²⁸ Also, the phrases “not by the appearance of his eyes,” “not by the hearing of his ears,” “with righteousness,” and “with uprightness” signal impartiality—language consistent with true and right justice. Situated in this context then, the Hiphil of יָכַח conveys the sense of “judge” or “decide.”

Job 9:33 supplies a fourth significant instance. In context, Job doubted whether even the righteous could find justice with God. He implied that God had shown himself unjust and would wield his supremacy to dominate if in court (Job 9:2–24). Then, after lamenting his sorry state (Job 9:25–31), he asserted, “For he is not a man like me, [that] I might answer him, [that] we might enter together into judgment (בְּמִשְׁפָּט). There is no מוֹכִיחַ between us. He would set his hand on us two” (Job 9:32–33). Job wanted a trial with God and an opportunity to address him with charges of unfair treatment. However, because he faced an unequal and ostensibly unjust opponent, Job desired help from an able מוֹכִיחַ. Therefore, by מוֹכִיחַ, Job in this case meant one who could dispense justice or right judgment between God and him. Similar cases of a third party who would perform the Hiphil of יָכַח with others appear elsewhere as well (Isa 2:4; Mic 4:3).

²⁸ Brown et al., *Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon*, 1047–48; Koehler and Baumgartner, *Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon*, 4:1622–26.

Importantly, several of these eight instances of the Hiphil of יָכַח appear in proximity to language that colors its context and meaning with the notion of judging²⁹—language that matches with “judge” or “decide.” As a result, the lexical meaning “judge” or “decide” sufficiently represents eight instances of the Hiphil of יָכַח.

Argue (a position). Third, the Hiphil of יָכַח can indicate to “argue,” as in to claim, contend, debate, maintain, or reason. It indicates this action on four occasions in the MT (4x; 7%; Job 13:3, 15; 15:3; 19:5).

Of these occurrences, the action’s recipient may appear unmarked (2x; Job 13:15; 19:5) and may remain less explicit (2x; Job 13:3; 15:3). Common prepositions mark the action’s direction, including אֶל (2x; Job 13:3; 15) and עַל (1x; Job 19:5). Once, בְּ marks the manner of action (1x; Job 15:3).

The context for the Hiphil of יָכַח, when used in this sense, involves a contested position that prompts address regarding its legitimacy. Situations include one’s conduct (Job 13:3, 15), one’s view of reality (Job 15:3), and one’s moral standing (Job 19:5). Personal agents perform the action, including Job, a supposed wise man, and Job’s friends. Impersonal referents also receive the action, such as Job’s ways and Job’s disgrace. An examination of these four occurrences in context shows that the Hiphil of יָכַח may convey the sense of “argue.”

For example, two such instances occur in Job 13. In context, Job had suffered significant loss, yet despite accusations of personal culpability, he alleged that he did not deserve his suffering, that God had acted unjustly, and that he better grasped God’s dealings than his accusing friends (Job 1–13:2). Then in Job 13:3, Job declared, “but I would speak to the Almighty, and I desire הוֹדִיָּךְ with God.” Since Job’s hearing with his friends left him wanting, and as noted above, Job desired a trial to address God and to

²⁹ See the following examples of such proximate language: judging via words rooted in שָׁפַט (Job 9:32; Isa 2:4; 11:3–4; Mic 4:3).

accuse him of unfair treatment, Job’s juxtaposing הוֹכַח with “speak” shows that by הוֹכַח he meant speaking with God as one would in a courtroom. In other words, Job sought to reason or argue his case with God. Notably, he used הוֹכַח to mean contesting God’s supposed illegitimate or wrong dealings with him and not a morally neutral point. And this sense carries forward into his subsequent use of the Hiphil of יָכַח as well.

After further denouncing his friends and requesting opportunity to speak (Job 13:4–14), Job stated of God, “Though he kills me, I will hope in him, but אֹכִיחַ my ways to his face” (Job 13:15). Amidst the same context, Job again meant by אֹכִיחַ that he wished to contend for or argue the rightfulness of his conduct to God’s face.

In its next use, Eliphaz had heard Job’s perspective (Job 13–14) and responded saying, “Should a wise man answer with windy knowledge and fill his belly with the east wind? הוֹכַח useless talk and unprofitable words?” (Job 15:2–3). Eliphaz related הוֹכַח to Job’s “answering” and employing “talk” and “words” that should have been useful and profitable but in his view were not. Since one answers and employs useful, profitable words to strengthen and defend a position, Eliphaz utilized הוֹכַח to describe Job’s arguing the legitimacy of his perspective.

Finally, in Job 19:5, Job used the Hiphil of יָכַח in this same way. Following assertions that his friends had verbally assaulted and insulted him (Job 19:2–3), Job set up a conditional statement, “If truly you magnify yourselves against me and תוֹכִיחוּ my disgrace against me” (Job 19:5). To act such that someone’s disgrace rests against him implies charging it to or maintaining it on their public record. Then, used in context with his friends verbally attacking him, Job showed he meant by תוֹכִיחוּ that his friends had charged or argued his disgrace against him as part of their attack. And like before, arguing someone’s disgrace is to charge one with dishonorable or wrongful action—not a morally neutral position. The above instances, therefore, show that “argue” sufficiently represents four instances of the Hiphil of יָכַח.

Significantly, no use of the Hiphil of יָכַח in the MT suggests that it inherently means to “intercede” or “mediate,” as in personal entreaty, supplication, or action with respect to one’s interests or taking one’s side. When a third party performs the Hiphil of יָכַח toward others over unaddressed faults (Gen 31:42; 2 Kgs 19:4; 1 Chr 12:18 [17]; Isa 37:4; Job 16:21) or unsettled matters (Gen 24:14, 44; 31:37; Isa 2:4; 11:3–4; Mic 4:3; Job 9:33), the third-party agency does introduce a secondary, acquired sense of to “arbitrate,” “referee,” or “umpire.” However, even then, the Hiphil of יָכַח never indicates one petitioning or negotiating for another’s personal sake or interests. Instead, it remains tethered to its essential meaning—facilitating an objective rebuke, judgment, or decision. Therefore, to posit that such uses show the Hiphil of יָכַח to entail “shades of meaning” that involve “to take sides” argues too much.³⁰ Instead, the third-party agent of the Hiphil of יָכַח acts impartially toward pertinent parties and only for the sake of making matters right. The extent to which one already stands on the side of objective right determines whether the agent incidentally acts for one’s own sake or on one’s behalf.

Furthermore, uses in which a third party performs the action for others do not suggest that the Hiphil of יָכַח means to “intercede” or “mediate” in the sense of conciliating, reconciling estranged parties, or restoring friendly relations. Again, the third-party agency with its supplementary language “between” (בֵּינָם; Gen 31:37; Job 9:33) and “set his hand on us two” (יָשַׁת יָדוֹ עַל-שְׁנֵינוּ; Job 9:33) introduces a secondary, acquired sense of “joining” or “uniting.” Yet, even in such cases, the Hiphil of יָכַח never indicates working to restore personal relations but remains tethered to its intrinsic sense—facilitating an objective judgment or decision. It thus claims too much to posit that the

³⁰ Contra Pietro Bovati, *Re-Establishing Justice: Legal Terms, Concepts and Procedures in the Hebrew Bible*, trans. Michael J. Smith, *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament, Supplement Series 105* (Sheffield, England: JSOT Press, 1994), 46–48; see also Glazov, *Bridling of the Tongue*, 259–60; Lena-Sofia Tiemeyer, “Ezekiel: A Compromised Prophet in Reduced Circumstances,” in *Constructs of Prophecy in the Former and Latter Prophets and Other Texts*, ed. Lester L. Grabbe and Martti Nissinen, *Ancient Near East Monographs 4* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2011), 189n55; Lena-Sofia Tiemeyer, “God’s Hidden Compassion,” *Tyndale Bulletin* 57, no. 2 (2006): 209.

Hiphil of יכח “involves promoting dialogue between two parties.”³¹ On the contrary, a third party facilitating a judgment or decision acts to resolve matters and thus promotes an end to dialogue between parties. It also oversteps to assert that the Hiphil of יכח entails mediation “to reconcile the estranged parties” or “restore the broken relationship of the two parties.”³² Conceivably, one arbitrating judgment or decision may issue a finding that settles a matter but leaves relations soured. The Hiphil of יכח is not concerned with subjective relationships so much as affecting objective right on a given issue.

In sum, a contextual analysis of the Hiphil of יכח as used in the MT reveals that even when performed by a third party, the lexical meanings “reprove” or “rebuke,” “judge” or “decide,” and “argue” sufficiently cover its semantic range.

Ancient version translations. Next, translations of the Hiphil of יכח into the Greek, Latin, Syriac, and Aramaic versions provide possible synonyms for the Hiphil of יכח and so serve to substantiate these lexical meanings. Though at times indicating senses not yet noted, the analysis below demonstrates that Greek, Latin, Syriac, and Aramaic translators selected words for the Hiphil of יכח that largely reflect the senses found in the above three MT-derived lexical meanings. In other words, ancient translators considered the Hiphil of יכח to convey mainly the same meaning expressed by the words “reprove” or “rebuke,” “judge” or “decide,” and “argue.” Beginning with the Greek, the following tables present lexical forms or verbal roots underlying a given version’s translations for the Hiphil of יכח along with their respective occurrences and dictionary definitions.

³¹ Contra Wilson, “An Interpretation of Ezekiel’s Dumbness,” 100–101; see also Tiemeyer, “Ezekiel: A Compromised Prophet in Reduced Circumstances,” 189n55; Tiemeyer, “God’s Hidden Compassion,” 208–9.

³² Contra Margaret S. Odell, *Ezekiel*, Smyth & Helwys Bible Commentary (Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys, 2005), 58; Mayer, “יכח *ykh*; תוכחת *tōkhaḥat*; תוכחה *tōkēḥā*,” 6:68.

Table 1. Greek lexical forms used to translate the Hebrew Hiphil of כִּבֵּן

Item	Occur	Lexical Form ³³	Definitions ³⁴
1.1	40	ἐλέγχω	disgrace, put to shame, treat with contempt, cross-examine, question, accuse, convict, test, bring to the proof, prove, bring convincing proof, refute, confute, put right, correct, get the better of, expose, betray, decide
1.2	2	ἐτοιμάζω	get ready, prepare, furnish, make arrangements, make ready
1.3	2	ἔλεγχος (A), ἔλεγχος (B)	A. reproach, disgrace, dishonour B. argument of disproof or refutation, cross-examining, testing, scrutiny esp. for purposes of refutation, proof, test, an account, trial, conviction, evidence on which convicted, conscience, catalogue, inventory, drop-pearl
1.4	1	ἐξελέγχω	convict, confute, refute, blame, put to the proof, bring to the test, ascertain sentiment, prove, find out one's weak points, compute, establish a claim to
1.5	1	ἐλεγμός (ἔλεγχις)	= ἔλεγχις (refuting, reproving, conviction)
1.6	1	παιδεύω	bring up or rear a child, train and teach, educate, culture, breed well, give instruction, correct, discipline, chastise, punish
1.7	1	ὀνειδίζω	cast in one's teeth, make a reproach to one, reproach, upbraid, chide
1.8	1	βλασφημέω	speak profanely of sacred things, offer rash prayers, utter imprecations against, speak ill or to the prejudice of one, slander, have evil spoken of one, speak impiously or irreverently of God, blaspheme
1.9	1	ἐνάλλομαι	leap in or on, rush at or against, jump about, dance

³³ ἐλέγχω: Gen 21:25; 31:37, 42; Lev 19:17; 2 Sam 7:14; 1 Chr 12:18 [17]; 16:21; Job 5:17; 9:33; 13:3, 10, 15; 15:3; 22:4; 32:12; 40:2; Ps 6:2 [1]; 37:2 [38:1]; 49:8 [50:8]; 49:21 [50:21]; 93:10 [94:10]; 104:14 [105:14]; 140:5 [141:5]; Prov 9:7, 8 (2x); 15:12; 19:25; 24:25; 28:23; 30:6; Isa 2:4; 11:3, 4; 29:21; Jer 2:19; Ezek 3:26; Hos 4:4; Amos 5:10; Hab 1:12; ἐτοιμάζω: Gen 24:14, 44; ἔλεγχος: Job 6:26; 16:21; ἐξελέγχω: Mic 4:3; ἐλεγμός: Lev 19:17; παιδεύω: Prov 3:12; ὀνειδίζω: Isa 37:4; βλασφημέω: 2 Kgs 19:4; ἐνάλλομαι: Job 19:5; αἰτέω: Job 6:25; λόγος: Prov 25:12; ἰσχύς: Job 6:25; οὐθείς + ἡσσω: Job 13:10.

³⁴ Henry George Liddell and Robert Scott, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, ed. Henry Stuart Jones and Roderick McKenzie, rev. ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), 44, 317–18, 530–31, 554, 590, 703, 779, 844, 1057–59, 1230, 1268–69, 1287. For simplicity, definitions have been consolidated around unique renderings and mainly into active voice forms for verbs. Additionally, only top-level renderings under the Roman numerals of Liddell and Scott are listed for λόγος and οὐθείς.

Item	Occur	Lexical Form	Definitions
1.10	1	λόγος	computation, reckoning, relation, correspondence, proportion, explanation, debate, continuous statement, narrative, oration, verbal expression or utterance, word, phrase, a particular utterance, saying, thing spoken of, subject-matter, matter, secret, subject, question, case, point, expression, utterance, speech, eloquence, language, manner of utterance, orations, the Word or Wisdom of God
1.11	1	αἰτέω	ask, beg, demand, postulate, assume, claim, borrow
1.12	1	ἰσχύς	strength, might, power, validity, brute force, perform, motive force, vigour, main body
1.13	1	οὐθείς (οὐδείς) + ἥσσω	later form for οὐδείς, οὐδέν (not one, no one, none, no set, naught, good for naught, nothing, not at all, never mind, no matter) inferior, weaker, not so good, second, the worse, less, fewer, giving way, yielding, a slave to, unable to resist, just as much

Greek translators primarily rendered the Hiphil of כִּבֵּן using the word ἐλέγχω (item 1.1; 40x; 74%), a word having a semantic range consistent with all three derived lexical meanings. For example, “accuse” carries the sense of “reprove” or “rebuke.”

Additionally, “convict,” “test” in an evaluative sense, and “decide” all express the idea of “judge” or “decide.” Furthermore, “cross-examine,” “bring to the proof,” “prove,” “bring convincing proof,” “refute,” and “confute” all convey the notion of “argue.” Moreover, “put right” and “correct” underly the sense of all three lexical meanings. And due to the presence of similar definitions, ἔλεγχος, ἐξελέγχω, ἐλεγμός, and παιδεύω also corroborate the three lexical meanings (items 1.3–6; 5x; 9%).

Notably, ἐλέγχω can mean “question.” Nevertheless, this definition does not suggest that the Hiphil of כִּבֵּן means “intercede” or “mediate,” as in making “request” or “petition.” Given its other definitions, “question” for ἐλέγχω likely aligns with “cross-

examine” and so carries the sense of “interrogating,” as in questioning to refute or set right.

In the Greek version, ἐλέγχω for the Hiphil of כּח does appear in context with language of mediation. Specifically, Job 9:33 is rendered, “our mediator and ἐλέγχων and hearer of the case between both” (ὁ μεσίτης ἡμῶν καὶ ἐλέγχων καὶ διακούων ἀνὰ μέσον ἀμφοτέρων). Yet the highly paraphrastic and speculative nature of the Greek text of Job undercuts claims that such adjacent language clearly reveals the meaning of ἐλέγχω and thus the Hiphil of כּח. At most, the translators used this language to render loosely the third-party agency with its ancillary language—“between” (בֵּין) and “set his hand on us two” (יָשַׁם יְדָיו עָלֵינוּ)—which, as with the Hebrew, could introduce a secondary, acquired sense of arbitration between parties. For example, it may mean one acting for others to accuse, convict, refute, or other actions intrinsic to ἐλέγχω (item 1.1), but it does not mean conciliating, reconciling estranged parties, or restoring friendly relations.

Additionally, ὀνειδίζω and βλασφημέω both communicate “reprove” or “rebuke” (items 1.7–8; 2x; 4%), though βλασφημέω only when expressing the sense of “utter imprecations against” or “speak ill or to the prejudice of one.” As for ἐνάλλομαι and λόγος, they too indicate “reproof” or “rebuke” (items 1.9–10; 2x; 4%). For example, the one case of ἐνάλλομαι for the Hiphil of כּח conveys the figurative movement of “rush at me with reproach” (Job 19:5). And the one instance of λόγος for the Hiphil of כּח indicates a word of correction—“a wise word to an obedient ear” (Prov 25:12). Then regarding ἐτοιμάζω, this verb more loosely intersects the lexical meaning “judge” or “decide” (item 1.2; 2x; 4%), for one judges and decides upon that which he “prepares.”

On the other hand, αἰτέω, ἰσχύς, and οὐθείς (οὐδείς) + ἦσσαν do not readily fit the proposed lexical meanings for the Hiphil of כּח (items 1.11–13; 3x; 6%). This mismatch occurs in the latter two cases because translators sought to render the sense of the Hebrew infinitive absolute rather than simply supplying a second finite verb for the Hiphil of כּח. Such translations do not invite a new lexical meaning for the Hiphil of כּח.

In the case of *αἰτέω*, its semantic range includes “ask,” “beg,” and “demand,” and so this translation could suggest the Hiphil of יכח entails the sense of “intercede” or “mediate,” as in to make “request” or “petition.” However, a single instance in one ancient version hardly gives grounds for recognizing an expanded sense of the Hiphil of יכח. Αἰτέω in Job 6:25 seems instead to suggest an outlier translation. Therefore, the Greek renderings for the Hiphil of יכח do not give sufficient cause to recognize a new lexical meaning conveying “intercede” or “mediate.” Instead, a firm majority communicate meaning in correspondence with one or more of the MT-derived lexical meanings (51x; 94%).

Next, an examination of the Latin Vulgate yields similar results. The following table contains inferred lexical forms for every Latin translation of the Hiphil of יכח along with their corresponding dictionary definitions.

Table 2. Latin lexical forms used to translate the Hebrew Hiphil of יכח

Item	Occur	Lexical Form ³⁵	Definitions ³⁶
2.1	29	<i>arguo</i>	make clear, show, prove, make known, declare, assert, accuse, reprove, censure, charge with, blame, expose, rebuke, convince, denounce as false

³⁵ *arguo*: Gen 31:42; Lev 19:17; 2 Sam 7:14; 2 Kgs 19:4; Job 6:25; 9:33; 13:10, 15; 15:3; 19:5; 22:4; 32:12; 39:32 [40:2]; Ps 6:2 [1]; 37:2 [38:1]; 49:8 [50:8], 21 [50:21]; 93:10 [94:10]; Prov 9:7, 8 (2x); 24:25; 25:12; 30:6; Isa 2:4; 11:3, 4; 29:21; Hos 4:4; *corripio*: Job 5:17; Ps 104:14 [105:14]; Prov 3:12; 15:12; 19:25; 28:23; Amos 5:10; Hab 1:12; Mic 4:3; *increpo*: Gen 21:25; 1 Chr 16:21; Job 6:26; Ps 140:5 [141:5]; Jer 2:19; *iudico (judico)*: Gen 31:37; 1 Chr 12:17; Job 16:22 [21]; *praeparo*: Gen 24:14, 44; *disputo*: Job 13:3; *obiurgo (objurgo)*: Ezek 3:26; *obprobro (opprobrio)*: Isa 37:4; *possum*: Job 6:25; *publice (publicus; publico)*: Lev 19:17; *ipse*: Job 13:10.

³⁶ Leo F. Stelten, *Dictionary of Ecclesiastical Latin: With an Appendix of Latin Expressions Defined and Clarified* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1995), 22, 61, 77, 128, 139, 143, 205, 216; Ethan A. Andrews et al., *A Latin Dictionary Founded on Andrews' Edition of Freund's Latin Dictionary*, rev. ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1896), 159, 473–74, 593, 929, 998–99, 1015, 1235, 1272, 1403–4, 1425, 1485. For simplicity, definitions have been consolidated around unique renderings and mainly into active voice forms for verbs.

Latin translators rendered the Hiphil of יכח using several words that reinforce all three MT-derived lexical meanings—*arguo*, *corripio*, *increpo*, and *obiurgo* (*objurgo*) (items 2.1–3 and 7; 44x; 81%). For instance, these Latin terms express one or more of the following meanings: “accuse,” “censure,” “reproach,” “chide,” “scold,” and “chastise,” all of which carry the sense of “reprove” or “rebuke.” For that matter, all these terms have “rebuke,” “reprove,” or both in their very definitions, and to “blame” is to communicate a rebuke, judgment, or argument. Moreover, “assert,” “exclaim loudly against a person,” and “exhort earnestly” each means to “argue” (items 2.1, 3, 7).

Additionally, the use of *iudico* (*judico*), *praeparo*, and *disputo* accord well with the lexical meaning “judge” or “decide” (items 2.4–6; 6x; 11%). For example, *iudico* (*judico*) aligns identically with this lexical meaning. *Praeparo* more loosely signifies “decide” on the basis that one may “prepare” and so “decide” on something. And *disputo* conveys “reckon up,” “estimate,” “examine,” and “weigh,” which all mean “judge” in an evaluative sense. *Disputo* also supports the lexical meaning “argue,” for “argue” appears in its very definition, and “preach,” “dispute,” and “contend” all mean “argue.”

More narrowly, *obprobro* (*opprobrio*) reinforces the first lexical meaning (item 2.8; 1x; 2%). It may mean “reproach” and “upbraid,” which both align well with the sense of “reprove” or “rebuke.”

Conversely, *possum*, *publice* (*publicus*; *publico*), and *ipse* do not fit the proposed MT-derived lexical meanings for the Hiphil of יכח (items 2.9–11; 3x; 6%). Yet, this result stems entirely from the fact that these words aim to express the sense of the Hebrew infinitive absolute rather than simply supplying a second finite verb for the Hiphil of יכח. Of all the Latin renderings for the Hiphil of יכח, fifty-one instances convey meaning in alignment with the MT-derived lexical meanings (51x; 94%), and zero call for acknowledging a lexical meaning expressing the sense of “intercede” or “mediate.”

thus in direct support of the first lexical meaning. ܘܢ also conveys senses matching that of the second and third lexical meanings. For example, “blame,” “find guilty,” and “convict” involve communicating “judgment” or “decision.” Additionally, “convince,” “refute,” “confute,” and “overcome by testimony” all entail the idea of “arguing.”

The translational choices ܘܢ and ܘܢܝܢ likewise entail senses that reflect the three lexical meanings (items 3.2–3; 4x; 7%). “Correct” by itself underlies the idea of all three lexical meanings, and several of the other definitions of ܘܢ and ܘܢܝܢ support one or more of the lexical meanings. And as with the Greek and Latin, ܘܢܝܢ (ܘܢܝܢ) loosely supports the lexical meaning “judge” or “decide” in that one “prepares” something and thus “decides” on it (item 3.4; 2x; 4%).

The use of the root ܘܢܝܢ appears to reflect a transposition error (item 3.5; 1x; 2%; Amos 5:10). Likely, the scribe intended to write ܘܢܝܢܢ for ܘܢܝܢܢ, but he reversed the letters ܢ and ܢ and so recorded ܘܢܝܢܢ (cf. translating ܘܢܝܢܢ elsewhere as ܘܢܝܢܢ; Ezek 3:26; Job 9:33; Prov 24:25). As a result, Amos 5:10 also likely shares the root ܘܢ and so employs a word that reinforces all three MT-derived lexical meanings.

The use of the root ܘܢܝܢ to render ܘܢܝܢܢ remains less explicable (item 3.6; 1x; 2%; Job 13:15). Perhaps the scribe read or heard ܘܢܝܢܢ as ܘܢܝܢܢ and so rendered it ܘܢܝܢ (?). Nevertheless, after accounting for the apparent transposition error of item 3.5, all other Syriac renderings for the Hiphil of ܘܢܝܢ (53x; 98%) express the same senses as the three proposed lexical meanings, and none insinuate the existence of a lexical meaning communicating “intercede” or “mediate.”

Finally, an appraisal of the Aramaic Targums yields similar outcomes. The table below contains both inferred verbal roots for every Aramaic translation of the Hiphil of ܘܢܝܢ along with their corresponding dictionary definitions.

Table 4. Aramaic Targum verbal roots used to translate the Hebrew Hiphil of יכח

Item	Occur	Verbal Root ³⁹	Definitions ⁴⁰
4.1	19	כסן	rebuke, chastise
4.2	16	יכח	clearly show (i.e. one's innocence or another's guilt), remonstrate, dispute, punish, be firm, stand, be right, admonish, reprove, prove, serve as an analogy, be evidence, show, argue, justify
4.3	3	כסס	cut, grind, chew, nibble, make incisions, mark, count, be gnawed at, be charred, rebuke, chastise
4.4	3	עבד + פרע	do, labor, make, act, fare, cause to prosper, spend time, produce, work, prepare, take place tear, destroy, loosen, disarrange, neglect the hair, uncover, pay, pay a debt, settle with, punish, call to account, collect payment, retribute, take vengeance, revenge, exact, render, reward, fly, cause to bloom
4.5	2	פרע	see item 4.4 above
4.6	2	זמן	arrange, designate, invite, appoint, prepare, notify, summon, meet, come to hand, join oneself to, make an appointment for meeting one another
4.7	1	לקי, לקא	affect, disorder, smite, punish
4.8	1	רדי, רדא	chastise, drive, rule, chasten, instruct
4.9	2	כסן / כסס	see items 4.1 and 4.3 above
4.10	2	כסן / יכח	see items 4.1 and 4.2 above
4.11	1	כסן / כנע	see item 4.1 above / press, oppress, depress, mourn, lower one's self, humble, bow to a superior, salute
4.12	1	כסן / בחן	see item 4.1 above / distinguish, examine, try, probe, find out, inquire

³⁹ כסן: Job 5:17; 6:25 (2x), 26; 9:33; 13:3, 10 (2x), 15; 15:3; 16:21; 19:5; 22:4; 32:12; 40:2; Ps 141:5; Prov 9:7; 24:25; 25:12; יכח: Gen 21:25; 31:37, 42; Lev 19:17 (2x); 1 Chr 16:21; Ps 94:10; 105:14; Isa 2:4; 11:3, 4; 29:21; Ezek 3:26; Hos 4:4; Amos 5:10; Mic 4:3; כסס: Prov 9:8; 19:25; 28:23; פרע + עבד: 2 Kgs 19:4; Isa 37:4; Jer 2:19; פרע: 1 Chr 12:18 [17]; Hab 1:12; זמן: Gen 24:14, 44; לקא, לקי: 2 Sam 7:14; רדי, רדא: Prov 3:12; כסן / כסס: Prov 9:8; 15:12; יכח / כסן: Ps 50:8, 21; כנע / כסן: Ps 6:2 [1]; כסן / בחן: Ps 38:2 [1]; כסן / כסף: Prov 30:6.

⁴⁰ Marcus Jastrow, *A Dictionary of the Targumim, the Talmud Babli and Yerushalmi, and the Midrashic Literature* (New York: Pardes, 1950), 1:155, 404, 577, 650, 654–55; 2:718, 784, 1035, 1235–36, 1451–52; Charles Rufus Brown, *An Aramaic Method: A Class Book for the Study of the Elements of Aramaic from the Bible and Targums*, vol. 1 (Chicago: American Publication Society of Hebrew, 1884), 83, 88, 99, 102. For simplicity, definitions have been consolidated around unique renderings and mainly into active voice forms for verbs.

Item	Occur	Verbal Root	Definitions
4.13	1	כסן / כסף	see item 4.1 above / peel, whiten, grow pale, fade, wither deteriorate, fall in value, put to shame, frighten, alarm, feel ashamed, frightened

Aramaic translators rendered the Hiphil of יכח predominantly using words based on the verbal roots כסן and יכח (items 4.1–2; 35x; 65%). Definitions for כסן indicate that it conveys senses matching the lexical meaning “reprove” or “rebuke.” Not surprisingly, יכח in Aramaic most similarly communicates the sense of יכח in Hebrew. For example, “punish” and “admonish” express “rebuke” or “reprove.” Additionally, “justify” and “clearly show one’s innocence or another’s guilt” signify “judgment” or “decision.” Furthermore, “remonstrate,” “dispute,” “prove,” and “show” mean “argue.” Then, like כסן, the use of כסס may communicate “rebuke” and “chastise,” and so it too matches the first lexical meaning (item 4.3; 3x; 6%).

Also, either פרע + עבד or simply פרע alone may offer an expression of the first and second lexical meanings (items 4.4–5; 5x; 9%). Specifically, when פרע indicates “punish” or “call to account,” items 4.4–5 could convey the sense of “reprove” or “rebuke.” Alternatively, when פרע means “retribute,” “revenge,” “render,” or “reward,” items 4.4–5 could signify the notion of “judge” or “decide.”

The two translations that use לקא, לקי, and רדא, רדי express the sense of “smite,” “punish,” “chastise,” and “chasten” and so corroborate the first lexical meaning—“reprove” or “rebuke” (item 4.7–8; 2x; 4%). “Instruct” in רדא, רדי also supports this first lexical meaning along with the third lexical meaning of “argue.”

At times, differing Aramaic renderings appear in the Targums for a given case of the Hiphil of יכח (items 4.9–13; 7x; 13%). In four of these instances (items 4.9–10), translators still selected כסן, כסס, and יכח, and so expressed senses in accordance with the

MT-derived lexical meanings. Items 4.11–12 show that in two other such cases, translators used כנע and בחן for the Hiphil of יכח. Since כנע conveys to “humble,” it reflects the sense of the first lexical meaning, for humbling a wrongdoer sets him in his rightful place and so reproves him. בחן matches the second lexical meaning, for its definitions—including “inquire”—all suggest seeking judgment and decision in an interrogating or evaluating sense. Items 4.11–12 also indicate that translators supplied כסן for the Hiphil of יכח. Thus, these two instances convey meaning in accordance with the MT-derived lexical meanings as well. In one case, translators used the Aramaic root כסך for the Hebrew יוכיח (item 4.13; Prov 30:6). Perhaps in writing יכסיח, the translator meant to express “put to shame” from כסך. This definition is also possible for ἐλέγχω and ܟܣܝܚ, and translators used both ἐλέγχω and ܟܣܝܚ to render יוכיח in Proverbs 30:6. In a sense, “putting to shame” could suggest an act of “reproof” or “rebuke.” Otherwise, this rendering appears suspect and may indicate a transcription error related either to the verse’s earlier use of the Aramaic תוסיח or to an attempt to affix the ח suffix while writing יכסיח instead of יכסיד. Nevertheless, the alternate translation, כסן, aligns well with the first lexical meaning.

Finally, in two other instances, זמן loosely aligns with the second lexical meaning “judge” or “decide,” for one may “designate,” “prepare,” or “appoint” something and in that way “decide” on it (item 4.6; 2x; 4%). Of note, זמן can mean “invite” and “summon.” However, these definitions do not imply that the Hiphil of יכח may mean “intercede” or “mediate,” as in to make “request” or “petition.” Given the other definitions for זמן, “invite” and “summon” more likely align with “arrange” and so carry the sense of seeking to make a placement. Consequently, all the Aramaic renderings of the Hiphil of יכח correspond with one or more of the three proposed lexical meanings (54x; 100%) and so suggest no new lexical meaning conveying the sense of “intercede” or “mediate.”

To sum up, the four ancient versions translated the Hiphil of יכח using words that express senses captured in the three distinct MT-derived lexical meanings and that do not give reason to recognize a new lexical meaning. This result supports the recognition of these lexical meanings as representative of the Hiphil of יכח.

Hebrew synonyms of יכח. Next, consideration of the synonyms for יכח further bolsters the case for recognizing the three MT-derived lexical meanings. According to David J. A. Clines, synonyms for the root יכח include “שפט *judge*, יסר pi. *discipline*, and ריב *contend* [italics original].”⁴¹ The following table shows these roots with their associated dictionary definitions.

Table 5. Hebrew synonyms to יכח

Item	Verbal Root	Definitions ⁴²
5.1	שפט	act as law-giver, judge, governor, pass or execute judgment, administer justice, make a judgement about, announce a verdict, judge, decide controversy, discriminate between persons, direct, rule, be in authority
5.2	יסר (Piel)	chasten, chastise, rebuke, teach, bring up, discipline, correct
5.3	ריב	get into a brawl, strive, contend, quarrel, carry on or contest a lawsuit, plead someone’s (legal) cause, lodge a complaint with, complain to, attack or dispute with someone

The root שפט thoroughly and exclusively correlates with the second lexical meaning “judge” or “decide” (item 5.1). The root יסר (Piel) has broader overlap with יכח (item 5.2). Via the definition “correct,” it matches the underlying sense of all three lexical meanings. Additionally, “chasten,” “chastise,” and “discipline” align with “reprove” or

⁴¹ David J. A. Clines, ed., *The Dictionary of Classical Hebrew* (Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993), 4:210.

⁴² Brown et al., *Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon*, 415–16, 936, 1047–48; Koehler and Baumgartner, *Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon*, 2:418–19; 3:1224–25; 4:1622–26.

“rebuke,” while “teach” reflects “reprove” or “rebuke” and “argue.” And the root ריב also matches the first or third lexical meaning, for to “lodge a complaint with,” “complain to,” or “attack” entails “reproving” or “arguing” (item 5.3). Also, to “strive,” “contend,” “quarrel,” “carry on a lawsuit,” and “dispute with someone” correspond with “argue.”

The root ריב does include the idea of “plead someone’s (legal) cause.” Since “the basic meaning of the root [ריב] is to strive,”⁴³ ריב is not necessarily oriented around objectivity, and so it may convey the sense of pleading one’s interests or taking one’s side. If יכח were to share such meaning with ריב, then it would suggest that יכח, and thus the Hiphil of יכח, may mean “intercede” or “mediate” in those ways. However, as the above MT survey of the Hiphil of יכח indicated and the next section will show, the meaning of יכח is bound to objective right. This reality limits the semantic overlap between ריב and יכח to the sense of “argue” for objective right but precludes יכח from sharing the senses of petitioning one’s interests or taking one’s side.

Significantly, synonyms for יכח do not include Hebrew language typical of intercession, such as פגע, עתר, פלל, קרא, בקש, דרש, שאל, נשא תפלה, and עמד לפני יהוה.⁴⁴ If יכח and thus the Hiphil of יכח were meant to express intercession or mediation, as in the sense of Israel’s prophets, then one would expect its synonyms to include one or more of these words and constructions typically used with prophets. Accordingly, the synonyms of יכח support the MT-derived lexical meanings, but none offer ample grounds for a lexical meaning conveying “intercede” or “mediate.”

Cognates to יכח from cognate languages. Next, cognates to יכח from related languages also show correspondence with the three derived lexical meanings and so

⁴³ Koehler and Baumgartner, *Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon*, 3:1224.

⁴⁴ See Samuel E. Balentine who recognizes such language as “technical language of intercession” or “prayer language.” Samuel E. Balentine, “The Prophet as Intercessor: A Reassessment,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 103, no. 2 (1984): 162–68.

continue to reinforce their recognition. The following table contains both the cognates to יכח from related languages along with the basic meaning of יכח.

Table 6. Cognates to יכח from cognate languages and the basic meaning of יכח⁴⁵

Item	Cognate Language or Basic Meaning	Definitions
6.1	Middle Hebrew (hif.); Middle Hebrew (hitp. (ettapa. ?))	rebuke, prove; dispute
6.2	Jewish Aramaic (af.)	rebuke
6.3	Jewish Aramaic of the Babylonian tradition	prove
6.4	Jewish Aramaic of the Targumic and Galilean traditions (ettaph.)	dispute, prove to be just
6.5	Ethiopic (<i>wkḥ</i>)	cause an argument
6.6	Arabic (<i>waka 'a</i> , <i>wkḥ</i> IV, X)	reprimand, refrain from, refuse
6.7	basic meaning	to put in the right, ⁴⁶ argue

Each related language contains cognates to יכח with definitions that reinforce one or more of the MT-derived lexical meanings (items 6.1–6). For example, Middle Hebrew’s cognates match the first and third lexical meanings (item 6.1). Alternatively, Arabic’s cognates may align with the first and second lexical meanings, for to “reprimand” is to “reprove” or “rebuke,” and to “refrain from” or “refuse” is to “judge” or “decide” against (item 6.6). Therefore, cognates from cognate languages uphold the three MT-derived lexical meanings and suggest no new ones. Moreover, the basic meaning “put in the right” reflects all three lexical meanings, and “argue” identically matches the third lexical meaning (item 6.7).

⁴⁵ Koehler and Baumgartner, *Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon*, 2:410.

⁴⁶ Koehler and Baumgartner note some scholars who add, “in legal context.” Koehler and Baumgartner, *Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon*, 2:410; see also Mayer with others asserting, its “basic meaning is ‘set right,’ ‘show what is right.’” Mayer, “יכח *ykh*; תוכחת *tōkḥat*; תוכחה *tōkḥā*,” 6:65.

Summary. In considering usage in the MT, usage in ancient versions, synonyms, and cognates in related languages, the distinct lexical meanings “reprove” or “rebuke,” “judge” or “decide,” and “argue” sufficiently capture the semantic range of the Hiphil of יכח. The Hiphil of יכח may involve a third party arbitrating objective reproof, judgment, or decision. However, insufficient evidence exists to claim that it expresses “intercede” or “mediate” in the sense of petitioning personal interests, reconciling estranged parties, or restoring friendly relations as with Israel’s prophetic intercession.

The Hiphil of יכח in Ezekiel 3:26aγ (מוכיח). Next, determining whether the Hiphil participle of יכח in Ezekiel 3:26aγ (מוכיח) means “reprove” or “rebuke,” “judge” or “decide,” or “argue” stems from comprehending its use in context. Here, YHWH employed מוכיח as part of calling Ezekiel to address exilic Israel with his word. Thus, its use suggests מוכיח entails acting as a third party amidst others. That is, מוכיח in Ezekiel 3:26aγ may mean one who reproves someone for another, one who arbitrates judgment between parties, or perhaps one who argues with someone for another. Further consideration of the context in which YHWH used מוכיח narrows these possibilities.

Namely, YHWH did not mean by מוכיח one who arbitrates judgment or decision between parties. Since, as I will show, YHWH banned Ezekiel from being איש מוכיח specifically toward the exiles, מוכיח in this sense would mean YHWH forbid him from in some way⁴⁷ adjudicating unsettled matters for exilic Israel. Yet in context, Ezekiel had no unresolved matters to adjudicate for them. First, the book of Ezekiel gives no indication of disputes in need of settlement between the exiles. Second, Ezekiel’s prophetic conditions suggest that exilic Israel would not pursue Ezekiel for help with reaching judgment or decision with YHWH. The exiles’ rebelliousness manifested itself in a refusal to believe that YHWH had judged them with exile. They expected to return

⁴⁷ Until I address the import of the construction איש + מוכיח, I repeatedly use the qualifier “in some way” to retain a degree of ambiguity as to how YHWH meant to employ מוכיח with איש.

from Babylon quickly, and they cavalierly continued in their sin. Since exilic Israel did not recognize themselves as in jeopardy with YHWH, they would not look to Ezekiel to arbitrate divine judgment on their behalf. Third, Ezekiel's conditions imply that he would not independently work for the exiles to arbitrate judgment or decision with YHWH. As an Israelite exile and prophet, he intimately knew that YHWH had already passed judgment on the exiles by banishing them to Babylon. He would spend much of his messaging as a mute seeking to communicate and help them recognize this reality. Thus, he would not now take it upon himself to arbitrate judgment on this already closed case. Because Ezekiel had no unsettled matters to adjudicate for exilic Israel, it would be pointless for YHWH to in some way ban him from it. Considering Ezekiel's context then, YHWH did not employ מוֹכִיחַ in the sense of one who arbitrates judgment or decision.

For similar reasons, context also shows that YHWH did not use מוֹכִיחַ to indicate one who would “argue the people's case with Yahweh.”⁴⁸ In this sense, YHWH's ban on אִישׁ מוֹכִיחַ would bar Ezekiel from in some way addressing YHWH regarding the legitimacy of a contested position held by his people—perhaps exilic Israel's meriting their judgment by exile or Judah's deserving their coming judgment. But again, the exiles would not look for Ezekiel to make such a case to YHWH, for in their rebelliousness they recognized neither themselves as under judgment nor Judah as at risk of YHWH's wrath. Also, being an Israelite exile and prophet, Ezekiel thoroughly knew Judah and the exiles' rebelliousness. It was incontestable, and so he would not now seek to argue their innocence over the judgment YHWH had already rendered and would yet carry out. Hence, YHWH would not have needed to ban Ezekiel from in some way arguing exilic Israel's case, and he consequently did not use מוֹכִיחַ in that sense.

⁴⁸ Contra Wilson, “An Interpretation of Ezekiel's Dumbness,” 101; see also Kathryn Pfisterer Darr, *The Book of Ezekiel*, in *The New Interpreter's Bible: General Articles & Introduction, Commentary, & Reflections for Each Book of the Bible, Including the Apocryphal/Deuterocanonical Books in Twelve Volumes*, vol. 6 (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2001), 1139, 1454.

Moreover, YHWH also did not employ מוֹכִיחַ in the sense of one who reproves YHWH for Israel.⁴⁹ On this meaning, YHWH’s ban on אִישׁ מוֹכִיחַ would preclude Ezekiel from in some way charging him with wrongdoing. For YHWH to speak this way would suggest that he expected his prophet to accuse him of fault. Yet, YHWH had already told Ezekiel that the fault was with rebellious Israel. Also, Ezekiel would not dare to charge YHWH with wrongdoing. Therefore, YHWH would not have needed to ban Ezekiel from in some way reproving him, and so he did not mean מוֹכִיחַ, as in one who reproves YHWH for Israel. As a result, YHWH must have meant מוֹכִיחַ in either the sense of one who argues with exilic Israel for YHWH or one who reproves exilic Israel for YHWH.

Used in this former sense, YHWH’s ban on אִישׁ מוֹכִיחַ would forbid Ezekiel from in some way addressing the exiles regarding the legitimacy of a contested position, such as their status under divine judgment or Judah’s coming judgment. While context permits this interpretation, it remains unlikely. Without considering Ezekiel 3:26aγ, the Hiphil of יכח means “argue” only four times (4x; 8%), and it never occurs in the participle form (מוֹכִיחַ). Conversely, forty-one such occurrences of the Hiphil of יכח (41x; 77%) and eight in its participle form (מוֹכִיחַ; 8x; 89%) carry the sense of “reprove” or “rebuke.” Additionally, multiple Hebrew lexicons⁵⁰ and four ancient versions⁵¹ employ terms that suggest מוֹכִיחַ in Ezekiel 3:26aγ conveys the sense of “reprove” or “rebuke.”

Furthermore, context and usage call for interpreting מוֹכִיחַ in the sense of one who in some way reproves Israel’s exiles for YHWH. Moses, Nathan, and Jeremiah’s ministries show that obstinacy against YHWH normally called for a prophet’s rebuke.

⁴⁹ Contra Glazov, *Bridling of the Tongue*, 259–60.

⁵⁰ Brown et al., *Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon*, 406–7; Clines, *The Dictionary of Classical Hebrew*, 1:227; 4:209; Wilhelm Gesenius and Edward Robinson, *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament, Including the Biblical Chaldee*, 18th ed., rev. and ster. (Boston: Crocker and Brewster, 1865), 398; cf. “arbitrator” yet specifying it as “someone who administers a reprimand.” Koehler and Baumgartner, *Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon*, 2:410; cf. perhaps more akin to judging with “making an accusation.” Mayer, “יכח” *ykh*; תוֹכַחַת *tōkahat*; תוֹכְהָה *tōkēhā*,” 6:66.

⁵¹ Greek from ἐλέγχω; Latin from *obiurgo* (*objurgo*); Syriac from ܘܚܝܘܬܐ; and Aramaic from יכח.

And like his predecessors, Ezekiel was sent to those in rebellion against YHWH—a people who even from Babylon refused to believe that they were under divine judgment for their sin. Thus, Ezekiel ministered in conditions where exilic Israel remained at fault with YHWH, which would prompt address and redress between these two parties. As YHWH’s prophet in such an environment, Ezekiel would typically take up this activity. So, if YHWH desired Ezekiel to abstain from in some way reproving or rebuking, he would undoubtedly need to prohibit it. Reasonably then, YHWH intended מוֹכִיחַ in Ezekiel 3:26aγ to express “reprove” or “rebuke.”

אִישׁ מוֹכִיחַ: A Technical Expression

Next, YHWH used מוֹכִיחַ as part of the construction אִישׁ מוֹכִיחַ. Reaching a robust interpretation of this language begins with observing the features of this two-word construction and then evaluating these features together and in context. First, the *Munach* conjunctive accent followed by the *Athnach* disjunctive accent mark אִישׁ מוֹכִיחַ. These accents indicate that אִישׁ and מוֹכִיחַ exist in a tightly bound relationship.⁵² Second, מוֹכִיחַ being a participle means that it may function as a predicate, attributive, or substantive.⁵³ Every instance of מוֹכִיחַ outside of Ezekiel 3:26aγ, however, functions as a substantive. In particular, מוֹכִיחַ serves as the subject of a finite verb (Job 40:2; Prov 28:23), the object of a finite verb (Isa 29:21; Amos 5:10; Prov 24:25), the subject of a gapped verb (Prov 9:7), the nominative of a verbless clause (Prov 25:12), and the substantive of a participle of

⁵² See Russell T. Fuller and Kyoungwon Choi who say, “conjunctive accents join a word or words to the next word, without a pause between the words.” Russell T. Fuller and Kyoungwon Choi, *Invitation to Biblical Hebrew Syntax: An Intermediate Grammar*, Invitation to Theological Studies Series (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2017), 354.

⁵³ See Fuller and Choi, *Invitation to Biblical Hebrew Syntax*, §16; Duane A. Garrett and Jason S. DeRouchie, *A Modern Grammar for Biblical Hebrew* (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2009), 103; Wilhelm Gesenius, *Gesenius’ Hebrew Grammar*, ed. E. Kautzsch, trans. A. E. Cowley, Dover Books on Language (Mineola, NY: Dover, 2006), §116; Christo H. J. van der Merwe, Jacobus A. Naudé, and Jan H. Kroeze, *A Biblical Hebrew Reference Grammar*, 2nd ed. (London: Bloomsbury T & T Clark, 2017), §20.3.2; Bruce K. Waltke and M. O’Connor, *An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1990), §37; Ronald J. Williams and John C. Beckman, *Williams’ Hebrew Syntax*, 3rd ed. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007), §213–22.

(non-)existence (Job 9:33; 32:12). Also, other than Job 9:33, all such instances of מוֹכִיחַ exist in parallel or identity with other substantives. Specifically, substantives in parallel with מוֹכִיחַ include an “answerer” (עוֹנֶה; Job 32:12), “faultfinder” (פוֹסֵד; Job 40:2), “corrector” (יֹסֵר; Prov 9:7), “sayer” (אֹמֵר; Prov 24:24–25), “flatterer” (מְחַלֵּיק; Prov 28:23), “man” (אָדָם; Isa 29:21), and “speaker” (דּוֹבֵר; Amos 5:10). Substantives sharing identity with מוֹכִיחַ include “a gold ring and an ornament of gold” (נָגָם זָהָב וְחֶלְי־כֶּתֶם; Prov 25:12). Considering such consistent usage of מוֹכִיחַ as a substantive, מוֹכִיחַ in Ezekiel 3:26aγ reasonably acts as a substantive as well and not as a predicate or attributive. These conclusions help narrow the possible meanings of אִישׁ מוֹכִיחַ.

Namely, אִישׁ מוֹכִיחַ does not indicate a “man reproving” where “man” (אִישׁ) serves as the subject of the durative verb “reproving” (מוֹכִיחַ).⁵⁴ As just noted, the fact that מוֹכִיחַ functions as a substantive precludes the possibility of it acting as a predicate for אִישׁ. Additionally, when אִישׁ and a neighboring participle interact through a subject-predicate relationship, a disjunctive accent often marks off אִישׁ from its adjacent participle. Examples include when a “man” was or would perform the act of “gathering” (אִישׁ מְקַשֵּׁשׁ; Num 15:32), “stealing” (אִישׁ גֹּנֵב; Deut 24:7), “standing” (אִישׁ עֹמֵד; Josh 5:13), or “telling” (אִישׁ מְסַפֵּר; Judg 7:13). The *Munach* conjunctive accent on אִישׁ in Ezekiel 3:26aγ, however, suggests a closer correspondence between terms than a mere subject-predicate relationship. Therefore, a different grammatical relationship must explain the connection between אִישׁ and מוֹכִיחַ.

Christo H. J. van der Merwe, Jacobus A. Naudé, and Jan H. Kroeze find that a “conjunctive accent can indicate a construct relationship.”⁵⁵ Given its accents, אִישׁ מוֹכִיחַ may thus involve a construct relationship. Along those lines, Russell T. Fuller and Kyoungwon Choi point out the following: “Participles as substantives may be used in the

⁵⁴ Contra Clines, *The Dictionary of Classical Hebrew*, 1:227; 4:209.

⁵⁵ van der Merwe, Naudé, and Kroeze, *Biblical Hebrew Reference Grammar*, §25.1.2.(5).

genitive,” as in “persons **of the dead** [emphasis original]” (נַפְשֵׁת מָת; Lev 21:11).⁵⁶ Fuller and Choi mean that when a participle functions substantively, it may be constructed onto a preceding noun and so participate as a genitive in a construct relationship. In their Leviticus 21:11 example, the participle “dead” (מָת) functions substantively, it is constructed onto the preceding noun “souls” or “persons” (נַפְשֵׁת), and as a result it participates as a genitive in the construct package “persons of the dead.”

According to Fuller and Choi, a relationship of this sort may stem from “Proper Annexation” wherein “the second word (the genitive) limits and identifies the first word (the governing noun) in some manner, forming one unit of meaning or one conceptual unit. . . . Words in proper annexation cannot be separated without changing the meaning of the annexation.”⁵⁷ Said differently, a substantive participle constructed onto a preceding noun may produce a new, unique expression conveying meaning beyond its two component terms. This kind of relationship appears active in אִישׁ מוֹכִיחַ.

Notably, אִישׁ מוֹכִיחַ has comparable accents and structure to those of Fuller and Choi’s proper annexation example, and such formal similarity supports reasoning that the two constructions share grammatical similarity. That is, given the fact that the accents of both constructions suggest a tight correspondence between terms, the participles of both constructions function substantively, and נַפְשֵׁת and מָת in Leviticus 21:11 relate by proper annexation, אִישׁ and מוֹכִיחַ in Ezekiel 3:26aγ arguably relate by proper annexation as well. This deduction means that מוֹכִיחַ acts as a genitive participle constructed onto אִישׁ, and so

⁵⁶ Fuller and Choi, *Invitation to Biblical Hebrew Syntax*, §16j; see also Williams and Beckman who affirm that participles may both participate in construct relationships and function as the genitive. Williams and Beckman, *Williams’ Hebrew Syntax*, §28a, 30d.

⁵⁷ Fuller and Choi, *Invitation to Biblical Hebrew Syntax*, §12b, cf. 12a; contra “Improper Annexation,” in which “the genitive does not limit or identify the first word, a definite genitive will not make its first noun definite, and an indefinite genitive will not specialize its first noun.” Fuller and Choi, *Invitation to Biblical Hebrew Syntax*, §12f; see also others who recognize this concept under the categories “construct” and “genitive” as opposed to “annexation,” which is more typical of Arabic grammars: Gesenius, *Gesenius’ Hebrew Grammar*, §89, 127–30; van der Merwe, Naudé, and Kroeze, *Biblical Hebrew Reference Grammar*, §25.1–4; Waltke and O’Connor, *Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax*, §9; Williams and Beckman, *Williams’ Hebrew Syntax*, §28–30, 36–49.

the two terms form a construct package with new meaning beyond its individual words.

Many have observed that throughout the HB, the construction *איש* + *identifier* engenders this phenomenon. So much so that Thomas E. McComiskey affirms *איש* + *identifier* can be a “technical expression” of sorts.⁵⁸ James Strong finds that *איש* is “often used as an adjunct to a more definite term (and in such cases [is] frequently not expressed in translation).”⁵⁹ Said another way, *איש* adjoins and so facilitates expressing a developed sense of a more definite term or *identifier*.

Hebrew lexicons typically mention this usage. For example, Francis Brown, S. R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs attest to *איש* joining both with a “word of occupation” to identify one as a farmer (*איש האדמה*; Gen 9:20; cf. *איש-עבד אדמה*; Zech 13:5) or champion (*איש הבנים*; 1 Sam 17:4, 23) and with abstract words to characterize one’s very person as bloodthirsty (*איש הדמים*; 2 Sam 16:7, 8), worthless (*איש הבליעל*; 2 Sam 16:7), death-deserving (*איש מות*; 1 Kgs 2:26), and violent (*איש חמס*; Ps 140:12 [11]; Prov 3:31).⁶⁰ Likewise, J. Kühlewein recognizes that *איש* used as part of a phrase may be for “indicating vocations,” as in a “hunter” (*איש ידע ציד*; Gen 25:27), it may designate “descriptions of the activity or being of a man,” as in a “champion” (*איש הבנים*; 1 Sam 17:4, 23), and it may “serve as a circumlocution for an adj[ective],” as in the hairy and the smooth (*איש חלק . . . איש שער*; Gen 27:11).⁶¹ B. Davidson helpfully describes such a

⁵⁸ Thomas E. McComiskey, “*איש* (*ysh*),” in *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, ed. R. Laird Harris, Gleason J. Archer Jr., and Bruce K. Waltke, (Chicago: Moody Press, 1980), 1:38.

⁵⁹ James Strong, “A Concise Dictionary of the Words in the Hebrew Bible,” in *Strong’s Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible* (New York: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, 1890), 12.

⁶⁰ Brown et al., *Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon*, 36. English renderings of the Hebrew cited here are mostly my own, as their lexicon translates only a few cited occurrences. Here, they also note the following characterizations resulting from occupational *identifiers*: outdoorsman (*איש שדה*; Gen 25:27), newsman (*איש בשרה*; 2 Sam 18:20), his counselor (*איש עצה*; Isa 40:13); from abstract *identifiers*: valiant (*איש חיל*; 1 Sam 31:12; 2 Sam 24:9; 1 Kgs 1:42, etc.), warrior (*איש מלחמה*; Num 31:49; Deut 2:14, 16; Josh 5:4, 6; etc.) gray-haired (*איש שיבה*; Deut 32:25). Additionally, though they suggest conferring with the following in relation to their list of occupational *identifiers*, these too seem to reflect personal abstractions: devoted-by-YHWH-to-destruction man (*איש-חרמי*; 1 Kgs 20:42) and many-friends man (*איש רעים*; Prov 18:24).

⁶¹ J. Kühlewein, “*איש* *’iš* Man,” in *Theological Lexicon of the Old Testament*, ed. Ernst Jenni and Claus Westermann, trans. Mark E. Biddle (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1997), 1:101; see also Koehler

construction by saying it may be used “to denote the qualities or qualifications of men.”⁶²

Hence, *איש* + *identifier* may serve to characterize an individual’s occupation or self-abstraction—that is, their preoccupation. By extension to Ezekiel 3:26aγ then, *מוכיח* functions with *איש* such that *איש מוכיח* specifies either an individual occupied in the official role of a reprover or one essentially preoccupied with and defined by reproof.

Indeed, the features of *איש מוכיח* permit interpreting it as specifying an official position or occupation of issuing reproof. The biblical usage shows that *מוכיח* alone may denote a “reprover” (Job 9:33; 32:12; 40:2; Prov 9:7; 24:25; 25:12; 28:23; Isa 29:21; Amos 5:10), but as Moshe Greenberg points out, even “the reprover in the gate” (Isa 29:21; Amos 5:10) does not clearly mean one with “official standing.”⁶³ Thus, YHWH’s adjoining *איש* to *מוכיח* in Ezekiel 3:26aγ could signify one fulfilling the formal office of reprover. The muted prophet’s context, however, does not permit this understanding.

As noted above, Ezekiel’s commission demanded that he reprove others, but as the next section will show, YHWH barred him from being *איש מוכיח* as part of his call. Therefore, if *איש מוכיח* simply meant the office or role of reprover, then his commission would contradict itself by both requiring and prohibiting reproof. Furthermore, Ezekiel delivered multiple reproving prophecies, and so if *איש מוכיח* meant serving in the office of reprover, it would seem Ezekiel filled this position in violation of YHWH’s ban. Yet,

and Baumgartner who hold that on this usage, “*איש* indicates a position, occupation, public office,” though they also include more abstract meanings of the construction, including “*איש מופת*” bearers of foreboding Zech 3:8, *השם איש* men of renown Gn 6:4 . . . *מתן א* generous Pr 19:6 . . . *איש רעים* everybody’s friend Pr 18:24, *הרמי א* the man under my ban 1K 20:42.” Koehler and Baumgartner, *Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon*, 1:43.

⁶² B. Davidson, *The Analytical Hebrew and Chaldee Lexicon: Consisting of an Alphabetical Arrangement of Every Word and Inflection Contained in the Old Testament Scriptures . . . A Complete Series of Hebrew and Chaldee Paradigms, with Grammatical Remarks and Explanations*, 2nd ed. (London: Samuel Bagster and Sons, 1855), xxiii; see also Gesenius and Robinson who similarly say, “With genit. of an attribute, quality, virtue, vice, etc. it denotes one possessing that attribute or quality.” Gesenius and Robinson, *Hebrew and English Lexicon*, 45; see also grammars that similarly recognize this concept: Gesenius, *Gesenius’ Hebrew Grammar*, §128s–t; Waltke and O’Connor, *Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax*, §9.5.3a–b.

⁶³ Greenberg, *Ezekiel 1–20*, 102.

YHWH neither reprimanded nor repudiated Ezekiel for defaulting on his commission. Instead, he expected Ezekiel to receive vindication as a true prophet sometime after the ban on *איש מוכיח* ended (Ezek 33:33). This implies that Ezekiel satisfied his commission. Because Ezekiel both reprovved and fulfilled his call not to be *איש מוכיח*, the two-word construction must not mean holding the position, occupation, office, role, or rank of reprover.⁶⁴ Reasonably then, YHWH did not use *איש מוכיח* to indicate Ezekiel's banned occupation while a mute. By process of elimination, *איש מוכיח* in Ezekiel 3:26a_y indicates one essentially preoccupied with and personally defined by the act of reproving.

Significantly, the construction *איש* + *identifier* used in this way describes other major figures in the HB. For example, at one point in Joseph's life, everything he did would succeed (Gen 39:3, 23), and so he was deemed a "man of success" (*איש מצליח*; Gen 39:2). In other words, Joseph himself had become the very embodiment of prospering. Similarly, Moses claimed that he was not "eloquent," or more woodenly, "a man of words" (*איש דבָרִים*; Exod 4:10). Moses meant that he was fundamentally unable to speak well (cf. Aaron; Exod 4:14). Likewise, Jeremiah identified himself as a "man of strife and a man of contention" (*איש ריב ואיש מְדוֹן*; Jer 15:10), which, as already discussed, signified that he had become wholly preoccupied with chiding his hearers. Of note, the constructions describing these three men have similar or identical accents and form to *איש מוכיח*. In each case, these men claimed to be or had become essentially identified by a particular quality or characteristic. *איש מוכיח* in Ezekiel 3:26a_y then, signifies one essentially characterized by reproving—a "man of reproof."

In that way, *איש מוכיח* does not mean a "man of reproof," as in a "man often experiencing reproof." This distinction may explain the choice of the substantive

⁶⁴ Contra what Block has called, "'one who holds the rank of *mōkīah*,' cf. *'iš šar wēšōpēl*, 'a prince and a judge' (Exod. 2:14); *'iš kōhēn*, 'priest' (Lev. 21:9); *'iš nābī*, 'prophet' (Judg. 6:8); *'iš sārīs*, 'eunuch' (Jer. 38:7)." Block, *Ezekiel 1–24*, 157n40; what Allen has called, "a role Ezekiel has within the community: one is reminded of *איש נביא* 'a prophet man' in Judg 6:8." Allen, *Ezekiel 1–19*, 61.

participle from יכח (מוכיח) over the cognate noun from יכח (תוכחה). Since the cognate noun תוכחה refers to disciplinary chidings and reproaches, coupling it with איש creates a construction conveying one fundamentally characterized by experiencing or receiving reproof (cf. איש תוכחות; Prov 29:1).⁶⁵ The substantive participle מוכיח, on the other hand, entails a verbal action that expresses the sense of enacting—not experiencing—reproof. In other words, איש מוכיח depicts one who has a haranguing temperament, who is easily drawn to criticize, and who tends to go around berating others. The tenor and manner of his very being centers on rebuke. In considering איש מוכיח as a part of the entire phrase in Ezekiel 3:26a_γ, it becomes clear that YHWH meant to mute Ezekiel from this way of life toward his people.

וְלֹא־תִהְיֶה לָהֶם לְאִישׁ מוֹכִיחַ: A Construction of Relationship

Returning to the whole of Ezekiel 3:26a_γ, YHWH said, “and you will not be to them for a man of reproof.” By leading with conjunction ו and particle ל, YHWH signaled his continued disclosure of the nature of Ezekiel’s muteness and particularly something it would negate. He identified the specific injunction using language with the following basic form: היה + ל with a pronominal suffix + ל with a term of relationship. This construction occurs over one hundred times throughout the HB, and the table below illustrates several such examples, including the two pertinent to Ezekiel’s muteness.

Table 7. Sampling of the relational construction used in Ezekiel 3:26a_γ

Item	Reference	Hebrew Construction	Subject (היה; “be”)	Recipient (ל; “to”)	Relational Term (ל; “for” / “as”)
7.1	Gen 20:12	וְתִהְיֶה לִי לְאִשָּׁה	Sarah	Abraham	a wife

⁶⁵ See also Brown et al., *Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon*, 407; Koehler and Baumgartner, *Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon*, 4:1699.

Item	Reference	Hebrew Construction	Subject (היה; “be”)	Recipient (ל; “to”)	Relational Term (ל; “for” / “as”)
7.2	Exod 4:16	הוא יהיה־לִּי לִפֶּה וְאַתָּה תהִי־לוֹ לְאֱלֹהִים	Aaron, Moses	Moses, Aaron	a mouth, God
7.3	Lev 26:12	וְהָיִיתִי לְכֶם לְאֱלֹהִים וְאַתֶּם תהִיוּ־לִי לְעָם	YHWH, Israel	Israel, YHWH	God, a people
7.4	2 Sam 7:14	אֲנִי אֶהְיֶה־לוֹ לְאָב וְהוּא יִהְיֶה־לִּי לְבֵן	YHWH, David’s son	David’s son, YHWH	a father, a son
7.5	2 Kgs 16:15	יִהְיֶה־לִּי לְבַקֵּר	altar	Ahaz	seeking
7.6	Ezek 34:23	וְהוּא־יִהְיֶה לְהֶן לְרֹעֶה	(a son of) David	sheep of YHWH	a shepherd
7.7	Ezek 3:26ay	וְלֹא־תִהְיֶה לְהֶם לְאִישׁ מוֹכִיחַ	Ezekiel	exilic Israel	not a man of reproof
7.8	Ezek 24:27ba	וְהָיִיתָ לְהֶם לְמוֹפֵת	Ezekiel	exilic Israel	a sign

Such language may delineate a simple familial relationship, as with Sarah being a wife to Abraham (item 7.1). It may also occur with reciprocal terms that mutually define two associated parties. For instance, YHWH called Moses to relate to Aaron as God and Aaron to Moses as a mouth (item 7.2).⁶⁶ As mentioned in chapter 3, YHWH ordained this arrangement as a kind of divine enablement to assist Moses in his prophetic commission. Other examples involve YHWH using this language to describe his covenant relationships, including he and Israel relating as God with his people (item 7.3) and he and David’s son relating as a father with his son (item 7.4). And as items 7.5–6 show, even more abstract substantives like infinitives and participles may define the terms of a given relationship. Thus, this construction designates a relationship between parties.

⁶⁶ See also others who characterize this construction as defining a relationship between parties: “Aaron would stand in the same relation to Moses, as a prophet to God” (C. F. Keil, *The Second Book of Moses (Exodus)*, in *Commentary on the Old Testament*, vol. 1, *The Pentateuch*, ed. C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, trans. James Martin (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2006), 293); “defines the individual roles of Moses and his brother” (J. Alec Motyer, *The Message of Exodus: The Days of Our Pilgrimage*, Bible Speaks Today (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2005), 80); “an arrangement” (Douglas K. Stuart, *Exodus*, New American Commentary, vol. 2 (Nashville: B&H, 2006), 138).

Among its other uses in the book of Ezekiel,⁶⁷ YHWH twice invoked this language to qualify Ezekiel’s muteness and so impose upon him two specific associations with others (items 7.7–8). A later section will discuss his sign function relationship (item 7.8). Regarding Ezekiel 3:26aγ (item 7.7), however, YHWH asserted that the imposed silence would bar Ezekiel from existing (וְלֹא־תִהְיֶה) in relation “to them” (לָהֶם) “for” or “as” (לְ) “a man of reproof” (אִישׁ מוֹכִיחַ).

Ernst Jenni labels the ל of אִישׁ מוֹכִיחַ as “Lamed revaluationis” and asserts that it marks, “Revaluation of people . . . as a related person . . . אִישׁ מוֹכִיחַ.”⁶⁸ Jenni also labels the ל of לָהֶם as “Lamed ascriptionis” and says it marks, “Belonging of people to people . . . Belonging to a group through special task . . . אִישׁ מוֹכִיחַ . . . with a negated adverbial predicate.”⁶⁹ Since YHWH here spoke with Ezekiel to further define his speechlessness, Jenni’s labels show that YHWH would mute Ezekiel and so make him belong to a people in a way that precluded him from being in his person אִישׁ מוֹכִיחַ. Given his call and context, this people “them” to whom Ezekiel would belong refers to exilic Israel. In later verses, YHWH would link Ezekiel’s muteness to the exiles using similar terminology (“to them”; Ezek 3:27; 24:27bα; “they”; Ezek 3:26b, 27; 24:27bβ). Here, however, YHWH disclosed that Israel’s exiles would not have in Ezekiel one relating to them as a man of reproof.

Though Ellen F. Davis and Kelvin G. Friebel interpret אִישׁ מוֹכִיחַ differently, their broad remarks around Ezekiel’s muteness lend support to this sense of אִישׁ מוֹכִיחַ just argued. Davis says Jeremiah’s “campaign of destruction and restoration with words . . . would appear to be the very opposite of the compulsion laid upon Ezekiel. His call

⁶⁷ See also other uses of this relational construction in the book of Ezekiel (Ezek 11:11, 16, 20; 14:11; 18:30; 27:7; 34:10, 24; 36:12, 28; 37:23, 27; 38:7; 39:13; 44:28; 45:8).

⁶⁸ Ernst Jenni, *Die hebräischen Präpositionen Band 3: Die Präposition Lamed* (Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer, 2000), 26, 31, 33–35. Translation mine.

⁶⁹ Jenni, *Die Präposition Lamed*, 54, 57–58, 62, 64. Translation mine.

leads, not to urgent appeal, but to confinement and dumbness. . . . The prophets' urgency to break through Israel's deafness, which reached a crescendo in Jeremiah, is gone."⁷⁰ Davis is correct in that YHWH muted Ezekiel from embracing a Jeremiah-like, high-pressure crusade of relentlessly rebuking the exiles. Friebel views the statements in Ezekiel 3:26 to be among the "restrictions on Ezekiel's prophetic lifestyle."⁷¹ He is right in that YHWH silenced Ezekiel from a specific way of life—chronically haranguing his people. In summary then, YHWH revealed that Ezekiel's muteness includes two additional aspects: an orientation toward exilic Israel and a prohibition on living a reproving lifestyle toward them.

Ezekiel 3:26b: Muteness Despite Exilic Israel's Rebelliousness

Next, YHWH further commented on his disclosure of Ezekiel's muteness. He said, *בֵּית מְרִי הֵמָּה*, which in part means, "כִּי they are a rebellious house" (Ezek 3:26b). In other words, YHWH connected his silencing of Ezekiel to the exiles' rebelliousness with the word *כִּי*. To explain the connection between Ezekiel's speechlessness and exilic Israel's recalcitrance requires discerning the intended function of this instance of *כִּי*.

Translators of the King James Version (KJV), New Revised Standard Version (NRSV), New American Standard Bible (NASB), English Standard Version (ESV), New International Version (NIV), Christian Standard Bible (CSB), and New Living Translation (NLT) render *כִּי* here as "for" or "since" and so assert a causal connection. As noted in chapter 2, most holding to the Speak Only as YHWH's Messenger approach do the same. They mean that YHWH muted Ezekiel because the exiles were a rebellious

⁷⁰ Ellen F. Davis, *Swallowing the Scroll: Textuality and the Dynamics of Discourse in Ezekiel's Prophecy*, Journal for the Study of the Old Testament, Supplement Series 78, Bible and Literature Series 21 (Sheffield, England: Almond Press, 1989), 52, 61; cf. Ellen F. Davis, "Swallowing Hard: Reflections on Ezekiel's Dumbness," in *Signs and Wonders: Biblical Texts in Literary Focus*, ed. J. Cheryl Exum, Semeia Studies (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 1989), 229.

⁷¹ Friebel, *Jeremiah's and Ezekiel's Sign-Acts*, 174.

house. Yet, all these interpreters may have arrived at this translational choice because כִּי often marks causal clauses. Multiple detailed studies of כִּי have identified causal כִּי as its most prominent use.⁷² As a polysemous word⁷³ with diverse functions and uses, however, כִּי can convey other meanings beyond causation. Rightly interpreting an instance of כִּי requires understanding both the characteristic uses of כִּי and its specific use in context.

To resolve כִּי in Ezekiel 3:26b, the following investigation notes common functions of כִּי alongside its use in the book of Ezekiel, it evaluates the function of כִּי in instances of the phrase shared with Ezekiel 3:26–27 (כִּי בַּיִת מְרִי הָמָּה; Ezek 2:5, 6, 7; 3:9; 12:2, 3), and it uses all these findings as a guide to discern how כִּי functions in Ezekiel 3:26b. A later section will employ the same principles to evaluate כִּי in Ezekiel 3:27. Notably, Christian S. Locatell analyzed כִּי in several books of the HB, including an exhaustive investigation of the 202 occurrences in 189 verses in the book of Ezekiel. Though not without areas of disagreement—especially concerning Ezekiel 3:26b—this investigation benefited considerably from his works, and it interacts with them often.

כִּי and Its Use in the Book of Ezekiel

To begin, כִּי may function in many ways. Nine such uses are considered below along with examples from the book of Ezekiel where applicable. Causal and concessive כִּי come last since distinguishing between these two often poses unique difficulty.

⁷² Barry Louis Bandstra found that causal כִּי comprised 854 cases in his 1,480 tokens (58%). Barry Louis Bandstra, “The Syntax of Particle *Ky* in Biblical Hebrew and Ugaritic” (PhD diss., Yale University, 1982), 410; Carl M. Follingstad found that causal כִּי comprised 586 cases in his 1,078 tokens (54%). Carl M. Follingstad, *Deictic Viewpoint in Biblical Hebrew Text: A Syntagmatic and Paradigmatic Analysis of the Particle כִּי*, Special Issue of JOTT, Journal of Translation and Textlinguistics (Dallas: SIL International, 2001), 409; Christian S. Locatell found that causal כִּי comprised 617 cases in his 1,058 tokens (58%) and concluded that the causal function is “the most prototypical use of כִּי.” Christian S. Locatell, “Grammatical Polysemy in the Hebrew Bible: A Cognitive Linguistic Approach to כִּי” (PhD diss., University of Stellenbosch, 2017), 243.

⁷³ Polysemy means, “A single phonological/orthographic form may be used with a number of different, recognisable interpretations that are assumed to be related.” Kerstin Fischer, “Towards an Understanding of the Spectrum of Approaches to Discourse Particles: Introduction to the Volume,” in *Approaches to Discourse Particles*, ed. Kerstin Fischer, Studies in Pragmatics 1 (Amsterdam: Elsevier, 2006), 13.

Complement כִּי. First, כִּי may function as a complementizer for verbs, nouns, and other parts of speech, and it is glossed as “that.” On this usage, the כִּי clause adds complementary information regarding nouns or often mental verbs of perception or cognition, such as “know” (יָדַע), “hear” (שָׁמַע), “see” (רָאָה), “believe” (אָמַן), “swear” (שָׁבַע), “tell” (גָּדַד), “remember” (זָכַר), “forget” (שָׁכַח), “warn” (עוֹדַד), and “say” (אָמַר).⁷⁴

כִּי in the book of Ezekiel frequently functions in this way (84–85x; 42%),⁷⁵ most often marking the verbal complement “know that” (יָדַע כִּי; 76x). For example, YHWH stated using the *divine recognition formula*, “And they will know כִּי I am YHWH” (Ezek 6:10). Since YHWH employed כִּי adjacent to the cognition verb “know,” כִּי marks a complement clause disclosing what will become known, and it may be translated as “that.” Several cases of כִּי also mark the verbal complement, “see that” (רָאָה כִּי; 3–4x; Ezek 19:5; 21:4 [20:48]; 23:13; and perhaps 12:3). One instance of כִּי marks the verbal complement with implied verb, “I swear that” (כִּי [שָׁבַע]; 1x; Ezek 35:6).⁷⁶ Elsewhere, כִּי also functions to mark a noun complement as in, “these things . . . that you are doing” (כִּי אֲפֹתָה עֹשֶׂה . . . אֵלֶּה; 1x; Ezek 24:19). And a few times, כִּי marks a *qal va-ḥomer* in the form אַף כִּי (3x; Ezek 14:21; 15:5; 23:40). In such cases, the כִּי clause complements the preceding text by rhetorically asking “how much less that” or “how much more that.”⁷⁷

⁷⁴ See Gesenius, *Gesenius’ Hebrew Grammar*, §157a–b; van der Merwe, Naudé, and Kroeze, *Biblical Hebrew Reference Grammar*, §40.29.2.(1), cf. 19.2.1.2.(2); Waltke and O’Connor, *Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax*, §38.8; Williams and Beckman, *Williams’ Hebrew Syntax*, §451a, 483–84, 487, 489–90, cf. 464.

⁷⁵ Ezek 2:5 (#2); 5:13; 6:7, 10, 13, 14; 7:4 (#2), 9, 27; 10:20; 11:10, 12; 12:3 (complement or concessive כִּי), 15, 16, 20; 13:9, 14, 21, 23; 14:8, 21 (#2), 23 (#2); 15:5, 7; 16:62; 17:21, 24; 19:5; 20:12, 20, 38, 42, 44; 21:4 [20:48], 10 [5]; 22:16; 22; 23:13, 40, 49; 24:19, 24, 27; 25:5, 7, 11, 17; 26:6; 28:22, 23, 24, 26; 29:6, 9, 16, 21; 30:8, 19, 25, 26; 32:15; 33:29, 33; 34:27, 30; 35:4, 6, 9, 12, 15; 36:11, 23, 36, 38; 37:6, 13, 14, 28; 38:23; 39:6, 7, 22, 23, 28. With perhaps occasional differences, see Locatell, “Grammatical Polysemy in the Hebrew Bible,” 264–70, esp 264n358, 270nn386–387; James Muilenburg, “The Linguistic and Rhetorical Usages of the Particle כִּי in the Old Testament,” *Hebrew Union College Annual* 32 (1961): 144n29.

⁷⁶ See Locatell, “Grammatical Polysemy in the Hebrew Bible,” 266–68.

⁷⁷ See Locatell, “Grammatical Polysemy in the Hebrew Bible,” 269–70, 272.

Conditional כִּי. Second, כִּי may also mark conditional clauses. As van der Merwe, Naudé, and Kroeze explain, כִּי “introduces as subordinating conjunction the protasis of a condition and may then be translated *when* or *if* [emphasis original].”⁷⁸ Of note, this study differentiates conditional כִּי—translated as “if”— from temporal כִּי— considered next and rendered as “when.” That said, since conditional and temporal clause complexes both use כִּי to mark their subordinating protasis, and conditional and temporal כִּי clauses both tend to prefer *yiqtol* verbs and pre-apodosis positioning,⁷⁹ discerning between these two כִּי clause types can be difficult.⁸⁰ Still, some characteristics aid in distinguishing conditional כִּי. For instance, whereas a temporal clause will likely be realized, a conditional clause remains hypothetical.⁸¹ Additionally, conditional כִּי will commonly employ a prefixed conjunction, such as ו, and occur within a casuistic text.⁸²

In the book of Ezekiel, conditional כִּי marks multiple hypotheticals (13x; 6%).⁸³ Two such instances occur in YHWH’s statements, “כִּי the prince gives (יָתַן) a gift to any of his sons, [then] it is his inheritance and will belong to his sons. . . . But (וְ) כִּי he gives (יָתַן) a gift from his inheritance to one of his servants, then it will belong to him

⁷⁸ van der Merwe, Naudé, and Kroeze, *Biblical Hebrew Reference Grammar*, §40.29.1.(1), cf. 19.2.1.3; see also Gesenius, *Gesenius’ Hebrew Grammar*, §159aa–bb; Waltke and O’Connor, *Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax*, §31.6.1b, 32.2.1b, 38.2d; Williams and Beckman, *Williams’ Hebrew Syntax*, §446, 515, 517, cf. 469.

⁷⁹ See Bandstra, “Syntax of Particle *Ky*,” 121, 126; Locatell, “Grammatical Polysemy in the Hebrew Bible,” 208, 235, 253; Christian S. Locatell, “Temporal Conjunctions and Their Semantic Extensions: The Case of כִּי in Biblical Hebrew,” *Journal of Semitic Studies* 65, no. 1 (2020): 104.

⁸⁰ See Anneli Aejmelaeus, “Function and Interpretation of כִּי in Biblical Hebrew,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 105, no. 2 (1986): 197; Williams and Beckman, *Williams’ Hebrew Syntax*, §445n565.

⁸¹ See Aejmelaeus, “Function and Interpretation of כִּי in Biblical Hebrew,” 197; Locatell, “Temporal Conjunctions and Their Semantic Extensions,” 107; van der Merwe, Naudé, and Kroeze, *Biblical Hebrew Reference Grammar*, §40.29.1.(2).

⁸² See Bandstra, “Syntax of Particle *Ky*,” 126, 128; Locatell, “Grammatical Polysemy in the Hebrew Bible,” 235, 253; Antoon Schoors, “The Particle כִּי,” in *Remembering All the Way: A Collection of Old Testament Studies Published on the Occasion of the Fortieth Anniversary of the Oudtestamentisch Werkgezelschap in Nederland*, ed. A. S. Van der Woude, Oudtestamentische Studiën, d. 21 (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1981), 270.

⁸³ Ezek 3:19, 20, 21 (#1); 14:9, 13; 18:5, 21; 33:2, 6, 9, 10; 46:16, 17. With perhaps occasional differences, see Locatell, “Grammatical Polysemy in the Hebrew Bible,” 208, 252–56, esp 252n322, 253n325, 253n327; Schoors, “The Particle כִּי,” 271; Rooker, *Biblical Hebrew in Transition*, 121.

until the year of liberty” (Ezek 46:16–17). Notably, these verses employ *yiqtol* verbs, they position their כִּי clauses before their apodoses, they exist as part of a casuistic text, and the second כִּי appears with prefixed conjunction ו. Also, given the contrasting alternatives separated by the prefixed conjunction “but” (וְ), these verses carry more of a hypothetical sense. Consequently, כִּי here marks two conditional clauses translated in both cases as “if.”

Temporal כִּי. Third, כִּי may introduce temporal clauses rendered as “when.” In such cases, a subordinated כִּי clause occurs at the same time as its main clause.⁸⁴

Temporal and causal כִּי clauses can look similar, which can make distinguishing the two difficult.⁸⁵ Helpfully, Locatell supplies categories that assist in recognizing a temporal כִּי clause. He finds that כִּי marks a temporal clause when, relative to the main clause, the subordinate clause introduces a situation in a state of anteriority (“after”), immediate anteriority (“as soon as”), simultaneous overlap (“when”), contingency (“whenever”), simultaneous duration (“while”), or simultaneous coextensiveness (“as long as”).⁸⁶

Temporal כִּי occurs across the book of Ezekiel, albeit somewhat infrequently (6x; 3%).⁸⁷ For example, כִּי in the following verse marks a subordinate clause in either simultaneous overlap or contingency with its main clause: “and (וְ) כִּי the prince will make (יַעֲשֶׂה) a voluntary burnt offering or a voluntary peace offering to YHWH, then the gate facing east will be opened for him” (Ezek 46:12). This כִּי clause entails a *yiqtol* verb and

⁸⁴ See Gesenius, *Gesenius' Hebrew Grammar*, §164d; van der Merwe, Naudé, and Kroeze, *Biblical Hebrew Reference Grammar*, §40.29.1.(2); Waltke and O'Connor, *Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax*, §38.7a; Williams and Beckman, *Williams' Hebrew Syntax*, §445, 497, cf. 502.

⁸⁵ See van der Merwe, Naudé, and Kroeze, *Biblical Hebrew Reference Grammar*, §40.29.1.(3)n66.

⁸⁶ Locatell, “Temporal Conjunctions and Their Semantic Extensions,” 101–3.

⁸⁷ Ezek 14:23 (#1); 21:12 [7] (#1); 25:3 (#1, #2, #3); 46:12. With perhaps occasional differences, see Aejmelaeus, “Function and Interpretation of כִּי in Biblical Hebrew,” 197n12; Locatell, “Grammatical Polysemy in the Hebrew Bible,” 219–20, 234–43, esp 235n270, 237n275, 239nn279–80, 240n282, 242n287; Locatell, “Temporal Conjunctions and Their Semantic Extensions,” 103–9, esp 106n31, 106nn33–34; Schoors, “The Particle כִּי,” 276.

pre-apodosis positioning, and since it also occurs inside a casuistic text with conjunction ו prefixing כִּי, it may appear to be a conditional clause. Nevertheless, the כִּי clause seems to expect realization rather than identify a mere possibility. Consequently, Ezekiel 46:12 employs temporal כִּי translated as “when” or perhaps “whenever.”

Adversative and exceptive כִּי. Fourth, כִּי may indicate adversative and exceptive clauses, in which case כִּי or אֲבָרְכָה כִּי conveys the sense of “but,” “rather,” “unless,” or “except.” Typically in such כִּי clause complexes, negation occurs in the main clause and ahead of the כִּי clause and so serves as a significant כִּי clause discriminator.⁸⁸

In the book of Ezekiel, this use of כִּי appears a handful of times and always after negating particles אֵל or אִם (12x; 6%).⁸⁹ For instance, YHWH asserted that even if three particularly righteous men resided in a faithless land, he would yet bring judgment. He said that “they would not (אֵל) deliver sons and daughters, כִּי they alone would be delivered” (Ezek 14:18). In classic form, כִּי follows the negative particle אֵל, suggesting כִּי means “but” and signals a contrast between what would and would not occur with these righteous men present. As a second example, כִּי also appears adversative when YHWH said, “though he [one who fathers an evil son] does not (אֵל) do any of these [evil] things, כִּי even [the evil son] eats upon the mountains and he defiles his neighbor’s wife . . . will he [the evil son] live?” (Ezek 18:11–13). Here too, אֵל precedes כִּי. In context, the verse suggests that כִּי marks a contrast between a father and his evil son translated as “but.”⁹⁰

⁸⁸ See Bandstra, “Syntax of Particle *Ky*,” 149–50; Follingstad, *Deictic Viewpoint in Biblical Hebrew Text*, 280–81; Gesenius, *Gesenius’ Hebrew Grammar*, §163; Locatell, “Grammatical Polysemy in the Hebrew Bible,” 247; van der Merwe, Naudé, and Kroeze, *Biblical Hebrew Reference Grammar*, §40.29.2.(3); Waltke and O’Connor, *Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax*, §38.6, 39.3.5d; Williams and Beckman, *Williams’ Hebrew Syntax*, §447, 555–56, cf. 457.

⁸⁹ Ezek 7:4 (#1); 10:11; 12:23, 25 (#2); 14:18; 18:11; 33:11; 36:22; 44:10, 22, 25; 46:9. With perhaps occasional differences, see Locatell, “Grammatical Polysemy in the Hebrew Bible,” 247–48, 257–61, esp 247n303, 257n336, 258n339, 259n342.

⁹⁰ See Block who notes, “The adversative *kī gam* (LXX ἀλλὰ καὶ) highlights the contrast with the father’s conduct.” Block, *Ezekiel 1–24*, 575n101; contra Locatell who takes כִּי in Ezek 18:11 to function as a complementizer. Locatell, “Grammatical Polysemy in the Hebrew Bible,” 264n358.

Consecutive כִּי. Fifth, כִּי may signify consecutive clauses expressing purpose or result and is glossed as “that.” In citing Psalm 8:5 [4]—“What is man *that* [(כִּי)] you think of him? [emphasis in grammar]”—Bruce K. Waltke and M. O’Connor state, “A result clause can be introduced by כִּי . . . notably after a question.”⁹¹ No such clauses appear in the book of Ezekiel (0x; 0%).⁹²

Recitative כִּי. Sixth, some scholars recognize a recitative כִּי rendered as “that” and used to “introduce direct speech, just like the Greek word ὅτι.”⁹³ Others, however, have successfully argued against the existence of this category⁹⁴ and thus give cause to exclude recitative כִּי from consideration in this investigation.

Asseverative כִּי. Seventh, some scholars say כִּי may function asseveratively. In that way, כִּי tends to head a sentence or section to instill certainty in the ensuing content with the meaning “surely” or “indeed.”⁹⁵ Yet, in a point-by-point rebuttal, Barry Louis Bandstra has addressed supposed examples of asseverative כִּי and compellingly shown that they are assumed from textual aspects distinct from כִּי.⁹⁶ Therefore, like recitative כִּי, asseverative כִּי also need not be considered as a possible function of כִּי.

⁹¹ Waltke and O’Connor, *Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax*, §38.3b; see also Waltke and O’Connor, *Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax*, §18.2g; Gesenius, *Gesenius’ Hebrew Grammar*, §107u, 166b; Williams and Beckman, *Williams’ Hebrew Syntax*, §450, 527.

⁹² See Locatell, “Grammatical Polysemy in the Hebrew Bible,” 261n350.

⁹³ Williams and Beckman, *Williams’ Hebrew Syntax*, §452; see also Williams and Beckman, *Williams’ Hebrew Syntax*, §451b; Aejmelaeus, “Function and Interpretation of כִּי in Biblical Hebrew,” 208; Gesenius, *Gesenius’ Hebrew Grammar*, §157b.

⁹⁴ See Bandstra, “Syntax of Particle *Ky*,” 165–66; Schoors, “The Particle כִּי,” 256–59; cf. Follingstad, *Deictic Viewpoint in Biblical Hebrew Text*, 47–49; Locatell, “Grammatical Polysemy in the Hebrew Bible,” 266, 266n367.

⁹⁵ See Gesenius, *Gesenius’ Hebrew Grammar*, §149, 159ee; Robert Gordis, “The Asseverative Kaph in Ugaritic and Hebrew,” *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 63, no. 2 (1943): 176–78; van der Merwe, Naudé, and Kroeze, *Biblical Hebrew Reference Grammar*, §40.29.2.(4); Waltke and O’Connor, *Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax*, §39.3.1d, 39.3.4e, 40.2.2b; Williams and Beckman, *Williams’ Hebrew Syntax*, §449, cf. 457.

⁹⁶ Bandstra, “Syntax of Particle *Ky*,” 33–49; see also Locatell who says, “The support for emphatic/asseverative כִּי/כ from comparative study of other Semitic languages (especially Ugaritic) appears

Causal כִּי. Eighth, כִּי may mark causal clauses and is translated as “for,” “because,” or “since.” Sometimes prefixed particles יַעַן, עַל, תַּחַת, and עִקְבּוֹ make it easier to identify such a case.⁹⁷ Without these additional markers, context must clarify how כִּי functions. Locatell finds that causal כִּי clauses appear in their respective contexts to indicate the following: (1) objective or personal explanations for a state of affairs, (2) motivations for speech acts like a command or question, (3) reasoned explanations for an outcome, (4) justifications for either clarifying forms of speech or for smoothing a way of speaking, and (5) markers moving the discourse forward.⁹⁸ Such causal כִּי categories offer a framework for distinguishing כִּי as causal from its other possible functions.

In the book of Ezekiel, causal כִּי occurs second most frequently (76–77x; 38%),⁹⁹ and its cases span the varieties outlined above. For example, כִּי marks both objective and personal reasons for specific situations. Regarding the former, YHWH depicted a thriving tree saying, “And it was beautiful in its greatness—in the length of its

to have slowly evaporated under the scrutiny of subsequent scholarship.” Locatell, “Grammatical Polysemy in the Hebrew Bible,” 273n400.

⁹⁷ See Gesenius, *Gesenius’ Hebrew Grammar*, §158b; van der Merwe, Naudé, and Kroeze, *Biblical Hebrew Reference Grammar*, §40.29.1.(3)n66, 40.29.2.(2); Waltke and O’Connor, *Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax*, §38.4; Williams and Beckman, *Williams’ Hebrew Syntax*, §353, 363b, 444, 533–34.

⁹⁸ These descriptions are my paraphrases of Locatell’s categories, which respectively he refers to as (1) content non-volitional/volitional, (2) speech-act, (3) epistemic, (4) metalinguistic, and (5) discourse marker forms of causal כִּי. Christian S. Locatell, “Causal Categories in Biblical Hebrew Discourse: A Cognitive Approach to Causal כִּי,” *Journal of Northwest Semitic Languages* 45, no. 2 (2019): 86–96; Locatell, “Grammatical Polysemy in the Hebrew Bible,” 160–89, 225, 270–74.

⁹⁹ Ezek 1:20, 21; 2:5 (#1; causal or concessive כִּי), 7; 3:5, 7 (#1, #2), 21 (#2), 27; 5:6; 7:12, 13 (#1, #2), 14, 19, 23; 8:12, 17; 9:9; 10:17; 12:2, 6, 24, 25 (#1); 14:7, 21 (#1); 16:14, 59; 18:18, 32; 20:16, 40; 21:12 [7] (#2), 17 [12], 18 [13], 26 [21], 37 [32]; 23:8, 28, 34, 37, 45, 46; 24:7; 25:6; 26:5, 7, 14, 19; 28:10; 29:13; 30:3, 9; 31:7, 14; 32:11, 32; 33:31; 34:11; 36:8, 9; 39:5, 10; 40:4; 41:7; 42:5, 6, 8, 13, 14; 44:2; 45:14; 47:1, 5, 9, 12; 48:14. With perhaps occasional differences, see Christian S. Locatell, “An Alternative to the Coordination-Subordination Dichotomy: The Case of Causal כִּי,” in *Ancient Texts and Modern Readers: Studies in Ancient Hebrew Linguistics and Bible Translation*, ed. Gideon R. Kotzé, Christian S. Locatell, and John A. Messarra, *Studia semitica neerlandica*, vol. 71 (Leiden: Brill, 2019), 86n31, 89–90; Locatell, “Causal Categories in Biblical Hebrew Discourse,” 86–96, esp 89n27, 92n35; Locatell, “Grammatical Polysemy in the Hebrew Bible,” 160–231, 270–74, esp 162n136, 169n154, 173n161, 174n164, 179n175, 181n179, 182n183, 184n184, 186n186, 188n191, 203n218, 205–6n223, 209n231, 211n233, 225n256, 271n392, 271nn394–95, 273n401; Muilenburg, “The Linguistic and Rhetorical Usages of the Particle כִּי in the Old Testament,” 147n40, 148, 154n62, 155, 157; contra Grace J. Park, “Stand-Alone Nominalizations Formed with *’āšer* and *kī* in Biblical Hebrew,” *Journal of Semitic Studies* 61, no. 1 (2016): 54–55.

branches—יְּ its root went to many waters” (Ezek 31:7). Here, the tree’s connection with plentiful water provides an objective explanation for its flourishing.¹⁰⁰ Then regarding the latter use, YHWH described his obstinate people saying, “they are not willing to listen to me, יְּ all the house of Israel have a hard forehead, and they are hard of heart” (Ezek 3:7). Here, YHWH presented exilic Israel’s hardheaded and hardhearted nature as the personal explanation for their unwillingness to listen.

Causal יְּ also indicates the motivation behind a speech act of commanding, inquiring, or the like. For instance, YHWH ordered Ezekiel, “Cry out and wail, son of man, יְּ it is against my people, it is against all the princes of Israel” (Ezek 21:17 [12]). Here, YHWH gave his motive for charging Ezekiel to cry out and lament. One might over translate Ezekiel 21:17 [12] to mean, “Cry out and wail, son of man—I command this because it [the judgment] is against my people, it is against all the princes of Israel.”

Additionally, causal יְּ signifies a reasoned explanation supporting an outcome. In one case, YHWH reasoned Tyre’s death from his inviolable word saying, “You will die the deaths of the uncircumcised by the hand of strangers, יְּ I have spoken declares the Lord YHWH” (Ezek 28:10). Here, the theological perspective that nothing can violate YHWH’s word informs YHWH’s rationale behind his message of doom for Tyre.¹⁰¹ One may paraphrase it, “You Tyre will die the deaths of the uncircumcised by the hands of strangers because I YHWH declared it so, and nothing can contravene what I have said.”

Furthermore, causal יְּ marks justifications for one’s speech forms or for smoothing out one’s way of speaking. As an example of the former, Ezekiel once declared, “And he returned me to the door of the temple, and behold, water went out from

¹⁰⁰ Locatell categorizes יְּ as metalinguistic or content non-volitional. Locatell, “Grammatical Polysemy in the Hebrew Bible,” 169n154, 174n164, 188n191.

¹⁰¹ See Locatell, “Grammatical Polysemy in the Hebrew Bible,” 182.

under the threshold of the temple to the east, כִּי the temple faced east” (Ezek 47:1). Here, Ezekiel used the כִּי clause to justify his form of describing water flowing eastward.

Moreover, causal כִּי functions as a linguistic marker to advance the discourse as well. For instance, YHWH once asserted of three particularly upright men in a faithless land, “They, with their righteousness, would deliver their souls. (פ) כִּי thus says the Lord YHWH” (Ezek 14:20–21). The presence of כִּי immediately after the *petuḥa* (פ) and before the *messenger formula* suggests that כִּי functions to move the discourse into a new divine message.¹⁰² Accordingly, in the several preceding examples and throughout the book of Ezekiel, כִּי marks causal clauses translated as “for,” “because,” or “since.”

Concessive כִּי. Ninth, כִּי may mark a concessive clause glossed as “though,” “although,” “even if,” or “in spite of.”¹⁰³ Scholars acknowledge the challenge of definitively identifying concessive כִּי,¹⁰⁴ a difficulty likely arising because of its similarity in form with other functions of כִּי.¹⁰⁵ Nevertheless, concessive כִּי entails some features that aid in recognizing its usage. Specifically, concessive כִּי clauses assume the

¹⁰² See Locatell, “Grammatical Polysemy in the Hebrew Bible,” 151n128, 225, 271–72.

¹⁰³ See Bandstra, “Syntax of Particle *Ky*,” 129–33, 352–53; Follingstad, *Deictic Viewpoint in Biblical Hebrew Text*, 238–41, 273–77; Gesenius, *Gesenius’ Hebrew Grammar*, §159bb.2, 160b; Locatell, “Grammatical Polysemy in the Hebrew Bible,” 245–46, 256–57; Muilenburg, “The Linguistic and Rhetorical Usages of the Particle כִּי in the Old Testament,” 140, 147; Schoors, “The Particle כִּי,” 270–73; van der Merwe, Naudé, and Kroeze, *Biblical Hebrew Reference Grammar*, §40.29.1.(1)d; Williams and Beckman, *Williams’ Hebrew Syntax*, §448. They further note potential for a conditional concessive marked with כִּי גַם (Ps 23:4; Jer 51:53; Ps 95:9; Jer 36:25; Ps 129:2). Williams and Beckman, *Williams’ Hebrew Syntax*, §530; Menahem Zevi Kaddari notes Ben Sira’s use of כִּי as part of introducing a concessive clause. Menahem Zevi Kaddari, “The Syntax of כִּי in the Language of Ben Sira,” in *The Hebrew of the Dead Sea Scrolls and Ben Sira: Proceedings of a Symposium Held at Leiden University, 11-14 December 1995*, ed. T. Muraoka and J. F. Elwolde, Studies on the Texts of the Desert of Judah, vol. 26 (Leiden: Brill, 1997), 89–90; Follingstad notes the DSS’s use of concessive כִּי. Follingstad, *Deictic Viewpoint in Biblical Hebrew Text*, 20; cf. Schoors, “The Particle כִּי,” 272; Follingstad notes rabbinical recognition of concessive כִּי. Follingstad, *Deictic Viewpoint in Biblical Hebrew Text*, 31; cf. Aejmelaeus who affirms כִּי can convey a concessive idea but claims no so-called concessive כִּי clause following its main clause “is indisputable. Indeed, most of them can without difficulty be understood as causal, and others simply as object clauses.” Aejmelaeus, “Function and Interpretation of כִּי in Biblical Hebrew,” 198–99, 205–7; Waltke and O’Connor do not mention concessive כִּי. Waltke and O’Connor, *Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax*.

¹⁰⁴ See Bandstra citing T. C. Vriezen. Bandstra, “Syntax of Particle *Ky*,” 129, cf. 352–53; Williams and Beckman, *Williams’ Hebrew Syntax*, §446.

¹⁰⁵ See Bandstra, “Syntax of Particle *Ky*,” 130; Locatell, “Grammatical Polysemy in the Hebrew Bible,” 235, 256.

existence of a normal causal relation as background information.¹⁰⁶ Also, they often “occur either with some negative particle or with elements in the protasis and apodosis that are held to be generally incompatible on background knowledge.”¹⁰⁷ Furthermore, concessive clauses typically precede their main clause except when expressing “an afterthought” or “parenthetical material of an explanatory nature.”¹⁰⁸ Moreover, they tend to “employ the *qatal* or a verbless clause.”¹⁰⁹

Other filters also serve to discriminate כִּי as marking a concessive clause from its various possible functions. Namely, one may distinguish concessive כִּי from conditional כִּי based on whether a כִּי clause must be realized for its main clause to hold true. If a main clause exists hypothetically and is only realized in the event that its adjoining כִּי clause holds true, it may be conditional. Alternatively, if a main clause exists actually and independently of its adjoining כִּי clause, it is not conditional and may be concessive.¹¹⁰ Additionally, one may recognize concessive כִּי from adversative כִּי based on whether a כִּי clause is realized in direct contradiction to its main clause. While both clause types involve contrast, if a main clause directly contradicts its כִּי clause, כִּי may mark an adversative clause. Otherwise, if a main clause is negated in a more circumstantial relation to its כִּי clause, כִּי may mark a concessive clause.¹¹¹ Furthermore, one may differentiate concessive from causal כִּי based on whether the clause complex negates or upholds a normal causal relation expected from the background information. If

¹⁰⁶ See Bandstra, “Syntax of Particle *Ky*,” 91; Follingstad, *Deictic Viewpoint in Biblical Hebrew Text*, 241.

¹⁰⁷ Locatell, “Grammatical Polysemy in the Hebrew Bible,” 257, cf. 235; see also Bandstra, “Syntax of Particle *Ky*,” 130–32.

¹⁰⁸ Bandstra, “Syntax of Particle *Ky*,” 129–30; see also Locatell, “Grammatical Polysemy in the Hebrew Bible,” 246, 257.

¹⁰⁹ Locatell, “Grammatical Polysemy in the Hebrew Bible,” 257.

¹¹⁰ See Bandstra, “Syntax of Particle *Ky*,” 130; Locatell, “Grammatical Polysemy in the Hebrew Bible,” 255, 257.

¹¹¹ See Bandstra, “Syntax of Particle *Ky*,” 149.

a main and כִּי clause together uphold a normal background causal relation, כִּי may mark a causal clause. Conversely, if this same clause complex contradicts an expected background causal relation, כִּי may mark a concessive clause.¹¹²

In the book of Ezekiel, concessive כִּי occurs in a small number of instances (9–11x; 4–5%).¹¹³ Ezekiel 11:16, for example, entails two such cases. YHWH asserted, “כִּי I have caused them to be far off (הִרְחַקְתִּי) among the nations, and כִּי I have scattered them (הִפְצִיזְתִּי) among the lands, yet I was a small sanctuary to them in the lands which they there entered” (Ezek 11:16).

This text contains all the above-noted features expected when a concessive clause is present. First, YHWH alluded to the assumed background causal relation in the prior verse—being outside the land normally causes one to “be far from YHWH” (Ezek 11:15). Second, YHWH said he was “a small sanctuary” to Israel’s dispersed “brothers,” “kindred,” and the “whole house of Israel” (Ezek 11:15–16), and so he rejected the idea that scattering these exiles from the land meant they would not experience his presence. He thus issued a statement incompatible with the assumed background relation. Third, both כִּי clauses precede their main clause. Fourth, both כִּי clauses employ *qatal* verbs.

Additionally, this text’s main clause remains viable without its כִּי clauses, and all its clauses are actual and realized—YHWH had been a small sanctuary for Israel, and he had scattered them. In that way, YHWH did not speak hypothetically, and so neither case of כִּי marks a conditional clause. Also, the main clause uses neither negation nor

¹¹² See Locatell, “Grammatical Polysemy in the Hebrew Bible,” 144–45, 245; Williams and Beckman, *Williams’ Hebrew Syntax*, 187.

¹¹³ Ezek 2:5 (#1; concessive or causal כִּי), 2:6 (#1, #2); 3:9; 11:16 (#1, #2); 12:3 (concessive or complement כִּי); 32:25, 26, 27; and I will argue Ezek 3:26. With perhaps occasional differences, see Follingstad, *Deictic Viewpoint in Biblical Hebrew Text*, 33–34; Locatell, “Grammatical Polysemy in the Hebrew Bible,” 245–46, 256–57, esp 245n299, 256n331, 257n334; Muilenburg, “The Linguistic and Rhetorical Usages of the Particle כִּי in the Old Testament,” 147n37a; Schoors, “The Particle כִּי,” 272–73; contra Aejmelaeus, “Function and Interpretation of כִּי in Biblical Hebrew,” 198n14, 199nn18–19, 205, 206n40; Ezekiel 2:6 (#1) may be causal if Block is correct that “perhaps . . . the thorns, briars, and scorpion plants should not be interpreted as threats to the prophet but as symbols of his protection.” Block, *Ezekiel 1–24*, 121.

exists in direct contradiction with its כִּי clauses, ruling out adversative כִּי. And the main clause goes against the expected background causal relation, which eliminates causal כִּי. Thus, כִּי in Ezekiel 11:16 marks a concessive clause and may be translated as “though.”

Having reviewed standard functions of כִּי and representative examples of its use in the book of Ezekiel, the table below organizes the discussed features into a scorecard for evaluating other cases of כִּי.

Table 8. Scorecard guiding the recognition of the function of כִּי in a given case

Use of כִּי	Typical Feature(s)	Met
Complement	mental action verb(s) (main clause)	
Conditional or Temporal	<i>yiqtol</i> verb(s) (כִּי clause)	
	pre-apodosis position (כִּי clause)	
Conditional	prefixed conjunction on כִּי	
	hypothetical nature (main, כִּי clauses)	
	casuistic text (context of main, כִּי clauses)	
Temporal	occur at the same time (main, כִּי clauses)	
Adversative	precedes כִּי clause (main clause)	
	negation (main clause)	
	main and כִּי clauses directly contradict	
Consecutive	a preceding question (main clause)	
	potential purpose or result (כִּי clause)	
Causal	objective or personal situation explained (כִּי clause)	
	speech act motivations given (כִּי clause)	
	outcome explanation reasoned (כִּי clause)	
	justification to clarify forms or smooth speech given (כִּי clause)	
	discourse advanced (כִּי clause)	
Concessive	prior background supplies a normal causal relation	
	negation (main clause); elements incompatible with background	
	precedes main clause or parenthetical afterthought (כִּי clause)	
	<i>qatal</i> verb(s) or verbless clause (כִּי clause)	

By recording which typical features from the above scorecard are present in a given כִּי clause complex and evaluating whether those present features sufficiently suggest that the

clause complex meets the norms of a particular use of כִּי, one may deduce the way a particular case of כִּי functions.

כִּי in the Repeated Phrase כִּי בֵּית מְרִי הֵמָּה

Next, this study appropriates the above scorecard to evaluate cases of כִּי in the repeated construction germane to Ezekiel’s muteness. Eight times in the book of Ezekiel, כִּי appears in the phrase כִּי בֵּית מְרִי הֵמָּה, with occasional, slight variations (Ezek 2:5, 6, 7; 3:9, 26, 27; 12:2, 3). The following examination first resolves the function of כִּי in the six cases outside of Ezekiel 3:26–27 before addressing those of Ezekiel 3:26–27.

Ezekiel 2:5. The repeated phrase first occurs amidst Ezekiel’s prophetic call and following YHWH’s descriptions of his people’s rebelliousness—a condition he said then permeated them generationally (Ezek 2:3–4). YHWH ordered Ezekiel to speak his word to the exiles and then stated, “And they, whether they will hear (שמע) and whether they will refuse (חדל), כִּי they are a rebellious house, they will know that a prophet was in their midst” (Ezek 2:4–5). Since כִּי appears inside a nominal clause fronted with “And they,” it must relate to a part of this nominal clause focusing on exilic Israel. However, whether the clause preceding or following the כִּי clause is meant to be the main clause remains less clear. Still, the guidelines for recognizing how כִּי functions here help to narrow the possibilities. The completed scorecard for evaluating כִּי appears below.

Table 9. Completed scorecard for כִּי in Ezekiel 2:5

Use of כִּי	Typical Feature(s)	Met
Complement	mental action verb(s) (main clause)	Y
Conditional or Temporal	<i>yiqtol</i> verb(s) (כִּי clause)	N
	pre-apodosis position (כִּי clause)	Y/N
Conditional	prefixed conjunction on כִּי	N
	hypothetical nature (main, כִּי clauses)	N
	casuistic text (context of main, כִּי clauses)	N

Use of כִּי	Typical Feature(s)	Met
Temporal	occur at the same time (main, כִּי clauses)	N
Adversative	precedes כִּי clause (main clause) negation (main clause) main and כִּי clauses directly contradict	Y/N N N
Consecutive	a preceding question (main clause) potential purpose or result (כִּי clause)	N N
Causal	objective or personal situation explained (כִּי clause) speech act motivations given (כִּי clause) outcome explanation reasoned (כִּי clause) justification to clarify forms or smooth speech given (כִּי clause) discourse advanced (כִּי clause)	N N N Y N
Concessive	prior background supplies a normal causal relation negation (main clause); elements incompatible with background precedes main clause or parenthetical afterthought (כִּי clause) <i>qatal</i> verb(s) or verbless clause (כִּי clause)	Y N; Y Y/N Y

This information reveals that כִּי in Ezekiel 2:5 may mark either a causal or concessive clause. First, it appears improbable that כִּי indicates a complement clause. Though the perception verb “hear” (שמע) occurs in the verse, it does so with “refuse” (חדל)—a verb uncharacteristic of complement כִּי. Second, the clause complex lacks elements consistent with conditional כִּי—the כִּי clause is verbless, כִּי has no prefix, the exiles are not hypothetically but already actually rebellious (Ezek 2:3–4), and Ezekiel 2:5 does not occur in a casuistic text. Third, כִּי does not mark a temporal clause. The כִּי clause is verbless, and since exilic Israel’s rebelliousness is already actual, it occurred before the time of its main clause. Fourth, adversative כִּי is unlikely because the two possible main clauses (Ezek 2:5aα, 5b) neither entail negation nor directly contradict the כִּי clause. Also, adversative כִּי appears clumsy and less felicitous than other possibilities, such as causal or concessive כִּי. Fifth, consecutive כִּי is non-sensical, for it would be absurd to intend rebelliousness as some purpose or result of the exiles’ hearing or Ezekiel’s prophesying. Additionally, the main clause does not include a question. Sixth, כִּי may mark causality, for YHWH could have meant to justify his form of speaking about exilic Israel: “whether

they will hear and whether they will refuse.” His wording introduced a way of talking about the exiles that insinuated doubt about their receptivity of Ezekiel. Since he had not yet used this expression with Ezekiel, it may have invited an explanation. That is, YHWH may have used the כִּי clause to in effect say, “I have formulated exilic Israel as a people who may or may not listen to your prophesying because they are a rebellious house.”¹¹⁴ The כִּי clause’s medial position between what would be the main clause and an ensuing adjunct also matches other cases wherein causal כִּי serves to justify a manner of speech.¹¹⁵ Thus, causal כִּי appears viable. Alternatively, כִּי may mark concession. In this way, YHWH could have had in mind the background relation that rebelliousness normally causes people not to know and recognize a true prophet (cf. Ezekiel’s prophetic conditions cited above and especially his experience with his rebellious audience). Then by asserting that the exiles would come to know Ezekiel as a true prophet (Ezek 2:5b), YHWH went against this normal causal relation. Also, YHWH’s כִּי clause is verbless and precedes what would be the main clause. As a result, כִּי here marks either the basis for YHWH’s form of speaking about the exiles rendered as “for” or his concession that “though” the exiles are rebellious, they will yet know that Ezekiel is a true prophet.

Ezekiel 2:6b. In the ensuing verse, YHWH again invoked the repeated phrase while instructing Ezekiel about his prophetic ministry. He said, “Do not (לֹא) fear from their words, and do not (לֹא) be dismayed from their faces, כִּי they are a rebellious house” (Ezek 2:6b). The table below supplies the completed scorecard for evaluating כִּי .

¹¹⁴ See Locatell’s reasoning and similar paraphrase. Locatell, “Grammatical Polysemy in the Hebrew Bible,” 173–74.

¹¹⁵ See Locatell, “Causal Categories in Biblical Hebrew Discourse,” 89, 89n27.

Table 10. Completed scorecard for כִּי in Ezekiel 2:6b

Use of כִּי	Typical Feature(s)	Met
Complement	mental action verb(s) (main clause)	N
Conditional or Temporal	<i>yiqtol</i> verb(s) (כִּי clause)	N
	pre-apodosis position (כִּי clause)	N
Conditional	prefixed conjunction on כִּי	N
	hypothetical nature (main, כִּי clauses)	N
	casuistic text (context of main, כִּי clauses)	N
Temporal	occur at the same time (main, כִּי clauses)	N
Adversative	precedes כִּי clause (main clause)	Y
	negation (main clause)	Y
	main and כִּי clauses directly contradict	N
Consecutive	a preceding question (main clause)	N
	potential purpose or result (כִּי clause)	N
Causal	objective or personal situation explained (כִּי clause)	N
	speech act motivations given (כִּי clause)	N
	outcome explanation reasoned (כִּי clause)	N
	justification to clarify forms or smooth speech given (כִּי clause)	N
	discourse advanced (כִּי clause)	N
Concessive	prior background supplies a normal causal relation	Y
	negation (main clause); elements incompatible with background	Y; Y
	precedes main clause or parenthetical afterthought (כִּי clause)	Y
	<i>qatal</i> verb(s) or verbless clause (כִּי clause)	Y

An appraisal of the above results suggests that כִּי in Ezekiel 2:6b marks concession. First, the two main clauses do not use verbs typical of cognition and perception, making complement כִּי unlikely. Second, כִּי marks neither a conditional nor a temporal clause for reasons similar to those specified when discussing Ezekiel 2:5. Also, the כִּי clause follows the main clause. Third, כִּי also does not indicate an adversative clause. The main clauses do precede the כִּי clause and employ the negative particle אֵל, but they do not directly contrast with the כִּי clause. Instead, the focus merely shifts from Ezekiel’s negated action to exilic Israel’s status. Fourth, כִּי does not signal a consecutive clause on grounds like those noted for Ezekiel 2:5. Fifth, since the כִּי clause adjoins YHWH’s speech act command, כִּי might function causally. In that way, causal כִּי would mean YHWH ordered

Ezekiel against a wrong basis for him to fear and be dismayed—the exiles are rebellious.¹¹⁶ Yet, since YHWH separately marked the expected basis or source of fear with the *מן* preposition—“from their words . . . and from their faces” (. . . מִדְּבָרֵיהֶם וּמִפְּנֵיהֶם)—marking an additional improper basis with *כִּי* would seem extraneous. Causal *כִּי* could also convey YHWH’s motivation for his own command. In that sense, he would mean, “The reason I command you not to fear and become dismayed is because I know that they are rebellious, and so you might be tempted to respond in fear and dismay.” However, this expression communicates concession more than it does causation.

Used in that way, YHWH would assume as background the common relation that facing a rebellious people tends to cause fear and dismay in a prophet (cf. Moses and Jeremiah). Then, rather than permitting this expected causal relation to eventuate, he used the negative particle *לֹא* to command Ezekiel and so refused to let him fear and become dismayed amidst a rebellious people. Such main clause negation leads to incompatibility with the background expectation, which implies concession. Additionally, though YHWH’s *כִּי* clause follows its main clauses, YHWH had already mentioned the exiles’ rebelliousness (Ezek 2:3–4) and employed the exact phrase “they are a rebellious house” (Ezek 2:5). Thus, his echoed *כִּי* clause appears more parenthetical at this point. Furthermore, *כִּי* occurs in a verbless clause. Moreover, Ezekiel 2:6b parallels a clause complex containing *כִּי* that arguably expresses a concessive idea as well (Ezek 2:6a). Reasonably then, *כִּי* in Ezekiel 2:6b marks concession with the following meaning: YHWH yet required Ezekiel not to fear nor be dismayed “though” he must face a rebellious people, and rebellious people usually induce fear and dismay in prophets.

Ezekiel 2:7. After that, YHWH again commanded Ezekiel saying, “And you will speak my words to them, whether they will hear (*שמעו*), and whether they will refuse

¹¹⁶ See Locatell, “Grammatical Polysemy in the Hebrew Bible,” 246.

(חדל), כִּי they are rebellious” (Ezek 2:7). Since the verse entails some common phrasing with Ezekiel 2:5 and a speech act command like in Ezekiel 2:6, כִּי here probably indicates what it did in those verses—either a causal or concessive idea and not the alternatives. That said, כִּי likely does not mark a causal clause justifying YHWH’s form of phrasing the exiles as a people who may or may not listen. Unlike in Ezekiel 2:5, where this use of causal כִּי is possible, כִּי in Ezekiel 2:7 does not occur as part of a nominal clause focusing on the exiles but as part of a speech act clause complex. Additionally, while the כִּי clause is verbless and parenthetically follows its main clause like the concessive כִּי in Ezekiel 2:6b, the main clause of Ezekiel 2:7 contains no negation, and its clause complex conveys an idea that upholds a causal relationship well attested to in Israel’s history. Namely, Israel’s rebelliousness normally motivated YHWH to send his prophet to courageously proclaim his prophetic word. As a result, כִּי here likely marks a speech act causal clause, it may be translated as “for,” and it indicates YHWH’s motivation for directing Ezekiel to speak his word regardless of audience receptivity—exilic Israel is a rebellious house.¹¹⁷

Ezekiel 3:9. Next, YHWH exhorted Ezekiel as he had before saying, “Do not (לֹא) fear them, and do not (לֹא) be dismayed from their faces, כִּי they are a rebellious house” (Ezek 2:6b). Considering the comparable language and form shared between Ezekiel 3:9 and 2:6b, the analysis and conclusion from Ezekiel 2:6b also apply to Ezekiel 3:9.¹¹⁸ That is, כִּי here marks concession and may be translated as “though.”

Ezekiel 12:2. Then, in the second to last instance of the repeated phrase, YHWH stated, “Son of man, you are dwelling in the midst of a rebellious house—they have eyes to see (ראוה), and they do not (לֹא) see (ראוה), they have ears to hear (שמע), and

¹¹⁷ Contra Locatell, “Grammatical Polysemy in the Hebrew Bible,” 169n154.

¹¹⁸ See Locatell who asserts, “since the rebellion of Israel is known normally to be sufficient causal grounds for the fear and dismay of a prophet (i.e. because of the threat of physical harm for their unpopular message, e.g. 1 Kgs 18:4; 19:10), this yields a concessive reading.” Locatell, “Grammatical Polysemy in the Hebrew Bible,” 246, cf. 245, 256n331, 257n334.

they do not (לֹא) hear (שמע), כִּי they are a rebellious house” (Ezek 12:2). The populated scorecard for assessing כִּי appears in the table below.

Table 11. Completed scorecard for כִּי in Ezekiel 12:2

Use of כִּי	Typical Feature(s)	Met
Complement	mental action verb(s) (main clause)	Y
Conditional or Temporal	<i>yiqtol</i> verb(s) (כִּי clause)	N
	pre-apodosis position (כִּי clause)	N
Conditional	prefixed conjunction on כִּי	N
	hypothetical nature (main, כִּי clauses)	N
	casuistic text (context of main, כִּי clauses)	N
Temporal	occur at the same time (main, כִּי clauses)	N
Adversative	precedes כִּי clause (main clause)	Y
	negation (main clause)	Y
	main and כִּי clauses directly contradict	N
Consecutive	a preceding question (main clause)	N
	potential purpose or result (כִּי clause)	Y
Causal	objective or personal situation explained (כִּי clause)	N
	speech act motivations given (כִּי clause)	N
	outcome explanation reasoned (כִּי clause)	N
	justification to clarify forms or smooth speech given (כִּי clause)	Y
	discourse advanced (כִּי clause)	N
Concessive	prior background supplies a normal causal relation	Y
	negation (main clause); elements incompatible with background	Y; N
	precedes main clause or parenthetical afterthought (כִּי clause)	Y
	<i>qatal</i> verb(s) or verbless clause (כִּי clause)	Y

An assessment of these tabulations implies that כִּי in Ezekiel 12:2 signifies a causal clause. First, complement כִּי appears improbable. Despite the presence of the perception verbs “see” (ראה) and “hear” (שמע), כִּי exists far removed and thus detached from all but one such verb instance. Second, כִּי marks neither a conditional nor a temporal clause for reasons like those noted when discussing Ezekiel 2:5. Also, the כִּי clause follows the main clause. Third, adversative כִּי also appears unlikely. Though the main clause

precedes the כִּי clause and conveys negation via the two negative particles אֵל, it does not directly contradict the כִּי clause. Instead, a spiritual sort of not seeing or hearing corresponds with rebelliousness. Fourth, consecutive כִּי is possible but not probable. On this reading, exilic Israel’s rebelliousness would result from corrupted ears and eyes. Yet, rebelliousness seems more the cause rather than the consequence of spiritual blindness and deafness. Also, the main clause does not include a question. Fifth, asserting concessive כִּי fails as well. The verse does have both a verbless כִּי clause that may be parenthetical and a main clause entailing negation via the two negative particles אֵל. However, the negative particles create a clause complex compatible with the background relation, in which rebelliousness normally causes spiritual blindness and deafness. Consequently, causal remains the most probable meaning of כִּי. Given the strangeness of talking about non-seeing eyes and non-hearing ears, YHWH likely sought to make his form of speech more felicitous by supplying the additional background information that these dysfunctional eyes and ears belong to dynastically rebellious people.¹¹⁹ As a result, כִּי here marks a causal clause translated as “for.”

Ezekiel 12:3. The recurrent phrase’s last use occurs in the next verse. There, YHWH ordered Ezekiel to go out in the sight of the exiles with an exile’s baggage and stated, “Perhaps they will understand (רָאוּהוּ) כִּי they are a rebellious house” (Ezek 12:3). The following table shows the scorecard summary for assessing כִּי.

Table 12. Completed scorecard for כִּי in Ezekiel 12:3

Use of כִּי	Typical Feature(s)	Met
Complement	mental action verb(s) (main clause)	Y
Conditional or Temporal	<i>yiqtol</i> verb(s) (כִּי clause)	N
	pre-apodosis position (כִּי clause)	N

¹¹⁹ See Locatell, “Grammatical Polysemy in the Hebrew Bible,” 174, 174n164.

Use of כִּי	Typical Feature(s)	Met
Conditional	prefixed conjunction on כִּי	N
	hypothetical nature (main, כִּי clauses)	N
	casuistic text (context of main, כִּי clauses)	N
Temporal	occur at the same time (main, כִּי clauses)	N
Adversative	precedes כִּי clause (main clause)	Y
	negation (main clause)	N
	main and כִּי clauses directly contradict	N
Consecutive	a preceding question (main clause)	N
	potential purpose or result (כִּי clause)	N
Causal	objective or personal situation explained (כִּי clause)	N
	speech act motivations given (כִּי clause)	N
	outcome explanation reasoned (כִּי clause)	N
	justification to clarify forms or smooth speech given (כִּי clause)	N
	discourse advanced (כִּי clause)	N
Concessive	prior background supplies a normal causal relation	Y
	negation (main clause); elements incompatible with background	N; Y
	precedes main clause or parenthetical afterthought (כִּי clause)	Y
	<i>qatal</i> verb(s) or verbless clause (כִּי clause)	Y

A review of the data charted above reveals that כִּי may mark either a complement or concessive clause. First, the text contains elements typical of complement כִּי. Namely, כִּי appears immediately after the verb of perception “see” or “understand” (ראה). Also, YHWH seven times repeated the refrain “before their eyes,” showing that he meant Ezekiel to visually reach the exiles about their obstinacy (Ezek 12:3 (2x), 4 (2x), 5, 6, 7). Then, since the people asked Ezekiel, “What are you doing?” (Ezek 12:9), his portrayal had a visual effect. Thus, YHWH may have meant, “With Ezekiel parading my message in plain sight before them, perhaps they will see that (כִּי) they are rebellious.” Second, כִּי does not mark a conditional or a temporal clause for reasons like those cited when considering Ezekiel 2:5. Also, the כִּי clause follows the main clause. Third, though the main clause precedes the כִּי clause, it neither contains negation nor directly contrasts its כִּי clause. Instead, the focus merely shifts from YHWH’s statement of possibility to exilic Israel’s status, excluding adversative כִּי. Fourth, כִּי does not indicate a consecutive clause

for a rationale like that mentioned with Ezekiel 2:5. Fifth, one may also rule out causal כִּי. YHWH stated the operative background relation in the prior verse—rebelliousness causes people not to see and understand (Ezek 12:2). However, his subsequent main clause goes against this causal relation by raising the possibility that they may yet see and understand Ezekiel’s depiction of going into exile (Ezek 12:3). Accordingly, YHWH’s main clause is incompatible with the background relation, which implies concession. Also, though the כִּי clause follows its main clause, YHWH had already stated this exact phrase many times, and so its use once again appears more parenthetical. And כִּי here marks a verbless clause. Consequently, a credible case exists for כִּי in Ezekiel 12:3 to mark either a complement clause translated as “that” or a concessive clause translated as “though.”

Evaluating כִּי in six of the eight cases of the phrase כִּי בֵּית מְרִי הִמָּה reveals that כִּי need not function identically despite occurring in a comparable or identical כִּי clause. In these instances, כִּי marks causal clauses, concessive clauses, and possibly a complement clause. Therefore, both the context and content of the clause complex containing כִּי remain decisive in determining how a given case of כִּי functions.

כִּי in Ezekiel 3:26b

With these results in mind, this investigation now turns to consider כִּי as used in Ezekiel 3:26b. In context, YHWH commanded Ezekiel to shut himself up in his home and informed him that he would be bound with cords (Ezek 3:24–25). Then, he stated, “And I will cause your tongue to cling to the roof of your mouth so that you will be mute and not (לֹא) be to them for a man of reproof, כִּי they are a rebellious house” (Ezek 3:26). The table below contains the scorecard summary for appraising כִּי in Ezekiel 3:26b.

Table 13. Completed scorecard for כִּי in Ezekiel 3:26b

Use of כִּי	Typical Feature(s)	Met
Complement	mental action verb(s) (main clause)	N

Use of כִּי	Typical Feature(s)	Met
Conditional or Temporal	<i>yiqtol</i> verb(s) (כִּי clause)	N
	pre-apodosis position (כִּי clause)	N
Conditional	prefixed conjunction on כִּי	N
	hypothetical nature (main, כִּי clauses)	N
	casuistic text (context of main, כִּי clauses)	N
Temporal	occur at the same time (main, כִּי clauses)	N
Adversative	precedes כִּי clause (main clause)	Y
	negation (main clause)	Y
	main and כִּי clauses directly contradict	N
Consecutive	a preceding question (main clause)	N
	potential purpose or result (כִּי clause)	N
Causal	objective or personal situation explained (כִּי clause)	N
	speech act motivations given (כִּי clause)	N
	outcome explanation reasoned (כִּי clause)	N
	justification to clarify forms or smooth speech given (כִּי clause)	N
	discourse advanced (כִּי clause)	N
Concessive	prior background supplies a normal causal relation	Y
	negation (main clause); elements incompatible with background	Y; Y
	precedes main clause or parenthetical afterthought (כִּי clause)	Y
	<i>qatal</i> verb(s) or verbless clause (כִּי clause)	Y

In reviewing these findings, כִּי in Ezekiel 3:26b likely marks concession. First, the verse contains no verbs of cognition or perception, which makes complement כִּי implausible. Second, כִּי does not signify a conditional clause. As in Ezekiel 2:5, the main and כִּי clauses are not hypothetical but actual—Ezekiel shall be mute and not a man of reproof, and exilic Israel already existed as a rebellious house (Ezek 2:3–4). Additionally, the כִּי clause is verbless and follows the main clause, כִּי has no prefix, and Ezekiel 3:26b does not occur in a casuistic setting. Third and like in Ezekiel 2:5, כִּי does not indicate a temporal clause. The כִּי clause is verbless and follows the main clause, and since exilic Israel’s rebelliousness is already actual, it occurred before the time of YHWH’s main clause announcement of Ezekiel’s muteness. Fourth, the main clause does precede the כִּי clause and entail negation via YHWH’s tongue binding, revoking of speech, and use of the negative particle אֵל. Nevertheless, it does not directly contradict its כִּי clause. Instead,

the focus merely shifts from YHWH's pronouncement precluding speech and a haranguing lifestyle to exilic Israel's status as a rebellious people. Therefore, adversative כִּי is excluded. Fifth, כִּי does not mark a consecutive clause either. The main clause does not include a question, and it makes no sense to intend rebelliousness as a purpose or result of muting Ezekiel. Sixth, though many take כִּי to mark a causality, a consideration of the possibilities for causal כִּי shows that this construal has problems as well.

For example, Locatell finds the כִּי clause to give an explanation of a personal situation like the second use of כִּי in Ezekiel 3:7.¹²⁰ As mentioned already, there YHWH said, "But the house of Israel will not be willing to listen to you, for (כִּי) they are not willing to listen to me, for (כִּי) all the house of Israel have a hard forehead, and they are hard of heart" (Ezek 3:7). Locatell would rightly assert that there, YHWH spoke as the narrator profiling exilic Israel's unwillingness to hear as caused by their own hard heads and hearts.¹²¹ Yet, it is difficult to see how such causation applies to כִּי in Ezekiel 3:26b. Unlike in Ezekiel 3:7 and other similar cases of causal כִּי (cf. Ezek 7:14; 8:12; 9:9; 20:16), no narrator in Ezekiel 3:26b profiled a third-person's reasoning behind their thoughts or actions. In Ezekiel 3:26b, YHWH spoke of the rebellious exiles in the third person, but he did not profile their intentionality, reasoning, evaluating, or acting as caused by their rebelliousness. Instead, he linked his own first-person muting-of-Ezekiel action along with Ezekiel's second-person muted action to exilic Israel's third-person recalcitrance. Further still, two other tendencies Locatell sees as typical of such causal clauses are missing. Namely, כִּי neither precedes the verb אמר nor follows a question (cf. Ezek 8:12; 9:9).¹²² As a result, כִּי in Ezekiel 3:26b does not seem to meet Locatell's own

¹²⁰ Locatell, "Grammatical Polysemy in the Hebrew Bible," 184n184.

¹²¹ After identifying כִּי in Ezek 3:7 (#2) and 26 as content volitional causal כִּי , see this line of reasoning supplied for content volitional causal כִּי , exemplified by Gen 19:30 and 32:33. Locatell, "Grammatical Polysemy in the Hebrew Bible," 184–85.

¹²² See Locatell, "Grammatical Polysemy in the Hebrew Bible," 186.

criteria for marking an explanation of a personal situation. It also does not match the other possibilities of causal כִּי .

Specifically, כִּי does not indicate YHWH's motivation behind his speech act announcing his muting of Ezekiel. In that case, YHWH would mean, "My reason for muting your speech and reproofing manner of life is because the exiles are rebellious." However, Israel's rebelliousness normally motivated YHWH to send them a reproofing prophet (cf. Moses and Nathan) and at times even to send them a prophet consumed with reproofing them (cf. Jeremiah). Therefore, deeming כִּי here to mark a speech act causal clause appears unprecedented, it goes against Israel's historical pattern, and it thus appears surprising and doubtful.

Additionally, כִּי does not mark YHWH's reasoned explanation for muting Ezekiel. Since the precedent of sending a muted prophet because of a rebellious people did not yet exist in Israel's broader context, YHWH would not reason from such a cause-effect precedent.

Furthermore, citing the exiles as rebellious does not seem to justify YHWH's form of announcing Ezekiel's muteness in any apparent way. Neither does it appear to supply background that makes his announcement more in line with normative communication practices.

Moreover, no indications that כִּי marks a causal clause advancing the discourse, such as the *petuḥa* (פ), *setuma* (ס), or basic prophetic speech formulae, are present. Instead, the כִּי clause, "they are a rebellious house," appears more parenthetical and tagged on as part of the end of the preceding thought. While these conclusions preclude the possibility of כִּי marking a causal clause, the evidence does support reasoning that כִּי here marks a concessive clause.

In particular, YHWH's mentioning of a man of reproof in conjunction with rebellious Israel recalls Jeremiah's contemporary, contentious prophetic ministry toward the very generation of rebellious Israelites that Ezekiel would face. Thus, YHWH

reasonably had in mind the background causal relation just noted—recalcitrance in YHWH’s people normally motivated him to deploy his rebuking prophet and even send them one with a compulsion to reprove. Additionally, YHWH’s binding the tongue, revoking of speech, and using the negative particle אֵל all serve to mute Ezekiel’s speech and manner and so create a negated main clause. Also, his sending such a muted prophet is incompatible with the above referenced background relation. As stated, prophetic muteness appears uncharacteristic for dealing with rebellious people. Furthermore, though YHWH’s כִּי clause follows its main clause, YHWH had already noted the exiles’ rebelliousness and used the exact phrase “they are a rebellious house” several times. Thus, his echoed כִּי clause here seems more parenthetical and tagged on. Moreover, כִּי here marks a verbless clause. Therefore, כִּי in Ezekiel 3:26b likely marks a concessive clause translated as “though.” In other words, YHWH connected his muting Ezekiel’s speech and manner with exilic Israel’s rebelliousness through a relationship of concession. He granted that even though the exiles’ ingrained obstinance normally gives cause for a highly vocal prophet who unrelentingly rebukes his people, YHWH would restrain Ezekiel with muteness so that Ezekiel would not relate to the exiles in that way. In chapter 5, I will consider why Ezekiel’s conditions prompted such prophetic muteness.

Ezekiel 3:27: Muteness Enabling Prophetic Speech

Next, the subsequent verse shows that while YHWH muted Ezekiel, he did permit Ezekiel to speak in one specific way. YHWH announced, “But when I speak with you, I will open your mouth, and you will say to them, ‘Thus says the Lord YHWH’” (וּבְדַבְרֵי אֹתָךְ אֶפְתַּח אֶת־פִּיךָ וְאָמַרְתָּ אֲלֵיהֶם כֹּה אָמַר אֲדֹנָי יְהוִה; Ezek 3:27a). Some who explain Ezekiel’s muteness with the Later Redactional Editing approach cite this specific verse as an editorial insertion.¹²³ However, such an assertion stems from presupposing

¹²³ Cooke, *Ezekiel*, 47; Eichrodt, *Ezekiel*, 348, cf. 76; Vawter and Hoppe, *Ezekiel*, 38–39; John W. Wevers, *Ezekiel*, Century Bible (London: Nelson, 1969), 58–59.

that Ezekiel’s muteness must be durative from its inception until Jerusalem’s fall, which results in a circular argument.¹²⁴ Even Joseph Blenkinsopp, who accepts this redactional method, concedes that claiming later redactors added Ezekiel 3:27 remains speculative.¹²⁵ In fact, the Hebrew permits understanding Ezekiel 3:27 both as pertinent to Ezekiel’s muteness and as specifying an exception to it for his intermittent speaking.

Muteness Except to Prophecy

Specifically, YHWH began his declaration with the conjunction ו. Since ו marks YHWH’s shift from specifying muteness to stipulating speech, he meant “but” by the conjunction ו and so signaled his continued, contrastive disclosure of Ezekiel’s muteness. And with that contrast, YHWH told Ezekiel he would open his mouth “when I speak with you” (בְּדַבְרֵי אֹתָךְ). In this construction, “when” (כִּי) may convey the sense of “at one particular future moment” or “whenever.” That is, YHWH could have meant either he would on one forthcoming occasion speak with Ezekiel to open his mouth, or he would recurrently speak with Ezekiel throughout his period of muteness to open his mouth. Clarity as to which sense YHWH meant comes from his use of comparable language in Ezekiel’s watchman call (Ezek 3:16–21; cf. 33:1–9).

There YHWH declared, “When I say (כִּי אֶמַּר) to the wicked ‘You will surely die,’” and then he went on to make Ezekiel responsible for warning the wicked people he would mention (Ezek 3:18; cf. 33:8). In this case, YHWH clearly meant Ezekiel to warn each wicked person every time he gave Ezekiel notice of their impending doom. To rephrase, YHWH meant by “when” (כִּי), “as often as” or “whenever.” Since YHWH’s watchman call demands a recurrent sense, and his proviso on Ezekiel’s muteness in Ezekiel 3:27 employs a similar construction also at the time of his call, YHWH likely

¹²⁴ See Friebel, *Jeremiah’s and Ezekiel’s Sign-Acts*, 184.

¹²⁵ Blenkinsopp, *Ezekiel*, 32.

meant this same intermittent sense in Ezekiel 3:27.¹²⁶ In other words, he asserted that he would open his muted prophet's mouth "whenever" he would speak with Ezekiel.

Next, the expression of mouth opening (פתח + פה) specifies one starting to talk. Block identifies such meaning in several texts (Num 22:28; Job 3:1; 33:2; Ps 78:2; 109:2; Prov 31:8, 9, 26; Dan 10:16), and he observes that it "usually refers to the commencement of speaking, without any association with dumbness."¹²⁷ Though here linked with Ezekiel's dumbness, this language means the start of talking as well, for YHWH connected Ezekiel's mouth opening to his speaking (אָפְתַח אֶת־פִּי וְאָמַרְתָּ). Hence, YHWH revealed that whenever he would speak with Ezekiel, he would open Ezekiel's mouth, and Ezekiel would then speak.

Also, YHWH said that Ezekiel would then speak a particular message. In having his mouth opened, Ezekiel would give address in accordance with the *messenger formula*, "Thus says the Lord YHWH" (כֹּה אָמַר אֲדֹנָי יְהוִה). Since the *messenger formula* marks speech attributed to YHWH, it serves in this case as a metonym or shorthand for any word YHWH would give Ezekiel to speak. Accordingly, YHWH's opening of Ezekiel's mouth would bring him to utter prophecy.

Of note, YHWH's pledge here would seem to go beyond merely putting his words in his prophet's mouth and making it possible for the prophet then to deliver them (cf. Jeremiah). Ezekiel would undoubtedly enjoy that divine aid, but he would also experience YHWH himself opening his mouth and therefore moving him to utter the

¹²⁶ See Duguid, *Ezekiel*, 80n8; Friebel, *Jeremiah's and Ezekiel's Sign-Acts*, 185; Greenberg, *Ezekiel 1–20*, 103; Ralph W. Klein, *Ezekiel: The Prophet and His Message*, Studies on Personalities of the Old Testament (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1988), 39.

¹²⁷ Block, *Ezekiel 1–24*, 156, 156n39; see also Friebel, *Jeremiah's and Ezekiel's Sign-Acts*, 179–80.

divine word. As such, Ezekiel would find himself unable to withhold speaking prophecy, for YHWH would compel his prophetic speech.¹²⁸

Moreover, YHWH asserted that Ezekiel would speak his word “to them” (אֶל־יהִם). As noted above, “them” in Ezekiel’s call refers to Israel and principally exilic Israel. Thus, while YHWH would tie Ezekiel’s tongue to bar speech and a reproving lifestyle toward his people, YHWH qualified this muteness with his commitment to cause Ezekiel’s mouth to speak whenever he would talk with Ezekiel so that Ezekiel would then prophesy to his people. In that respect, YHWH did not impose a durative but an intermittent muteness upon Ezekiel—he would provision divine speech for Ezekiel as often as he spoke his word to him.

By implication then, YHWH’s supplying only prophetic speech for his muted prophet suggests Ezekiel would remain tongue-tied from all other kinds of speech—he could not speak ordinarily within his community.¹²⁹ And because YHWH imposed muteness specifically in relation to the exiles but placed no restriction on Ezekiel’s

¹²⁸ See also Peter C. Craigie, *Ezekiel*, The Daily Study Bible (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1983), 26; Michael A. Lyons, *An Introduction to the Study of Ezekiel*, T & T Clark Approaches to Biblical Studies (London: Bloomsbury T & T Clark, 2015), 16.

¹²⁹ See also others who say his muteness precluded normal, routine, casual, ordinary, personal, self-motivated, self-initiated, spontaneous, free, non-prophetic, or similar speech: Allen, *Ezekiel 1–19*, 61; Block, *Ezekiel 1–24*, 159; Daniel I. Block, *The Book of Ezekiel, Chapters 25–48*, New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1998), 255; Carley, *The Book of the Prophet Ezekiel*, 29; Corrine L. Carvalho, *The Book of Ezekiel*, in *New Collegeville Bible Commentary, Old Testament*, vol. 16, *Ezekiel, Daniel*, ed. Daniel Durken (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2012), 17; Duguid, *Ezekiel*, 82; Ellison, *Ezekiel*, 32, cf. 118; Charles Lee Feinberg, *The Prophecy of Ezekiel: The Glory of the Lord*, 4th printing (Chicago: Moody Press, 1974), 31; Friebe, *Jeremiah’s and Ezekiel’s Sign-Acts*, 185, 374; Greenberg, *Ezekiel 1–20*, 121; Greenberg, *Ezekiel 21–37*, 681, cf. 513, 516, 682; Greenberg, “On Ezekiel’s Dumbness,” 103; C. F. Keil, *Ezekiel*, in *Commentary on the Old Testament*, vol. 9, *Ezekiel Daniel*, ed. C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, trans. James Martin (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2006), 39; Lind, *Ezekiel*, 45; John W. Olley, *Ezekiel: A Commentary Based on Iezekiël in Codex Vaticanus*, Septuagint Commentary Series (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 258; Thomas Renz, *The Rhetorical Function of the Book of Ezekiel*, Supplements to Vetus Testamentum, vol. 76 (Leiden: Brill, 1999), 92, 157; Stuart, *Ezekiel*, 243; John B. Taylor, *Ezekiel: An Introduction and Commentary*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries, vol. 22 (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2009), 211; Nicholas J. Tromp, “The Paradox of Ezekiel’s Prophetic Mission: Towards a Semiotic Approach of Ezekiel 3,22–27,” in *Ezekiel and His Book: Textual and Literary Criticism and Their Interrelation*, ed. J. Lust, Bibliotheca Ephemeridum Theologicarum Lovaniensium 74 (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1986), 210; Wright, *Ezekiel*, 70, 72–73; cf. less confidently. Blenkinsopp, *Ezekiel*, 32, cf. 150.

exchanges with himself, Ezekiel would remain at liberty to converse with YHWH. As such, Ezekiel's muteness also curbed informal, casual conversation with exilic Israel.

Prophesying through Muteness to Challenge Israel's Rebellious Exiles

Next, YHWH announced a purpose in the exception he placed on Ezekiel's muteness. He said, "The one who hears, let him hear, but the one who refuses, let him refuse" (יְהִי־לְךָ | יִשְׁמַע וְיִהְיֶה־לְךָ | יִשְׁמַע; Ezek 3:27b^a). YHWH's use of the jussive "let" conveys his desire regarding those people who would hear and those who would not. Since he shared this desire after stating he would recurrently cause Ezekiel to prophesy to exilic Israel (Ezek 3:27a), YHWH showed that he meant for the exiles willing to hear Ezekiel's preaching to listen to it and for those declining his speeches to reject them.

Scholars give negative¹³⁰ and more positive¹³¹ appraisals of the expected response to Ezekiel's preaching. Some view YHWH to say it "will tend to confirm men in their attitude, whether of obedience or of neglect."¹³² Others more loosely interpret him to mean, "People are free to react by acceptance or rejection of God's message. God invites response but does not force it."¹³³ In any case, by compelling Ezekiel to utter his word, YHWH intended him to evoke an audience response. Ezekiel's muteness and periodic release to prophesy came with a divine purpose. Block calls YHWH's language

¹³⁰ Block, *Ezekiel 1–24*, 160–61; Greenberg, *Ezekiel 1–20*, 103; Ronald M. Hals, *Ezekiel*, *Forms of the Old Testament Literature*, vol. 19 (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1989), 25; Paul M. Joyce, *Ezekiel: A Commentary*, T & T Clark Library of Biblical Studies (New York: T & T Clark, 2007), 83.

¹³¹ Lamar Eugene Cooper Sr., *Ezekiel*, *New American Commentary*, vol. 17 (Nashville: B&H, 1994), 89; Lind, *Ezekiel*, 46.

¹³² Cooke, *Ezekiel*, 47; see also Taylor, *Ezekiel*, 76; Tromp, "Paradox of Ezekiel's Prophetic Mission," 211–12.

¹³³ Stuart, *Ezekiel*, 51; see also Craigie, *Ezekiel*, 26; Rooker, *Ezekiel*, 56.

here a “challenge.”¹³⁴ In that regard, YHWH meant breaks in Ezekiel’s muteness for him to prophesy and thus challenge the exiles to choose obedience or refusal.

Finally, YHWH completed Ezekiel’s commission, and in so doing, he related Ezekiel’s intermittent, purposeful preaching to exilic Israel’s deep-seated rebellion. YHWH restated, “כִּי בַּיִת מְרִי הֵמָּה” (Ezek 3:27bβ). Given the comparable language shared with Ezekiel 2:7, כִּי in Ezekiel 3:27 almost certainly marks a causal clause as it did there. In Ezekiel 2:7, כִּי marked the motive behind YHWH’s speech act. There, the exiles’ obstinance motivated ordering Ezekiel to speak regardless of receptivity. In Ezekiel 3:27, exilic Israel’s rebelliousness likewise motivated intermittently moving Ezekiel to prophesy to them with an openness to their receptivity. In both cases, YHWH spoke his speech act “because” the exiles were entrenched in rebellion. And such a causal relationship aligns well with Israel’s history, wherein recalcitrance gave rise to YHWH sending his word-bearing prophet to confront Israel.

Significantly, this exception to Ezekiel’s speechlessness complements the previously discussed aspect in which YHWH said he would mute Ezekiel from speech and a haranguing way of life toward his hearers (Ezek 3:26). In that statement, YHWH announced he would render Ezekiel unable to speak and berate his people into hearing and obeying the prophetic word. Here, YHWH stated he would free Ezekiel’s tongue and open his mouth only to proclaim his message while letting his people hear or refuse. Both facilitate Ezekiel’s allowing exilic Israel to freely receive or rebuff the divine word.

In summary of Ezekiel’s muteness as revealed in Ezekiel 3, YHWH sent his watchman-prophet Ezekiel to address exilic Israel, an obstinate people who denied YHWH had judged them with banishment. Ezekiel would deliver a message mainly of judgment against Judah and the nations intermingled with salvation and calls for repentance. As part of his commission, YHWH muted Ezekiel’s speech and manner by

¹³⁴ Block, *Ezekiel 1–24*, 77, 160n56.

imposing a literal, circumstantial, and provisional silence from speaking and from a lifestyle of reproof with exilic Israel despite their stiff-necked nature. Yet, because of their deep-seated rebelliousness, YHWH also periodically freed and caused Ezekiel's mouth to prophesy to exilic Israel with an openness to their receptivity and an aim at prompting their reply. As such, YHWH permitted formal prophetic speech but restrained Ezekiel's informal speaking. In a unique sense then, Ezekiel experienced a kind of divine enablement to prophesy through his muteness.

Ezekiel 24:25–27: Muteness's Coming End and Sign

About four and a half years after muting Ezekiel, YHWH again spoke of his speechlessness. Ezekiel 24 records YHWH informing Ezekiel that a survivor from Jerusalem would arrive in Babylon, reporting news that the city had fallen (Ezek 24:25–26). He then proclaimed the coming end of Ezekiel's muteness.

Muteness's Coming End

YHWH stated, “In that day, your mouth will be opened with the survivor, and you will speak and not be mute again” (בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא יִפְתַּח פִּיךָ אֶת־הַפִּלִּיט וְתִדְבַּר וְלֹא תֵאָלֵם) (Ezek 24:27a). Said another way, YHWH announced that at a future time, when a siege survivor came to tell of Jerusalem's ruin, Ezekiel would experience his mouth opening, he would talk with the survivor, and his muteness would permanently cease.

Notably, Ezekiel's mouth opening mentioned in Ezekiel 24:27 differs from that of Ezekiel 3:27. In Ezekiel 3:27, YHWH linked his opening of Ezekiel's mouth with enabled oracle delivery through muteness. In the forthcoming moment cited here, however, YHWH juxtaposed Ezekiel's mouth opening with his speaking and YHWH forever vacating the muteness (Ezek 24:27a).¹³⁵ He did not associate Ezekiel's speech at that time with the *messenger formula*, and so unlike in Ezekiel 3:27, YHWH did not

¹³⁵ See Greenberg, *Ezekiel 1–20*, 103.

mean that this future mouth opening would empower prophesying. Instead, it would end Ezekiel’s muteness—which permitted only prophesying—and thus free him to resume all manner of speech.¹³⁶ Ezekiel would again have the liberty to ordinarily communicate with others for the first time since his muteness began.

Muteness Signals a Model

YHWH then disclosed that Ezekiel’s return to informal speaking would have significance for his people. He added, “And you will be to them for a sign, and they will know that I am YHWH” (וְהָיִיתָ לָהֶם לְמוֹפֵת וַיִּדְעוּ כִּי־אֲנִי יְהוָה; Ezek 24:27b). Like in Ezekiel 3:26aγ, YHWH used language typical of defining a relationship between parties. He said that when Ezekiel’s muteness ended, Ezekiel would exist (וְהָיִיתָ) in relation “to them” (לָהֶם) “for” or “as” (לְ) a “sign” (מוֹפֵת). And as already noted, “them” refers to the exiles.

Jenni labels ל of מוֹפֵת as “Lamed revaluationis” and asserts that it marks, “Revaluation of people . . . as an experienced abstraction . . . מוֹפֵת.”¹³⁷ He also labels ל of לָהֶם as “Lamed experientiae” and says it marks, “Validity of a sentence statement . . . [a] Definition . . . מוֹפֵת.”¹³⁸ Considered all together then, YHWH pronounced that Ezekiel’s very person would take on the abstract sense of a sign, and exilic Israel would begin to experience his signaling the moment Ezekiel’s mouth opened and his muteness ceased. Grasping the sign’s precise import requires considering the basic meaning of מוֹפֵת, the use of מוֹפֵת elsewhere in the book of Ezekiel, and then the particular use of מוֹפֵת in Ezekiel 24:27. While largely following Friebel’s interpretation, the analysis below discusses each of these points in turn.

¹³⁶ See also Friebel, *Jeremiah’s and Ezekiel’s Sign-Acts*, 189–90.

¹³⁷ Jenni, *Die Präposition Lamed*, 26, 31, 33–34, 37–38. Translation mine.

¹³⁸ Jenni, *Die Präposition Lamed*, 106, 113. Translation mine.

מוֹפֵת. Dictionaries define מוֹפֵת as a “wonder,” “sign,” “portent,” or “token.”¹³⁹ Thus, מוֹפֵת indicates something tangible that draws attention and conveys representative meaning. Samuel A. Meier regards מוֹפֵת as “primarily an unusual portent accompanying the disruption of the status quo.”¹⁴⁰ Similarly, FriebeI views מוֹפֵת as functioning to “transmit understanding and to alter the observers’ perceptions of the situation which would have an effect on subsequent beliefs and behaviors.”¹⁴¹ Therefore, Ezekiel, who himself would become a מוֹפֵת to the exiles, would seek to move exilic Israel away from their present position. He would draw their attention and convey representative meaning with an aim to disrupt and alter their beliefs and behaviors.

מוֹפֵת in the book of Ezekiel. Importantly, מוֹפֵת in the book of Ezekiel appears only in relation to Ezekiel and specifically to his own self functioning as the sign. Block observes that outside of Ezekiel 24:27, Ezekiel “is identified as a *môpēt* in two other contexts, 12:6, 11 and 24:24. In both instances his sign value is associated with behavior that will be imitated by the people.”¹⁴² Indeed, מוֹפֵת occurs when Ezekiel’s activity describes or prescribes the future behavior of those going into exile (Ezek 12:11) and those reacting to Jerusalem’s demise (Ezek 24:24).

מוֹפֵת in Ezekiel 24:27. Since all uses of מוֹפֵת elsewhere in the book of Ezekiel identify Ezekiel as the sign with his behavior indicating its representative meaning, and מוֹפֵת in Ezekiel 24:27 also identifies Ezekiel as the sign, the meaning of מוֹפֵת in Ezekiel 24:27 reasonably stems from Ezekiel’s conduct as well. Puzzlingly, Block goes on to

¹³⁹ Brown et al., *Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon*, 68–69; Koehler and Baumgartner, *Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon*, 2:559.

¹⁴⁰ Samuel A. Meier, “Signs and Wonders,” in *Dictionary of the Old Testament: Pentateuch*, ed. T. Desmond Alexander and David W. Baker, IVP Bible Dictionary Series (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2003), 757.

¹⁴¹ FriebeI, *Jeremiah’s and Ezekiel’s Sign-Acts*, 30.

¹⁴² Block, *Ezekiel 1–24*, 158.

reject this conception of מוֹפֵת for Ezekiel 24:27. He claims that “the sampling is too limited.”¹⁴³ Yet, there would seem no compelling cause to view מוֹפֵת in Ezekiel 24:27 as an exception.¹⁴⁴ Friebel helpfully summarizes saying,

The word ‘sign’ (מוֹפֵת), when applied explicitly to Ezekiel, always refers to the prophet acting representationally in the role of the people and not of God. Thus the designation as a ‘sign’ always meant that Ezekiel was performing behavior which either was being enjoined on the people or would be imitated by them: ‘just as I have done, so should/will the people do’.¹⁴⁵

In other words, a consistent approach recognizes that Ezekiel’s muteness sign expresses a described or prescribed conduct for his audience as do the book of Ezekiel’s other instances of מוֹפֵת. By his own behavior then, Ezekiel would model for exilic Israel their expected conduct. Notably, this construal reinforces earlier arguments against viewing Ezekiel’s muteness as symbolic of YHWH’s behavior. For example, against the Prophecy Only Doom approach, Ezekiel as a מוֹפֵת does not portray YHWH’s alienation and judgment turned to nearness and hope but a conduct envisaged for Israel’s exiles.¹⁴⁶ Additional consideration of both the text and context of Ezekiel 24:27 reveals the nature of this expected conduct.

As noted, YHWH indicated Ezekiel himself would function as the sign, and so the sign would signal something aligned with Ezekiel’s behavior. Additionally, because YHWH said the sign’s onset would occur at the nexus of Ezekiel’s protracted period of muteness and his renewed speech, the sign would portend both a silence and speaking akin to Ezekiel’s. In that way, Ezekiel’s muteness sign entailed two poles—one of non-

¹⁴³ Block, *Ezekiel 1–24*, 158.

¹⁴⁴ See Friebel, *Jeremiah’s and Ezekiel’s Sign-Acts*, 185.

¹⁴⁵ Friebel, *Jeremiah’s and Ezekiel’s Sign-Acts*, 186, cf. 28; see also others who similarly view Ezekiel’s sign function consistently depicting the people’s expected behavior: Carvalho, *Ezekiel*, 32, 65; Davis, *Swallowing the Scroll*, 83–84; Jacqueline É. Lapsley, *Can These Bones Live? The Problem of the Moral Self in the Book of Ezekiel*, Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft, bd. 301 (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2000), 115–16; Renz, *Rhetorical Function*, 91–92, 150–60, cf. 65.

¹⁴⁶ See Friebel, *Jeremiah’s and Ezekiel’s Sign-Acts*, 190.

speaking and one of speaking. Furthermore, YHWH associated the sign with the *divine recognition formula*, “and they will know that I am YHWH” (וַיִּדְעוּ כִּי־אֲנִי יְהוָה). Since this formula marks “announcements of Yahweh’s self-manifestation,”¹⁴⁷ the sign would have theological significance, revealing to and stirring in its witnesses a recognition of YHWH and their relationship with him.¹⁴⁸ By implication then, the sign would comport with YHWH and his character. To sum up thus far, Ezekiel’s muteness sign would urge beliefs and behaviors that align with and recognize YHWH, and it would do so through Ezekiel’s modeling of the expected silence and speaking conduct commensurate with YHWH’s character. Further clarity as to this divinely agreeable conduct comes from observing Ezekiel’s both muted and regained speech as situated in their respective contexts of YHWH’s character-driven activity.

On the one hand, Ezekiel experienced a muteness that precluded casual conversation and fervent reproof in a context primarily characterized by divine judgment. As such, Ezekiel’s muteness modeled for the exiles a conduct of silence that they ought to embrace while YHWH carried out judgment. Support for this interpretation comes from several facts present while Ezekiel remained mute, and divine judgment loomed. First, YHWH repeatedly cast Israel’s speech as wrong in some form or fashion (Ezek 8:12–13; 9:9; 11:3–4, 15–16; 12:22–23, 27–28; 13:2, 6–7, 10; 14:1–11; 18:2–3, 19–20, 25, 29; 20:1–3, 32; 22:28; 33:10–11, 17, 20).¹⁴⁹ Of note, the fact that the exiles spoke and were not quiet during Ezekiel’s period of silence shows that his muteness sign did not portend how exilic Israel would act but how they should act.¹⁵⁰ Second, YHWH multiple times called for and expressed concern about hearing (Ezek 2:5, 7; 3:11, 27; 6:3; 13:2;

¹⁴⁷ Block, *Ezekiel 1–24*, 39.

¹⁴⁸ See Friebel, *Jeremiah’s and Ezekiel’s Sign-Acts*, 30; Lapsley, *Can These Bones Live?*, 115.

¹⁴⁹ See Friebel, *Jeremiah’s and Ezekiel’s Sign-Acts*, 188, 190; Lyons, *Ezekiel*, 26.

¹⁵⁰ See Friebel, *Jeremiah’s and Ezekiel’s Sign-Acts*, 187.

16:35; 18:25; 20:39; 21:3 [20:47]; 33:4–5)¹⁵¹ and criticized failures in hearing (Ezek 3:5–7; 12:2; 13:19). Since hearing correlates with non-speaking, YHWH’s concern for others to hear reinforces his call for silence. Thus, located in context with divine judgment alongside YHWH’s refusal of speech and his calls to hear, Ezekiel’s mute conduct signaled that the exiles ought not speak to YHWH but instead remain silent and ready to listen while his wrath played out.¹⁵²

On the other hand, Ezekiel experienced a newfound speech and freedom to converse in a context mainly characterized by the completion of YHWH’s wrath. Hence, his renewed speaking modeled for the exiles the appropriateness of renewed communication with YHWH after divine judgment. Support for this interpretation comes from YHWH’s announcement following the fall of Jerusalem that he would welcome inquiry from Israel (Ezek 36:37).¹⁵³ Similarly, YHWH said that after the exile he would hear Israel’s calls and prayers (Jer 29:12). YHWH’s renewed openness to Israel speaking with him after judgment implies that he would then approve of Israel’s recommencing speech. Therefore, positioned in context with the close of YHWH’s wrath and his again accepting Israel’s speech, the end of Ezekiel’s muteness heralded that exilic Israel may again speak freely with YHWH once his judgment had passed over.¹⁵⁴

Thoughtfully, Friebel envisions that the exiles would come to terms first with Ezekiel’s muteness sometime during its period of over seven years and then with his normal speaking again sometime after the muteness ceased. Friebel then says, “While the people’s attitudes and responses to Judah’s destruction and to their extended exile were

¹⁵¹ See Friebel, *Jeremiah’s and Ezekiel’s Sign-Acts*, 187.

¹⁵² See Carvalho, *Ezekiel*, 66; Friebel, *Jeremiah’s and Ezekiel’s Sign-Acts*, 52, 64, 173, 186–88, 386–87, 411, 423, 450.

¹⁵³ See Friebel, *Jeremiah’s and Ezekiel’s Sign-Acts*, 190–91.

¹⁵⁴ See Friebel, *Jeremiah’s and Ezekiel’s Sign-Acts*, 190–95, 314, 386–87, 410–11, 423, 447, 450.

still in the seminal stages of development, Ezekiel, through his behavior, sought to shape the people's proper attitudinal response to that disaster."¹⁵⁵ In other words, Ezekiel's muteness and resumed speech would gradually coach the exiles regarding their correct comportment or conduct in context with YHWH.

As one final aspect then, Ezekiel's muteness would signal to his people their appropriate conduct toward YHWH. First, its arrival while divine wrath continued would prompt exilic Israel to embrace speechlessness—those under YHWH's judgment ought not to speak but remain silent and disposed to listen. Second, the removal of muteness and Ezekiel's resumed speech following YHWH's wrath would herald the suitability of speaking and so invite others to address YHWH again.

Ezekiel 33:21–22: The End of Muteness

Next, the final passage mentioning Ezekiel's muteness brings these conditions to a head. Spoken about seven and a half years after YHWH imposed Ezekiel's silence, Ezekiel explained that the foretold siege survivor from Jerusalem had come and declared Jerusalem's destruction (Ezek 33:21). He then added that YHWH's hand had come upon him the night before the survivor's arrival such that YHWH "opened my mouth at [his] coming to me in the morning, and my mouth was opened, and I was not mute again (וַיִּפְתַּח אֶת־פִּי עַד־בּוֹא אֵלַי בַּבֶּקֶר וַיִּפְתַּח פִּי וְלֹא נִאֲלַמְתִּי עוֹד)" (Ezek 33:22). To rephrase, when the Jerusalem siege survivor reached Ezekiel, YHWH liberated Ezekiel's mouth so that his muteness left him forevermore. Henceforth, Ezekiel had the full freedom to converse within his community, and now his sign value would signal to the exiles their right behavior in relating to YHWH when he brought judgment and after it had passed over.

¹⁵⁵ Friebel, *Jeremiah's and Ezekiel's Sign-Acts*, 194, cf. 362. In citing Ezekiel 3:26, 24:27, and 33:22, he elsewhere notes that "the graphic nonverbal displays sought to produce the emotive attitudes which would serve as the catalysts for the sought after proper responses." Friebel, *Jeremiah's and Ezekiel's Sign-Acts*, 442.

Evaluating this Explanation for Ezekiel's Muteness

Having exegeted all texts describing Ezekiel's muteness and supplied an explanation for the prophet's silence, the following analysis evaluates this account of Ezekiel's muteness against the evidence of his speech throughout the book of Ezekiel. It will demonstrate that before his muteness, Ezekiel engaged in informal dialogue with his fellow exiles. Then during his silent period, the muted prophet uttered prophetic speeches involving rebukes, spoke only by divine enablement, had no ordinary dialogue, and did not deal with his people out of a haranguing temperament or manner of life. To be sure, showing that Ezekiel ceased from particular speech and a manner of speaking requires making arguments from silence, and while this line of reasoning may seem specious in other situations, it appears appropriate for examining the behavior of a muted prophet. Lastly, Ezekiel again spoke normally with others after YHWH reinstated his speech.

Ezekiel's Pre-muted Communications

First, Ezekiel casually conversed with his people leading up to his muteness. Sparse evidence of Ezekiel's communication exists before the time of his speechlessness. However, one text gives reason to think that Ezekiel engaged in normal dialogue with his community during that time. From its outset, the book of Ezekiel records that Ezekiel "was among the exiles by the Chebar canal" (Ezek 1:1). Ezekiel's presence with the exiles does not disclose specific speech events. Nevertheless, like Jeremiah's coming in, going out, and dwelling "among the people" (Jer 37:4, 12; 39:11–14; 40:5–6), it implies that Ezekiel would have had regular, everyday conversations with others as he went about life. Additionally, since YHWH had not yet made Ezekiel a prophet, the only speech he could have uttered at that time was of the ordinary sort.¹⁵⁶ Moreover, YHWH's later silencing of Ezekiel's non-prophetic speech suggests such speech remained likely and so

¹⁵⁶ Block even intimates that up until he came to Tel Aviv and sat seven days among the exiles (Ezek 3:15), Ezekiel probably had engaged in "idle or mundane chatter." Block, *Ezekiel 1–24*, 138.

supports the notion that it had previously been present. Thus, Ezekiel would have had informal, casual communication with his family and community prior to his muteness.

Ezekiel's Muted Communications

Second, Ezekiel's muted prophetic career shows that his speechlessness enabled formal prophesying while restraining informal speech and aggressive reproof.

Formal prophetic speech. For example, Ezekiel prophesied against Israel's wicked men during his visionary journey to Jerusalem (Ezek 11:1–13). Beyond YHWH's prompt to prophesy and Ezekiel's obedience (גבא; Ezek 11:4, 13), YHWH's call for Ezekiel to preach while invoking the *messenger* formula (Ezek 11:5, 7), speaking for YHWH in the first person (Ezek 11:5, 8–12), foretelling future events (Ezek 11:7–12), and declaring the word as YHWH's own (אָדָנִי יְהוָה; Ezek 11:8) show that Ezekiel spoke on YHWH's behalf. Also, Pelatiah's immediate death afterward appears as a sign commensurate with the rebuking judgment Ezekiel had just prophesied (Ezek 11:13).

Another instance of formal speech occurred after YHWH had returned Ezekiel to Babylon from this Jerusalem visionary trip, and Ezekiel spoke to the exiles (Ezek 11:25). Since YHWH had taken Ezekiel on this visionary journey (Ezek 8:2–3), made sure he witnessed and took in the vision (Ezek 8:5–7, 9–10, 12–17, 9:1, 5; 10:2, 13, 19; 11:1–2),¹⁵⁷ and then brought him back to the exiles (Ezek 11:24), YHWH clearly meant for Ezekiel to disclose this vision to the exiles upon his return. And because Ezekiel went on to communicate to the exiles “all the matters of YHWH (דְּבַרֵי יְהוָה), which he had shown” him (Ezek 11:25), Ezekiel prophesied this visionary trip to his people in accordance with the exception placed on his muteness (Ezek 3:27).¹⁵⁸

¹⁵⁷ See also other indications of Ezekiel's seeing, hearing, and beholding the vision (Ezek 8:4, 8; 9:2, 11; 10:1, 5, 9, 15, 20, 22).

¹⁵⁸ See also Charles Sherlock, “Ezekiel's Dumbness,” *The Expository Times* 94, no. 10 (1983): 297.

In a third case, YHWH ordered Ezekiel to prophesy Jerusalem's destruction, and Ezekiel subsequently "spoke to the people in the morning" (Ezek 24:1–14, 18). Since YHWH's word the day prior described Jerusalem's end (Ezek 24:3–14), and Ezekiel's speech to the people preceded his sign act of Jerusalem's demise (Ezek 24:18, cf. 15–17, 24), Ezekiel undoubtedly disclosed YHWH's word of destruction consistent with his sign act.¹⁵⁹ Notably, this word came with divine prompting (Ezek 24:3). It also involved the *word event* and *messenger formulae* (Ezek 24:1, 3, 6, 9), speaking for YHWH in the first-person (Ezek 24:8–9, 13–14), foretelling of future events (Ezek 24:9, 13–14), and YHWH's stamp of declaration (אָמַרְתִּי יְהוָה; Ezek 24:14). As a result, Ezekiel here delivered a divine word to the exiles.

Immediately thereafter, the book of Ezekiel records a fourth example of Ezekiel's prophesying—he voiced to the exiles an explanation of his sign act linked to the loss of his wife (Ezek 24:19–24, cf. 16–18). Ezekiel spoke by divine prompting (Ezek 24:21), he introduced his speech with the *word event* and *messenger formulae* (Ezek 24:20–21), he spoke for YHWH in the first person (Ezek 24:21, 24), he foretold future events (Ezek 24:21–24), and his own sign act accompanied his speech event (Ezek 24:24, cf. 16–18). Ezekiel thus made clear that he had spoken in his formal prophetic capacity.

Moreover, throughout Ezekiel's muteness, YHWH gave him many other messages marked with indications of formal speech, and then either overtly or by implication, YHWH charged him to deliver each one. Like his prophetic predecessors, Ezekiel would plainly speak to declare the divine word to his people.

In fact, the muted Ezekiel seems to have become known not for his everyday speech but for pronouncing prophecy. Exilic elders more than once came to Ezekiel, and YHWH's response shows that they came seeking a divine word (Ezek 14:1–3; 20:1–3; cf. 8:1–11:25). The elders' recurrent approach to Ezekiel for a word from YHWH suggests

¹⁵⁹ See also Keil, *Ezekiel*, 199.

that Ezekiel had established himself as one who spoke prophecy. Additionally, YHWH at one point had ordered Ezekiel to prophesy an apparently cryptic message (Ezek 21:1–4 [20:45–48]), and Ezekiel replied, “Ah, Lord YHWH! They are saying of me, ‘Is he not a maker of parables?’” (Ezek 21:5 [20:49]). For the exiles to assign Ezekiel the title “maker of parables” shows that he had gained a reputation for his prophetic, if parabolic, messages.¹⁶⁰ And the fact that Ezekiel had developed a public persona of prophesying shows the controlling position of prophetic speech in his communication. Therefore, Ezekiel’s speeches, combined with the exiles’ perception of his utterances, reinforce the claim that YHWH had stifled Ezekiel’s communication with the exiles except to proclaim prophecy.

Divinely enabled prophetic speech. Next, the book of Ezekiel implies that Ezekiel’s prophesying remained completely under YHWH’s control and so came only by divine enablement. As an example, when Ezekiel became upset at the exiles labeling him “a maker of parables,” he directed his objection to YHWH (Ezek 21:5 [20:49]). Clearly, he neither appreciated the label nor wanted to keep speaking so parabolically. However, instead of simply refraining from such speech, Ezekiel brought his protest to YHWH. In so doing, Ezekiel demonstrated his belief that YHWH had constrained his speech, that YHWH had chosen messages leading to his unwanted title, that YHWH could free him but had not yet done so, and that unless YHWH did otherwise, he would continue as “a maker of parables.” In other words, Ezekiel’s protest reveals that his speech came entirely at YHWH’s behest, and he remained unable to resist speaking it—he had to speak what YHWH decreed and at YHWH’s decree. Interestingly, Ezekiel did go on to speak more clearly, yet as the *word event formula* leading the next verse indicates, even his clarification came by divine empowerment (Ezek 21:6ff [1ff]).

¹⁶⁰ See also Sherlock who surmises that Ezekiel was “gaining an increasing reputation for prophecy (and strange visions).” Sherlock, “Ezekiel’s Dumbness,” 297.

Along those lines, specific inquiries directed at Ezekiel also imply that he remained unable to correspond without YHWH's power to open his mouth. For instance, each time the elders approached Ezekiel seeking a divine message, they remained seated before him, and then YHWH gave his word (Ezek 14:1–3; 20:1–3; cf. 8:1–11:25). The elders' merely sitting with Ezekiel at each visit followed by YHWH's eventual reply and Ezekiel's presumed address insinuate that these men waited until YHWH spoke with Ezekiel and thus until YHWH empowered him to dispense the divine word.

In other cases, specific questions from the exiles give a similar impression. At one time, following Ezekiel's sign act of the exile, YHWH said to him, "Son of man, has not the house of Israel, the rebellious house, said to you, 'What are you doing?' Say to them, 'Thus says the Lord YHWH'" (Ezek 12:9–10). The fact that YHWH both raised the exiles' question after Ezekiel's sign act and ordered him to give them a reply indicates that exilic Israel had asked Ezekiel about his actions, but Ezekiel had not yet answered them. Similarly, after the exiles witnessed Ezekiel's sign act at his wife's death, they demanded, "Will you not tell us what these things that you are doing mean for us?" (Ezek 24:18–19). Such phrasing implies that Ezekiel had left his behavior unexplained to the point of inciting their incredulity. Since YHWH did not tell Ezekiel to expect inquiry for either of these sign acts mentioned above, he likely did not premeditate leaving them unexplained to provoke questions. Instead, the exiles' lingering confusion and inquiry appear inadvertent of Ezekiel and suggest he left his sign acts unexplained, not because he meant to, but because he had no choice.¹⁶¹ Ezekiel 17:12 may also involve an instance

¹⁶¹ The exiles would later ask Ezekiel a question phrased like that of Ezekiel 24:19 after his muteness ended (Ezek 37:18). Yet, in that case, YHWH said to perform a sign act, "and as the sons of your people say to you, 'Will you not tell us what you mean by these things?' say to them, 'Thus says the Lord YHWH . . .'" (Ezek 37:18–19). That is, YHWH told Ezekiel in advance to prophesy with the expectation of inciting wonder, and so Ezekiel would have known ahead of time that YHWH meant him to delay clarifying in order to provoke questions. Thus, even as an un-muted prophet, Ezekiel could have deliberately withheld explanation to prompt inquiry and so satisfy YHWH's purpose. In Ezekiel 12:9–10 and 24:18–19, Ezekiel received no advance notice to expect questions. This difference implies that the exiles' inquiry in Ezekiel 12:9 and 24:19 resulted purely from Ezekiel's prophecies and inability to explain them on his own.

of confusion left to linger on account of Ezekiel's restrained speech. Not only did Ezekiel have to prophesy whatever YHWH told him whenever YHWH spoke and empowered his speech, but without this divine enablement, Ezekiel could not utter a thing.

No informal speaking. Also, Ezekiel's surprising lack of normal dialogue corroborates the claim that his muteness stopped all informal communication. For example, the book of Ezekiel never mentions Ezekiel interacting with his wife, much less speaking to her, despite receiving advance notice of her imminent death (Ezek 24:15–24). Significantly, it recognizes his wife as “the delight of [his] eyes” (Ezek 24:16) and cites Ezekiel's first-person testimony about “my wife” (Ezek 24:18), but it only specifies that he prophesied to the exiles on both the day of and the day after his wife's death (Ezek 24:18–24). Since the record of Ezekiel's ministry depicts his wife as dear to him, but it mentions only prophesying and no exchange between him and his wife upon his learning of her fast-approaching death, the book of Ezekiel implies the two had no such exchange. Ezekiel and his wife could not converse, for Ezekiel could not speak except to prophesy.

Then after his wife died, the book of Ezekiel still cites no words of sorrow from Ezekiel. Friebel comments that “even her death was not sufficient grounds to forego the abstention of nonprophetic speaking so as to utter lamentations.”¹⁶² This omission would not seem for lack of care, for he certainly grieved her death as far as YHWH permitted (Ezek 24:16–18). But again, Ezekiel spoke nothing of his wife after her death, for YHWH had tied his tongue from all non-prophetic communications with his people.

The muted prophet did offer an occasional unprompted word to YHWH (Ezek 4:14; 9:8; 11:13; 21:5 [20:49]). Since YHWH defined his muteness in relation to his people, one would expect that he could do so. Still, the fact that Ezekiel voiced every one

¹⁶² Friebel, *Jeremiah's and Ezekiel's Sign-Acts*, 169n206.

of his unprompted words to YHWH and none to the exiles bolsters the claim that he could not speak freely with his people.

Incidentally, Ezekiel spoke unprompted several times to intercede with YHWH (Ezek 9:8; 11:13; cf. 4:14), and so even then his personal speech intersected with a part of his prophetic office. Additionally, as Ezekiel spoke impromptu, he did so to question a forthcoming prophecy (Ezek 4:14), to interrupt his prophesying (Ezek 11:13), and to object that he had become notorious for his prophesying (Ezek 21:5 [20:49]). Thus, even much of Ezekiel's self-directed speech centered on prophesying. Though Ezekiel as a mute spoke freely with YHWH, he remained on message and did not speak unprompted or casually with his people.

No reproving lifestyle toward his people. Furthermore, evidence from the book of Ezekiel suggests that Ezekiel's muteness restrained him from relating to his people out of a reproving temperament—that is, living a lifestyle of reproof toward them. The exiles' apparent lack of antagonism toward the muted prophet despite his frequent judgment prophecies gives cause to believe that he was truly no man of reproof. As discussed, Jeremiah lived a life of fiercely censuring his hearers, and he said that they in turn mocked, cursed, denounced, threatened, betrayed, plotted against, and persecuted him (Jer 11:18–21; 12:6; 15:10, 15; 18:18; 20:1–2, 7–10; cf. 5:14; 6:10–11). Ezekiel, on the other hand, never endured such hostility. Some scholars claim that he experienced “rejection,” “resistance,” “opposition,” “public threat to his safety,” “the threat of persecution,” “hostility,” or similar such behavior during his ministry, several of whom look to Ezekiel 2:6, 3:7, and 3:25 for support.¹⁶³ Yet, these texts come from his call and

¹⁶³ Allen, *Ezekiel 1–19*, 61; Brownlee, *Ezekiel 1–19*, xxxiv, 56, 93; Greenberg, *Ezekiel 1–20*, 121; Greenberg, *Ezekiel 21–37*, 516; Klein, *Ezekiel*, 39; Renz, *Rhetorical Function*, 65; Robert R. Wilson, *Prophecy and Society in Ancient Israel* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1980), 285; Zimmerli suggests hostility toward Ezekiel is plausible but concedes the book of Ezekiel does not mention it elsewhere. Zimmerli, *Ezekiel 1–24*, 160; see also Davidson who posits that ministry resistance before Ezekiel's muteness led to his silencing. Davidson, *Ezekiel*, 28.

before his ministry began, and none of them provide sufficient testimony that exilic Israel treated Ezekiel with ire and opposition.

Instead, all interactions between the muted Ezekiel and the exiles just outlined show that they treated him far more favorably than Jeremiah's audience did him. The book of Ezekiel records no account of cursing, mockery, disgrace, schemes, or other acts of antagonism against Ezekiel.¹⁶⁴ Indeed, he seems to have experienced a degree of détente with exilic Israel. Since obstinate hearers are prone to answer incessant reproof with hostility, and Ezekiel endured no such enmity even while prophesying primarily judgment as a mute, Ezekiel's speechlessness arguably precluded him from being a man of reproof toward his people.

Ezekiel's Post-muted Communications

Finally, the book of Ezekiel confirms that Ezekiel regained his ability to talk normally with others after his muteness ended. Just as before the onset of his muteness, few signs of Ezekiel's speech exist after his muteness ended. Greenberg claims, "We have no evidence . . . of this new freedom, for the prophet's speech in subsequent chapters of the book is not more spontaneous than in the foregoing ones; as before, all that Ezekiel speaks is 'the word of YHWH.'"¹⁶⁵ Greenberg is mostly correct.

From Ezekiel 33:23 through the end of the book, speech between Ezekiel and his people appears only of the formal sort. For example, YHWH acknowledged that the exiles would come sit before Ezekiel, hear his words, and treat him as a spectacle, but he said they would eventually recognize him as a prophet (Ezek 33:30–33). In stating that exilic Israel had not yet appreciated Ezekiel as a true prophet after his muteness had

¹⁶⁴ See also Blenkinsopp, *Ezekiel*, 32; Block, *Ezekiel 1–24*, 155; Eichrodt, *Ezekiel*, 76; Feinberg, *Ezekiel*, 30; Friebel, *Jeremiah's and Ezekiel's Sign-Acts*, 175n220; Keil, *Ezekiel*, 38; Henry McKeating, *Ezekiel*, Old Testament Guides (Sheffield, England: JSOT Press, 1993), 25; Wright, *Ezekiel*, 73n30.

¹⁶⁵ Greenberg, *Ezekiel 21–37*, 682.

ended, YHWH implied that Ezekiel continued addressing them in his prophetic capacity. Additionally, YHWH repeatedly commanded the now un-muted prophet to proclaim his word until the end of the book of Ezekiel (Ezek 33:23–48:35). Typical signs of formal speech mark these prophecies with narrative texts sparsely noting that Ezekiel did in fact prophesy (Ezek 37:7, 10). Once, Ezekiel spoke freely with YHWH (Ezek 37:3), but since his muteness never precluded unprompted speech with YHWH, this instance reveals no newfound freedom of speech. Thus, Ezekiel appears to persist in relating with the exiles at least predominantly as YHWH’s prophet after his muteness expired.

Nevertheless, evidence from one verbal interaction demonstrates that Ezekiel regained his ability to engage in ordinary conversation the moment his muteness left him. YHWH told Ezekiel that when Jerusalem fell, “your mouth will be opened with the survivor (יִפְתָּח פִּי אֶת־הַפְּלִיט)” (Ezek 24:27). Several English versions render this text as Ezekiel’s mouth will “be opened to” the survivor (ESV, NASB, NRSV, NKJV, KJV), while others prefer “be opened to talk with” the survivor (CSB, HCSB). Each translation reasonably renders the prepositional phrase “with the survivor” (אֶת־הַפְּלִיט) as it modifies the verb “will be opened” (יִפְתָּח). In other words, Ezekiel’s mouth opening would occur “with” or “to” the Israelite fleeing fallen Jerusalem, and so Ezekiel would then experience a commencement and thus freedom of conversation with that survivor.¹⁶⁶

Indeed, when this survivor came and spoke to Ezekiel, he reported that he experienced just such a mouth opening (Ezek 33:21–22). Significantly, YHWH gave him no prophecy to utter with this mouth opening as he did during his muteness. YHWH’s subsequent messages appear to come later in time (Ezek 33:23–29).¹⁶⁷ Consequently, this mouth opening was not for oracle delivery but to restore Ezekiel’s freedom of speech.

¹⁶⁶ See Cooke, *Ezekiel*, 273; Friebe, *Jeremiah’s and Ezekiel’s Sign-Acts*, 189–90; Stuart, *Ezekiel*, 243.

¹⁶⁷ See Cooke, *Ezekiel*, 367.

With his mouth unbound and opened from muteness, Ezekiel engaged in ordinary dialogue with this survivor on Jerusalem's demise. Here marks a single yet certain instance wherein Ezekiel spoke normally after his muteness had ceased.

Moreover, YHWH implied that such unmuted speech would continue even if it was not strictly cataloged. He designated Ezekiel's shift from silence to free speaking as a sign (Ezek 24:27), and a sign requires tangible expression to portend its meaning. Thus, just as he had spoken ordinarily with the siege survivor, Ezekiel reasonably continued having casual conversation with exilic Israel after his muteness had ended.

Presumably, Ezekiel's loosed tongue also removed the restraint from his living as a man of reproof toward his people. While no evidence shows him taking up such a lifestyle after his muteness ended, one would not expect to find him doing so—circumstances had changed with the destruction of Jerusalem.¹⁶⁸ Judgment had largely fallen. As a result, Ezekiel would have no impetus to embrace such a berating way of life, for he had far fewer judgment prophecies to preach. Along those lines, YHWH's ensuing prophecies would now take on primarily a favorable tone, and so being *אִישׁ מוֹכִיחַ* toward the exiles while delivering messages of this sort would make no sense. Unsurprisingly then, one finds no evidence of Ezekiel being *אִישׁ מוֹכִיחַ* after his muteness ended.

Conclusion

In summary, YHWH called Ezekiel as a prophet and watchman to exilic Israel. Though divinely banished to Babylon, these exiles were a deeply rebellious people who did not believe that YHWH had judged them with deportation. In turn, YHWH sent them Ezekiel so that he would warn them and pronounce to them a grave word of prophecy.

Under such circumstances, YHWH imposed a literal silence upon Ezekiel. He

¹⁶⁸ See also Renz who observes that though Ezekiel could now “act as a ‘reprover’ (cf. 3:26),” “[t]he expression *אִישׁ מוֹכִיחַ*, however, is not taken up in chap. 33. The prophetic ministry after the fall of the city is not simply what the prophetic ministry before the fall of the city would have been like without the restrictions imposed on the prophet.” Renz, *Rhetorical Function*, 102.

muted Ezekiel from speech and a lifestyle of admonition toward Israel's exiles despite their rebelliousness. Yet, since they remained stiff-necked, YHWH intermittently lifted Ezekiel's silence whenever he spoke to Ezekiel so that he would prophesy and prompt exilic Israel's response. Thus, Ezekiel's silence enabled formal prophesying but restricted all informal speech with his people. Additionally, Ezekiel's muteness and return to normal communication signaled the conduct Israel's rebellious exiles should adopt toward YHWH. Namely, the exiles ought to embrace silence while under YHWH's judgment and renewed communication after judgment had passed. Once judgment fell on Jerusalem, Ezekiel's muteness ended, and his sign took full effect.

Finally, evidence from the book of Ezekiel shows that Ezekiel's social interaction reflected a freedom to speak in his unmuted state and then restricted speech during his muteness. In particular, it reveals that Ezekiel conversed normally within his community before his silencing. Then as a mute, Ezekiel addressed his people strictly through formal prophetic pronouncements, entirely regulated by YHWH, and without experiencing opposition. Moreover, after YHWH freed Ezekiel from speechlessness, he again enjoyed normal societal communication. Consequently, Ezekiel's prophetic experience corroborates the claim that Ezekiel's muteness silenced him from informal speech and a reproving lifestyle toward the exiles yet enabled him to prophesy at YHWH's command.

CHAPTER 5

IMPLICATIONS AND CONCLUSION

My explanation of Ezekiel's muteness results in several significant inferences for how one reads and interprets the book of Ezekiel. This chapter discusses three. First, Ezekiel's muted ministry implies that YHWH intended the disability of muteness as a means of divinely enabling Ezekiel to fulfill his prophetic call. Second, Ezekiel's speechlessness suggests that YHWH meant prophetic muteness as part of his plan to be merciful to the exiles and seek their restoration. Third, Ezekiel's muteness reveals that he stands in succession with other Israelite prophets. In one sense, Ezekiel stands with prophets who received divine enablement to aid them in their commission and specifically with those who claimed a speech problem. In another sense, Ezekiel's silence places him in a line of prophets who suffered for their vocation. The following discussion addresses each of these implications in turn, starting with muteness as divine prophetic empowerment.

Muteness Implies Divine Prophetic Enablement

When YHWH called his prophet into adverse circumstances, he often supplied supernatural help with the call. YHWH certainly sent Ezekiel into a challenging situation.

Review of Ezekiel's Prophetic Conditions

YHWH deployed Ezekiel as a prophet to pronounce his divine word, and that word would involve "lamentation, and moaning, and woe" (Ezek 2:9–10). No matter how Ezekiel's hearers would respond, he had strict orders to proclaim it. YHWH also made Ezekiel a watchman bound to warn apostates around him to turn from their sin. And YHWH sent Ezekiel to address Israel's exiles in Babylon, a rebellious people with a

doubtful willingness to hear. Therefore, YHWH sent Ezekiel to declare a weighty word to an obstinate people with his life on the line—far from ideal prophetic conditions.

Risks to Ezekiel's Call

Under such circumstances, Ezekiel appears prone to at least two temptations that could jeopardize the fulfillment of his commission.

Temptation to fear speaking. First, Ezekiel's conditions would tempt him to fear proclaiming the divine word and thus falter in executing his office. Prior prophets had feared to do their duty. Whether on grounds of personal inadequacy or audience hostility, Moses and Jeremiah voiced anxiety and reluctance at the prospect of speaking for YHWH (Exod 3:11; 4:1, 10, 13; 6:12, 30; Jer 1:6). Even well into Jeremiah's ministry with the promise of YHWH's presence, protection, and word, Jeremiah required exhortation not to shrink from prophesying (Jer 26:2; cf. 1:8–9, 19). Given his predecessors' timidity, Ezekiel too could have feared to speak for YHWH.

Additionally, in being a priest (Ezek 1:3), Ezekiel would have had training that educated him in biblical truths. Thus, he would have known that rebellious people exhibit the height of stubbornness, that stubbornness is a chief quality of the scoffer,¹ and that scoffers refuse reproof, hate the reprover, and might even retaliate with violence (Prov 9:7–8; 13:1; 15:12). He also would have known that wisdom cautions against rebuking such individuals (Prov 9:8). And since YHWH sent Ezekiel to a defiant people with a grave word of judgment and warning, he would have reasonably dreaded confronting his hearers. Given wisdom's caution (Prov 9:8), Ezekiel may have even felt justified in hesitating from his commission. He certainly appeared overwhelmed by it (Ezek 3:15).

¹ See Günter Mayer who finds, "The nature of the *lēš* is revealed in his stubbornness (Prov 13:1; cf. 23:9; 27:22)." Günter Mayer, "יכח *ikh*; תוכחה *tōkahat*; תוכה *tōkēhā*," in *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, ed. G. Johannes Botterweck and Helmer Ringgren, trans. David E. Green (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1990), 6:69.

Furthermore, the fact that YHWH told Ezekiel not to fear multiple times and followed each of these commands with orders to speak implies that YHWH expected Ezekiel would fear and perhaps hesitate from declaring his divine word (Ezek 2:6–7; 3:9–11). Left unchecked, a fear-induced reluctance would threaten Ezekiel’s proclamation of YHWH’s message and the fulfillment of his call to the exiles.

Temptation to speak rashly and wrongly. Second, Ezekiel’s circumstances would incline him toward uttering impulsive, incorrect speech. Even under relatively ideal conditions, prophets remained at risk of miscommunicating. Nathan resided safely in the royal court and enjoyed King David’s favor. Yet, he hastily told David that he could build YHWH a temple and later received divine correction (2 Sam 7:1–17; 1 Chr 17:1–15). And the danger of misspeaking only rises when prophetic conditions deteriorate. On account of Israel’s rebelliousness, Moses grew angry and bitter. As a result, he spoke rashly, acted faithlessly, and received YHWH’s severe reprimand (Num 20:10–13; Ps 106:32–33).

Significantly, Ezekiel’s demeanor at his initial call aligns identically with Moses’s disposition when he misspoke. As YHWH initially commissioned Ezekiel to Israel’s rebellious exiles, Ezekiel reacted with bitterness, an angry spirit, and seven days of apparent shock (Ezek 3:14–15). Left in such a state, he would be predisposed not only to recoiling in fear but also to speaking rashly and wrongly and thus to botching his call.

Muteness Mitigates Risks and Enables Pure Prophesying

Yet as YHWH did with Moses and Jeremiah, he did not leave Ezekiel prone to failure but supplied him with his supernatural aid. For Ezekiel, YHWH imposed the divine remedy of prophetic muteness. As a mute, Ezekiel could not speak until YHWH gave him the word, and then whenever YHWH disclosed his message to Ezekiel, Ezekiel could not prevent himself from prophesying. YHWH himself would open Ezekiel’s

mouth, cause him to speak, and so guarantee that his word went out as it ought. In that way, Ezekiel would never experience the tension of not knowing what or when to speak or the conflict of whether or not to speak. Instead, he always had the right message at the right moment. Even in the hypothetical event of audience aggression, he would have delivered YHWH's word as required by his calling. Accordingly, Ezekiel's muteness strengthened him with a readiness to speak that would overcome any incompetence or hostility-based fear to address the refractory exiles.

Likewise, YHWH's imposed silence helped Ezekiel face his stubborn people, whose rebelliousness would tempt him to speak presumptuously and inaccurately. By muting Ezekiel, YHWH prevented him from uttering unprompted speech, which could contain rash or erroneous messages. Also, Ezekiel's speechlessness created the context that ensured he received YHWH's word directly and would only declare those divine words. As a result, Ezekiel always spoke in concert with YHWH's messages, and he could not confuse his hearers or compromise his witness in any way.

Therefore, divinely imposed speechlessness delivered Ezekiel from several speaking hazards and focused him entirely on his prophetic mandate. YHWH's silencing of Ezekiel's speech and provisioning his own word through the muteness freed Ezekiel for unalloyed prophesying. He became a prophet in the purest sense, for he could not but speak the divine word to his people. Additionally, YHWH's muting of Ezekiel and supplying his speech amidst the muteness ensured that Ezekiel would announce every warning to perishing exiles. Hence, muteness also helped Ezekiel satisfy his obligation as Israel's watchman.² Ironically then, muteness aided Ezekiel in fulfilling his duties and thus made him flourish as a watchman-prophet amidst precarious prophetic conditions.

² See also Iain M. Duguid who asserts, "No one who has read chapters 4–32 can doubt the prophet's faithfulness to proclaiming the judgment to come; he is free from any culpability in the death of the wicked." Iain M. Duguid, *Ezekiel*, NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1999), 383; cf. Millard C. Lind, *Ezekiel*, Believers Church Bible Commentary (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1996), 46.

Many scholars have described YHWH's supplying Ezekiel with his words to speak in terms of enabling, empowering, or inspiring.³ Some have described the whole of Ezekiel's muteness as a kind of fitting, preparation, or initiation for his vocation.⁴ In that YHWH's imposed silence helped Ezekiel overcome barriers to his call and fulfill his commission to address and warn Israel's rebellious exiles, one may reasonably conclude that YHWH meant the muteness as part of a program of divine prophetic enablement.

Muteness Implies Divine Mercy

Next, several factors considered together suggest that YHWH purposed Ezekiel's muteness as part of a merciful plan to promote the receptiveness, repentance, and subsequent restoration of an exilic remnant.

Prophetic Muteness Implies Divine Purpose

First, YHWH commissioned Ezekiel as his one-of-a-kind silenced prophet to the exiles, which suggests that YHWH intended Ezekiel's speechlessness and thus his ministry for a distinctive exilic purpose. YHWH had used prophets alleging a speech problem before, but none experienced such limited speech as did Ezekiel. He did not merely claim an impairment. YHWH truly muted much of Ezekiel's speech.

³ Ralph H. Alexander, *Ezekiel*, Everyman's Bible Commentary (Chicago: Moody, 1976), 18; Ralph H. Alexander, *Ezekiel*, in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, vol. 7, *Jeremiah-Ezekiel*, ed. Tremper Longman III and David E. Garland, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 673; Leslie C. Allen, *Ezekiel 1–19*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 28 (Dallas: Word Books, 1994), 62; Keith W. Carley, *The Book of the Prophet Ezekiel*, Cambridge Bible Commentary: On the New English Bible (London: Cambridge University Press, 1974), 29; Lamar Eugene Cooper Sr., *Ezekiel*, New American Commentary, vol. 17 (Nashville: B&H, 1994), 87; Moshe Greenberg, *Ezekiel 1–20: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, Anchor Bible, vol. 22 (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1983), 103; C. F. Keil, *Ezekiel*, in *Commentary on the Old Testament*, vol. 9, *Ezekiel Daniel*, ed. C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, trans. James Martin (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2006), 10, 40; Ralph W. Klein, *Ezekiel: The Prophet and His Message*, Studies on Personalities of the Old Testament (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1988), 39; Walter R. Roehrs, "The Dumb Prophet," *Concordia Theological Monthly* 29, no. 1 (1958): 178, cf. 179.

⁴ Daniel I. Block, *The Book of Ezekiel, Chapters 1–24*, New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1997), 77–78, 151–62; Robert W. Jenson, *Ezekiel*, Brazos Theological Commentary on the Bible (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2009), 205; Keil, *Ezekiel*, 39; John B. Taylor, *Ezekiel: An Introduction and Commentary*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries, vol. 22 (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2009), 75.

Additionally, Israelite prophets typically rebuked their people as they rebelled. Jeremiah became the embodiment of scolding to his obstinate hearers. Yet remarkably, YHWH muted Ezekiel from Jeremiah's chiding manner even though he faced the same generation of rebellious people as did Jeremiah. By deviating from the norm of sending a zealously vocal reprover to his recalcitrant people and imposing such specialized speech restraints on his exilic prophet, YHWH insinuated that he had a particular purpose for Ezekiel's muted ministry to the exiles.

Divine Purpose in the Exile

Second, YHWH specified his purpose to restore a remnant of the exiles. The books of Leviticus, Deuteronomy, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel show that when YHWH would banish his people for their rebellion, he would not utterly destroy them. Instead, he would offer a way through exile to renewal (Lev 26; Deut 4; 30), expect Israel to take this path (Deut 4; Jer 24), and seek to prompt this outcome through an exilic prophet (Ezek).

Leviticus 26:39–45. Leviticus records YHWH speaking of a future in which Israel would abhor and reject his statutes, and as a result, he would bring them “into the land of their enemies,” the land would “be abandoned by them” lying “desolate without them,” and Israel would pine away in enemy lands because of iniquity (Lev 26:39, 41, 43–44). At that time, Israel would have a proud and “uncircumcised heart” (Lev 26:41). Mark F. Rooker explains “the metaphor of the uncircumcised heart as one in rebellion against God.”⁵ Thus, when Israel became an arrogant, rebellious people who committed grave sin against YHWH, YHWH would banish them from the land. As discussed above, the exiles to whom Ezekiel prophesied satisfied all such conditions.

⁵ Mark F. Rooker, *Leviticus*, New American Commentary, vol. 3A (Nashville: B&H, 2000), 320n388. Here he cites, “Deut 10:16; 30:6; Jer 4:4; 9:25; Rom 2:28–29.”

Additionally, YHWH stated that despite Israel’s covenant betrayal, he would seek their renewal (Lev 26:42, 44–45). However, for YHWH to implement such a restoration, he would require Israel to be humbled in their rebellious hearts, confess their iniquity, and “make amends for their iniquity (יְרִצּוּ אֶת-עֲוֹנָם)” (Lev 26:40–41, 43). Gordon J. Wenham suggests that this last phrase means, “*Accept (the punishment for) the guilt* (vv. 41, 43). ‘*Āwōn* means both ‘guilt’ and ‘punishment for guilt’ (BDB 730b). *Accept (rātsāh)* is the word used of God accepting a sacrifice [italics original].”⁶ YHWH insisted that in having their hearts humbled, Israel ought to acknowledge they had sinned against YHWH, affirm he had rightly judged them for their infidelity, and accept the divine sentence resting upon them—they must repent.⁷

Furthermore, YHWH said that upon reaching these conditions, he would not reject Israel so as to break and destroy his covenant with them (Lev 26:44). Instead, he would remember his covenant with their forefathers and the land and again be their God (Lev 26:42, 45). As Baruch A. Levine puts it, “their contrition will prompt God to remember His covenant. . . . [A]fter Israel shows remorse and confesses its sins, God will reaffirm the covenant enacted at Sinai.”⁸ To rephrase, when Israel would become exiled under divine wrath, their turning away from sin and humble acknowledgment of their unfaithfulness would motivate YHWH to reenter into the relationship with them as his people and him as their God. Repentance would open the door for divine renewal.

⁶ Gordon J. Wenham, *The Book of Leviticus*, New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1979), 332n12.

⁷ See also R. K. Harrison, *Leviticus: An Introduction and Commentary*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1980), 234; John E. Hartley, *Leviticus*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 4 (Dallas: Word Books, 1992), 469; Rooker, *Leviticus*, 320.

⁸ Baruch A. Levine, *Leviticus אִקְרָא: The Traditional Hebrew Text with the New JPS Translation*, JPS Torah Commentary (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1989), 191, 280; see also W. H. Bellinger Jr., *Leviticus and Numbers*, New International Biblical Commentary: Old Testament Series, vol. 3 (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2001), 159–60.

Deuteronomy 4:27–31; 30:1–3. This restorative path reemerges in Deuteronomy. Moses there announced a time when Israel would turn from and disobey YHWH, and YHWH in reply would drive and scatter them among the peoples and nations to serve false gods and endure distress (Deut 4:27–28, 30; 30:1, 3). Again, the exiles to whom Ezekiel prophesied met all these conditions.

Then as in Leviticus, Moses said Israel’s calling to mind YHWH’s covenant blessings and curses, their returning to him, and their seeking and obeying him with all their being would move YHWH to redeem them (Deut 4:29; 30:1–3). He would extend mercy, restore Israel’s fortunes, gather Israel from where he had scattered them, and be found by Israel (Deut 4:29; 30:3). He would show himself merciful, not leave or destroy Israel, and not forget the covenant he had made with their fathers (Deut 4:31). Simply put, YHWH established true repentance as his condition for mercifully renewing Israel from exile.⁹ Interestingly, Moses described Israel’s return to YHWH and obedience to his voice here as an eventuality (Deut 4:30)—it was anticipated.

Jeremiah 24:5–7. Next, Jeremiah’s prophecy reaffirmed Israel’s restoration and the expectation that Israel would experience it. YHWH announced through Jeremiah that he would regard the exiles in Babylon as good, set his eyes on them for good, bring them back to the land, build and plant them, and give them a heart to both know him and be his people (Jer 24:5–7). In that way, the deportation would become what F. B. Huey Jr. calls “part of God’s redemptive purposes.”¹⁰ That is, YHWH identified the exile as pertinent to renewing his people. YHWH also grounded this restorative work in saying, “for (כִּי) they [the exiles] will return to me with all their heart” (Jer 24:7). This causal clause aligns with Leviticus and Deuteronomy, wherein Israel’s wholehearted repentance

⁹ See also J. Gordon McConville, “Deuteronomy,” in *New Bible Commentary: 21st Century Edition*, ed. D. A. Carson et al., 4th ed. (Leicester, England: InterVarsity Press, 1994), 206.

¹⁰ F. B. Huey Jr., *Jeremiah, Lamentations*, New American Commentary, vol. 16 (Nashville: B&H, 1993), 221.

would lead to their renewal. And like in Deuteronomy, its phrasing demonstrates YHWH's expectation that Israel will fulfill this condition. Hetty Lalleman finds such language to "indicate an unconditional promise: it will happen. . . . God's initiative will bring about the change in people's hearts and their future."¹¹ In other words, YHWH not only anticipated that exilic Israel would repent, but he would act toward that end.

The book of Ezekiel. After that, the book of Ezekiel reveals that facilitating such a transformative effect on exilic Israel's inner person appears to be one of YHWH's chief aims for Ezekiel's ministry. As touched on in prior chapters, YHWH intended his words through Ezekiel to stir understanding, heart change, and repentance in the exiles. Highlighting several signs of this purpose from Ezekiel's ministry illustrates the point. For example, Ezekiel at one time declared that YHWH would confront idolatrous prophet-seekers so that he might seize the estranged house of Israel in their heart (Ezek 14:4–5). Then, Ezekiel announced that YHWH would punish both the false prophets and the idolatrous men seeking them so that the house of Israel might not stray nor defile themselves with sin but be YHWH's people with him as their God (Ezek 14:7–11). YHWH stated his aim was to get a hold of the exiles' hearts so that they would walk with him as his faithful covenant people, and he pronounced this purpose through Ezekiel.

Other examples appear near the climax of Ezekiel's judgment prophecies against Judah. For instance, Ezekiel proclaimed that when YHWH's judgment would come, "every heart will melt, and all hands will grow slack, and every spirit will grow faint, and all knees will be weak as water" (Ezek 21:12 [7], cf. 19–20 [14–15]). Subsequently, Ezekiel delivered YHWH's rhetorical question to those who would go into exile: "Will your heart stand, or will your hands be strong, in the days that I will deal with you? . . . I will consume your uncleanness out of you" (Ezek 22:14–15). YHWH

¹¹ Hetty Lalleman, *Jeremiah and Lamentations: An Introduction and Commentary*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries, vol. 21 (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2013), 199.

indicated that he meant to soften and even weaken the exiles to eliminate their impurity, and again, he voiced these intentions by his prophet Ezekiel.¹²

Additionally, from Ezekiel's call until Jerusalem's fall, YHWH ordered Ezekiel to proclaim messages for the exiles that frequently condemned Judah's evil institutions and announced Judah's consequent demise. Ezekiel in turn prophesied each message either to or before exilic Israel. And then YHWH permitted these institutions to fall. In first speaking of the temple, J. Gordon McConville calls its destruction the "decisive blow . . . a key moment in Ezekiel's prophecy to his fellow-exiles . . . whose hope of a quick end to the exile was thus shattered. . . . It is hard to over-estimate the importance of the exile in the life and thought of the people of the OT. The loss of the land, temple and king—the centre of covenantal promises—was shattering."¹³ McConville's comments get at the fact that by sending Ezekiel to decry Judah's institutions and then fulfilling his judgment prophecies, YHWH worked to break exilic Israel. By implication, YHWH used Ezekiel to shake the exiles at the core of their being.

Furthermore, YHWH repeatedly marked Ezekiel's prophecies with the refrain, "and you will know that I am YHWH," or a similar form of this *divine recognition formula*. As a sampling, YHWH paired this formula with his desolating of Judah (Ezek 5:13; 6:14; 12:20; 24:25–27), destroying the people of Judah (Ezek 6:7, 13; 11:10; 13:9, 14, 21, 23; 15:7; 17:21; 21:10 [5]; 23:49; 24:21–24, 25–27), scattering the people of Judah among nations (Ezek 6:9–10; 12:15–16; 17:21; 22:15–16), destroying the temple (Ezek 24:21–24, 25–27), and generally punishing with judgment (Ezek 7:4, 9, 27; 11:11–12; 22:22). He also associated the formula with his declaring deliverance, restoration, or covenant commitment for his people (Ezek 13:21, 23; 16:62; 17:24; 20:33–38, 40–42,

¹² Cf. YHWH announcing via Ezekiel his gathering those in Jerusalem to "melt" them like metal in the furnace of his wrath such that they will "know that I am the Lord—I have poured out my wrath upon you" (Ezek 22:17–22).

¹³ J. Gordon McConville, "Biblical History," in Carson et al., *New Bible Commentary*, 33.

43–44). Daniel I. Block says uses of this formula serve as “prophetic proof sayings, according to which the actions of God are designed to bring the observer to the recognition of Yahweh’s person and his sovereign involvement in human experience. . . . whether it be in judgment or salvation.”¹⁴ In other words, YHWH tagged his announced acts of judgment and salvation with this formula to signal that their fulfillment would move witnesses of these acts to admit truths about YHWH and his workings among them. Since YHWH repeatedly gave Ezekiel prophecies marked by this formula, YHWH implied that he purposed Ezekiel’s prophesying and its fulfillment to stoke the exiles’ hearts into acknowledging who YHWH is and thus who they are.

Therefore, during the exile, YHWH meant Ezekiel’s prophesying to get a hold of, soften, and even break the exiles’ rebellious hearts. And YHWH did this so that they might recognize him and themselves in relation to him, that YHWH might remove their sinful impurities, and that they might return to him changed and as his covenant people. In that sense, YHWH intended Ezekiel’s ministry to urge exilic Israel to see that YHWH judges sin and that they too are under judgment.¹⁵ Since this purpose fulfills YHWH’s terms for restoring Israel from exile, YHWH arguably designed Ezekiel’s exilic ministry to spur the exiles’ repentance and thus to bring about his covenant restoration.

A Potential Exilic Ministry Apart from Prophetic Muteness

Third, apart from prophetic muteness, the confluence of YHWH sending Ezekiel to a defiant people with a message involving “lamentation, and moaning, and

¹⁴ Block, *Ezekiel 1–24*, 39.

¹⁵ See also comparable descriptions of Ezekiel’s purpose: “Ezekiel’s overriding purpose is to transform his audience’s perception of their relationship with Yahweh, exposing delusions of innocence and offering a divine understanding of reality,” which included “ultimately to change their behavior.” Block, *Ezekiel 1–24*, 14–15; “Ezekiel was commissioned to address both spiritual disillusionment and hardened rebellion, to reconstruct religion’s fundamentals as an internal work of grace and a life of faith, and to confront and prepare hearts for their promised return.” John N. Day, “Ezekiel and the Heart of Idolatry,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 164, no. 653 (2007): 23; Ezekiel prophesied “the approaching catastrophe for them to consider and lay to heart, that they might be brought to acknowledge their sin, and turn with sorrow and repentance to their God.” Keil, *Ezekiel*, 201.

woe” (Ezek 2:9–10) poised Ezekiel’s ministry to resemble that of Jeremiah’s, including its outcomes. Millard C. Lind points out that “Ezekiel’s problem of communication is how to deal with an alienated people who do not wish to see that their difficult situation is God’s doing. He wants to convince them that their way to the future is not to rebel against God’s judgment but to cooperate with it.”¹⁶ Lind’s comment speaks to Ezekiel’s predicament of having to warn the rebellious exiles of YHWH’s coming judgment, of their present state under his judgment, and of their need to repent, yet obstinate people like his fellow exiles tend to refuse such reproof. Ezekiel’s situation raises the question as to what sort of prophetic approach he would take to address exilic Israel and so persuade them that their future restoration would only come through repentance.

Had Ezekiel not been muted, it is plausible he would have taken up a life of zealous reproof to fulfill his duties, particularly when he came to terms with his call and the exiles’ stubbornness. Ezekiel’s priestly training would have informed him of the need to rebuke a sinning neighbor along with the potential benefits of reproof (Lev 19:17; Job 5:17; Ps 141:5; Prov 3:12; 9:8; 19:25; 24:25; 25:12; 28:23). Then as a prophet, Ezekiel would have understood the prophetic pattern of reproof, including fervent correction for the rebellious. Many prophets before him had rebuked their sinning hearers (cf. Moses and Nathan), and Ezekiel’s contemporary Jeremiah received divine exhortation to vigorously chide the same people from whom his hardened hearers had come. And as a watchman, Ezekiel would have recognized both his obligation to warn the exiles to repent and his culpability for their demise if he did otherwise. Reasonably then, Ezekiel would have seen adopting an intense regimen of rebuke toward his rebellious people as a positive, typical, and even necessary practice for fulfilling his call.

Alternatively, Ezekiel was also a man beset by the plaguings of the flesh. He knew that his people’s hard-heartedness had led YHWH to banish them along with him

¹⁶ Lind, *Ezekiel*, 92–93.

and his family from their home and had thus cost him his future priesthood. He also witnessed first-hand that his people's stubbornness had blinded them from grasping YHWH's judgment upon them despite their residing in Babylon, and he would acquire prophetic insight that this very heart posture would lead to the destruction of Judah and all others who remained in it. Accordingly, as YHWH meted out wrath and the exiles remained in denial, Ezekiel would have naturally become exasperated and so felt the urge to assertively admonish his people. He had already reacted with bitterness, an angry spirit, and seven days of shock during his initial commission to these exiles (Ezek 3:14–15)—conditions which provoked Moses to aggressively address his people (Num 20:10–13; Ps 106:32–33). Moreover, YHWH's intervening to silence Ezekiel from a reproofing way of life suggests that Ezekiel was otherwise disposed to adopt it. Therefore, whether on account of his commission or perhaps his flesh, it is probable that Ezekiel, apart from muteness, would have moved to doggedly harangue his people into repentance.¹⁷

Regardless of his motive, had Ezekiel embraced such a lifestyle of reproof to fulfill his call, this approach would have likely invited the same outcomes for his hearers as those experienced by Jeremiah's. Ezekiel dealt with exiles originating from the very stiff-necked people that Jeremiah addressed. Thus, the exiles too would possess a propensity for refusing rather than receiving fervent rebuke. This is not to say that Ezekiel would have necessarily erred in ardently admonishing his people—they were rebellious and certainly deserved correction. And again, Jeremiah zealously reproved his stubborn people by divine mandate—they in turn chose to fight against him. It is to say, however, that had Ezekiel been able to act on the inclination to take an intense, scolding approach toward his defiant hearers, then they, as Jeremiah's impenitent people, would

¹⁷ Cf. Gregory Yuri Glazov who views Ezekiel's going out and being *אִישׁ מוֹכִיחַ* as "what Ezekiel would wish to do naturally." Gregory Yuri Glazov, *The Bridling of the Tongue and the Opening of the Mouth in Biblical Prophecy*, Journal for the Study of the Old Testament, Supplement Series 311 (Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001), 241.

have likely opposed him, not repented, and so realized their own ruin.

Prophetic Muteness Mercifully Promoted the Divine Purpose in the Exile

Fourth, YHWH's muting of Ezekiel mercifully advanced his restorative plan in the exile by preventing Ezekiel from contentiously confronting his people while ensuring he gave them a measured, repentance-fostering message, manner, and behavioral model.

Measured speech would serve YHWH's exilic purpose. A broad consideration of the HB shows that measured prophetic speech would suit YHWH's aims for Ezekiel's ministry. Proverbs asserts, "As coals to burning coals and wood to fire, so is a man of contention ([מְדִינִים] אִישׁ מְדוֹנִים) for kindling strife" (Prov 26:21). In other words, a contentious, quarrelsome speaker tends to beget further friction and controversy in others. Conversely, Proverbs affirms that more gentle speech tends to ease tensions while at the same time still having a powerful effect (Prov 15:1; 25:15). Proverbs also states that when one speaks a fitting word, it comes across to its hearer with pleasantness (Prov 15:23; 25:11). Said differently, controlled, suitable communication encourages audience acceptance without diminishing its potency. Measured speech, therefore, mitigates the provocation of one's hearers and promotes the reception of one's message.

Two examples illustrate this principle. First, the men of Ephraim sharply chided Gideon, but Gideon used humble, shrewd speech to calm their anger and satisfy their interests (Judg 8:1–3). Second, Nabal railed against David and thus incited his ire (1 Sam 25:10–13, 21–22). Yet afterward, Abigail addressed David with winsome, tactful language and so overturned his anger, protected him from sin, and entreated his favor (1 Sam 25:23–35). Thus, while intense, aggressive speaking tends to aggravate a listener, regulated speech often quells contention and promotes responsiveness in one's hearers.

One related principle bears mentioning as well. Proverbs 29:1 points out that the "man often experiencing reproof (אִישׁ תּוֹכַחְוֹת), who hardens his neck, will suddenly

be broken, and there will be no healing.” In other words, someone subject to persistent rebuke may opt to rebel and so perish in the process of being censured. Consequently, when dealing with particularly hardened individuals disposed toward defiance, restrained words of correction rather than relentless rebuke may be more conducive to reaching them. This approach would appear to be beneficial because rebellious people do not naturally have what Günter Mayer calls “a receptive ear” found in “the ideal relationship between student and teacher.”¹⁸ Their headstrong nature makes them less apt to receive a reprimand.

Indeed, Jeremiah’s stiff-necked hearers chose to oppose instead of accepting his vehement rebuke. Since YHWH sent Ezekiel to an equally disinclined audience, he could have commissioned Ezekiel with Jeremiah’s same mandate to fervently reprove his people while leaving the exiles’ rebellious nature to rule their response. Yet, despite the exiles’ recalcitrance, YHWH gave them a muted prophet with his message, manner, and model measured to motivate exilic Israel’s message receptivity and thus their repentance.

Ezekiel’s muted message. More specifically, by constraining Ezekiel’s mouth, YHWH negated all ordinary, unprompted speaking. Had Ezekiel uttered any informal speech skewed from YHWH’s intended messaging, even if inadvertent, it could have distracted, confused, misguided, or antagonized Ezekiel’s rebellious hearers and so dissuaded them from their duty to repent. Muteness prevented these possibilities by limiting Ezekiel’s speech with his people to pure prophecy.

Furthermore, because muteness permitted Ezekiel only divine speech with his hearers at YHWH’s decree, it ensured YHWH could strictly curate the communications Ezekiel’s people would receive from him. Notably, YHWH mainly provided messages for the exiles that condemned Judah. Sometimes he supplied messages of hope and calls

¹⁸ Mayer, “יִכְח; תּוֹכַחַת *tôk̄ahat*; תּוֹכְחָה *tôk̄ehâ*,” 6:70.

for repentance, and occasionally he reproached exilic leadership (cf. Ezekiel's Message discussion in chapter 4 above). In general, however, YHWH prescribed limited critique of the exiles and largely opted to make Judah's plight the exiles' instruction. For example, Ezekiel decried the sin of YHWH's people to the exiles using graphic imagery of wanton whore (Ezek 16; 23), but he proclaimed this judgment against Judah—not the exiles. Kelvin G. Friebel calls this kind of approach “the rhetorical strategy of ‘indirect address,’” a tactic that draws hearers into a message from a distance before impressing upon them the same point by implication.¹⁹ In other words, YHWH chose a messaging program for exilic Israel that would show them from afar how Judah's sin led to ruin. This messaging would then permeate their own hearts, convince them of their status under divine judgment, and urge them to repent. Since YHWH's silencing of Ezekiel guaranteed he could carefully channel such oblique, less confrontational, yet piercing words of wrath for sin, prophetic muteness made possible proffering a message program that called the rebellious exiles to repent while remaining conducive toward their reception and acceptance. Therefore, Ezekiel's muteness not only curbed his personal speech, but in effect, it also softened or muted his prophetic messages.

Ezekiel's muted manner. Next, by silencing Ezekiel, YHWH negated his ability to aggressively rebuke his recalcitrant people, which could tend to undercut their interest in the prophesied word and deter them from seeing their need to repent. Through imposed muteness, YHWH positioned Ezekiel for a restrained mode of address. For example, even as he would clap, stamp, and say, “Alas” (Ezek 6:11; cf. 21:19 [14]) or even as he would “make Jerusalem know her abominations” (Ezek 16:2; cf. 20:4; 22:2;

¹⁹ Kelvin G. Friebel, *Jeremiah's and Ezekiel's Sign-Acts: Rhetorical Nonverbal Communication*, *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament*, Supplement Series 283 (Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999), 55–56, 436–40, 446, cf. 230–31, 244–46, 252–54, 277–78, 288–89.

23:36), his manner remained divinely controlled to prohibit a haranguing approach.²⁰ His subdued conduct would cultivate audience consideration, receptivity, and acceptance of his calls for repentance.

Thus, as a muted prophet, Ezekiel would prophesy with precision. Even his judgment prophecies meant to shatter exilic Israel would strike the balance of firm but not fierce and rousing but not rancorous. Every word would come across how YHWH intended to penetrate the exiles' rebellious hearts and to urge them to turn from sin.

Ezekiel's muted model. Moreover, YHWH's muting of Ezekiel not only created the conduit through which weighty words could reach the exiles, but it also summoned them to adopt the conduct, and by extension the character, required for covenant renewal. In particular, Ezekiel's muteness modeled for his people their proper behavior of silence toward YHWH while divine judgment fell, and as the HB shows, silence stems from the sobered heart.

First, silence indicates the presence of sensibility and an embrace of wisdom. For example, Proverbs asserts that "the one restraining his lips is wise" (Prov 10:19). Other passages offer a similar estimation (Job 13:5; Prov 17:27–28; Eccl 3:7). Some texts show that silence reveals a willingness to hear wisdom, as in Job's experience of men waiting silently to hear his counsel, or Elihu's demand that Job silently hear his insight (Job 29:21–23; 33:31–33). In another passage, silence expresses an acknowledgment and acceptance of one's state (Judg 18:19). And some verses show that silence denotes a wise recognition of YHWH's presence, of YHWH's impending activity, or of an evil time (Amos 5:13; Hab 2:20; Zeph 1:7; Zech 2:17 [13]). Accordingly, quietness reflects one's turning to wisdom, a characteristic of the humble and repentant individual.

²⁰ Keil gets close to this idea in saying that Ezekiel being "אִישׁ מוֹכִיחַ" meant he could "place their sins before them to no greater extent, and in no other way, than God expressly directs him." Keil, *Ezekiel*, 40.

Second, speechlessness also signifies submission to divine deliverance. For example, Moses declared, “YHWH will fight for you, and you will be silent” (Exod 14:14). Likewise, the psalmist dealt with his enemies like a mute man waiting for YHWH to answer (Ps 38:13–16 [12–15]). And other texts present quietness as an expression of readiness for YHWH’s salvation (Isa 7:4; 30:15; Lam 3:25–33). Therefore, silence also conveys yielding to YHWH for rescue, a quality typical of the meek and penitent person.

Third, quietness reflects the solemnity consistent with humbling or repentance by one’s own self or YHWH. For instance, Job and his friends stopped speaking because of suffering, horror, dismay, or a correct estimation of self (Job 2:13; 21:5; 32:15; 40:4). Speechlessness also appears as an attitude in contrast with sin, deceit, foolishness, self-exaltation, and devising of evil (Ps 4:5 [4]; 35:20; Prov 30:32). And silence elsewhere denotes deference, self-diminishment, awe, a response to devastation, self-abasement, and shame (Job 29:9–10; Ps 137:6; Isa 52:15; Jer 7:34; Lam 2:10; Mic 7:16; cf. Jer 16:9; 25:10). An example of keeping one’s mouth shut because of shame also occurs in the book of Ezekiel. In Ezekiel 16:63, YHWH associated Israel’s not again opening its mouth with his atoning for them and Israel then becoming ashamed from their disgrace. Gregory Yuri Glazov comments on this text saying, “The silence derives from repentance and constitutes the condition for forgiveness and restoration of the Covenant.”²¹ In other words, quietness here expresses Israel’s contrition upon recognition of personal shame, and this attitude reflects the exact condition YHWH required to renew the exiles. Thus, the HB shows that the quiet individual tends to have a heart turned toward sensibility, submission to YHWH, and solemnity—a sobriety consistent with humble repentance.

Significantly, Ezekiel’s muteness bid the exiles to embrace this very sort of sobered silence. Friebel finds that as Ezekiel 16:63 links “not having an opening of the mouth” to recognizing one’s shame, Ezekiel’s muteness sign showed “the people what

²¹ Glazov, *Bridling of the Tongue*, 268.

their overt participation in the divine-human relationship should be . . . it also connotated the motivating disposition, which in this case was one of shame. Just as he was speechless, so should they be as they took responsibility for their sins.”²² Friebel means that Ezekiel’s silence portended to his people their expected behavior toward YHWH along with the heart behind it. As divine wrath fell, Ezekiel’s muteness modeled the quietness YHWH meant for the exiles in order that they might embrace a penitent heart in keeping with that quietness and experience his restoration.

Summary

YHWH had a special purpose for Ezekiel’s muted ministry to the exiles. He had already foreordained restoring an exilic remnant through repentance, and he meant Ezekiel’s ministry to urge repentance in the exiles. Though Ezekiel appeared poised to tenaciously reprove his recalcitrant people, likely resulting in their opposition and ruin, YHWH sent Ezekiel to exilic Israel with his personal speech and prophetic message and manner muted despite the exiles’ obstinance. Since prophetic muteness serves to assuage audience antagonism while fostering openness to calls for repentance and modeling conduct aligned with repentance, YHWH arguably sent the rebellious exiles his muted prophet as part of his plan to promote their receptiveness, prompt their repentance, and so make eligible his covenant restoration. In that respect, YHWH foisted silence upon Ezekiel as a divine mercy to his defiant, undeserving people.

Muteness Implies Prophetic Succession

Next, Ezekiel’s muted ministry suggests that he stands in succession with other Israelite prophets who experienced divine enablement and suffering.

²² Friebel, *Jeremiah’s and Ezekiel’s Sign-Acts*, 187.

Divinely Enabled Prophets

First, Ezekiel's initial call situates him with prophets who received supernatural aid to fulfill their call, and his muteness distinctively positions him with speech-impaired prophets who received divine help. Moses claimed he was too poor a speaker to address Pharaoh and the Egyptians, but YHWH was with his mouth and taught him what to say (Exod 4:10–16). Though not discussed above, Samuel could not see how he would go about anointing David king without inciting Saul's wrath, but YHWH showed him what to do (1 Sam 16:2–3).²³ Then, Jeremiah asserted he did not know how to speak as a prophet to the nations because of his youth, but YHWH reassured him, was with him, touched him, and put the words in his mouth (Jer 1:6–9). From Jeremiah's experience, Lalleman concludes that "Jeremiah stands in the tradition of the true prophets of God (Deut. 18:18b), like Moses and Samuel."²⁴ Indeed, YHWH equipped Jeremiah with his word according to the prophetic paradigm and the precedent of prior prophets who satisfied their commission. As a result, Moses, Samuel, and Jeremiah all exist in a succession of prophets who discharged their duty and did so by divine aid.

Like these prophets, YHWH also gave Ezekiel his word, orders to prophesy it to his people, and strengthening for the task (Ezek 2:3–3:4, 8–11). Thus, from Ezekiel's initial call and before his muteness, Ezekiel followed the Deuteronomy 18:18 paradigm and the path of his predecessors who enjoyed supernatural aid in their vocation.²⁵

²³ See also Ronald F. Youngblood who points out that YHWH's promise here "echoes an early classic passage about prophetic enabling: 'I [emphatic] . . . will teach you what to do' [brackets original]" (Exod 4:15). Ronald F. Youngblood, *1, 2 Samuel*, in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, vol. 3, *1 Samuel–2 Kings*, ed. Tremper Longman III and David E. Garland, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009), 166. In other words, as YHWH empowered his timid prophet Moses to go to Egypt and speak for him, he also enabled his reluctant prophet Samuel to face his fearful conditions and do his duty.

²⁴ Lalleman, *Jeremiah and Lamentations*, 72; see also others recognizing Jeremiah as in alignment with Israel's prophets: Huey, *Jeremiah, Lamentations*, 51–52; Victor H. Matthews, *The Hebrew Prophets and Their Social World: An Introduction*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2012), 144; J. A. Thompson, *The Book of Jeremiah*, *New International Commentary on the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1980), 148–50.

²⁵ See also Glazov, *Bridling of the Tongue*, 233–34; Huey, *Jeremiah, Lamentations*, 52; Thompson, *Jeremiah*, 149–50; Lena-Sofia Tiemeyer, "Ezekiel: A Compromised Prophet in Reduced Circumstances," in *Constructs of Prophecy in the Former and Latter Prophets and Other Texts*, ed. Lester

Yet because YHWH later imposed muteness, Ezekiel stands in a unique succession with Moses and Jeremiah. Moses and Jeremiah's claimed speech deficiency situates the two in a tradition of prophets who struggled with speaking.²⁶ Since they went on to fulfill their call by YHWH empowering their mouths, their ministries also form a line of prophets who, through their limited mouth, experienced divinely enabled speech.

As with Moses and Jeremiah, Ezekiel too had an inhibited mouth with muteness tying his tongue and constraining much of his speech. And like Moses and Jeremiah, Ezekiel's curbed mouth became the setting through which YHWH supplied his words. Through muteness, YHWH gave Ezekiel his divine messages, Ezekiel proclaimed them to his people, and Ezekiel would eventually experience prophetic vindication. Therefore, Ezekiel more narrowly followed the footsteps of prophets who dealt with speech difficulties and yet executed their office by divine speaking assistance.²⁷ Interestingly, Moses, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel's struggles with speech reveal that a prophet's speaking deficiency poses no liability to his commission but paradoxically becomes his vocational asset—a speechless prophet is entirely undistracted by himself and remains predisposed to receive divine aid for delivering only YHWH's word.

Still, Ezekiel's experience goes beyond that of Moses and Jeremiah. Whereas they claimed speech problems, Moses and Jeremiah demonstrated during their ministry that they retained the freedom for normal dialogue with others. They could also conduct themselves in an aggressive manner toward others. Conversely, YHWH acted on Ezekiel's mouth to bind his tongue and levy a near-total ban on his speech with his

L. Grabbe and Martti Nissinen, *Ancient Near East Monographs 4* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2011), 188.

²⁶ See also Rolf Rendtorff, *The Canonical Hebrew Bible: A Theology of the Old Testament*, trans. David E. Orton, *Tools for Biblical Study 7* (Leiden: Deo, 2005), 43, 204.

²⁷ See also Douglas K. Stuart who connects Moses, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel as prophets who received "explicit assurance of God's control over speech and of help for the prophet's speaking per se." Douglas K. Stuart, *Exodus*, *New American Commentary*, vol. 2 (Nashville: B&H, 2006), 135n77.

people. As a mute, Ezekiel remained restricted with his community to speaking official prophetic words in a carefully controlled way. Consequently, Ezekiel's muteness centered him solidly on his prophetic duty and so gave him a similar yet superior ability to fulfill his call compared to his predecessors. Thus, Ezekiel extends the succession of speech-limited and empowered prophets with his muteness situating him at the apex of this lineage.

Suffering Prophets

Second, Ezekiel's muted ministry implies that, like other Israelite prophets, he endured a kind of prophetic suffering. In dealing with their sinful communities, prophets would experience varying degrees of anguish. Moses's people grumbled and rebelled against him, Nathan had to confront a sinning king, and Jeremiah dealt with societal hatred and persecution his entire life. His people mocked, cursed, denounced, threatened, betrayed, plotted against, and persecuted him. Serving as Israel's prophet characteristically led to suffering at the hands of one's own people.

Ezekiel, however, did not experience this same sort of conflict, hostility, and anguish typical of Israel's prophets. By muting Ezekiel's speech and zealous confrontation toward others, YHWH limited his social expression and so largely withdrew him from the community wherein such suffering could arise.

Nevertheless, Ezekiel would suffer in different ways. Heath A. Thomas identifies Ezekiel's muteness itself as a source of his suffering.²⁸ Friebel speaks to this idea as well, asserting that Ezekiel's muteness "involved an extended lifestyle behavior which isolated [him] socially because of the contrariness to social expectations and interaction."²⁹ Friebel means that Ezekiel's restriction from ordinary dialogue with others

²⁸ Heath A. Thomas, "Suffering," in *Dictionary of the Old Testament: Prophets*, ed. Mark J. Boda and J. Gordon McConville, IVP Bible Dictionary Series (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2012), 762–63.

²⁹ Friebel, *Jeremiah's and Ezekiel's Sign-Acts*, 426.

would leave him disconnected from his people. The exiles themselves may have viewed his consistently quiet conduct as odd and so may have refrained from engaging with him.

Many scholars have mentioned Ezekiel's relative isolation from his people.³⁰ YHWH's seeming to limit Ezekiel's mobility in conjunction with his speech along with Ezekiel's encountering community leaders inside his home all suggest that he had a reduced public presence (Ezek 3:24–26; 8:1; cf. 14:1; 20:1). This is not to say that Ezekiel only worked in private. He prophesied on his visionary journey to Jerusalem (Ezek 11:2–13), and he performed sign acts before onlookers and all around the city (Ezek 4:12; 5:2; 12:3–7; 21:11 [6]). Though YHWH constrained Ezekiel's ability to interact, he did not completely cut him off from society.³¹

That said, Ezekiel's muteness did separate him from his community and so result in meaningful suffering. Of the kinds of confinement YHWH placed on his prophet in Ezekiel 3:24–26, Douglas K. Stuart views the muteness as “probably the most miserable.”³² Truly so, for Ezekiel's helplessness to have casual conversations and

³⁰ Alexander, *Ezekiel*, 1976, 18; Alexander, *Ezekiel*, 2010, 673–74, cf. 779; Allen, *Ezekiel 1–19*, 61; Block, *Ezekiel 1–24*, 138, 161, cf. 279; Cooper, *Ezekiel*, 88, cf. 240; A. B. Davidson, *The Book of the Prophet Ezekiel: With Notes and Introduction*, ed. A. W. Streane, rev. ed., Cambridge Bible for Schools and Colleges (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1916), xi, 28; H. L. Ellison, *Ezekiel: The Man and His Message* (London: Paternoster Press, 1956), 31, cf. 118; Charles Lee Feinberg, *The Prophecy of Ezekiel: The Glory of the Lord*, 4th printing (Chicago: Moody Press, 1974), 30; Greenberg, *Ezekiel 1–20*, 120–21; Moshe Greenberg, *Ezekiel 21–37: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, Anchor Bible, vol. 22A (New York: Doubleday, 1997), 514, 516, 681, cf. 513, 682; Moshe Greenberg, “On Ezekiel's Dumbness,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 77, no. 2 (1958): 103; Thomas Renz, *The Rhetorical Function of the Book of Ezekiel*, Supplements to Vetus Testamentum, vol. 76 (Leiden: Brill, 1999), 157, 159–60; Mark F. Rooker, *Ezekiel*, Holman Old Testament Commentary, vol. 17 (Nashville: Holman Reference, 2005), 55; Charles Sherlock, “Ezekiel's Dumbness,” *The Expository Times* 94, no. 10 (1983): 297; Douglas K. Stuart, *Ezekiel*, Communicator's Commentary, Old Testament, vol. 18 (Dallas: Word Books, 1989), 50–51; Nicholas J. Tromp, “The Paradox of Ezekiel's Prophetic Mission: Towards a Semiotic Approach of Ezekiel 3,22–27,” in *Ezekiel and His Book: Textual and Literary Criticism and Their Interrelation*, ed. J. Lust, Bibliotheca Ephemeridum Theologicarum Lovaniensium 74 (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1986), 211; Christopher J. H. Wright, *The Message of Ezekiel: A New Heart and a New Spirit*, Bible Speaks Today (Leicester, England: InterVarsity Press, 2001), 73–74; Walther Zimmerli, *Ezekiel I: A Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Ezekiel, Chapters 1–24*, ed. Frank Moore Cross, Klaus Baltzer, and Leonard Jay Greenspoon, trans. Ronald E. Clements, Hermeneia, vol. 1 (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1979), 159; see also Block who believes YHWH used Ezekiel's silence to “distance the prophet from those among whom he sat.” Block, *Ezekiel 1–24*, 157; cf. Tiemeyer, “Ezekiel: A Compromised Prophet in Reduced Circumstances,” 190.

³¹ See also Friebel, *Jeremiah's and Ezekiel's Sign-Acts*, 174–76, 205; Taylor, *Ezekiel*, 75.

³² Stuart, *Ezekiel*, 51.

dialogue freely with others would curtail his ability to enjoy meaningful relationships. For seven and a half years, he could not have normal interaction with community leaders, people in the marketplace, his neighbors, or even his wife. Basic routines of life would feel lonely, detached, and cumbersome. Additionally, Ezekiel could not verbally process personal experiences or share his thoughts with others. When he learned of his homeland's forthcoming destruction or his wife's imminent death, he remained tongue-tied from talking it over with anyone. Moreover, without divine authorization, he could not clarify his prophecies to others, and so he fell prey to public misunderstanding, confusion, awkwardness, and embarrassment. Therefore, even as YHWH's muting of Ezekiel empowered him to prophesy with particular precision and palatability, it detached him from normal human interaction and so led him to suffer deep social isolation.

Furthermore, Ezekiel experienced a degree of hardship in the curbing of his own identity. Lena-Sofia Tiemeyer has argued that "Ezekiel is portrayed as God's ultimate tool to the degree that he lacks a distinct personality."³³ To an extent, Tiemeyer is right. In becoming a prophet who purely conveyed YHWH's word in YHWH's way, Ezekiel lost the ability to represent himself and his own expression to his community. Iain M. Duguid describes Ezekiel's muteness as part of his "self-emptying."³⁴ In that regard, he endured a diminishment of his personal nature and individuality. For Ezekiel then, his muteness would distance him from his people and his own self, and thus it would serve as a kind of prophetic suffering.

Importantly, each form of Ezekiel's suffering would also position him to relate

³³ Tiemeyer, "Ezekiel: A Compromised Prophet in Reduced Circumstances," 177, cf. 180, 194; cf. Tiemeyer stating, "The prophet is portrayed as God's ultimate tool, on the verge of losing his own identity." Lena-Sofia Tiemeyer, "Ezekiel: Book of," in Boda and McConville, *Dictionary of the Old Testament: Prophets*, 221; Tiemeyer asserting that Ezekiel's muteness contributes to him having "ceased to be an independent agent and has become someone with God's point of view." Lena-Sofia Tiemeyer, "God's Hidden Compassion," *Tyndale Bulletin* 57, no. 2 (2006): 210; see also Block, *Ezekiel 1-24*, 27; Ellen F. Davis, *Swallowing the Scroll: Textuality and the Dynamics of Discourse in Ezekiel's Prophecy*, Journal for the Study of the Old Testament, Supplement Series 78, Bible and Literature Series 21 (Sheffield, England: Almond Press, 1989), 135.

³⁴ Duguid, *Ezekiel*, 80.

more closely to YHWH. By experiencing social isolation from exilic Israel, Ezekiel would better identify with YHWH and his experience of a rebellious people who had turned away from him. Additionally, by having his self-expression silenced and overtaken by YHWH's, he would intimately encounter YHWH's word and way as he engaged his people. In that sense, even Ezekiel's prophetic suffering would bring him to know YHWH better and thus confer upon him a peculiar divine blessing.

Conclusion

For over seven years and until the fall of Jerusalem, YHWH called Ezekiel to serve as his muted prophet to the exiles. Ezekiel's muted ministry suggests several significant implications. First, it implies YHWH intended prophetic muteness as a special form of divine enablement that ensured Ezekiel would fulfill his duties as prophet and watchman to exilic Israel. Second, given YHWH's plan to restore a repentant exilic remnant along with the repentance-promoting nature of prophetic muteness, YHWH's limiting Ezekiel's tongue suggests he meant Ezekiel's muteness as a mercy to foster repentance in the rebellious exiles that he might then enact covenant renewal. Third, Ezekiel's experience of muteness places him in succession both with divinely empowered prophets—especially speech-deficient and empowered prophets—along with prophets who suffered while fulfilling their vocation. And Ezekiel's suffering from muteness brought him into closer association with YHWH. Extraordinarily then, Ezekiel's prophetic muteness enabled him to fulfill his call, allowed him to promote the covenant restoration of his rebellious people, and gave him a greater glimpse of the divine. As a muted prophet, Ezekiel would truly live up to his name as one whom God strengthened.

APPENDIX 1

SCHOLARS' APPROACHES EMPLOYED TO EXPLAIN EZEKIEL'S MUTENESS ALONG WITH THEIR VIEWS ON ITS VARIOUS ASPECTS

This appendix presents a table summarizing the approaches scholars have used to explain Ezekiel's muteness. Of note, scholars who accept the Do Not Intercede approach and see Ezekiel's muteness as intermittent tend to mean that his speech was intermittent—not his ability to intercede.

Additionally, the table displays scholars' views on the various aspects of Ezekiel's muteness as discussed in this dissertation. I view scholars who offer an explanation for Ezekiel's muteness sign function or who suggest it has emblematic value to at least imply that it has a symbolic aspect. Aspects on which scholars did not comment are indicated with a dash while those which scholars left ambiguous are tagged with a parenthetical question mark. Table entries stem from the associated scholar's works cited in the subsequent bibliography, many particulars of which are delineated in the above dissertation. The table begins on the following page.

Table A1. Summary of scholarship on Ezekiel's muteness

Scholar	Approaches Used to Explain Muteness							Views on Aspects of Muteness					
	Redactional / Editing	Prophetic Vindication	Shift to Writing	Prophecy Only Doom	Do Not Intercede	Speak Only as YHWH's Messenger	Ezekiel's Call (C) / Jerusalem's Fall (F)	Durative (D) / Intermittent (I)	Voluntary (Vol) / Imposed (Imp) / Afflicted (Affl)	Literal (L) / Symbolic (S)	(Ezek 3:26b) ִשָּׁקֵט	Muteness Signals	
Alexander		√		√	√	C	I	Imp	L, S	concessive		prophetic vindication, doom/alienation/to hope	
Allen				√		C	I	Imp	L, S	casual / concessive		doom/alienation/to hope	
Blenkinsopp	√					F	D	Affl	L, S	-		new phase of activity	
Block		√		√	√	C	I	Imp / Vol	L, S	casual		prophetic vindication, doom/alienation/to hope	
Brownlee	√					F	D	Affl	L, S	casual / concessive		doom/alienation/to hope (?)	
Carley	√			√	√	F	I	Affl	L, S	concessive		doom/alienation/to hope, model for the people	
Carvalho				√	√	C	I	Imp	L, S	-		model for the people	
Cooke	√					F	D	Imp	S	casual		model for the people	
Cooper		√		√	√	C	I	Imp	L, S	concessive		prophetic vindication, who YHWH is	
Craigie				√	√	C, F	I, then D	Imp	L, S	casual		doom/alienation/to hope, model for the people	
Darr		√		√	√	C	I	Imp	L, S	casual		prophetic vindication, who YHWH is	
Davidson		√				C	D	Affl	S	casual		prophetic vindication	
Davis			√		√	C	D	Imp	L, S	-		shift to writing, model for the people	
Duguid				√	√	C	I	Imp	L, S	concessive		doom/alienation/to hope	
Eichrodt	√			√		F	D	Affl	L, S	casual		doom/alienation/to hope, model for the people	
Ellison					√	C	I	Vol	S	-		people's rebelliousness	
Fairbairn				√	√	F	D	Affl	L, S	casual		doom/alienation/to hope	
Feinberg					√	C, F	I, then D	Imp	L, S	-		model for the people (?)	
Fohrer	√			√		F	D	Vol	S	-		doom/alienation/to hope	
Friebel				√	√	C	I	Vol	L, S	-		model for the people, who YHWH is	
Glazov		√		√	√	C / F	I	Affl, Vol	L, S	casual		prophetic vindication, doom/alienation/to hope	
Greenberg		√		√	√	C	I	Imp, Affl	L, S	casual		prophetic vindication, doom/alienation/to hope	
Hals	√			√		F	D	Imp	L, S	-		doom/alienation/to hope	
Jenson					√	F	D	Imp, Affl	L, S	casual		doom/alienation/to hope (?)	
Joyce		√		√	√	C	I	Imp	L, S	causal (?)		prophetic vindication, model for the people	
Kasher		√			√	C	I	Imp	L, S	-		prophetic vindication	
Keil					√	C	I	Imp	L, S	casual		who YHWH is	
Klein				√	√	C	I	Imp	L, S	-		doom/alienation/to hope	
Lind				√	√	F	I	Imp, Affl	L, S	-		doom/alienation/to hope	

Scholar	Approaches Used to Explain Muteness							Views on Aspects of Muteness				
	Redactional Editing	Prophetic Vindication	Shift to Writing	Prophecy Only Doom	Do Not Intercede	Speak Only as YHWH's Messenger	Ezekiel's Call (C) / Jerusalem's Fall (F)	Durative (D) / Intermittent (I)	Voluntary (Vol) / Imposed (Imp) / Afflicted (Affl)	Literal (L) / Symbolic (S)	(Ezek 3:26b) מָּוֹת	Muteness Signals
Lyons				√	√	C	I	Imp	L, S	-	model for the people	
McKeating		√			√	C	I	Imp	L	-	unclear	
Odell	√			√	√	C	I	Imp	L, S	-	prophetic vindication	
Olley	√				√	C	I	Imp	L, S	casual	prophetic vindication	
Renz	√	√		√	√	C	I	Imp	L, S	casual	prophetic vindication, model for the people	
Roehrs	√				√	C	I	Imp	L, S	casual	prophetic vindication	
Rooker	√		√		√	C	I	Imp	L, S	-	prophetic vindication, doom/alienation/to hope	
Sherlock			√	√	√	C	I	Imp	L	-	unclear	
Stuart			√		√	C, F	I, then D	Imp	L, S	casual / concessive	doom/alienation/to hope	
Sweeney				√	√	F	I	Affl	L, S	-	who YHWH is	
Taylor					√	C	I	Imp	L, S	-	who YHWH is, doom/alienation/to hope (?)	
Tiemeyer				√	√	C	I	Imp	L, S	-	who YHWH is	
Tromp			√		√	C	I	Imp	L, S	casual	doom/alienation/to hope	
Tuell			√	√	√	C	I	Imp	L, S	casual / concessive	doom/alienation/to hope	
Vawter, Hoppe	√		√			F	D	Affl	L, S	-	doom/alienation/to hope	
Wevers	√					F	D	Imp	L	casual	unclear	
Wilson	√		√	√	√	C	I	Imp	L	casual	unclear	
Wright			√	√	√	C	I	Imp	L, S	-	doom/alienation/to hope	
Zimmerli	√	√				F	D	Imp	L, S	casual	prophetic vindication, who YHWH is	

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ABSTRACT

EXPLAINING EZEKIEL'S ENIGMATIC MUTENESS

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This dissertation explains the nature and significance of the prophet Ezekiel's muteness as mentioned in Ezekiel 3:22–27, 24:25–27, and 33:21–22. It addresses the paradox of Ezekiel prophesying in verbal address and apparent reproof (see for example Ezek 11:13, 25; 13–14; 20; 24:18, 20) despite YHWH barring him from speech and from being some sort of “reprover” toward Israel (אִישׁ מוֹכִיחַ; Ezek 3:26) until his release (Ezek 33:22). It also explicates the sign function of Ezekiel's muteness (מוֹפֵת; Ezek 24:27). I contend that Ezekiel's muteness was a divinely imposed, literal silencing that precluded informal speech and a reproving lifestyle toward exilic Israel despite their rebelliousness. Yet, because of the exiles' recalcitrance, his muteness also enabled prophetic speech at YHWH's decree. Moreover, Ezekiel's muteness and return to ordinary talking signified the exiles' proper speech conduct of silence toward YHWH while under judgment and a renewed freedom to speak with YHWH once judgment had passed over.

I argue this thesis first by introducing in chapter 1 the texts citing his muteness from the book of Ezekiel and the enigma that they set up in relation to the whole book. In chapter 2, I assess approaches from the history of interpretation used to explain this enigma of Ezekiel's muteness along with how they impact the interpretation of the book of Ezekiel. In chapter 3, I contextualize Ezekiel's muteness by considering the experiences of other socially integrated prophets, such as Moses, Nathan, and Jeremiah, and especially with those claiming a speech problem, including Moses and Jeremiah. In chapter 4, I thoroughly examine Ezekiel's muteness, including a broad look at his mute

prophetic conditions and a passage-by-passage exegesis of the texts citing his muteness in order of their occurrence. Herein, I identify the various aspects of Ezekiel's muteness that, when considered together, constitute my explanation for his muteness. I then show that Ezekiel's communications before, during, and after his speechlessness as noted in the book of Ezekiel substantiate my explanation of his muteness. In chapter 5, I describe several inferences stemming from this understanding of Ezekiel's muteness. Namely, YHWH intended Ezekiel's muteness as part of a program of prophetic enablement that ensured Ezekiel would fulfill his commission. Also, YHWH meant the muteness as a divine mercy to the exiles, for it would facilitate prompting their repentance and so make eligible YHWH's covenant restoration. Furthermore, Ezekiel as a muted prophet stands in succession with prophets who received divine enablement, especially for a speech problem, and with prophets who suffered for their vocation.

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