

# Water (and Blood) in Ezekiel 16 and 36-37

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## 1. Introduction

In Ezekiel 16, Ezekiel, an exiled priest and prophet, delivers a lengthy prophetic tirade (Eze 16:1-63) against Jerusalem, which is represented as the unfaithful wife of YHWH. The mention of Jerusalem's birthplace as having belonged to the Canaanites and of her ancestry as going back to the Amorites and Hittites (Eze 16:3, 45)—these being three of the seven peoples of the Promised Land that YHWH commanded the Israelites to eradicate, along with their idols (Deu 7:1-6)<sup>1</sup>—emphasizes the licentiousness of the personified

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1) For further discussion on the rhetorical function of these ethnic groups, see T. Ishida, "The Structure and Historical Implications of the Lists of Pre-Israelite Nations", *Biblica* 60 (1979), 461-490; D. Rom-Shiloni, *Exclusive Inclusivity: Identity Conflicts between the Exiles and the People who Remained (6th-5th Centuries BCE)*, LHBOTS 543 (New York: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2013), 166 (esp. n. 89); B. Oded, "'Your Father Is an Amorite and Your Mother a Hittite' (Ezekiel 16:3)", S. Yona, et al., eds., *Marbeh Hokmah: Studies in the Bible and the Ancient Near East in Loving Memory of Victor Avigdor Hurowitz* (University Park, PA: Penn State University Press, 2015), 389-400.

Jerusalem. According to Ezekiel, the abominable deeds of Jerusalem dwarf those of her neighbors, including Samaria to the north and Sodom and her daughters to the south (Eze 16:46-47; cf. Lev 20:23). Ezekiel 16 and Ezekiel 23 are regarded as instances of “inner-biblical exegesis” or “resumptive exposition” (*Prinzip der Wiederaufnahme*)<sup>2)</sup> because they share metaphors of adulterous women, with the later chapter intensifying the graphic imagery of the earlier one.<sup>3)</sup> However, in the wider framework of the book of Ezekiel, Ezekiel 16 and Ezekiel 23 both belong to the literary unit that features indictment of Israel, and the promise of restoration in Ezekiel 16 is, as expected, difficult to find in Ezekiel 23.<sup>4)</sup> This paper proposes that further evidence for a literary affinity with Ezekiel 16 may be located in the literary unit of Ezekiel 34-39 (“Oracles of Restoration” B’), which is parallel to that of Ezekiel 12-23 (“Oracles of Judgment” B).<sup>5)</sup> The metaphor of using water to cleanse Israel of her defilement is especially prominent in Ezekiel 16 and Ezekiel 36. Although exegetes have occasionally observed the relationships between these chapters, further exploration is required to properly assess the correspondences between Ezekiel 16 and Ezekiel 36:1–

2) See discussion and examples of the concept in M. A. Fishbane, *Biblical Interpretation in Ancient Israel* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1985); W. Zimmerli, *Ezekiel 1–24*, 2nd ed., BKAT 13/1 (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 1979; org. ed. 1969), 215-216; C. Kuhl, “Die „Wiederaufnahme“—ein literarkritisches Prinzip?”, *ZAW* 64 (1952), 1-11; D. I. Block, *The Book of Ezekiel: Chapters 1–24*, NICOT (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1997), 24-25, 45, 286.

3) D. I. Block, *Ezekiel: Chapters 1-24*, 24-25, 729. For those who affirm strong literary interdependence between the two chapters, see W. Zimmerli, *Ezekiel 1: A Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Ezekiel: Chapters 1–24*, R. E. Clements, trans., Hermeneia (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979), 480; M. Greenberg, *Ezekiel 1–20: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, AB 22 (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1983), 488-493; S. Moughtin-Mumby, *Sexual and Marital Metaphors in Hosea, Jeremiah, Isaiah, and Ezekiel* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 156-200.

4) Other examples of “resumptive exposition” that do not always occur in texts replete with restoration elements may be found here. D. I. Block, *Ezekiel: Chapters 1–24*, 24-25.

5) R. M. Davidson, “The Chiasmic Literary Structure of the Book of Ezekiel”, D. Merling, ed., *To Understand the Scriptures: Essays in Honor of William H. Shea* (Berrien Springs, MI: Institute of Archaeology/Siegfried H. Horn Archaeological Museum, 1997), 71-93 (esp. 75). Other notable discussions on Ezekiel’s literary structure can be found in U. Cassuto, *Biblical and Oriental Studies: Volume 1: Bible*, I. Abrahams, trans. (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1973), 227-240; S. Talmon and M. Fishbane, “The Structuring of Biblical Books: Studies in the Book of Ezekiel”, B. Knutsson, ed., *Annual of the Swedish Theological Institute - 1975-76* (Leiden: Brill, 1976), 129-153; T. D. Mayfield, *Literary Structures and Setting in Ezekiel* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010).

37:14.<sup>6)</sup>

In this article, I examine Ezekiel 16 (vv. 1-14) in relation to ancient Near Eastern literature in order to trace the sociocultural norms that may have influenced the rhetoric of the prophetic narrative. In Ezekiel 16, recurrent flashbacks to YHWH's rescue of Jerusalem as a foundling and transformation of her into a royal consort contrast with his rejection of her after she degenerates into a shameless prostitute.<sup>7)</sup> In the context of ancient Near Eastern traditions about birth rituals, we can see that the foundling theme in Ezekiel 16 reinforces YHWH's gracious character in reinstating Israel despite her unfaithfulness. Then I compare Ezekiel 16 and Ezekiel 36:1-37:14 in order to evaluate aspects that are reappropriated in the latter chapters, paying particular attention to the imagery of water (and blood) that is underscored prior to the account of the ushering of Israel's revival. In biblical scholarship, the connection between these chapters with respect to the concept of hopeful repatriation has not been drawn with sufficient attentiveness.<sup>8)</sup> In seeking to fill the gap, the present study concludes that Ezekiel's rhetoric in Ezekiel 36:1-37:14 is indebted to the foundling motif in Ezekiel 16, especially by alluding to the priestly purgation rituals (e.g., Num 19; Lev 16) for the sake of stressing the contrast between Israel's former state of defilement and her eschatological recovery.

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6) See, for example, in W. Zimmerli, *Ezekiel 2: A Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Ezekiel: Chapters 25-48*, J. D. Martin, trans., Hermeneia (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983), 238, 247-248, 265, 276; M. Greenberg, *Ezekiel 21-37: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, AB 22A (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1997), 720, 729, 732; T. Häner, "Reading Ezekiel 36.16-38 in Light of the Book: Observations on the Remembrance and Shame after Restoration (36.31-32) in a Synchronic Perspective", W. A. Tooman and P. Barter, eds., *Ezekiel: Current Debates and Future Directions*, FAT 112 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2017), 329-331.

7) Since the scope of the paper is limited, I will focus on a literary reading of the relevant chapters rather than providing an ideological critique of the ways in which Jerusalem is subjected to sexual violence by her male partners. See, for example, in H.-M. Lim, "A Reconsideration of the Problematic Image of Yahweh and the Metaphor in Ezekiel 16", *KJOTS* 25:2 (2019), 91-117 (in Korean).

8) Refer to Häner's discussion of the lexical links between Eze 16 and Eze 36 along the verbs "to be ashamed" (כָּלַם) and "to remember" (זָכַר). T. Häner, "Reading Ezekiel 36.16-38 in Light of the Book", 329-331.

## 2. Deliverance of Jerusalem

### 2.1. Unwashed Infant (Eze 16:1-5)

And as for your birth, on the day you were born your cord was not cut, nor were you washed with water<sup>9)</sup> to cleanse you, nor rubbed with salt, nor wrapped in swaddling cloths. (Eze 16:4 ESV)

As commentators have noted, washing, oiling, salting, and swaddling a newborn after severing the umbilical cord is a common practice in ancient Near Eastern and Mediterranean cultures.<sup>10)</sup> The mythological rationale for the birth ritual is given in Levantine folklore and likely reflects the socioeconomic factors informing the text of Ezekiel 16:4. It is said that the midwife “bathes the baby and anoints its body with oil in which fine powdered salt has been dissolved” not only to fortify the skin but also to ward off evil influences, for “non-salted children have a weak and silly character.”<sup>11)</sup> Illegitimate children who are labeled as *ibn ḥaram* or *bandūq* (“bastard”) are deprived of the chance to be salted after birth, and calling a person as “not salted” is considered as an insult.<sup>12)</sup> Some scholars believe that in the ancient Near East, postnatal washing was a way of formally acknowledging newborns. Those who did not receive this ritual ablution would be put up for adoption.<sup>13)</sup>

9) The difficulty of the hapax  $\text{ׁוּשְׁׁוּׁ}$  (“to cleanse you” NRS and ESV; “for cleansing” NAS; “to make you clean” NIV; “to cleanse” NKJ) has been duly noted by many commentators and its translation remains inconclusive. See W. Zimmerli, *Ezekiel 1*, 323; M. Greenberg, *Ezekiel 1–20*, 275; D. I. Block, *Ezekiel: Chapters 1–24*, 473.

10) J. Morgenstern, *Rites of Birth, Marriage, Death and Kindred Occasions among the Semites* (Cincinnati, OH: Hebrew Union College Press, 1966), 8, 196.

11) *Ibid.*, 8.

12) *Ibid.*

13) M. Stol and F. A. M. Wiggermann, *Birth in Babylonia and the Bible: Its Mediterranean Setting*, CM 14 (Groningen: STYX Publications, 2000), 178; C. Wilcke, “Noch einmal: *šilip rēmim* und die Adoption *ina mē-šu*: Neue und alte einschlägige Texte”, *ZA* 71 (1981), 94; M. Malul, “Adoption of Foundlings in the Bible and Mesopotamian Documents: A Study of Some Legal Metaphors in Ezekiel 16.1-7”, *JOT* 46 (1990), 109; Raymond Westbrook, *Law from the Tiber: The Writings of Raymond Westbrook, Volume 2: Cuneiform and Biblical Sources*, B. Wells and F. R. Magdalene, eds. (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2009), 139-141; R. Yaron, “Varia on Adoption”, *JJP* 15 (1965), 171-173; R. Borger, *Handbuch der Keilschriftliteratur: Band 1: Repertorium der Sumerischen und Akkadischen Texte*, vol. 1 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1967-1975), 30.

Remarkably, the section of the Hammurabi Code on primary adoption (CH 185) refers to the foundling as “a child in his [or her] water [and blood]”: “If a man adopted a child in its water (*ina me-e-šu* = ‘out of its water’) and has brought him up, that one who has been raised shall not be reclaimed.”<sup>14</sup> R. Westbrook and others maintain that the expression “its water” is a shortened form of “its water and blood,” an ancient phrase for what we call amniotic fluid.<sup>15</sup> The following line of the cuneiform text of Susa illustrates the point: “Manniyatu the *istarītu* abandoned Mar-ešre in his water and blood in order to acquire her property.”<sup>16</sup> Omitting a washing ritual for a newborn indicates that the biological parents intend to dispose of the child. Legally, the action implies that the natural parents are foregoing their parental rights.<sup>17</sup> Such measures secure the primary parental rights of adoptive parents—who may be judicial officials or temple functionaries who remain celibate—if the natural parents later attempt to reclaim the child.<sup>18</sup> According to YHWH’s description of the infancy of Jerusalem in Ezekiel 16:5, no one was willing perform the birth ritual for Jerusalem. Instead, being abhorrent from the moment she was born, she was cast out into an open field.

Ezekiel’s metaphorical narrative makes clear that the parents did not accidentally lose the baby and were not forced to abandon her by circumstances; rather, they simply cast the baby outside the city wall because she repulsed them. That “no eyes pitied” her enough to perform the birth ritual (v. 5) implies that not even adoptive parents were available, indicating the direness of her adversity.<sup>19</sup> The use of the term “open field” (פְּנֵי הַשָּׂדֶה, Eze 16:5) is

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14) R. Westbrook, *Law from the Tigris*, 140. So R. Yaron, “Varia on Adoption”, 171. Driver and Miles’ argument against interpreting the legal provision (CH 185) as pertaining to the case of a foundling is convincingly refuted by Yaron.

15) R. Westbrook, *Law from the Tigris*, 140. See the discussion of its translation in C. Wilecke, “Noch einmal”, 88 n. 3.

16) R. Westbrook, *Law from the Tigris*, 140 (MDP 23 288). *Mémoires de la Mission archéologiques de Perse, Mission de Susiane*, vols. 16-28 (1921-1939).

17) R. Westbrook, *Law from the Tigris*, 140-141.

18) J. Morgenstern, *Rites of Birth*, 187.

19) Aside from the severance of the umbilical cord, water and oil are indispensable components of the birth ritual, presumably for the purification of the mother and the infant from blood contamination with water, and for the smearing of oil on the newborn’s breast. J. A. Scurlock, “Baby-snatching Demons, Restless Souls and the Dangers of Childbirth: Medico-Medical Means of Dealing with Some of the Perils of Motherhood in Ancient Mesopotamia”, *Incognita* 2 (1991), 135-183; J. Black, et al., eds, *Gods, Demons, and Symbols of Ancient Mesopotamia*:

remarkable because the ritual texts of the Pentateuch occasionally employs the phrase in the context of removing contamination involving water and blood as an instrument of ritual mediation (cf. Lev 14:7, 53; Num 19:16). The text does not make clear why the parents loathed their newborn. But the author's use of the term hints that their antipathy may be a response to the malevolent potency of an intrinsic defilement. Whether the banishment was a response to undesirable physical traits or innate abnormalities, the severity of the rejection recalls the Babylonian practice of discarding a "hideous" child (or cattle) and the accompanying riddance ritual.<sup>20)</sup> If a baby was born with defective features, the Babylonians interpreted this as an omen of impending evil. A ritual was performed to enable the parents to ward off this evil, a ritual that culminated in abandoning of the baby in a river.<sup>21)</sup> To deflect the looming evil forces, the parents of the baby to be disposed of recited incantations to Šamaš (the sun god)<sup>22)</sup> and Nārum (the river god)<sup>23)</sup> three times each, ending with a sincere petition to protect the parents from evil and for their own vitality:

... By the command of Ea and Asalluḫi, remove that evil. May your banks release it. Take it down to your depths. Extract that evil. You, (full of) laughter, grant me life!<sup>24)</sup>

Along with purging flora believed to have purifying effects, the malformed child would then be dropped into the river, a site of ceremonial catharsis of defilement.<sup>25)</sup>

## 2.2. Unwashed Foundling (Eze 16:6-7)

In Ezekiel 16:6, we find a subtle point of reversal in the case of Jerusalem,

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*An Illustrated Dictionary*, 2nd ed. (London: The British Museum Press, 1992, 1998; repr. 2003/4), 133.

20) J. Morgenstern, *Rites of Birth*, 165.

21) Ibid.

22) S. M. Maul, *Zukunftsbewältigung: eine Untersuchung altorientalischen Denkens anhand der babylonisch-assyrischen Löserituale (Namburbi)* (Mainz: Philipp von Zabern, 1994), 338, Line 16 A Vs. 15 ÉN<sup>7</sup> ḏUTU DI.KUD AN-e KI-tim EN kit-te [u] me-ša-ri

23) Ibid., 339, Line 25 A Rs. 1 [ÉN attī] ḏ<sup>d</sup> ID DÛ-at k[a-la-ma]

24) J. Morgenstern, *Rites of Birth*, 166; S. M. Maul, *Zukunftsbewältigung*, 339, Lines 41-43.

25) J. Morgenstern, *Rites of Birth*, 166.

which YHWH observes writhing in her own blood in an open field. The twofold repetition of “in your blood” (בַּדָּמָיִךְ) is intertwined with the imperative, “Live!” (חַיִּי, Eze 16:6/2x). In Babylonia, the parent of a baby pleaded to the river deity for his life<sup>26</sup>) before disposing of the unwanted baby in the river. But in the oracular parable of Ezekiel, YHWH commands the rejected child to live. The juxtaposition of the image of Jerusalem bathed in her own blood with YHWH’s command to live engenders a portrait of regeneration analogous to that of the creation account of Genesis. Just as the LORD God breathed life into Adam’s nostrils so that he became a living being (Gen 2:7), YHWH’s word of life infuses a miraculous transformation of the moribund foundling. The child, near death, flourishes “like a plant of the field” (Eze 16:7), figuratively signifying a divine deliverance equivalent to the birth ritual required for an infant’s survival. The image of the baby girl being rejuvenated and growing into an adult lady with flowering physical characteristics is reminiscent of the image of a well-watered plant at the riverside. In the Babylonian context, the infant drowns in the water. In Ezekiel, the water enables her to thrive. Like a source of living water, YHWH’s creative proclamation nurtures the child and enables her to reach womanhood as she grows tall and manifests exquisite “adornment of the adornments” (בְּעֲדֵי עֲדָתָא, Eze 16:6-7).<sup>27</sup>)

### 2.3. Bathing and Washing of the Bride (Eze 16:8-9)

With the qualifier “yet you were naked and bare” (v. 7), the parabolic narrative transitions to a metaphorical scene in which YHWH enters a marital covenant with the mature Jerusalem. The act of spreading one’s garment over a virgin represents a man’s readiness to take a woman as his wife (cf. Rut 3:9), and this legal partnership is articulated in the formulaic statement “I pledged myself to you … you became mine,” as in Israel’s covenantal agreement with YHWH (v. 8 NRS; cf. Exo 6:7; 19:5; 24:7, 8). Then YHWH bathes his new

26) S. M. Maul, *Zukunftsbewältigung*, 341, Line 43 A Rs 12 and D Rs. 3 (TI<sup>1</sup>.[LA ] + qī]-°i-šī)

27) Commentators disagree on how to interpret the Hebrew phrase (בְּעֲדֵי עֲדָתָא). E.g., “to the time of (monthly) periods” (G. A. Cooke, *Ezekiel*, 163; W. Zimmerli, *Ezekiel 1*, 324; cf. the BHS textual notes), “the loveliest of adornments” (M. Greenberg, *Ezekiel 1–20*, 276), “completely nude” (D. I. Block, *Ezekiel: Chapters 1–24*, 478). G. A. Cooke, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Ezekiel*, ICC (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1936).

bride with water to cleanse her stains of blood, anoints her with oil, dresses her in splendid robes and precious jewels, and provides her with delectable food. The emphatic words, “I passed by you … and saw you” (v. 6a) and “I passed by you again and looked on you …” (v. 8a), distinguish the scene of YHWH’s discovery of Jerusalem as a foundling from that of his marriage with Jerusalem at her full maturity. However, the preceding literary unit, in which YHWH nourishes the foundling (vv. 6-7), should not be read independently of the unit in which YHWH takes Jerusalem as his bride (vv. 8-14).

In these two metaphorical accounts, YHWH explains his unwavering commitment to Jerusalem as an adoptive father and spouse, accounts that flow seamlessly as they repeat key terms (vv. 6a, 8a). This perspective has further ramifications for understanding the water ritual that YHWH conducts for Jerusalem in Ezekiel 16:9. Some commentators remark that the rescue of the flailing baby in her own blood in the earlier section (v. 4) is deferred until YHWH discovers her again in her prime (v. 9) and rinses the blood from her,<sup>28)</sup> in which case YHWH is purifying a blood stain that has remained since infancy.<sup>29)</sup> Others opine that it is illogical for a full-grown woman to receive divine cleansing for blood from her childhood and that the stain is the result of menstruation or coitus.<sup>30)</sup> Both of these interpretations pose difficulty. In the priestly prescriptions of Leviticus (cf. Eze 36:17), menstrual blood is regarded as one of the most abominable defilements, and it is inconceivable that YHWH would be near such a contagion during the purgation process (cf. Lev 15:24; 18:19; 20:18). Moreover, although prenuptial bathing and anointing is attested in ancient Near Eastern sources, these never mention a husband administering the rite, which he would be even less likely to do after the marriage has been consummated.<sup>31)</sup> Nor is there any ancient record of the husband rinsing the

28) See the discussion of female blood in A. Mein, *Ezekiel and the Ethics of Exile*, OTM (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 167-175 (esp. 167).

29) Greenberg, for instance, contends that the unit’s literary structure (i.e., “in the telescopic vision of the allegory”) points to YHWH’s cleansing of Jerusalem’s birth blood. This is understandable in light of the fact that he rejects the translation of בַּעֲדֵי עֲדִים (v. 7a) as “to the time of (monthly) periods” (Cooke, Zimmerli, et al.). M. Greenberg, *Ezekiel 1–20*, 278.

30) G. A. Cooke, *Ezekiel*, 163; W. Eichrodt, *Ezekiel*, 199; W. Zimmerli, *Ezekiel 1*, 324. W. Eichrodt, *Ezekiel*, OTL, C. Quin, trans. (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster, 1970).

31) In the Sumerian marriage ode, Innana is depicted as being “bathed” on Iddin-Dagan’s lap, although this does not suggest that her sexual partner performed the rite. S. N. Kramer, *The*

blood from coitus with water; even though, in ancient marital customs, retaining the blood from the conjugal union on a sheet of cloth was an essential legal procedure.<sup>32)</sup> It is also hard to explain why a description of washing the woman's blood from coitus would be combined with phrases describing prenuptial ablution and anointing.

None of these solutions can satisfactorily overcome the interpretive incongruity of Ezekiel's allegorical oracles, which are poetically evasive. Through his distinct literary arrangements, Ezekiel apparently exploits the ambiguity of his analogies in order to reinforce the impact of his prophetic messages. The first notable expression is "naked and bare" (Eze 16:7), which occurs in Ezekiel 16:22 and is repeated in Ezekiel 16:39 (cf. Eze 23:29). In the first instance of this usage, in verse 7, YHWH describes Jerusalem at the height of her maturity yet "naked and bare," recalling her former predicament as a foundling as well as her current predicament of being unprotected by a husband. The reference to YHWH's rinsing Jerusalem's blood stain is embedded in the clause describing YHWH's washing and anointing of Jerusalem with a double focus. YHWH's washing of Jerusalem's blood stain with water is a unilaterally gracious act of deliverance akin to his expunging of her defiled beginning, since he had previously rescued Jerusalem when she was a foundling flailing in her own blood, without having been washed with water for cleansing (v. 4). In other words, the section about YHWH's purification of Lady Jerusalem with water fills in the gap in the section about YHWH's discovery of the foundling Jerusalem (vv. 2-7), when the cleansing with water as part of the birth ritual was omitted despite the illustration of her proliferation. Whether the blood stain on her body mentioned in verse 9 is caused by birth or coitus, the focus is the completeness of YHWH's deliverance in washing away her shameful past—epitomized by the blood discharges of women, which in the priestly outlook, is

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*Sacred Marriage Rite: Aspects of Faith, Myth, and Ritual in Ancient Sumer* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1969), 65. Also see S. Greengus, "Old Babylonian Marriage Ceremonies and Rites", *JCS* 20:2 (1966), 61-62; W. Heffening, "Zur Geschichte der Hochzeitsgebräuche im Islam: Ein Beitrag zur Volkskunde der islamischen Länder", R. Hartmann and H. Scheel, eds., *Beiträge zur Arabistik, Semitistik und Islamwissenschaft* (Leipzig: O. Harrassowitz, 1944), 392-394.

32) M. Stol, *Women in Ancient Near East* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2016), 97; C. Locher, *Die Ehre einer Frau in Israel* (Freiburg: Universitätsverlag, 1986), 189-190; M. Malul, "Susapinnu: The Mesopotamian Paronym and His Role", *JESHO* 32 (1989), 264-266.

the most detestable form of ritual defilement.<sup>33)</sup> This line of portrayal resurfaces in verse 22, when the text conflates her infancy and adulthood into “the days of your youth,” a time “when you were naked and bare, wallowing in your blood.”

#### 2.4. Adulteress Wallowing in Water and Blood Again (Eze 16:36-39)

The tone of God’s prosecution of Lady Jerusalem (vv. 15-22) intensifies in the subsequent divine accusations (vv. 23-34; vv. 35-42), which include graphic descriptions of her prostitution and immorality. The imagery in Ezekiel 16 (vv. 15-22; vv. 23-34; vv. 35-42; vv. 43-52) leading up to the zenith of God’s wrath is the antithesis of Jerusalem’s blissful moment as God’s beautiful bride. The section (vv. 15-52) describing God’s conviction and sentence against his wife Jerusalem is rich with violent imagery, as though she were now wallowing in bodily discharges (vv. 15, 17, 27, 36) and the blood of her children in the context of her harlotry (vv. 36, 38).

Commentators observe that Ezekiel’s use of euphemistic comparisons to the pornographic spectacle of body parts and their secretions in Ezekiel 16 illustrates Jerusalem’s insatiable concupiscence (vv. 28-29). M. Greenberg, for instance, proposes that “your lust was poured out” (הַשֵּׁפָה נְהַשְׁתָּהּ, Eze 16:36) refers to “female genital ‘distillation,’” which indicates the arousal fluid Jerusalem excretes in her whoredom.<sup>34)</sup> S. T. Kamionkowski identifies an additional image of Jerusalem the whore venerating phallic idols (Eze 16:17, “male images”; cf. Isa 57:8). In light of the gender reversals in Ezekiel 16, she argues that the abundance of female discharges should be interpreted as a reference to “female ejaculation.”<sup>35)</sup> She concludes:

At a subtle level within the text of Ezekiel 16, wife Israel’s crime is that she is trying to pass for a male. Like a male, she is associated with war and violence, she seeks multiple sexual partners, she symbolically acquires male genitalia and ejaculates rather than receiving and containing fluids... And it is no accident that the word תועבה is used here.<sup>36)</sup>

33) A. Mein, *Ezekiel and the Ethics of Exile*, 167.

34) M. Greenberg, *Ezekiel 1-20*, 285.

35) S. T. Kamionkowski, “Gender Reversal in Ezekiel 16”, *Prophets and Daniel: A Feminist Companion to the Bible*, A. Brenner, ed. (London: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001), 177.

36) *Ibid.*, 182.

In recompense for Jerusalem's adultery and bloodshed, YHWH will pour "the blood of wrath and jealousy" upon her (v. 38) and force her to bear her debauchery and abominations (v. 58). The twofold description of Jerusalem's sin, adultery and pedocide, is reiterated in various forms throughout Ezekiel 16, such as idolatry and murder (v. 38) and lewdness and abominations (vv. 43, 58). As two sides of the same coin, adultery and pedocide reflect the offenses committed by the people of Judah in the ritual context of their idolatry (i.e., worship of idols and child sacrifices; cf. Eze 23:37), and they interface moral ramifications. As the following chapters will demonstrate, the carnage for which the Judahites would be condemned will vary from extortion to murder (Eze 22–24): in defiance of the Torah, they will violate the Sinaitic covenant in every respect against God's own people.<sup>37</sup> Jerusalem, the unfaithful wife of YHWH, perpetrated the heinous crime of despising her husband and his children (vv. 44-52), imitating her pagan parents: "Your mother was a Hittite and your father was an Amorite" (v. 45b; cf. v. 3). With this summary of Jerusalem's ancestry, Ezekiel's prophetic accusation comes full circle. Jerusalem, the adulterous wife, deserves to bear her own dishonor (vv. 52, 54) since she failed to remember the days of her youth (v. 43). Ezekiel's dual characterization of Jerusalem's sin is consistent with the emphasis on YHWH's redemptive initiative in both her childhood and her adulthood (v. 22): though she was born as a foundling in blood and an uncovered maiden, Jerusalem the chosen queen has transformed into a brazen harlot who shamelessly rejected her own husband and slaughtered his children. However, Ezekiel's message concludes with a message of unexpected optimism. When his fury is fully exhausted (v. 42), YHWH will remember his covenant with Jerusalem in her youth (v. 60) and grant her even greater sign of unmerited favor. To her shame, YHWH will enter into an "everlasting covenant" with her (v. 60) and pardon all her vile transgressions (v. 64).

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37) See related discussions in D. I. Block, *Ezekiel: Chapters 1–24*, 707-708, 714; L. E. Cooper, Sr., *Ezekiel: An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture*, NAC 17 (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 1994), 218; D. L. Thompson, *Ezekiel*, CBC 9 (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 2010), 142.

### 3. Jerusalem Restored (Eze 36-37)

#### 3.1. The Promise of Israel's Renewal (Eze 16:55//Eze 36:10, 11)

In Ezekiel 36 (vv. 1-38) and 37 (vv. 1-14), Ezekiel announces promises of Israel's renewal, restating and expounding strands of earlier oracular utterances. Using the metaphor of a defiled menstruant (Eze 16:17), Ezekiel begins Chapter 36 by recapitulating the principal sins of Israel, which are allegedly the basis for YHWH's punishment of Jerusalem in Ezekiel 16. The literary reformulation in Ezekiel 36 is attained by blending various strands of literary elements from Ezekiel 16 to project the house of Israel as YHWH's beautiful wife in her youth (e.g., Eze 16:22, 43, 60). For example, Ezekiel 36 (v. 11) and Ezekiel 16 (v. 55/3x) both contain the word for "former state, time" (לְקִדְמוֹתָיִם), which connects the two chapters by underlining the idyllic past of YHWH's covenantal partners<sup>38</sup>:

As for your sisters, Sodom and her daughters shall return to their former state (לְקִדְמוֹתָיִם), and Samaria and her daughters shall return to their former state (לְקִדְמוֹתָיִם), and you and your daughters shall return to your former state (לְקִדְמוֹתָיִם). (Eze 16:55 ESV)

And I will multiply (רַבֵּה) on you man and beast, and they shall multiply (רַבֵּה) and be fruitful. And I will cause you to be inhabited as in your former times (בְּקִדְמוֹתֵיכֶם), and will do more good to you than ever before. Then you will know (יָדַעַ) that I am the LORD. (Eze 36:11 ESV)

The emphatic repetition of "former state" in Ezekiel 16:55 occurs in the context of YHWH's pronouncement that Jerusalem will be restored along with Sodom and Samaria (Eze 16:53-54). In Ezekiel 36:11, the promise of renewal is amplified by the verbs "multiply" (רַבֵּה) and "know" (יָדַעַ), which occur repeatedly in the description of YHWH's gratuitous dealing with Israel in Ezekiel 36. To bless Israel, YHWH declares that he will "multiply, increase, or make [Israel] abundant," referring to both agricultural plenty and population growth (Eze 36:10, 11/2x, 29, 30, 37). This portrait of fertility and abundance

38) M. Greenberg, *Ezekiel 21-37*, 720; D. I. Block, *The Book of Ezekiel: Chapters 25-48*, NICOT (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998), 332.

starkly contrasts with Jerusalem's "multiplying" of her whoring in Ezekiel 16 (vv. 7, 25, 26, 29, 51) and harkens back to YHWH's blessing of her increase when he discovered Jerusalem as a foundling (Eze 16:7). The recognition formula "You shall know that I am the LORD" that was addressed to Jerusalem as an adulterous wife in Ezekiel 16 (v. 62) is used again in Ezekiel 36, pertaining now not only to Israel but to all of the nations (vv. 23, 36; cf. vv. 11, 32, 38).

### 3.2. Judgment on the Adulterous Wife (Eze 36:16-21)

Ezekiel 36:17 compares Israel's spiritual corruption to "the uncleanness of a woman in her menstrual impurity" (ESV) (הַטְּמֵאָה הַחַדָּשָׁה; cf. Lev 15:26; 18:19).<sup>39</sup> The phrase is not used explicitly in Ezekiel 16. But in describing Jerusalem's ritual defilement as a result of her adultery with "male images," the chapter alludes to profuse bodily discharges during her arousal.<sup>40</sup> The image of Jerusalem's lust being "poured out" (vv. 15, 36) dovetails with the image of the women of Jerusalem "pouring out" the blood of innocent children (v. 36) in Ezekiel 16. In fact, in underscoring the wretched promiscuity and violence of Jerusalem, Chapter 16 (vv. 15, 36, 38) repeats the verb "pour out" several times. Exploiting the verbal cues, Ezekiel 36:18 succinctly recaptures the essence of the longest discourse in the book of Ezekiel 16 (vv. 1-63): Jerusalem, the adulterous wife, is punished for her idolatry and bloodshed; just as she "poured out" the innocent blood, so YHWH will "pour out" his wrath upon the Israelites.

So I poured out (וַאֲשַׁפָּה) my wrath (חַמָּתִי) upon them for the blood that they had shed (וַאֲשַׁרְ-שָׁפְכוּ; lit: "poured") in the land, for the idols with which they had defiled it. (Eze 36:18 ESV)

The statement that YHWH "poured out" his rage (וַאֲשַׁפָּה חַמָּתִי עֲלֵיהֶם) on the Israelites in Ezekiel 36:18 corresponds to the expression, "I will bring upon you the blood of wrath and jealousy" (וַיָּבִיאוּ עֲלֵיכֶם דָּם חַמָּה וְקִנְיָה) in Ezekiel 16:38. YHWH foretold of the days when "his wrath" and "his jealousy" would be

39) Cf. Eze 7:19, 20; 18:6, 22:10. See also Jacob Milgrom's comments regarding the menstruant in *Leviticus 1-16: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, AB 3 (New York: Doubleday, 1991), 948-953.

40) M. Greenberg, *Ezekiel 1-20*, 285-286; D. I. Block, *Ezekiel: Chapters 1-24*, 500.

exhausted and withdrawn from Jerusalem in Ezekiel 16 (v. 42); accordingly, in Ezekiel 36, Ezekiel speaks of the prophetic reversal: YHWH will be vindictive in his “jealousy and wrath” on behalf of Israel after she suffers derision among the nations (vv. 5-6). Ezekiel assures us that God will gather the people of Israel back from the world, restore them to their homeland (Eze 36:24), and transform them (Eze 36:24-32) and bless them abundantly (Eze 36:33-37). The first phase of the restoration will entail purification from uncleanness caused by their idolatry.<sup>41)</sup>

### 3.3. Cleansing of the Adulterous Wife (Eze 36:22-32)

Over the generations, the image of water cleansing in Ezekiel 36:25 has elicited a variety of interpretations, giving rise to various ablutionary and baptismal rites in Judaism and Christianity.<sup>42)</sup>

I will sprinkle (וַיִּזְרֹקְתִי) clean water (מַיִם טְהוֹרִים) on you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses (מִכָּל טִמְאֹתֵיכֶם), and from all your idols I will cleanse you. (Eze 36:25 ESV)

Given Ezekiel’s penchant for inner biblical allusion, it is significant that terms evoking the priestly texts are interwoven in this particular verse. For instance, the verb “to sprinkle” (זָרַק) in conjunction with the preposition על (עָלַיְכֶם), Eze 36:25) in the context of priestly ritual is chiefly used when referring to the handling of blood or a sacred compound symbolic of blood.<sup>43)</sup> The purification ritual rendered for the house of Israel in Ezekiel 36 (v. 25) probably alludes to

41) So J. Blenkinsopp, *Ezekiel*, Interpretation (Louisville, KY: John Knox, 1990), 167.

42) W. Zimmerli, *Ezekiel 2*, 248-249; D. I. Block, *Ezekiel: Chapters 25–48*, 354. Also, see A. Y. Collins, *Cosmology and Eschatology in Jewish and Christian Apocalypticism* (Leiden: Brill, 2000), 228; O. Betz, “Die Proselytentaufe der Qumransekte und die Taufe im Neuen Testament”, *RevQ 1* (1958/59) 213-234.

43) E.g., “throw against, upon” (לְעַד זָרַק) Exo 24:6, 8; 29:16, 20; Lev 1:5, 11; 3:2, 8, 13; 7:2; 8:19, 24; 9:12, 18; 17:6; Num 18:17; 19:13, 20. Cf. “sprinkle against, upon” (בְּזָה עָלַיְכֶם) Exo 29:21; Lev 5:9; 8:30; 14:7; 16:14, 19; Num 8:7; 19:18, 19. Note Milgrom’s convincing argument (with Gray, Ehrich, Rashi, et al.) that “water[s] of purification” (מַיִם תְּשַׁאֲרֵם) Num 8:7) and “waters of lustration” (מַיִם הַבְּהָרָה) Num 19:9, 21; 31:23) are synonymous (contra Levine). J. Milgrom, *The JPS Torah Commentary: Numbers* (Philadelphia: JPS, 1990), 61; B. A. Levine, *Numbers 1–20*, AB 4 (New Haven: Doubleday, 1993), 274-275.

the red heifer ritual for the Israelites (Num 19:1-22) involving water(s) of “impurity” or “lustration” (מַי נְדָה, Num 19:20).<sup>44</sup> If so, this implies that the “clean water” (מַיִם טְהוֹרִים) mentioned in Ezekiel 36:25 should not be correlated with the unadulterated water used for ablution or baptism in later Judeo-Christian religious practices, even if the practices were inspired by this text. The Hebrew text has other terms that may be associated with the unmixed water used in a ritual setting, such as “holy water” (מַיִם קְדוֹשִׁים, Num 5:17) and “fresh water” (מַיִם חַיִּים, Num 19:17).<sup>45</sup>

Mixing water with the natural components that symbolize life in blood, albeit only trace amounts of such components, produces a lustration effect. This aspect more or less aligns with YHWH’s bathing of Jerusalem with water and rinsing her blood stains (Eze 16:9) in the context of a marriage covenant. The accounts of the purification rite in Ezekiel 16 and Ezekiel 36 are both presented at the pivotal juncture of God’s intervention to deliver and renew his covenantal partner. Both chapters demonstrate that God’s merciful regard for the unmerited motivates his salvific undertaking. For instance, YHWH’s regard for Jerusalem (Eze 16:5) and for his holy name (Eze 36:21) is accentuated by a verb that means “to spare” or “to have compassion” (חָמַל)<sup>46</sup> followed by the preposition על. In Ezekiel 16:5, the verbs “to pity” (חָוַס) and “to have compassion” (חָמַל) in a hendiadys construction disclose YHWH’s profound benevolence for the founding Jerusalem that is abandoned in an open field.<sup>47</sup> In Ezekiel 36:21,

44) See W. Zimmerli, *Ezekiel 2*, 249. However, Zimmerli fails to mention that the verb זָרַק is utilized in the context of Num 19:9-22 (esp. v. 13).

45) Noting the specific employment of the verb זָרַק, Block suggests that “clean water” (מַיִם טְהוֹרִים) in Eze 36:25 figuratively fuses, along with the threefold accent on “be clean” (טָהַר) in the verse, the cultic executions of both types (i.e., “priestly cleansing rituals and blood sprinkling ceremonies”). But this viewpoint does not account for the fact that the verb זָרַק (with על) is never used with ritual water for purification purposes in the priestly text, with the exception of the “water(s) of lustration” mentioned in Num 19:13, 20. Indeed, the triple occurrences of “clean” (טָהַר) in Eze 36:25 reveal an intriguing reversal of the corresponding triple occurrences of “unclean” (טָמֵא) in Num 19:20. While acknowledging the expression’s literary dependence on the text of Num 19 (vv. 13, 20), Greenberg rejects Ehrlich’s attempt to read “clean water” (מַיִם טְהוֹרִים) as an euphemism for “water(s) of lustration” (מַי נְדָה, Num 19:13, 20) and proposes that the terminology is merely the case of a “resultative adjective” for literary emphasis (“water that effects purity”). But the two viewpoints (i.e., those of Greenberg and Ehrlich) are not necessarily incompatible. D. I. Block, *Ezekiel: Chapters 25–48*, 354; M. Greenberg, *Ezekiel 21–37*, 730.

46) M. Greenberg, *Ezekiel 21–37*, 729; D. I. Block, *Ezekiel: Chapters 25–48*, 348 n. 63.

47) In other instances, the verb occurs with חָוַס in hendiadys structure as “My eye will not spare,

YHWH promises to act on account of his holy name, not on account of Israel (36:22; cf. 36:32). His “compassion” (חַמֵּל) for the sanctity of his name is aroused when the Israelites, who are called “YHWH’s people” (עַם־יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵי, v. 20), end up desecrating the holy epithet of YHWH as the pagan nations ridicule Israel’s exilic existence (Eze 36:20). The plight of the house of Israel described in Ezekiel 36 here converges with that of the foundling Jerusalem in Ezekiel 16: each is in dire need of salvation from a state of deprivation and alienation.

The word “impurity” (הִזְדִּיחַ), which means either menstruation or menstruant throughout the Bible<sup>48</sup>) and is used in Numbers 19:20 (vv. 13, 20; Num 31:23), also appears in Ezekiel 36:17, which encapsulates the nature of Israel’s transgression as understood in the priestly conceptual framework (cf. Lev 12:2; 18:19; Eze 18:6):

Son of man, when the house of Israel lived in their own land, they defiled it by their ways and their deeds. Their ways before me were like the uncleanness of a woman in her menstrual impurity (הִזְדִּיחַת הַנְּדָה).  
(Eze 36:17 ESV)

In Ezekiel 36:17, the expression הִזְדִּיחַ, denoting a menstruant, is variously translated in such phrases as “a woman in her menstrual impurity” (ESV), “a woman in her impurity” (NAS), “a woman’s monthly uncleanness” (NIV), and “a woman in her menstrual period” (NRS).<sup>49</sup>) Hence, when YHWH declares that he will sprinkle “clean water” (מַיִם טְהוֹרִים) to eliminate all her “uncleannesses” in Ezekiel 36:25 (מִכָּל טִמְאוֹתֶיךָ), the lexical correspondence conjures the priestly cleansing potion of the red heifer ritual mentioned in Numbers 19 (vv. 13, 20). In Numbers 19, the so-called “water of impurity” (מַיִם הַזֵּה, vv. 13, 20) is the liquid mixture composed of ashes from the red heifer sacrifice, cedar wood, hyssop branches, and crimson thread, with each component figuratively representing blood or employed in the manipulation of blood for the sake of

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and I will have no pity” (לֹא אֶחַמֵּל), Eze 5:11) (Eze 5:11; 7:4; 7:9; 8:18; 9:5; 9:10). The reappearance of this pair in Eze 16:5, which presents the account of Jerusalem’s infancy, ironically points to YHWH’s vindictive declaration (e.g., Eze 5:11 et al.) and thereby spotlights Jerusalem/Israel’s changed lot due to her unfaithfulness.

48) *BDB*, 622.

49) In the context of Eze 36, Eze 36:25 is a conceptual reversal of Eze 36:17-18. M. Greenberg, *Ezekiel 21-37*, 730.

atonement.<sup>50</sup>) As part of the riddance ritual, the mixture is to be sprinkled upon the ritually defiled person in an open field (עַל־פְּנֵי הַשָּׂדֶה), as shown in Leviticus and Numbers.<sup>51</sup>) Through the imagery of sprinkling of ritual substance in Numbers 19 (vv. 13, 20), YHWH's initial discovery and purgation of the foundling Jerusalem, who has been left unwashed (וּבְמִים לֹא־רָחֲצָתָהּ לְמַשְׁעֵי, Eze 16:4) in an open field (וַתִּשְׁלַח אֶל־פְּנֵי הַשָּׂדֶה), wallowing in her own blood (מִתְבֹּרֶסֶת בְּדַמָּיהָ, Eze 16:6), is thus juxtaposed with YHWH's sprinkling of the cleansing mixture (i.e., water and blood) on the menstruation-stained house of Israel (Eze 16:17) after he gathers her from among the nations at the outset of the eschatological renewal. The potency of the purgation is also illustrated also by the ways in which “all” (כָּל) is reiterated in modifying “your uncleannesses” (מִכָּל טְמֵאוֹתֶיכֶם, Eze 36:25) and “your idols” (וּמִכָּל־גִּלּוּלֵיכֶם, Eze 36:25), the rhetorical emphasis detected in Leviticus 16 (v. 16; cf. Lev 16:19).

Thus he shall make atonement for the Holy Place, because of the uncleannesses of the people of Israel (מִטְמֵאוֹת בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל) and because of their transgressions, all their sins (לְכָל־חַטָּאתָם). And so he shall do for the tent of meeting, which dwells with them in the midst of their uncleannesses (בְּתוֹךְ טְמֵאוֹתָם). (Lev 16:16 ESV)

And Aaron shall lay both his hands on the head of the live goat, and confess over it all the iniquities of the people of Israel (אֶת־כָּל־עֲוֹנוֹת בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל), and all their transgressions (וְאֶת־כָּל־פְּשָׁעֵיהֶם), all their sins (לְכָל־חַטָּאתָם) ... (Lev 16:21 ESV)

It is evident that Ezekiel has taken the term from Leviticus, for the term is mostly attested in the book of Leviticus to connote sins in ethical and ritual contexts. Ezekiel's employment of the distinctive noun in describing the context of the Day of Atonement in Ezekiel 36:25 is theologically meaningful. Just as forgiveness of Israel, despite her utter failure as a covenant partner, is

50) See H. Maccoby's contention that “water of impurity” (מֵי נִדָּה) should be translated as “waters of menstruation” since the red cow represents not only blood in general but also menstrual blood, which in ancient times signified the power of creation, mortality, and reproduction. The association is reasonable, but there is no biblical justification for it. H. Maccoby, *Ritual and Morality: The Ritual Purity System and Its Place in Judaism* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 105-117.

51) Cf. The mention of “open field” in other riddance rituals in the priestly texts (Lev 14:7; 17:5).

definitively declared on the basis solely of YHWH's grace and mercy on the Day of Atonement (cf. Exo 32-33), so YHWH will ultimately cleanse the house of Israel from all of her uncleannesses by sprinkling "clean water" on her. YHWH's provision of cleansing derived from the sacrificial blood will thus effectively undo even the repulsive form of human sins as figuratively expressed in the woman's bloody discharge.<sup>52)</sup>

The import of this overlapping of imagery lies in the fulfillment of God's commitment to "remember" the covenant with Jerusalem established in the days of her youth by entering into "an everlasting covenant" (Eze 16:60; cf. 37:26) with her. Its rhetorical impact is realized in the paradoxical turnaround of Jerusalem's lot: although Jerusalem failed to remember the days of her youth, YHWH remains faithful by remembering the covenant of those days, leaving Jerusalem dumbfounded as it recalled her disgrace and undeserving grace then and now (Eze 16:62-63). Both chapters feature the verb "to remember (זָכַר)" (Eze 16:22, 43, 60, 61, 63; cf. 36:31) in connection with the expression "to be ashamed (כָּלַם)" (Eze 16:27, 52, 54, 61, 63; cf. 36:6, 7, 15, 32) and "to be confounded (בוֹשָׁה)" (Eze 16:63; cf. 36:32).

### 3.4. Extension of God's Grace to Israel and Beyond (Eze 36:33-38)

God will be also mindful of Jerusalem's "sisters," Samaria and Sodom, and Ezekiel 37 elaborates on the future unity of the entire house of Israel in his hand. Before the section on the unification of Jerusalem and Israel begins, Ezekiel's oracle regarding the rehabilitation of Israel's house (Eze 36:33-38) and the visionary report of the bones in the valley (Eze 37:1-14) appear to have in the background YHWH's encounter with Jerusalem as a foundling in Chapter 16. YHWH promises to reinstate the desolate and hopeless condition of the house of Israel (Eze 16:31-33//Eze 37:14), just as he restored the infant foundling by announcing life to her, and she flourished like a tall plant with luscious fruits (Eze 16:7-8). The image of a foundling girl blossoming into a lady like a thriving plant (Eze 16) is enlarged to the extent that the Edenic paradise is

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52) In this sense, I depart from Klawans' interpretation of Ezekiel's rhetorical objective, which, in Klawans' view, is to highlight the ease with which God would cleanse his people of their sin, just as a menstruant woman would purify herself of menstrual discharge. J. Klawans, *Impurity and Sin in Ancient Judaism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 31.

projected onto the future restoration of the house of Israel. The section begins by reaffirming that YHWH's cleansing rite that will be accomplished on a single day in an eschatological sense and that Israel's deserted towns would be repopulated and rebuilt like "the garden of Eden" (Ezek 36:33-35 NRS).<sup>53)</sup>

### 3.5. Mandate to "Live!" (Eze 37:1-14)

The revival of the hopeless condition of the foundling in Ezekiel 16 (v. 6/2x) echoes throughout Ezekiel's vision of the dry bones in Ezekiel 37, with the verb "to live" (חַיָּה) receiving particular emphasis through rhetorical repetition (37:6, 9, 10, 14).<sup>54)</sup> The regenerative act is delineated with gruesome details of desiccated bones being covered with sinews and flesh (Eze 37) and evokes the image of Jerusalem writhing helplessly in her own blood while naked (Eze 16). In both accounts, YHWH's word is responsible for rejuvenating the forsaken's mortal condition. As in Ezekiel's vision of Jerusalem springing up like a tall plant after YHWH's creative command, YHWH, through Ezekiel, breathes—similar to the creation account in Genesis where God's breath imparts life to the first human (Gen 2:7)—the very life force from the four winds into the dry bones, transforming them into a vast army (Eze 37:1-10). Accordingly, Ezekiel's vision of the valley of bones embodies YHWH's early assurance to grant the people of Israel "a new heart" and place "a new spirit" as part of his restoration plans (Eze 11:19; 18:31) in establishing a new covenant relationship with them (Eze 36:26-28). This scene of Israel's regeneration, nonetheless, precedes YHWH's showering the house of Israel with "clean water" to generate purification and save them from all their uncleannesses (Eze 36:25, 29).

## 4. Conclusion

A literary comparison of Ezekiel 16 and Ezekiel 36:1-37:14 reveals that these chapters are interconnected, especially with respect to the theme of rehabilitation

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53) See the contextualized reading of Eze 36 in J. R. Lee, "Exodus and Utopia: Focusing on Ezekiel 36:16-38", *TS* 12 (1998), 217-244 (in Korean).

54) Refer to Zimmerli's brief remark, which is restricted to Eze 37:9-10. W. Zimmerli, *Ezekiel* 2, 339.

and renewal. A close examination of Ezekiel 16 in relation to ancient Near Eastern texts sheds light on the rhetorical strategy of the foundling narrative. A phrase from the Mesopotamian legal texts on primary adoption is used to refer to the foundling as “a child in his [or her] water [and blood],” which seems to coincide with the portrayal of Jerusalem as an abandoned newborn of Canaanite parents who is lying in her own blood in an open field (Eze 16:2-6). According to R. Westbrook and others, the phrase “its water” in the ancient Near East is an abbreviated form of “its water and blood,” an ancient term for what we now call amniotic fluid.

In this way, the blood stain on Jerusalem personified as the naked foundling and the exposed virgin in Ezekiel 16 (vv. 6-7; vv. 8-14) signifies her utter vulnerability. The literary arrangement of the unit (e.g., repetition of “I passed by you and saw/looked on you,” vv. 6a, 8a) indicates that the blood stain on the uncovered lady in Ezekiel 16 figuratively reiterates the humble origin of Jerusalem in relation to the preceding account (vv. 6-7). YHWH had saved Jerusalem as a foundling when she was flailing in her own blood without having been cleansed with water (Eze 16:4-6). His unconditional mercy of deliverance manifested in washing Jerusalem’s blood stain with water (Eze 16:9) is thus comparable to his eradication of her congenital defilement. The account of YHWH’s washing Lady Jerusalem with water fills in the literary gap left by the account of YHWH’s discovery of the foundling Jerusalem, an account that apparently does not refer to the purgation rite. Since YHWH’s saving grace was emphasized in both the childhood and adulthood of Jerusalem, Ezekiel’s dual description of Jerusalem’s sin is consistent with this emphasis (Eze 16:22): Despite having been delivered as a foundling and an uncovered maiden, Jerusalem the chosen queen has evolved into an impudent prostitute who publicly rejected her own husband and sacrificed his children.

Employing the metaphor of a defiled menstruant (Eze 16:17), Ezekiel begins the section (Eze 36:1-37:14) by recapitulating the main sins of Israel that are the ostensible basis for YHWH’s judgment against Jerusalem in Ezekiel 16. The literary reformulation in Ezekiel 36 is attained by distinctively weaving various literary strands from Ezekiel 16 to portray the house of Israel as YHWH’s beautiful wife in her youth (e.g., Eze 16:22, 43, 60). For instance, Ezekiel 36 (vv. 10, 11) and Ezekiel 16 (v. 55) both contain the word for “former state, time”

(הַרְבֵּה), which connects the two chapters by emphasizing the glorious past of YHWH's covenantal partners. The verb "multiply" (רָבָה), first used to delineate YHWH's merciful deliverance of Jerusalem (Eze 16:7), is reappropriated in the description of Jerusalem's wanton debauchery in Ezekiel 16 (vv. 25, 26, 29, 51); and it is used, with a reverse effect, to underline the promise of renewal for Israel in Ezekiel 36 (vv. 10, 11/2x, 29, 30, 37) in the blissful state of Edenic paradise (vv. 33-35; cf. Eze 16:6). The verb for "know" (יָדָע) used in the self-recognition formula in Ezekiel 16 (v. 62) that is addressed to Jerusalem is expanded in Ezekiel 36 (vv. 11, 23, 32, 36, 38) to include the surrounding nations that were taunting Israel.

The predicament of the house of Israel in Ezekiel 36 after the outpouring of YHWH's "jealous wrath" (Eze 36:6; cf. Eze 16:42) upon it, parallels that of Jerusalem, the foundling, in Ezekiel 16; both desperately need of deliverance from a state of desolation and estrangement. YHWH's purging of the foundling Jerusalem, who is left unwashed (Eze 16:4) in an open field (Eze 16:5) and wallowing in her own blood (Eze 16:6), is strikingly contrasted with YHWH's sprinkling of the purifying mixture (i.e., water and blood) on the house of Israel (Eze 16:17), stained by menstruation (an account that alludes to the imagery of the ritual potion that is sprinkled upon the defiled in Num 19:13, 20). In this way, the most revolting pollutant in the priestly worldview is expunged from the house of Israel by means of sacred liquid substance, emblematic of expiating blood, so that God's Spirit can dwell within their midst (Eze 36:25-27). The rhetorical effect of the comparison is evident in the ironical outcome of Jerusalem's fate. Even though Jerusalem did not "remember" the days of her youth (Eze 16:22, 43), in his compassion YHWH remained faithful by "remembering" the covenant (Eze 16:60, 61; cf. Eze 37:26) out of his compassion (לְמַל, Eze 36:21; cf. Eze 16:5), leaving Jerusalem in consternation as it evoked memories of her disgrace and undeserving grace then and now (Eze 36:6, 7, 15, 31, 32; cf. Eze 16:27, 52, 54, 63).

Ezekiel 36:1-37:14 explains the realization of the unification of the entire house of Israel under God's control and how God will be mindful of Jerusalem's "sisters," Samaria and Sodom. Ezekiel's prophecy about the rehabilitation of the house of Israel (Eze 36:33-38) and the visionary account of the bones in the valley (Eze 37:1-14) is uttered in the context of the account in Chapter 16 of

Jerusalem's encounter, as a foundling, with YHWH by way of his divine command, "Live!" (Eze 16:6/2x). This interaction is in stark contrast to the way estranged parents beseech the river god for their lives when abandoning an unwanted baby in the Mesopotamian riddance ritual, thereby dramatically affirming YHWH's enduring loving-kindness for his chosen people, whose parents have forsaken them (Eze 16:2). The creative mandate reverberates throughout Ezekiel's vision of the dry bones in Ezekiel 37:6, 9, 10, and 14, distinctively punctuated by the verb "to live" (חַיָּה).

<Keywords>

Ezekiel 16, Ezekiel 36-37, purification ritual, restoration, Numbers 19, foundling.

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<Abstract>

### **Water (and Blood) in Ezekiel 16 and 36-37**

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This article compares Ezekiel 16 and Ezekiel 36:1-37:14 as an example of “resumptive exposition” (D. I. Block) with particular attention to the ways that the message of Israel’s restoration in the later chapters allude to the message of Jerusalem’s judgment and rehabilitation in the earlier one. Although commentators have occasionally noted various lexical and thematic links between Ezekiel 16 and Ezekiel 36-37, none has yet provided an integrative assessment of these chapters with respect to the foundling motif. The prophetic indictment of the adulterous Jerusalem in Ezekiel 16 recurrently appeals to YHWH’s merciful treatment of Jerusalem in her youthful years as an exposed orphan and uncovered virgin (vv. 1-14). The author proposes that the ancient Near Eastern texts on the birth ritual and the foundling inform the rhetoric of Ezekiel 16. A careful examination of the chapters warrants the conclusion that Ezekiel 36:1-37:14, in connection with Ezekiel 16, employ literary reversal and amplification through skillful interlacing of lexical elements (e.g., to multiply, to know, to remember, and to live) to augment the import of YHWH’s message for the eschatological renewal of Israel. Moreover, in both chapters (Eze 16 and 36), the water ritual intimated at the beginning of YHWH’s deliverance of the covenantal partner is allusively linked to priestly texts on riddance rituals (e.g., Num 19; Lev 16), underscoring the irony of divine forgiveness of the house of Israel—to her shame. Ezekiel’s prophecy of the restoration of the house of Israel (Eze 36:33-38) and the vision of the bones in the valley (Eze 37:1-14) parallel the depiction in Ezekiel 16 of Jerusalem’s encounter with YHWH as a foundling in response to his divine command, “Live!” (Eze 16:6/2x). The creative imperative reverberates throughout Ezekiel’s vision of the dry bones in Ezekiel 37 (vv. 6, 9, 10, and 14) with the word *to live* (חַיִּי) serving as a characteristic leitmotif. This pronouncement powerfully affirms YHWH’s eternal loving-kindness for his chosen people, whom their parents had abandoned (Eze 16:2), in contrast to the way these estranged parents entreat the river god for

their lives while abandoning an unwanted child in the Mesopotamian riddance ceremony. Ezekiel 16 is thus a significant dialectical partner in understanding the prophetic discourse on the hopeful future of Israel in Ezekiel 36:1-37:14.